

An Interview With Ajahn Brahm

The Garden Of Silence

Ajahn Brahm, distinguished teacher and meditator based in Western Australia, explains how to cultivate emotional wisdom through an appreciation of silence, relaxation and non-judgement with more than a touch of valuable humor.



Ajahn Brahmavamso Mahathera (lovingly known as Ajahn Brahm) was born Peter Betts in London, United Kingdom on 7 August 1951. He studied Theoretical Physics at Cambridge University in the late 1960s. A year after graduation, and while training as a junior monk, he was asked to undertake the compilation of an English language guide to the Vinaya, which is the basis for monastic discipline in many Theravada monasteries in the Western world. He was then invited by the Buddhist Society of Western Australia to assist Ajahn Jagaro at the later named Bodhiyana Monastery, today, the largest community of Theravada Buddhist monks in Australia.

What can people do to have a healthier and more holistic existence?

1

Maybe you might try listening to your own body and mind instead of listening to experts (like me!). Ask your body, “How do you feel today?” and ask your mind, “What do you need right now?”.

Asking a question like this is a skillful way of arousing mindfulness. Then listen. Once you have an answer, follow the advice of your body and of your mind. You will be surprised how much wiser their advice is than what you have been taught by others.

I treat my body and mind like a good friend, not as a maid to order around, and never as a slave to do as they’re told. I listen to their advice, respect and trust them. They are my teachers.

“I treat my body and mind like a good friend, not as a maid to order around, and never as a slave to do as they’re told.”

How can the average person live a less stressful and more meaningful life in a world that is getting progressively more advanced technologically, and yet more isolated in terms of human relationships?

2

Don't worry what other people think about you. They are all so busy they probably have no time to think of you at all! That takes so much pressure off you. Now you can set your own agenda. That relieves so much stress!

My own agenda is "Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow because you may die tonight!" Furthermore, those who are more relaaaaaaaxxxxxedddd, yeah!, are more productive and innovative. How can one be productive when your battery is flat? So taking more rests is a win-win situation for your career and your well-being.

As for so-called "advanced" technology, maybe it should be re-branded as "oppressive" technology because it enslaves the users rather than liberate them. It is called a "cell" phone because it shares many features with the "cell" in a prison, and we even assume that the more bars on our cell phone mean a better connection, whereas the more bars should indicate less freedom!

As they said in Silicon Valley: "Disconnect (your devices) to Connect (with reality)."

How can we encourage as many people as possible, especially the younger generation, to use meditation to overcome their problems and issues?

3

Make it a secret teaching and, if they find out, order them not to tell anyone!

How can meditation help people become more tolerant of one another? How can meditation help promote peace and understanding amongst people?

4

At least when they are sitting still they are only a pain in the butt to themselves, not to others.

Seriously, when we learn to place more value in silence (listening to the world) than in thinking (talking back at the world) we realize how unfairly we judge ourselves and how unjust is our criticism of others.

Wisdom comes from silence, not from reasoning, and emotional intelligence is cultivated in the garden of silence.

To this day, why is it still difficult for people of different religions to find common ground and co-exist in harmony?

5

They all believe they are right. Wisdom teaches us to see that as soon as we open our mouths, we are usually wrong.

However, don't focus the blame on religion alone! Why do men and women, parents and children, conservatives and liberals, supporters of Liverpool FC and fans of Manchester United...find it difficult to get along and live in harmony? Because we become a prisoner of our assumed identity and, like a convict at the end of a long sentence, we prefer the familiarity of jail and fear the unknown that is freedom.



“Learn from nature and find that a mono-culture is bad for the ecosystem...”

What can people of different faiths do to set aside their differences and live in harmony, especially when more than a few world leaders today seem to be encouraging the opposite behavior?

6

Believe what their hearts tell them, not what their books say.

Learn from nature and find that a mono-culture is bad for the ecosystem, that an orchestra requires many different instruments to play in harmony to produce great music, and that even your own hand has five completely different fingers that have learnt how to work together in harmony.

Moreover, if one finger becomes wounded and infected, then the whole hand becomes unusable. So, every finger needs to protect and care for the other fingers. Every religion would do well to care and protect the other religions. Like the fingers of a hand, we are a family of religions.

Why do people continue to have issues with gender equality?

7

Because they hold on to gender agendas.

What can be done to help people overcome their prejudices and preconceptions in order to accept the global movement towards making gender equality a reality?

8

Perhaps try caring for the intolerant, instead of curing them of their prejudices.

When our fear of change crumbles, then the walls that separate people come down as well.

Make peace, be kind and be gentle, in working for a better world, and be patient.

A person who plants a tree understands that they may never see it reach maturity in their lifetime, but that doesn't discourage them from planting a forest.

Is there anything you would like to share with readers of bodymindsoul Magazine?

9

When I was visiting a Sri Lankan Temple in Singapore many years ago, I was asked to sign the Visitor's Book. It was only after entering my name and address that I realized that I had picked up the donation book by mistake. The next column was for me to write in the amount that I was to donate!

It was too late to delete my details, yet I was a monk who had no money so what could I donate? I wrote that "I donate my life". So that is what I can share with your readers - "my life".

Do you have any suggestion for our Magazine towards encouraging more people to live more positively and harmoniously with themselves and others?

10

*Grant yourself a moment of peace,
And you will understand how foolishly you have scurried about.*

*Learn to be silent,
And you will notice that you have talked too much.*

*Be kind,
And you will realize that your judgement of others was too severe.*