

FINDING INNER PEACE IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

DHARMA TALK BY VENERABLE AJAHN BRAHM (Part 1)



“There are people who aren’t very rich but are happy. They may not be terribly successful but they have a nice and peaceful life.”

- Ajahn Brahm



Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamsa Mahathera (lovingly known to most as Ajahn Brahm) was born Peter Betts in London, United Kingdom on 7 August 1951. Though he was from a working-class family, he was diligent and academically inclined and thus won a scholarship to study Theoretical Physics at Cambridge University in the late 1960s. After graduating from Cambridge, he taught in a high school for one year before travelling to Thailand to become a monk and train with the Venerable Ajahn Chah Bodhinyana Mahathera. Whilst still in his years as a junior monk, he was asked to undertake the compilation of an English language guide to the Buddhist monastic code – the *Vinaya* – which later became the basis for monastic discipline in numerous Theravadan monasteries in Western countries.

Today, he is the Abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery that is nestled amidst the rolling hills of the Darling Range, near the small town of Serpentine, Western Australia. He is also the Spiritual Director of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia and has a role in running many other monasteries and organisations dedicated to helping others realise for themselves the truth of the teachings of the Buddha.

On 23 September, Bodhinyana Singapore and Buddhist Fellowship jointly organised a half-day meditation retreat and a two-hour Dharma public talk titled “Finding Inner Peace In the Midst of Chaos” and both were led by Ven. Ajahn Brahm and held at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery (KM-SPKS). During the evening talk, when asked how should one approach finding peace amidst chaos in today’s world of uncertainty, violence and economic instability, Ven. Ajahn Brahm gave practical advice and most importantly insights to how one’s perspectives and attitudes can be changed to harness strength and positivity despite facing challenges and

stressful situations. The following are some ways Ven. Ajahn Brahm shared on finding peace.

Focus on the goodness

From the newspapers (and online social media), it is often more common than not for people to focus on the things that go wrong in life. We do have wars, tragedies... but from the ashes of disasters, we built even better worlds. For example, in the Great Fire of London, a major conflagration that destroyed more than three quarters of the city; almost the entire city was wiped out. And what did they do? They built a better city – used the opportunity to dig deeper for the foundation of a better city-wide sewage – turning the disaster into a great improvement for the city many still continue to enjoy.

Learn to be better

Whenever we face a “disaster”, we become better. As a Buddhist, I believe in rebirth, as even cities get reborn and cultures get revived. Unfortunately, sometimes we do need a little destruction in life – it is from tragedy that we learn and rebuild to be better next time – and people always say, “You can’t make an omelette without breaking an egg”.

Cultivate love and compassion

If we look at the material things in life, we do get worried. Economies go up, economies go down; buildings go up and they fall; natural disasters can strike anytime and anywhere, and all these other things that happen in the world is part of nature. And when they do strike, they provide opportunities for us to help and care for one another. That’s one of the most beautiful things we see in every tragedy, the opportunities that tragedy give; for us to look after people who are our brothers and sisters, not because they are Buddhists but they are human beings who also feel the pain. We may not share

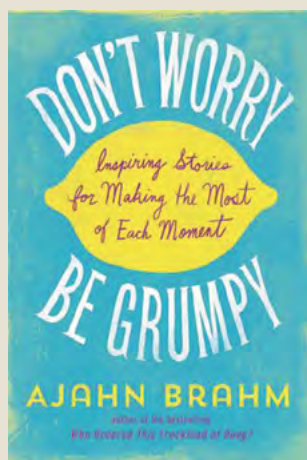
the same religion or culture with them, but we should still go out and help them, not because they are Singaporeans or Buddhists, but because they are human beings – same like us – when they lose their loved ones would feel the pain, need love, food and most importantly, need hope.

Give hope and have hope

Thus, the most important part of our world is to always have hope. And you don't just always read the newspapers that make it (our world or situation) look hopeless, you should also read your history to see how again and again, that through the tragedies that plague our world, there are such beautiful kindness and love that grow too. So, learn to have hope and give others hope too.



(Above) Ven. Ajahn Brahm is not only a wonderful speaker but a prolific author who has written numerous books and also gives regular Dharma talks at the Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre in Western Australia. During his recent visit to Singapore, many readers took the opportunity to interact with him after the half-day retreat and Dharma talk, and also have his autograph.



Don't Worry, Be Grumpy: Inspiring Stories for Making the Most of Each Moment is a compilation of 108 brief stories by Ven. Ajahn Brahm with titles like “The Bad Elephant”, “Girlfriend Power” and “The Happiness License”. These though brief, offer timeless wisdom to people from all

walks of life and all with a fresh twist of on his own experiences, stories from his students and other, coupled with his signature humour. This book is sure to delight and surprise, and the following excerpt, “The Container and the Contents” is definitely testament to that.

The Container and the Contents

There were riots in the streets some years ago after a guard at Guantanamo Bay was accused of taking a holy book and flushing it down the toilet.

The next day, I took a call from a local journalist who told me he was writing an article about the outrage by asking leaders of all the major religions in Australia the same question he was about to ask me.

“What would you do, Ajahn Brahm, if someone took a Buddhist holy book and flushed it down your toilet?”

Without hesitation I answered, “Sir, if someone took a Buddhist holy book and flushed it down my toilet, the first thing I would do is to call a plumber!”

When the journalist finished laughing, he confided that that was the first sensible answer he had received.

Then I went further.

I explained that someone may blow up many statues of the Buddha, burn down Buddhist temples, or kill Buddhist monks and nuns; they may destroy all these, but I will never allow them to destroy Buddhism. You may flush a holy book down the toilet, but I will never let you flush forgiveness, peace, and compassion down the toilet.

The book is not the religion. Nor is the statue, the building, or the priest. These are only the “containers”.

What does the book teach us? What does the statue represent? What qualities are the priests supposed to embody? These are the “contents”.

When we recognise the difference between the container and the contents, then we will preserve the contents even when the container is being destroyed.

We can print more books, build more temples and statues, and even train more monks and nuns, but when we lose our love and respect for others and ourselves and replace it with violence, then the whole religion has gone down the toilet.

Excerpt from © Ajahn Brahm, *Don't Worry, Be Grumpy*

(Wisdom Publications, 2014)