

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 自尋短見

*zi4 xun2 duan3 jian4*

Octopuses live in the sea. They can survive out of water, but not for long, especially when the condition is dry. So if they are stranded on a beach, they die.

Many octopuses died this way on a beach in Wales recently. But they weren't washed up by the waves, but "walked up on the tip of their legs," according to witnesses.

No one knows why the eight-legged creatures did that. Some speculated that it was because the sea was rough. But that was more likely just a wild guess. Concerned citizens urged people to pick up any grounded octopuses and put them back into the sea.

Whatever the reason, crawling out of the water and walk up the beach to die looks very much like an act of "自尋短見" (*zi4 xun2 duan3 jian4*).

"自" (*zi4*) is "self," "尋" (*xun2*) "to look for," "to search," "短" (*duan3*) "short," and "見" (*jian4*) is "an opinion," "an idea," "a view." "自尋短見" (*zi4 xun2 duan3 jian4*), translated directly, is "self seek short view," which does not make any sense. In fact, "短見" (*duan3 jian4*) means "a shortsighted view," "short-sighted," but it also means "suicide."

So "自尋短見" (*zi4 xun2 duan3 jian4*) means to commit suicide.

The idiom can mean actual suicide. It can also be used figuratively to describe people who do things which they know would cause serious harm to their interest.

When someone keeps coming to work late and yells at the boss, it is a case of "自尋短見" (*zi4 xun2 duan3 jian4*), as such behavior is like committing career suicide.

### Terms containing the character "短" (*duan3*) include:

短期 (*duan3 qi1*) – short-term

短缺 (*duan3 que1*) – shortage; deficiency

短暫 (*duan3 zan4*) – a short duration; brief; transient

短褲 (*duan3 ku4*) – shorts