

# EMPTINESS AND STILLNESS

*A tribute to Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso on  
the occasion of his 60th birthday*



A group of people, including men and women of various ages, are sitting in an audience. They are all smiling and laughing, suggesting a joyful or humorous event. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the people in the foreground.

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EMPTINESS  
AND  
STILLNESS

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Italicised entries indicate picture pages

# Editor's Note

This book has been produced to commemorate the 60th birthday of Ajahn Brahm. It has been generously sponsored for free distribution by his close lay disciples from Perth, interstate and overseas.

All the text is original material written specially for this publication. Likewise, many of the images were taken during recent Dhamma tours. Special thanks for wonderful pictures are due to supporters in Thailand, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Norway and Germany. Some of the photos are from The Buddhist Society of Western Australia archives and may bring back happy memories. Extracts from two of Ajahn's Dhamma talks are also included.

Much gratitude is also due to Ajahn Brahmāli, Ber Sun and Edwin Fong.

Contributions have come from around the world. These acts of generosity are most gratefully acknowledged. They show the joy that Ajahn has given to so many. This joy can be readily appreciated in some of the messages and images. Now as he might say: make peace, be kind, be gentle in every moment.

Richard Thomas

*Perth, July 2011*





*Happiness  
and  
Energy*

*The Life of Ajahn Brahm*

*An unauthorised hagiography*

## Childhood



London, 7th August 1951: it was probably a wet and gloomy day. But then into the gloom came a ray of light. Ajahn Brahm, then known as baby Betts – his parents had wished for a daughter and had no name at hand for a boy – had entered the human world.

Where did the baby come from? Later on he would be given the name Brahmavamso, “he of Brahma’s lineage”. Some have suggested that this name was no coincidence. As the events of his life unfolded, it became clear that there was something special about this child. Perhaps he really had descended from the lofty Brahma realms; perhaps his name was a reflection of a greater truth. But the name Brahmavamso was still far away in the future. In the meantime the nurse at the maternity ward suggested to the child’s parents that Peter would be a suitable name. It was thus that Peter Betts came into our midst.

Peter had been born into a working class family in post-war London, a time of relative hardship for many people, including the Betts family. They lived in a council flat, a kind of subsidized housing designated for people with limited means. One day while the family was watching TV, a gust of wind caught a £1 note and carried it through the open window. Even this was a financial setback for the family.



*The Betts family on holiday at Butlins*



Despite the lack of material wealth, the Betts family home was a good place for a young child to grow up. Peter's paternal grandfather had been a strict disciplinarian, and Peter's father had made a firm determination that he would be different. Peter thus grew up in a caring and loving household. It was in this household that Peter's father famously told the young adolescent, "The door of my home is always open to you, no matter what you do in life."

Peter was also close to his maternal grandparents. When he visited his grandmother, she would usually make him a big portion of chips. He would happily gobble it down. Those who know Ajahn Brahm's taste in food will realize that some things in *samsāra* are less impermanent than others. So for those who think Ajahn Brahm eats too much greasy food, it was all conditioned by his grandmother's affection. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.*

One Christmas Peter was given a fishing rod by his grandfather. Before the youngster got the opportunity to make any bad *kamma*, his father decided he first needed to test the rod. Testing ... testing ... break! The fishing rod was no more. Grandfather was upset, and Peter was furious. Only later did he understand his good fortune in being saved from killing animals.

From early on it was apparent that the young Peter was not quite like other children. When his school had the occasional half-day holiday for well-behaved children, Peter would finish his homework and then delight in having absolutely nothing to do. These were the most memorable times of his childhood. Where most children would delight in activity, Peter Betts would delight in doing absolutely nothing. The seeds of *samādhi* were clearly there from the very beginning.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the adolescent Peter would resonate with the Buddhist teachings when he first came across them at 16. He had won an academic prize through his excellent O level exam results, and he used the prize money to buy Christmas Humphries' pioneering book on Buddhism. He quickly recognized



*Peter at primary school*



that, in fact, he was already a Buddhist. But not being content with partial research, he decided to study other religions as well. Only when he felt satisfied that he understood the alternatives, did he call himself a Buddhist. Thus at the age of 16 he had made the most important choice in his life.

It was fortunate for him that he had the Buddhist teachings for support during this period, because this was also the time when his father died. One night Peter's mother came into his room and said she was unable to wake up his father. Peter went into his parents' bedroom, shook his father, and realized straight away that he was dead. Most people would get upset by such a discovery, but Peter instead remembered the Buddhist teachings: the difference between grief and non-grief is in how you perceive the situation. If you focus on the loss, you grieve. If instead you focus on how the departed person has enriched your life, you feel a sense of gratitude.

A year after his father's death, Peter sat his A level exams. Again his results were excellent, and he graduated as the dux of his class at Latymer Upper School. The way was then open for applying for a place at Cambridge University. He was accepted at Emmanuel College and was additionally granted a full scholarship. He entered Cambridge University and studied theoretical physics for the next three years.



*Emmanuel College, Cambridge (from Wikipedia, photo by Steve Cadman)*

## *At Cambridge University*

At Cambridge Peter soon became a member of the university Buddhist society. His first teacher at the society was the abbot of the recently established Thai temple in London, Wat Buddhapadipa. He proved to be adept at explaining Buddhism and Buddhist meditation, and Peter was inspired. After Peter had attended his talks two or three times, the monk

stopped coming. He had disrobed, and was going to get married to an English girl. Peter was shocked! It dawned on him that being an articulate and inspiring teacher is quite different from having a deep appreciation of the teachings.

His next teacher was Nai Boonman, a Thai lay Buddhist who had been one of the founders of the Samatha Society, perhaps the most successful of all British meditation societies. Peter soon became a serious practitioner of *samatha* meditation, a type of meditation for which Ajahn Brahm would later become well-known. Peter also took up other aspects of Buddhist practice. After an alcohol-fuelled party where he had too much to drink, he decided to give up alcohol. He never looked back. He also became a vegetarian at this time, a practice that ironically he had to give up when he became a monk, since there was no such thing as vegetarian food in the north-east of Thailand in the mid-1970s. But sometimes his idealism went too far: when his girlfriend prepared a delicious non-vegetarian meal for him, he refused to eat it. He later realised that sometimes kindness and compassion for your fellows is more important than strict adherence to principles.

He also cultivated generosity. He volunteered at a home for people with intellectual disabilities. He gave £10 to a Tibetan orphanage, even though this meant he had to go without food. When one of his Christian friends decided to fast, not to be outdone, he too went on a fast. Every day he would cycle past the fish and chips shop to test his resolve! Anyone who knows Ajahn Brahm well knows that he has an iron will, although it is rarely on display. And of course, he easily outlasted his Christian mate.

It was at Cambridge that he discovered that intelligence and wisdom are very different things. He looked carefully at the Cambridge faculty, which included a significant number of Nobel laureates, and he realised that even the brightest of people could have miserable private lives. Some had domestic problems, some were painfully socially inept, and others just plain unhappy. Intelligence may make you academically successful, but not necessarily successful in life. Peter had understood that real 'success' was not of the academic variety. He would spend the summer holidays working and travelling



*Peter, standing on the left, on holiday in Egypt*

the world. He went to such places as North Africa and Central America, and in 1973 to India on his first Buddhist pilgrimage. It was during his time in Central America, while visiting one of the Mayan pyramids on the Yucatan peninsula, that he had one of his insights about the nature of *samādhi*. He realised that the experience of deep *samādhi* is similar to climbing one of those ancient pyramids: just as when climbing a pyramid you get out of the jungle and get a proper perspective on the landscape below, so too, with the experience of *samādhi*, you lift yourself above the sensual world and for the first time understand it properly.

But as always Peter was at his happiest when he had absolutely nothing to do. One of his most memorable moments at Cambridge was sitting in the back of a boat that someone else was rowing. Once again, there was nothing to do in the whole world – the bliss of complete contentment.

It was also at Cambridge that Peter attended his first meditation retreat, and it was at this retreat that he experienced deep meditation for the first time. His mind was so peaceful that when he went out into the gardens he would sit for hours just staring at a clump of bamboo. He had never realised that bamboo could be so beautiful!

It was the power of his meditation that helped Peter achieve academic distinction. At Cambridge in the early 1970s all exams were done during a single week, with one exam in the morning and another in the afternoon. Most students would go for lunch between the morning and afternoon exams, but Peter would instead meditate. When he again met his fellow students just before the afternoon exam, he was so bright and cheery that his friends were wondering what sort of drug he was using! With the help of meditation he achieved the highest academic distinction – first-class honours.

### *Working as a Teacher*

While at Cambridge Peter decided to become a teacher. To qualify, he spent one year at Durham University near Newcastle. He then got a job at a secondary school in Devon, teaching maths and science.

Always questioning the way things appear to be, he set out to improve the results of the students who were performing the worst. He reasoned that, if instead of neglecting the poor performers – which seems to be a common problem in education – he gave them extra attention, he might be able to prove that ‘dummies’ aren’t necessarily stupid. Of course, he was right. The extra attention did prove that a poor academic record is not always due to lack of ability. But Peter’s proudest achievement as a teacher was teaching meditation to 650 students at the school assembly. If a single student had started to giggle,

it could have been a complete flop. But to his astonishment all the children followed his instructions and became dead quiet. After 5 minutes of meditation, he got a spontaneous ovation! Many years later he accidentally met one of his former students who told him that the short session of meditation had changed his life.

For those who think that Ajahn Brahm was born a saint, it may come as a surprise to learn that he also indulged in worldly pursuits. He had loved music from an early age, anything from rock and roll to classical. One of his favourites was the American guitarist Jimi Hendrix, and as a teenager he would compete in the volume stakes with his father who was playing Frank Sinatra! Later on he would frequent the London music scene, which in those days was the avant guard of rock and roll. He sported a beard, long hair and green velvet trousers. He played the guitar and had a girlfriend. It is good to know that nobody – even the Buddha before his awakening – starts out as a perfect saint. It gives hope to all the rest of us.

### *Taking Ordination as a Bhikkhu*

It was while he was working as a teacher that Peter decided to try out monastic life. After completing a year of teaching in Devon, he returned to London and was told by the monks at Wat Buddhapadipa to go to Thailand for ordination. While he was waiting for the right time to leave, every day he would rise early and ride his motorbike to Wat Buddhapadipa to attend the morning chanting and meditation. He was so keen, and would sometimes arrive so early, that he had to wake up the resident monks before the chanting could begin!



*Ajahn shortly after his ordination*



*Ajahn meeting his preceptor, Somdet Phra Buddhajahn, at Wat Saket in December 2010*

When Peter arrived in Bangkok, his taxi driver refused to believe that a foreigner wanted to go to a temple and kept insisting on taking him to a hotel instead. The taxi driver was at his wit's end when Peter told him he wanted to become a monk. In those days in Thailand, the West was looked upon as "the land of plenty", and surely no Westerner in his right mind would seek ordination as a Buddhist monk in Thailand! Despite his taxi driver's insistence, Peter eventually made it to Wat Saket, one of the most famous temples in Bangkok.

Wat Saket is generally regarded as the head monastery of the entire Maha-Nikaya order, the branch of the Thai Sangha which has by far the largest number of monks. Ajahn Brahm's ordination preceptor was none other than the monk who was later to become the acting head of the entire Thai Sangha, Phra Somdet Buddhajahn. Such a close connection to a high-ranking Sangha member in Thailand can be very useful, particularly when one needs support in difficult circumstances. During the brouhaha after the Perth bhikkhuni ordination, Ajahn Brahm got private and personal support from the very top of the Thai Sangha.

In December 1974 Peter made the transition to Venerable Brahmavamso, or Ajahn Brahm. Once he had been ordained, he knew he would never again be a lay Buddhist. His worst nightmare in those early months was dreaming that he was no longer a bhikkhu. He would wake up in a sweat and breathe a sigh of relief when he saw the brown robes next to him.

Although Wat Saket was a city temple, Ajahn Brahm diligently continued his meditation practice. As a young monk with few responsibilities his meditation continued to improve. But city life is never ideal for a meditation monk. After three months at Wat Saket he met Ajahn Sumedho who was in Bangkok to extend his Thai visa. Ajahn Sumedho told him about Ajahn Chah and Wat Pa Pong, and Ajahn Brahm knew that this was his future as a monk.



*Venerable Brahmavamso, standing on the right, was ordained in December 1974*

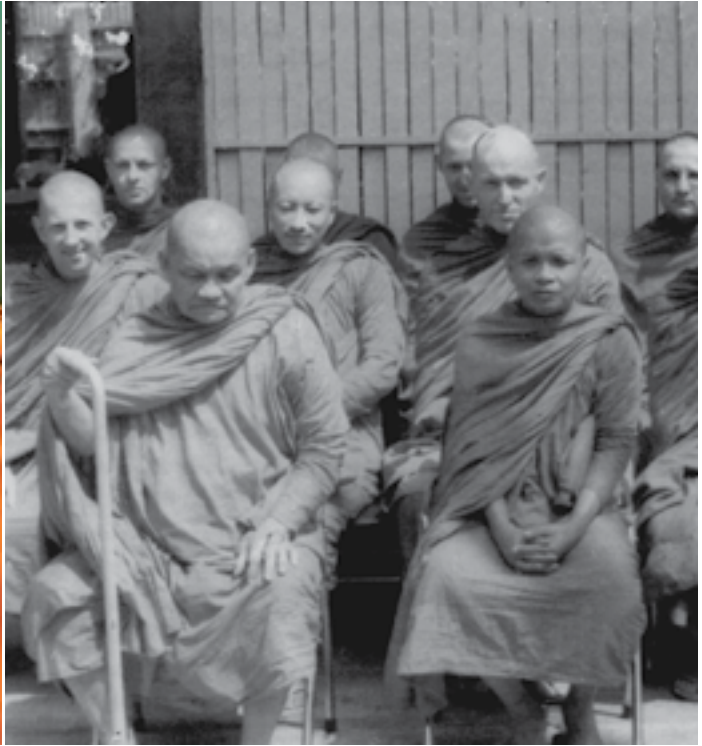
### ***At Wat Pa Pong***

Wat Pa Pong was an ascetic meditation monastery. The food was simple, occasionally just glutinous rice and insects. The climate was hot and humid, particularly for Westerners used to colder climes. The monastery routine was usually gruelling, with chanting and group meditation beginning at 3 a.m. But Wat Pa Pong had one thing that set it apart from other monasteries: Ajahn Chah.

Soon after he arrived at Wat Pa Pong in January 1975 Ajahn Brahm overheard a conversation between Ajahn Chah and one of the Western monks. As the conversation progressed, Ajahn Brahm would mentally formulate his own question. To his astonishment, what Ajahn Chah said next seemed as if tailored to his query. Ajahn Brahm would then formulate another question in his mind, and the same thing happened again ... and again ... and again! After the interview was over, the Western monk who had been asking the questions told Ajahn Brahm that he could not make any sense of Ajahn Chah's answers. It was this experience that cemented Ajahn Brahm's decision to become an Ajahn Chah disciple.



*Ajahn Chah*



*Left to right: Khemadhammo, Anando, Ajahn Chah, Gavesako, unknown, Brahm, Sumedho, Jundee, Viradhammo*

One of Ajahn Chah's famous teaching methods was the use of ascetic practices, *toraman*, the purpose of which were to teach the monks that desire is the cause of suffering. Not long after Ajahn Brahm's arrival, but before he was allowed to take part in the monastic meetings, he witnessed how Ajahn Chah gave an all-night talk to the Sangha, speaking for perhaps 6 or 7 hours. One of the monks was particularly displeased, telling the new arrival that, "Ajahn Chah is just crazy!"

Another of Ajahn Chah's *toraman* techniques was getting the monks to sit meditation in an old tin shed in the middle of the day when the heat was at its most oppressive. Participation was compulsory but, as Ajahn Brahm now jokes, wearing blankets was voluntary. For most monks such tough practices were plainly a matter of endurance. But for Ajahn Brahm it was the right opportunity for learning how to let go of the body. In those situations you either suffer terribly or you enter the world of the mind.

Sometimes Ajahn Chah would send his monks off to a branch monastery almost without notice. On one occasion Ajahn Brahm didn't even have time to collect his toothbrush before he was sent off to a remote hermitage on the border with Laos. He learnt to improvise. He found new ways of cleaning his teeth. From Ajahn Chah's point of view such exercises were simply lessons in impermanence.





Supplies of anything were very limited. Sometimes the monks had to walk barefoot because there were no sandals. When Ajahn Brahm went to see Ajahn Chah to ask for new batteries for his torch – and this was after squeezing out the very last electrons of his existing batteries – he was told there weren't any. When walking at night in snake-infested Wat Pa Pong, there was only one possibility: develop your mindfulness to the maximum. And sure enough, Ajahn Brahm proved to himself that even in the dark of night in the snake-ridden jungles of Thailand it was possible to walk barefoot and still not be bitten.



*Wat Pa Nanachat, 1981*

### *At Wat Pa Nanachat*

After Ajahn Brahm had stayed at Wat Pa Pong for about two months, the Western monks were invited to start a separate monastery near Bung Wai village, the monastery which is now known as Wat Pa Nanachat, the International Forest Monastery. It was a rough group of monks that set out from Wat Pa Pong, many of them American veterans from the Vietnam War. And apart from their experiences at Wat Pa Pong, their understanding of Buddhist monasticism was still developing.

Ajahn Brahm realised the importance of improving the Western Sangha's appreciation of Buddhist monasticism. He set out to study the monastic Vinaya – the code of conduct and the proper procedures of the Sangha – with his considerable analytical powers. Although the resources at Wat Nanachat were very limited, he was soon recognised as the in-house Vinaya master. He continued his studies of the Vinaya for the next 15 years, and by the early 1990s he was generally regarded as the foremost Vinaya expert in the international Ajahn Chah Sangha, and even beyond.



*Early days in Thailand*

Apart from his studies, Ajahn Brahm also took an interest in the practical side of running the monastery. In 1978, when he became the second monk at Wat Nanachat, he took on the job of building supervisor. Although he had no experience with building work, he was energetic and always willing to help out. The local villagers would do most of the manual labour, and Ajahn Brahm would ensure that the quality of their work was up to scratch; after all, they were rice farmers, not builders.

He was also a good friend to his monastic companions. On one occasion one of his fellow monks told him how he would love a cup of tea in the morning before the 3 a.m. meditation. Ajahn Brahm thought he would surprise the monk, and the next morning he brought him a cup of tea at 2.45 a.m.! It was an attitude that had a powerful effect on his meditation.

More significantly, he would spend much time teaching the anagarikas – the lay people intending to become monks – to sew robes. One evening when the ordainees were exhausted after spending long hours preparing to dye their new robes, Ajahn Brahm told them that he would look after the robes and that they could all take a rest. Ajahn Brahm didn't sleep at all that night, yet the following morning his meditation was particularly blissful. On the morning alms round through Bung Wai village he asked Ajahn Sumedho how this was possible. Ajahn Sumedho told him that it was the fruit of his sitting up all night to help others. Perhaps more than any other event in his life, this showed Ajahn Brahm the importance of service and generosity, not just for lay Buddhists but for monastics.

Despite his efforts at being a good community member, for Ajahn Brahm meditation has always been the core aspect of monastic life. Although he had been a gifted meditator since he started practising, he did have problems with dullness and drowsiness in those early days at Wat Nanachat. Initially he tried to fight the tiredness, but over the years he gradually learnt that fighting just makes matters worse and that the proper response is to allow the tiredness to be. The idea of letting things be, rather than exerting will-power, has in later years become an important aspect of Ajahn Brahm's meditation teachings.

Of course, at times Ajahn Brahm's meditation would be very powerful. While doing walking meditation on the concrete floor in the hall at Wat Nanachat, he became so peaceful that his perception of concrete would undergo mind-boggling transformations. What used to be a dull, grey surface became an explosion of colour, in the most beautiful of shapes. Ever since those experiences Ajahn Brahm has had a veritable love affair with concrete, wanting concrete here and there and everywhere, sometimes driving his fellow monks to the edge of despair!

On one occasion when Ajahn Brahm's meditation was particularly deep, his body became so still for such a long time that the monk sitting next to him quite literally thought he had died! At another time he had an unbearably painful toothache. He didn't know what to do with himself – he could neither sit still nor concentrate on anything – when he realised that craving was the problem. The realisation brought about a full embracing of the painful feeling. The result was complete contentment and the painful feeling just vanished. It was an almost unreal reminder of the power of insight. On yet another occasion Ajahn Brahm was hospitalised with typhus fever. He was so ill that he was unable to walk without supporting himself. When Ajahn Chah visited him in hospital and saw his condition, he famously said, "You'll either get better or you'll die." Yet in spite of his dire condition, Ajahn Brahm was able to let go of the body and enter *samādhi*.

One of Ajahn Brahm's most important personal experiences occurred one evening when Ajahn Chah was visiting Wat Nanachat for his weekly sauna. Since there was an abundance of monks looking after the ageing Master, Ajahn Brahm decided to do some meditation instead. After his meditation, he walked in the direction of the sauna to see if he could assist Ajahn Chah in any way. Ajahn Chah had already finished and was walking in Ajahn Brahm's direction. Straight away he could see that Ajahn Brahm was very peaceful and so he thought he would give him a teaching. He said, "Why?" - "I don't know" - "There is nothing. Do you understand?" - "Yes" - "No you don't!" And he walked away. Only later did Ajahn Brahm understand that he had been given a profound teaching on non-self.

At Wat Pa Pong and its branch monasteries it has generally been the custom for monks to go travelling – *tudong* – after their fifth rains retreat, and so it was for Ajahn Brahm. When he first suggested to Ajahn Chah that he might go travelling, Ajahn Chah told him to just walk round and round the perimeter of the monastery! This wasn't exactly what he had had in mind, but soon afterwards he got his chance to travel around the north-east of Thailand.

During his *tudong* months he visited many of the most famous meditation masters, including Ajahn Tate and Ajahn Maha Boowa. Ajahn Brahm had a special affinity for Ajahn Tate and he found him to be one of the most selfless (in the higher sense of the word) and peaceful of all the monks he had ever met. Meeting someone truly special can be enough to inspire one for a lifetime.

At one point, while walking between villages, he became particularly thirsty but there was nothing suitable to drink. He then thought to himself: "I am a good monk. If there are any *devas* (divine beings) out there, can you please ensure I get a Pepsi in the next village." Ajahn Brahm soon entered the next village and walked past the village store. Then just as he was giving up hope, a lady came running out of the store: "Venerable, would you like a Pepsi!" Then another person came, then another, then another ... until he has nine bottles of Pepsi. That's right: nine bottles of Pepsi, and nothing else!



*Ajahn Tate*



*Ajahn Gunha*

During his travelling months Ajahn Brahm spent a lot of time by himself on remote mountains and in isolated forests, just practising meditation. This time his greatest hindrance was not dullness and drowsiness but too much thinking. He tried to use force to silence the thoughts, but to his dismay the thinking got worse. He then realized that the use of force makes the mind rebel, and thus it is counter-productive. So he decided to set aside a full hour every day just for thinking. His mind went dead quiet! Once again he had seen that force and control are not the path to success in meditation.

During this period he discovered a small area of pristine jungle, with beautiful clear ponds, enormous trees, and wildlife in abundance. He realised what the north-east of Thailand once must have looked like. However, even while Ajahn Brahm was staying in that forest, the villagers decided to burn it all down and convert it into farmland. Ajahn Brahm was upset, since he knew this was probably the last piece of real jungle in the entire north-east. He then caught himself and realised the foolishness of getting angry: this was just the course of nature, and there was truly nothing he could do to prevent it.



*Attending the opening of a Vietnamese temple, 1984*



*Ajahn Brahm and Ajahn Jagaro in Magnolia Street Vihara, 1985*

## *Going to Perth*

When he had been in Thailand for seven years, Ajahn Brahm decided it was time to visit his family. Arriving in England was a culture shock for him, but he usually found the right answers to any difficult situations. As he walked past a group of menacing teenagers, he jokingly did a few fake kung fu moves. The kids ran a mile; they must have thought he was a real Shaolin kung fu master. While he was staying at his mother's flat, a gypsy woman came to beg for money. She said she would curse Ajahn Brahm's mother if she

didn't give anything. Then Ajahn Brahm came to the door and told the gypsy woman that Buddhist curses were much stronger than hers! The gypsy woman fled on the spot. While visiting Stoke-on-Trent he couldn't figure out why people kept pointing at him and laughing, until he realized there was a circus in town. Apparently people had thought he was a clown!

Not long after he returned to Wat Nanachat, Ajahn Sumedho asked Ajahn Brahm to go to Perth. Ajahn Jagaro, an Australian monk who had also trained at Wat Nanachat, had already been in Perth for about four months, but his second monk Ajahn Puriso was returning to Thailand. Ajahn Brahm was going to be Ajahn Jagaro's new lieutenant.



*Front row from left: Ven. Ariyasīlo, Ajahn Jagaro, Ajahn Sumedho, Ajahn Brahm, Ven. Visārado and Sr. Rocana*

Ajahn Brahm used his impending transfer as a spur in his practice. Instead of the usual rest after the meal in the hottest part of the day, he decided to put forth extra effort in meditation for the benefit of the people he was going to serve in Australia.

In April 1983 Ajahn Brahm flew from Thailand and moved into the small Vihara in Magnolia Street owned by the Buddhist Society of WA. The two resident monks closely followed the way of running a monastery they had learnt in Thailand. This meant that Ajahn Jagaro did the teaching and counselling of the lay Buddhists, while Ajahn Brahm fulfilled the more anonymous role of second monk. Indeed, Ajahn Brahm was so good at staying in the background that when he had to speak because Ajahn Jagaro was away, someone exclaimed: "You can speak! I had thought you were demented or something."

Because Ajahn Brahm had few teaching duties, he used his spare time to further his study of the Vinaya. Part of this was teaching himself Pali, the ancient language of the Buddhist scriptures, since a thorough understanding of the Vinaya requires a good knowledge of Pali. And once you know Pali, you also have direct access to the Buddhist suttas. Thus Ajahn Brahm gained an access to the Buddha's teachings shared by few other Western monks.

### *Establishing Bodhinyana Monastery*

The Magnolia Street Vihara was never intended as a permanent monastic residence, and the Buddhist Society had long wished to establish a proper forest monastery. After the rains retreat of 1983, the two monks set out in earnest to find a suitable property. They considered several options, and Ajahn Brahm pushed for the property that would stretch the Buddhist Society's finances the most. He maintained that instead of settling for a smaller property with limited prospects, the Buddhist Society should envisage where one day they hoped to be. Since they agreed that they hoped for a large and thriving Sangha, they would require a large and secluded property. It was thus that Bodhinyana Monastery was established on 97 acres of bushland on Kingsbury Drive in Serpentine, about 1 hour's drive south of Perth.

Despite the lack of facilities, the two monks moved to Serpentine straight away in November 1983. An old sheep shearer's shed became the dining hall. Ajahn Brahm's first 'kuti' was an old door with bricks for legs. One evening he wasn't able to find his door and had to curl up under a tree for the night. As the monastery gradually developed, Ajahn



*Ajahn Brahm's water tank kuti*



*Building the dining hall of the monastery, 1985*



*Celebrating the end of the Rains Retreat, 1984*



*Dana in the donated shearers' shed, end 1984*

Brahm moved into a tent and then half a water tank. The water tank was fitted with walls, a window and a door. Luxury! Unfortunately it was located in a gully where a small stream would run in winter. His mattress was soaking wet. If he moved too abruptly on the mattress, water would literally flow out of it. This is how Ajahn Brahm spent his first rains retreat at Bodhinyana. The shell of that half water tank kuti is still in the monastery, and it helps remind the rest of the Sangha of the high standard of their present dwellings.

During the early years at Serpentine, support from Thailand was essential for the development of the monastery. Not only did the bulk of financial support come from Thailand, but senior Thai monks such as the late Luang Por Paññānando played a critical role in generating support, consecrating the Main Hall, and acting as preceptor at ordination ceremonies. It was the new monastery's close association with Ajahn Chah and Wat Pa Pong that ensured such generous support from Thailand.





*Dana in the open with Bhante Gunaratana in 1985; the shearers' shed in the background*



*Samanera ordination of Ven. Visārado, 1986*

Nevertheless, in the earliest period the monastery's financial situation was very tight. Having spent all – and more – of the Buddhist Society's money on the land, there was hardly any money left for buildings. They could barely afford building materials, and for the most part had to do completely without hired manpower. Since Ajahn Brahm had been in charge of building at Wat Nanachat, he naturally became the builder of Bodhinyana Monastery. He learnt how to lay concrete and bricks, how to erect roofs and fit ceilings, how to do carpentry work and lay pipes. The workmanship was invariably of a very high standard, the sort of standard that is achievable only with a very focussed mind.

But even a master builder makes mistakes. In one of the first buildings he built, Ajahn Brahm discovered to his horror that two of the bricks had not been laid to perfection. Thus his well-known story of the two bad bricks was born. Many years later people began asking to see the by now famous two bad bricks. But Ajahn Brahm could no longer remember where they were. He was simply practising what he was preaching: he had completely let go of those bricks.



On a potentially fateful day he decided he was going to lay the bricks for the gable of the Main Hall, the highest point of any building in the monastery. He had no scaffolding and no ropes, and the recently built brick wall was entirely unsupported. All Ajahn Brahm had was an eight metre long ladder, which he extended to the max. He then took a few bricks in one hand and a bucket with mortar in the other, and proceeded up the ladder. When he reached the top he laid the bricks and then came down for more. By all appearances he was putting his life on the line to get the Monastery Hall completed.

A more indirect danger of being the builder is that you tend to focus on faults. What needs to be repaired? How can the buildings be made safe from bush fires? What are the further needs



*The meditation hall peak*



*Ajahn Cattamalo and Ven. Jotidhammo building Ajahn's cave in 2003*



*Giving a talk in Fremantle in 1986*



*Practising the delicate art of sprinkling holy water*

of the monastery? To counter this fault-finding tendency, Ajahn Brahm began walking round the monastery deliberately just focussing on what had already been achieved. By rejoicing in what he had already done, he further developed the contentment that is so important for success in meditation.

Ajahn Brahm has continued doing building work all along. As his 60th birthday is approaching, at times he is still found power-tool in hand, all covered in dust. Despite the fame and the accolades, he is a humble monk, and he understands the power of service.

Apart from the building work, which in the 1980s and early 90s would take up about 8 hours on a normal day, Ajahn Brahm continued his efforts in meditation. Although he sometimes felt there was too much work, he made a determination not to complain until he had properly utilised every single minute of his free time. So he never complained.

He became adept at using all his hard work to boost his meditation, thus using the method the Buddha called *cāgānussati*, "recollection of (one's) generosity". Such recollection generates joy, which in turn quickly takes the mind to *samādhī*. This is another meditation technique that has been a hallmark of Ajahn Brahm's meditation methodology.

He also started practising *samādhī* more systematically, in accordance with the instructions found in the suttas (see e.g. AN9:35). His *samādhī* became more stable and then developed further, and along with the *samādhī* came profound insights: "For one who has *samādhī* no will needs

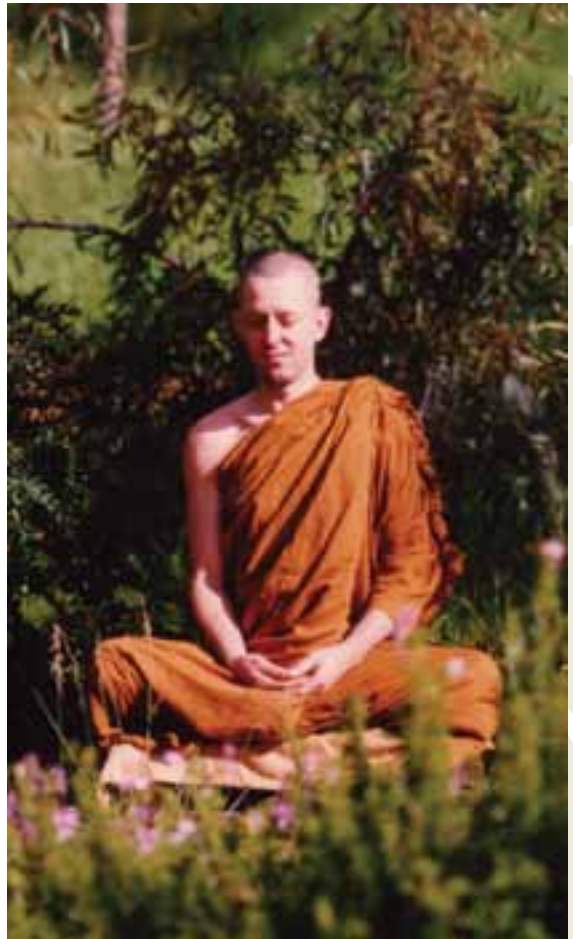
to be exerted: 'Let me know and see things as they really are.' It is natural that one who has *samādhi* knows and sees things as they really are." (AN10:2)

When the mind has been properly prepared by *samādhi*, insight can happen in seemingly unlikely situations. One day after giving a Dhamma talk, he decided to listen to one of his own talks from a few years before. To his astonishment the two talks were almost verbatim the same. Ajahn Brahm had thought that the previous evening's talk was the result of his freely choosing what to talk about. He had had a clear sense that his will was entirely free. But when he then listened to the older talk, he was forced to conclude the exact opposite: his will was entirely conditioned. It is the sort of insight that leads to the ending of *samsāra*.

In 2003 Ajahn Brahm entered a 6-month meditation retreat. He didn't speak to a single person for six months; he even picked up his food from a box. All he did was meditate and read the occasional sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya. Most people

would go nuts. After the six months Ajahn Brahm was beaming. His mind had been so peaceful for so long that for the first few days after the retreat he was virtually unable to speak. After he regained his powers of speech, he gave a talk to the Sangha called "six months of bliss".

Not everything Ajahn Brahm did was successful. His early talks at the Buddhist Society were considered by many as hopeless. Some said he had the style of a school teacher lecturing his audience, others that his jokes were lame and badly delivered. One man, after attending a retreat with Ajahn Brahm, swore that he would never again go to any of his talks. A lady said the talks were poor, but she would "front up" anyway just to show her support for the Buddhist cause.



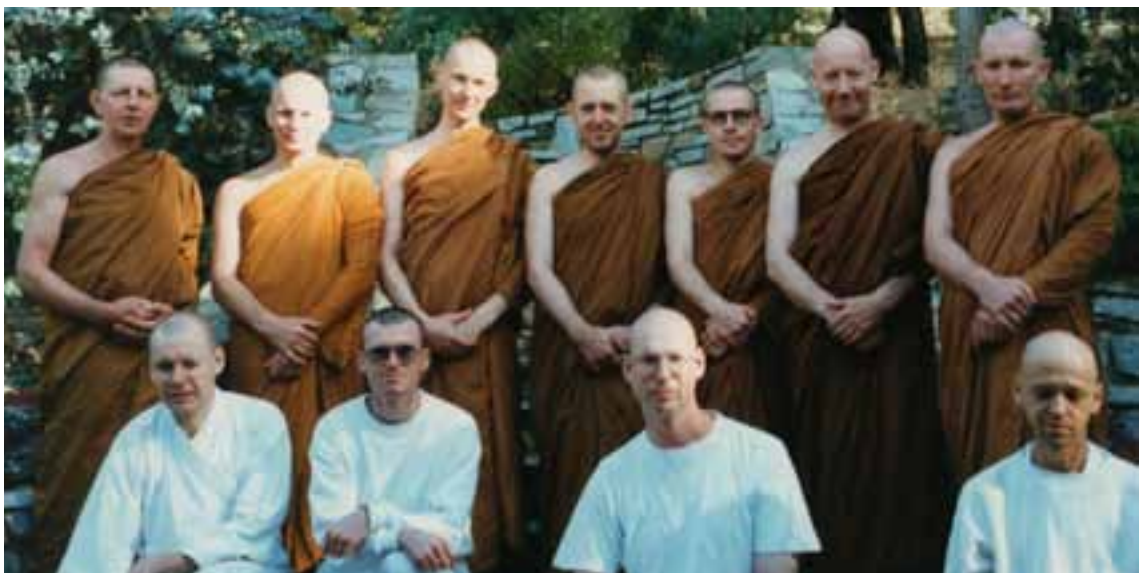
*Cāgānussati leads to sāmādhi: just reward for his hard work, 1988.*

But being persistent and irrepressible by nature, Ajahn Brahm gradually learned the ropes of public speaking. By the mid-1990s he was beginning to show the qualities that would make him one of the most popular speakers on Buddhism in large parts of the Buddhist world. He became more compassionate in his style and learnt how to connect better with his audience. His comic timing improved to virtual perfection, although his jokes were occasionally still a bit weak. And importantly, he started to tackle difficult but contemporary issues – euthanasia, abortion, human rights – and was thus able to make Buddhism much more relevant for his audience. In language and content he was relating directly to the audience, but his inspiration and clarity came from a deep understanding of the Buddhist suttas and his own profound meditation.

### *Becoming the Abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery*

In late 1993 Ajahn Jagaro went on 'sabbatical' leave to get away from his usual duties and increase his efforts in meditation. At around the same time Ajahn Brahm's reputation as a meditation master was gradually taking hold. Monks and lay people who wanted Ajahn Brahm as their teacher started to arrive at Bodhinyana Monastery.

Ajahn Jagaro eventually returned to Bodhinyana in March 1995. By that time he had concluded that Ajahn Brahm was better qualified to be the Abbot, and the two of them agreed that Ajahn Brahm would now take over. Ajahn Jagaro stayed for about a month before he headed for Melbourne. Then came the sad news for the Buddhist Society: he was going to disrobe. Ajahn Brahm immediately flew to Melbourne to dissuade him, as did Ajahn Sumedho, but to no avail.



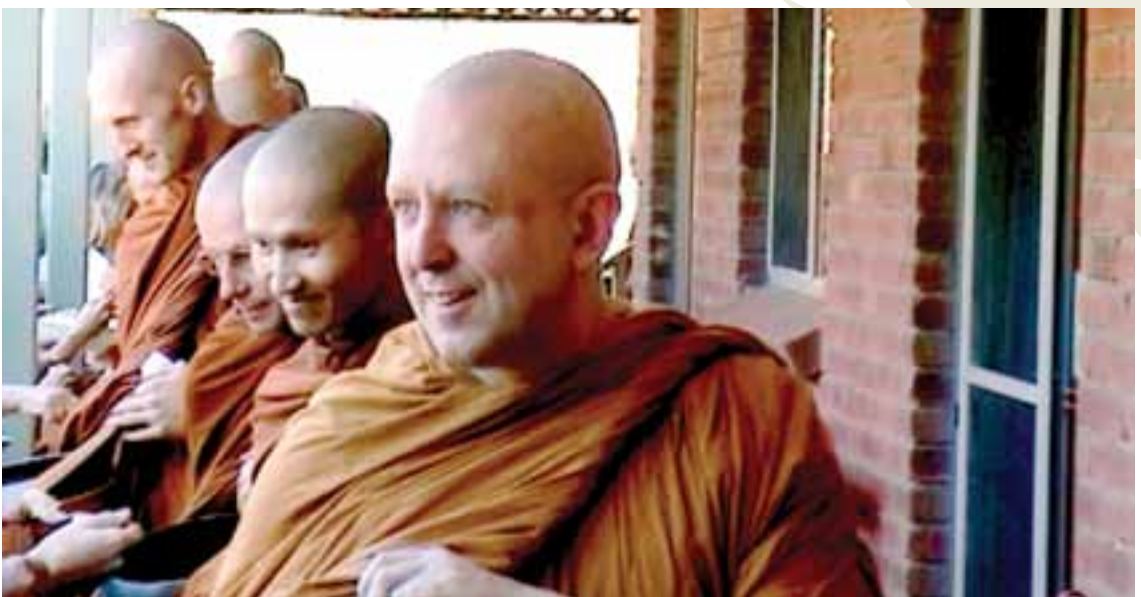
*From top left: Vens. Santidhammo, Nyānadhammo, Sumangalo, Ajahn Brahm, Cattamalo, Vimalo, Kemānando;  
from bottom left: anagarikas “Brahmāli”, “Appicchato”, “Nandiyo”, Alex; late 1994*

As abbot Ajahn Brahm was quite different from Ajahn Jagaro. Where Ajahn Jagaro had been committed to the Thai way of doing things, Ajahn Brahm had a more independent streak. He had already argued for years that some of the practices pursued at Wat Pa Pong were not suitable at Bodhinyana. At one point he lost all his energy, apparently due to lack of nutrition. Since the physical work at Bodhinyana was particularly arduous, Ajahn Brahm argued that a strict one meal a day practice was inappropriate and that a small breakfast would be helpful. Ajahn Jagaro eventually agreed.

In the area of community life, too, Ajahn Brahm had a different outlook from most of the other senior monks affiliated with Wat Pa Pong. Most Wat Pa Pong monasteries had compulsory all-night group meditation on the Uposatha days twice a month. In Ajahn Brahm's estimation such practices tended to lead to dullness and drowsiness. Another Wat Pa Pong custom was group chanting and meditation in the early morning and evening. Ajahn Brahm argued that deep meditation is much easier to access in solitude, and he used the suttas to support his argument. Gradually Ajahn Brahm was able to convince the resident Sangha, and Bodhinyana Monastery became more closely aligned with the ideals of the suttas and less so with the practices current at Wat Pa Pong.

### *Establishing Dhammasara Nuns' Monastery*

The Buddhist Society had been established to cater for both monks and nuns. When the Serpentine property was purchased, the idea had been to divide the land into a monks' section and a nuns' section. After the basic infrastructure was in place, a nun's kuti was built on the far side of the monastery creek.



*Ajahn Dtun, next to Ajahn Brahm at Bodhinyana, 2003*

# Ajahn the Builder



*Working on the ablation block,  
1984*



*Grading the gravel by the dining hall,  
1985*



*Ajahn at work in Bodhinyana, 1985*



*Ajahns Brahm and Jagaro doing  
pipe work for ablation block, 1984*



*Assisting around Dhammaloka*



*Ajahn Brahm supervising the construction of the  
teacher's cottage at Jhana Grove, 2011*



*Tree planting at Dhammaloka*



*Carpentry skills*



*Ajahn Vāyāmā showing visitors the building work at Dhammasara*

However, by the early 1990s it had become clear that men and women living together in the same monastery was far from ideal. Long-term female guests would occasionally fall in love with Ajahn Jagaro. This is not exactly helpful for celibacy. Indeed, after his disrobal Ajahn Jagaro went to live with one of the most persistent of his female admirers, and her advances had clearly been a factor (among many) in his decision to disrobe. In 1997, a couple of years after Ajahn Brahm had become the new abbot, the Buddhist Society decided to look for another property to establish an independent and separate nuns' monastery.

The Buddhist Society had been looking at several properties when a large block of almost 600 acres came onto the market in the locality of Gidgegannup to the east of Perth, over one hour's drive from Bodhinyana. Many thought it would be too large and too expensive, but not Ajahn Brahm. Ajahn Brahm argued that the property would give a nuns' monastery a high degree of independence, since it was so large that regardless of what happened on the adjacent land it would have minimal impact on monastery residents. The Buddhist Society committee agreed to bid a maximum of \$600,000 at the up-coming auction, and the Buddhist Society treasurer, together with Ajahn Brahm, was dispatched to do the bidding. The Buddhist Society held the bid at \$600,000 when someone else bid \$625,000. Was the limit given by the Buddhist Society absolutely binding, or was it more of a guideline? Ajahn Brahm thought it was the latter, and the Buddhist Society treasurer promptly bid \$650,000. The deal was done. The mood at the Buddhist Society was jubilant, and Ajahn Brahm and the treasurer were the heroes of the day.

From the beginning Ajahn Brahm's policy was to avoid interfering with the running of Dhammasara. He reckoned that a strong and sustainable nuns' community comes from independence and a sense of being in charge of one's own affairs. There was no need for any 'patriarchal' oversight. At the same time Ajahn Brahm would make himself available if the nuns needed advice or guidance: after all, he was very experienced in building and running monasteries. In this way Dhammasara gradually developed under the pioneering leadership and capable hands of the abbot, Ajahn Vāyāmā.

### *Bhikkhuni Ordination*

Possibly the most momentous event in the history of the Buddhist Society of WA, the full consequences of which will take many years to become fully apparent, was the decision by the four Dhammasara nuns to take the full bhikkhuni ordination in October 2009. The event was later listed by an American Buddhist pundit as the third most significant event in the entire Buddhist world in 2009. The groundwork had been laid by Buddhist scholars, including Ajahn Brahm, who had successfully argued that bhikkhuni ordination was fully possible within the limits of the monastic Vinaya. Once this hurdle had been cleared, there were no serious barriers left to the full ordination of women. The Buddhist lay community in Perth was keen on the idea, the nuns at Dhammasara were slowly forming the opinion that this was the future of Buddhist monasticism for women, and the monks at Bodhinyana were supportive. The ordination was a *fait accompli*. Though it was a potentially controversial decision, the subsequent feedback from around the world has mostly been very positive.



*The bhikkhuni ordination at Bodhinyana, 2009*



*Entry to the Rains Retreat at Dhammasara, 2000*



## *Building the Retreat Centre*

In 2001 the Buddhist Society acquired a property diagonally across Kingsbury Drive from Bodhinyana Monastery. Not long after the purchase, money was donated with the express purpose of building a dedicated retreat kuti. The Sangha decided that a kuti with all facilities, enabling long-term and independent retreats, would be built on the new land. The kuti was built and has since housed a number of monastics, both male and female, both locally resident and visiting.

Around 2003 Ajahn Brahm first suggested that the new property would be suitable for a retreat centre. The Buddhist Society had been renting premises for its retreats for a couple of decades and a dedicated Buddhist retreat centre was considered by many as highly desirable. The new property was seen as an ideal location for many reasons: it was



*Installing the volcanic name stone from Indonesia, carved from the same volcanic stone as that used for Borobudur, at Jhana Grove*



*Monks working on the floor of the main hall into the early hours to complete it on time*

secluded and quiet, with beautiful natural bushland; it was close to Bodhinyana Monastery, which would allow Ajahn Brahm to teach retreats while simultaneously keeping an eye on the monastery; the Buddhist Society did not need to look for another piece of land. Ajahn Brahm's very first estimate for the building cost was \$1 million. Among unreconstructed optimists, Ajahn Brahm is the most unreconstructed!

Gradually the plans became more concrete and the cost estimates started to rise. After Ajahn Brahm had made the first rough sketch of the required buildings, he acknowledged



*The opening procession down the drive at Jhana Grove Retreat Centre*

that \$2 million was closer to the mark. A pamphlet with a computerised drawing of the envisaged centre was produced to help people get some idea of what they were donating towards. By this stage the cost estimate was \$3 million. An architect was hired, detailed drawings produced, and a professional cost estimator hired. Cost: about \$6.5 million. Ajahn Brahm would have none of it, but conceded that the final bill would probably amount to \$5 million. To make a long story short, the final cost was in excess of \$5 million. But if the discount received from the builder is included, the figure is closer to \$7 million! Of course, if it hadn't been for Ajahn Brahm's optimism, the Buddhist Society might never have had a retreat centre.

What really made the retreat centre possible was Ajahn Brahm's large support base in a number of countries. When the news of the project gradually spread, donors came forward because of their confidence in Ajahn Brahm. Large donations were received from Singapore and Malaysia, and Thai Buddhists also made an important contribution. In addition, significant donations were received from around the world. But perhaps most auspicious of all – with an eye on the future of Buddhism in Australia – was that an important part of the funding came from local Australians, including donations from the immigrant Buddhist population and the generous builder who by forgoing any profit in effect donated almost \$1.5 million.

When the building work started in November 2007 the naysayers were in rapid retreat. By the end of 2008 the retreat centre was fully financed and the building work, despite delays, was making good progress. Geoff Gallop, the ex-premier of WA, was asked to

become the patron of the centre. He had received advice from Ajahn Brahm a few years earlier while he was going through a difficult period. He readily accepted.

The opening ceremony was held in April 2009. Geoff Gallop was present, as well as local and state politicians. Some of the monks had been working until the early hours of the morning to help finish the building work. Beautiful stupas and carved lions that were gifts from Indonesia were all in place. The ceremony itself had been thoughtfully and professionally put together by Buddhist Society volunteers. The name of the centre, Jhana Grove, had been suggested by one of Ajahn Brahm's disciples to honour his style of teaching. It was a proud moment.

As soon as the opening ceremony was over the first retreat started. There were, of course, teething problems, but the centre proved excellent for meditation retreats. Since then Jhana Grove has been the venue for a large number of retreats. The centre is open to any Buddhist group free of charge. It is thus a resource not just for the Buddhist Society but for all Buddhists, both in Perth and elsewhere.

### *Tirelessly Spreading the Dhamma*

Ajahn Brahm has almost unlimited energy for teaching the Dhamma. He has a deep conviction that he has an important message to deliver, and his audience can usually sense that they are receiving the genuine article. Add his remarkable sense of humour, and it is easy to see why he is such a popular teacher and speaker.

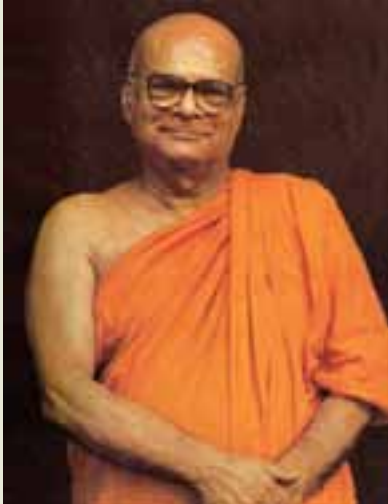


*Dhamma teachings in Singapore, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong and Jakarta*

# 🌿 Decades of Friendship in the Dhamma



*Luang Por Liem*



*Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda (from BGF)*



*Luang Por Paññānando, November 1984*



*Ven. Piyadassi*



*Ajahn Jagaro looks on with amusement on Ajahn Khantipālo's birthday, 1988*



*Ajahn Munindo and Ajahn Brahm at Bodhinyana, June 1988*



*Ayya Khema in Dhammaloka, 1994*



*Visiting monks and lay people from Thailand in 1986: back row from left: Vens. Ariyasīlo, Nyānadhammo, Jundee, Brahm, Visārado; second row: Ajahns Gunha, Mahasupong, Jun, Jagaro*



*Speaking at Literature House, Oslo, Norway, October 2009*



*Ajahn at Wisdom Publications, Boston, USA, 2006; clockwise from top left: Tim O'Neil, publisher; Josh Bartok, editor for "Dung"; David Kittelstrom, editor for MBB; and Rod Meade Sperry, marketing*

One of the first countries outside of Australia where he gained great popularity was Singapore. The Singaporeans marketed him with great zeal: his talks were advertised in the newspapers and on posters on the back of buses. Soon he attracted crowds in their thousands. In Malaysia the story was similar, but because the country has a Muslim majority the promotion was more low-key. Nonetheless, as he goes from city to city on one of his typical Dhamma tours, the crowds are always large. In Thailand, where the language barrier is a significant obstacle, he has reached large parts of the population principally because of the Thai translations of his books. He has become well-known among the English-speaking population of Hong Kong, and in Indonesia his books are best-sellers, on par with Indonesian translations of Dan Brown. But perhaps his greatest following is in Sri Lanka, where he speaks on national television, gives private teachings to the President, and is greeted on the streets by ordinary Sri Lankans as if he were a movie star.

Ajahn Brahm's teachings have resonated not just in Asia but also in the West. His first book, *Opening the Door of Your Heart*, has been translated into about 15 different European languages. His second book, *Mindfulness, Bliss, and Beyond*, is often quoted in meditation circles as an authoritative guide on meditation. He has a large following in Europe and North America.

In the end, the most important reasons for Ajahn Brahm's success as a teacher are simply his high energy levels and his willingness to work inhuman hours. Typically, Ajahn Brahm will give a Friday night talk at the Buddhist Society city centre in Nollamara. He will then

speak to people until about 10 p.m., at which point he rushes off to the airport in a car. He then takes the overnight flight to Singapore, where he has breakfast with a large number of disciples. He continues teaching non-stop until perhaps 11 p.m. The next morning he might be off on a 6-night Dhamma tour of Indonesia, with a similar daily schedule, before he flies back to Perth, arriving 3 or 4 hours before the next Friday night talk. You get the idea.



*Ajahn Brahm with Somdet Phra Theerayanmuni at Wat Thepsirin in Bangkok, December 2010*

How does he do it? By being at ease and relaxed in virtually all situations, and by enjoying what he does. And by not taking himself at all seriously. Waiting at the airport in Kuala Lumpur for a flight back to Perth, his disciples bought him a nice ice-cream coffee with a straw. He started sucking on the straw, but nothing came out. He tried harder, but still nothing. He then noticed that some of his disciples were holding their mouths, trying not to giggle. He had another look at his 'straw' – it was a spoon! He had a good laugh at himself. That's how he does it.



*Dhamma  
Teachings*

# The Meaning of Life: Achieving Peace of Mind

*Ajahn Brahm*

Achieving peace of mind is a lovely way of describing the meaning of life. It is something that everyone aspires to. However, peace of mind is often like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow – it tends to be elusive for most people.

I would like you to reflect on the times when you were the happiest. You probably find that your happiest times were when you experienced a deep sense of contentment or peace of mind. But when you reflect on these experiences, you realize they didn't occur because everything around you was perfect. On the contrary, you realize that peace of mind occurred in spite of your surroundings not being perfect, in spite of the difficulties, problems, and imperfections of life.

That's my first important point: don't think peace of mind only comes once you've fixed up all your problems and finished all your business. All your worrying, all your striving and struggling, has it ever got you where you really wanted to be? You can't control the world and change it the way you would like it. Therefore, you can only find peace of mind and achieve the meaning of life by embracing the imperfections of life. How do you do that? By knowing that imperfection is the nature of the world. So make peace with imperfection.

Another thing you can't change is the past. And yet, lingering on the past, people worry about and feel guilty and angry about it. But since you can't change it, the only wise thing to do is to make peace with it. How do you do that when there is so much unfinished business? You make it finished.

One of my favourite stories is about the abbot who was building the main hall for his monastery. It takes a lot of time and effort to make such a big building, and the building work was still in progress when the time came for the annual rains retreat. The abbot told the builders to go home and come back in three months. A few days later a visitor came to the temple and asked when the hall was going to be finished. The abbot replied, "It is finished." The visitor was quite stunned and said, "What do you mean it's finished? There's no roof; are you going to leave it like that? There's no glass in the windows; there are pieces of wood and old cement bags all over the floor. What do you mean it's finished?" To which the abbot unforgettably replied, "What's done is finished."



What a beautiful response that was. It's the only way to find peace in life. If you want all your building work to be finished before you stop to find peace, all your jobs out of the way, all your letters and emails replied to, you will never find peace of mind, because there's always more to be done. As I've often said, the only place in our modern societies where you find people resting in peace is in the cemeteries, but then it's too late to enjoy it. So I say RIP now while you can still enjoy it. I'm making the observation that you only find peace when you realize that what's done is finished. The past is gone; let it go.

One of the signs of true spirituality – of whatever tradition – is forgiveness and letting go. I was once asked how many times you should forgive, and I replied, "Always one more time," that is, forever.

Forgiveness is one of the most beautiful acts that humans are capable of. In South Africa, just after apartheid had been dismantled and Nelson Mandela had been made president, instead of seeking revenge, instead of punishing all those people who punished him, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Anybody who had done a crime was able to go to this commission and confess what they'd done. As long as they were truthful, no matter how horrendous their crimes, they would be given amnesty and forgiveness. It was a brilliant way of dealing with the past.

One of the moving events of that Commission was a policeman recounting, in the presence of the man's widow, how he had tortured and killed her husband, a black African activist from the ANC. Can you imagine this scene? There was a woman whose husband had disappeared, probably in the middle of the night, and she suspected what had happened, but didn't know the true story. Now she was facing a man who was confessing in detail how he had tortured and killed her husband, the father of her children, the man she loved. Apparently this white police officer was shaking and trembling as he recounted the details of what had happened. At the end of his testimony the widow rose from her seat and went towards him. The guards were supposed to stop her, but they froze. She went up to him, put her big black arms around him, hugged him, and said, "I forgive you." Not just the two of them wept, but apparently the whole room.

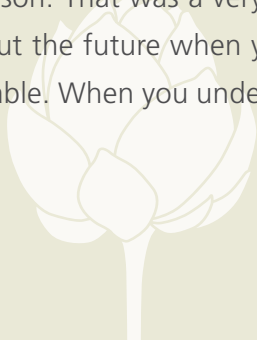
This sort of beautiful act is one of true spirituality. Both the victim and the perpetrator would move on and become better people. They would learn real compassion, gain real wisdom, and find a real way of moving forward. Now if that woman could forgive the murderer of the man she loved, then each one of us – if we really put our minds to it – is capable of forgiving anything.

I was once counselling a woman who was dying of cancer. I asked her what was the worst thing she'd ever done, an act she might carry to her grave and feel terrible about. She told me she had kissed a man who was not her husband. I said, "If that's the worst thing you've done, you've lived a pretty good life." When she saw my reaction, she realized for the first time that it wasn't all that bad. To me it seemed like a small thing, but she had been eaten up inside. It was such a release for her to tell someone. When you keep things to yourself, even the smallest things can become huge. When you acknowledge them, especially if you tell a good friend, you see that they're no big deal and you can let them go.

The way to forgiveness is to realize that you're worth forgiving, and so is the other person. That realization is step number one. That black woman in South Africa saw something in that policeman who had killed her husband, something she could respect, something worth saving, so she forgave. Remember, there's no such thing as a murderer, only a person who has murdered; no such thing as a thief, only a person who has stolen; no such thing as a cheat, only a person who has cheated. If you understand that, you understand why forgiveness is possible: there's something more to any person than the bad acts. And that's true of each one of you. No matter what you've done, there's always something inside of you worthy of forgiveness.

Another thing which stops inner peace is worrying about the future. People often think they need to worry about global warming, the credit crunch, the wars, the natural disasters, the AIDS, and the cancers. But it's only worthwhile thinking about things you can do something about. If you can't do anything, why worry? In addition, you can't predict the future; it's totally uncertain.

On one occasion when I was just a school kid my mother told me I was going to the dentist the following morning. I told my mum, "Mummy, don't send me to the dentist; you don't love me, you're sending me to the torturer." But try as I might, I couldn't get out of it. When I went to bed that night, I was worried, and I didn't sleep very well. The following morning my mother had to drag me to the dentist, and I was screaming and crying. But when I eventually got to the surgery, my appointment had been cancelled. All that worry, all that crying, for no reason. That was a very important experience for me. I learnt there's no point worrying about the future when you don't know what's going to happen. Life is completely unpredictable. When you understand that, you can have peace of mind in the present moment.



You can have peace of mind even when you're dying. Why not? No more worries about taxes, global warming, or anything else. Because you're soon to depart, the problems of the world become irrelevant. When there are no problems, you become peaceful. And because you never know how much time you've got left, you might as well be peaceful now. This was Ajahn Chah's great teaching to me when I was sick in hospital. He came to visit me and gave me the sort of teaching you remember for the rest of your life. He told me, "Brahmavamso, you're either going to get better or you're going to die." That really hurt at first, because it wasn't what I had expected. It wasn't the usual bedside manner of your best friend. But when I started to think about it, I realized it meant the sickness wasn't going to last. That was such a relief. Sometimes you meet people who have understood this: they are dying and supposedly in agony, but they still tell jokes; they're happy and peaceful.

You must also make peace with whatever you have to do in life, with your duties and responsibilities. Peace of mind is not achieved by always trying to do what you like. On the contrary, you find peace of mind by making peace with whatever you are called upon to do. Whatever your role, whatever your duties, you can always have fun with it, enjoy it, put happiness into it, and make peace with it. You can make peace and have fun with anything, anywhere. Peace of mind is not found by searching for a deep cave, in a perfect monastery, in a wonderful place high in the Himalayan Mountains. If you're looking for peace that way, you are looking for what Ajahn Chah called a tortoise with a moustache. People look for the impossible and of course they can't find it. There is no such thing as a tortoise with a moustache.

You find real peace of mind by accepting your life as you have it now, even in the midst of great tragedy. What a wonderful thing that is. How do you find this peace? Let go of all the past and all guilt, by forgiving; don't worry about the future, and learn to appreciate the moment. Do your duty and put fun into whatever you have to do. Peace of mind is as free as the air. Drink it, enjoy it, and take it with you. It's always there if you only look in the right place.



# The Simile of the Driverless Bus

Ajahn Brahm

You've meditated and meditated and meditated, tried and tried. Then one day you let go and everything becomes peaceful. You stop running after it and you have all the peace and happiness you ever wanted. You realize you cannot control these things and you understand the Buddha's teaching that the will is not yours. It's a wonderful realization.

To illustrate this I sometimes use the simile of the driverless bus. It is one of my favourites and it's also original. It goes like this. Sometimes life is wonderful and joyful, and everything is going right. When life is going wonderfully, beautifully, and joyfully, you just want to slow down and enjoy every moment. You think, "May the days go on as if they were months! I'm having such a wonderful time; I don't want to do anything else." And what happens? Time goes even more quickly.

It's like being on a bus that's going through wonderful scenery. You see beautiful waterfalls, meadows, mountains, little birds flitting through the trees, and butterflies flapping their beautiful little wings. It's beautiful and lovely. And what does the bus do? It speeds up and whooshes through. You think, "All my pleasant experiences are going by too fast. I've got to tell the bus driver to slow down so I can enjoy the pleasures and happinesses of life."

Then the bus goes through toxic waste dumps, past nuclear power plants, or into disaster zones. You want to tell the bus driver: "Fast! Get out of here quick. This is unpleasant; this is terrible." And what does the bus do? It slows down and stops!

When you're having a terrible time with pain and difficulties, frustrated with your meditation and your Buddhist practice, it seems to last forever. You can't get out of it soon enough, but it drags on. And when you're having a great time, it never lasts as long as you want. Why is that? Welcome to life! It's out of control.

When people discover they can't control their experiences they try to make their controller — their will — smarter. If they're enjoying themselves they try to teach their bus driver to slow down and stop, so the pleasures and joys of life can last longer. If they're suffering they try to teach their bus driver to get out of it quickly, to let go of the pain, and to linger on the happiness.

But you first need to find the bus driver. You get up from your seat — your normal way of living in the world — and you go beyond into the *jhāna* realms. There you get the shock of your life: the bus driver's seat is empty! There's no-one there. No-one is driving your life. It's all on automatic pilot. It's like flying in an aircraft at 10,000 metres, going into the cockpit, and seeing there's no pilot at the controls. That would scare a lot of people. But that's what life is like.

When you realise there's no-one there pushing the buttons, clicking the mouse, steering the wheel, or controlling in any imaginable way, you stop complaining, because there's no-one to complain to. You just go back to your seat and shut up. Nice scenery: shut up! Unpleasant experiences: shut up! No more craving. No more ill will. Peace and happiness at last!

*Freedom is realising you are out of control.*

*Ajahn Brahm*





***Bodhinyana  
Connections***



**Bodhinyana Buddhist Monastery**  
 216 Kingsbury Drive, Serpentine, Western Australia 6125  
 Tel: +61 (0) 8 9525 2420 Fax: +61 (0) 8 9525 3420

*The Buddhist Society of Western Australia (Inc.)*  
 Tel: +61 (0) 8 9345 1711  
 Fax: +61 (0) 8 9344 4220  
 Web Page: [www.bswa.org](http://www.bswa.org)

Dear Ajahn,

Truly you are of the lineage of the gods, wearing all seven marks of a good and dutiful teacher: a knowing grin, rotund belly, calloused back side (that's just a guess), shiny forehead, hairy ears, brickies hands and a snorting snoz – a beacon of peace, kindness and gentleness.

Nevertheless, your efforts to avoid fatherhood have failed, and you find yourself married to “The Mother” (Bodhinyana), with many challenging sons and daughters (monks and nuns) and an extended family of thousands. At the same time you hold down more work than is imaginable, ranging from Abbot, to spiritual director, accountant, chief correspondent, engineer, counsellor, funeral director, scholar, writer, diplomat, public speaker, stand-up comic, troglodyte, etc. etc. Who said life was suffering? With characteristic flair you remain the unfathomable juggler, master of the moment, leader of the herd and best friend.

So the meteor is blazing, the river is on the delta, the trees are planted and the fruit is ripe. With any luck some of us will sit under those trees long enough.

With love, gratitude and respect,

*Ajahn Appicchato*

*Ajahn Brahmāli*

*Venerable Sangāmaji*

*Venerable Ekaggata  
 (in Thailand)*

*Venerable Sangharatana*

*Venerable Santutthi*

*Venerable Bodhicitta  
 (in Sydney)*

*Venerable Gak San*

*Venerable Mahesi*

*Venerable Aranavihāri*

*Venerable Abhayaratana*

*Venerable Nyānavaro*

*Venerable Jhānarato*

*Venerable Lakkhana  
 (in Sri Lanka)*

*Venerable Nītho*

*Venerable Vedānanda*

*Venerable Buddharakkhita*

*Venerable Cittapālo*

*Venerable Lokahita*

*Venerable Cunda*

*Venerable Bodhidhaja*

*Venerable Mudito*

*Venerable Upasama*

Monastic Disciples of Ajahn Brahm and other Bodhinyana Sangha







## Patacara Bhikkhuni Hermitage

In the early days of the BSWA, Ajahn Brahm oversaw plans by the lay community for a nuns' monastery, which would complete the fourfold assembly in WA.

From small beginnings in 1998, Dhammasara Nuns Monastery grew into a viable community. In 2009, four nuns were able to take full ordination as bhikkhunis in the Theravada tradition - a first for Australia.

Ajahn Vāyāmā, now retired from her position as abbot due to ill-health, sends congratulations to Ajahn Brahm on his sixtieth birthday.

With respect and metta,

*Ajahn Vāyāmā Bhikkhuni and Venerable Serī Bhikkhuni*

*You plant the seed of letting go.*

*A shoot comes up – present moment awareness;*

*a sapling starts to grow – silence;*

*branches reach out – the breath;*

*leaves develop – the beautiful breath;*

*flowers grow – nimittas;*

*fruit ripens – jhānas;*

*and the fruit falls - enlightenment.*

*It all happens naturally.*

*Ajahn Brahm*



**DHAMMASARA  
NUNS MONASTERY**  
No. 203 Reem Road  
Gidgynooop WA 6083  
Australia  
Phone/Fax: (81-8) 9374 6583



## From The Bhikkhunis of Dhammasara Nuns' Monastery

Congratulations on Ajahn Brahmavamso's 60th Birthday and much respect and *sadhu* to the times in-between! To say "Thank You" is to say so little! Thank you for being a wonderful teacher and living the teaching and bravely helping to bring the 4 fold assembly to this fulfillment once again. Dhammasara, a forest monastery for Nuns, now Bikkhunis, came to life under his guidance and efforts.

I don't remember "meeting" Ajahn Brahm – he simply was and is there, selflessly helping, benefiting others to the max. We from Sydney looked increasingly to Perth since 1980 on, starting to visit and invite monks to teach at Wat Buddha Dhamma and some of us ended up in Perth! Once I was asked (during my rains retreat stay at Bodhinyana) to drive the Monastery van – having never driven a van I asked what I should know about the car, Ajahn Brahm's quick answer: the brakes, know where the brakes are! However, once again I took it as a teaching as well!

Ajahn Brahm, thank you for leaving large deep foot-prints, easy to see, harder to follow, but soon or later!

With Much Gratitude and Respect,

*Nirodhā Bhikkhuni*



May all beings be happy and well

The Buddhist Society of Western Australia, 18 Nanson Way, Nollamara, WA 6061 Phone: (61-8) 9345 1711



It gives me great pleasure to send my good wishes to Ajahn Brahm on his 60th Birthday! May he have a wonderful birthday this 7th August, 2011. Ajahn Brahm has done so much hard work with gentleness, kindness, humbleness and wisdom. It is very inspiring. He is someone who really lives what he teaches. Every time I think about this monastic life and how I have renounced the world and have taken on so many responsibilities and have to put up with all sorts of problems, I think of Ajahn Brahm and what he has to put up with, and my problems just vanish! For me his practice has been very inspirational. With Much Gratitude and Respect,

*Hāsapaññā Bhikkhuni*



May all beings be happy and well

## Ajahn Nissarano



Dear Ajahn Brahm,

In his first teaching the Buddha taught us that "*jati pi dukkha*", "birth is also suffering", which is undeniable, but, because it is a Noble Truth, it is also an opportunity for us to Awaken and to escape ("*nissarana*") from this burning house that is *samsāra*.

*Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu!* for all that you have done for yourself and so many others (myself included) during your 60 years on this earth. May you live another 60 years, like the Venerable Ananda, for the benefit and happiness of yourself and countless other beings.

I will always remember my first occasion of teaching the Dhamma. It was at the Armadale Meditation Group ("the monks' training ground"), not that far from the Monastery. I was rather nervous, as I had not done any teaching previously. At the evening cup of tea Ajahn Brahm gave me some humourous words of encouragement as I departed for Armadale, clouds of butterflies stirring in my stomach. When I started to teach, I experienced incredible waves upon waves of high voltage (not 250 volt ) *metta* filling me from head to toe. We weren't doing *metta* meditation at the time and I felt strongly that it was not coming from within myself. To this day, I am sure Ajahn Brahm was sending *samādhi*-charged *metta* to me on the occasion of my first Dhamma teaching. By the way, the teaching flowed smoothly and naturally, as you would expect after such an injection of high voltage *metta* energy.

With incredible gratitude and respect always,

*Ajahn Nissarano*

## Ajahn Visārada

Wishing Ven. Ajahn Brahm well on the occasion of his 60th birthday. May he enjoy good health, peace and happiness, and continue to inspire and benefit others for many years to come.

With sincere gratitude and respect,

*Visārada Bhikkhu*





***Dhamma  
Tours***

## Recent Schedule for Ajahn Brahm



11 October 2009	Western Australia
12 – 18 October 2009	England
19 – 20 October 2009	Norway
22 October 2009	Western Australia
20 – 26 February 2010	Malaysia
20 – 29 March 2010	Indonesia
1 – 10 April 2010	Jhana Grove
1 – 5 May 2010	NSW, Australia
15 – 18 May 2010	Victoria, Australia
26 – 28 May 2010	Singapore
12 – 20 June 2010	Thailand
22 June 2010	Queensland, Australia
11 – 18 July 2010	Germany
23 – 30 October 2010	Jhana Grove
5 – 14 November 2010	Jhana Grove
15 – 17 November 2010	Sri Lanka
18 November 2010	Singapore
19 – 21 November 2010	Malaysia
5 – 9 December 2010	Thailand
18 – 26 December 2010	Malaysia
26 – 29 December 2010	Malaysia
30 December 2010	Singapore
9 – 17 January 2011	Sri Lanka
5 – 15 February 2011	Hong Kong
16 February 2011	Malaysia
6 – 7 March 2011	Victoria, Australia
9 – 10 March 2011	NSW, Australia
19 – 29 March 2011	Indonesia
21 – 30 April 2011	Jhana Grove
3 – 8 May 2011	Singapore
10 May 2011	Malaysia
21 – 24 May 2011	Victoria, Australia
18 – 29 June 2011	Thailand

Kathina ceremony at Bodhinyana Monastery

Many places including The Buddhist Society and The London Buddhist Vihara

Literature House, University of Oslo, Rinzai Zen Centre

Bhikkhuni ordination at Bodhinyana Monastery

Buddhist Gem Fellowship and Brickfields Maha Vihara, Gandharama in Kuala Terengganu, Pahang Buddhist Association in Kuantan

Pedang, Jakarta, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Banten, East Kalimantan

BSWA 9-Day Retreat

MITRA Conference, Santi Forest Monastery

Buddhist Society of Victoria

Buddhist Fellowship

Buddhist Fellowship Executive Retreat, Chiang Rai

Australian Sangha Association, Mercy Place, Bardon

8-Day Retreat in Frankfurt

8-Day Retreat for Buddhist Fellowship

9-Day Retreat

World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference, Colombo

Buddhist Lodge

Seck Kia Eenh Temple, Melaka

World Fellowship of Buddhists, Bangkok

8-Day Retreat at Wat Chetawan, Kuala Lumpur

3-Day Retreat at Mahindarama Temple, Penang

Buddhist Fellowship

9-Day retreat at Bandarawela Holiday Resort, one day at BMICH in Colombo

6-Day Retreat at Wang Fat Ching She,  
Public Talks and Seminars at Hong Kong University and Polytechnic University

Metta Lodge, Johor Bahru

Anxiety and Depression Conference

Carlingford and Santi Forest Monastery

Bogor, Jakarta, Manado, Banjarmasin, Medan, Batam, Jambi, Pontianak

BSWA 9-Day Retreat

Public talks, Singapore Buddhist Film Festival

Brickfields Maha Vihara, Kuala Lumpur

Buddhist Society of Victoria

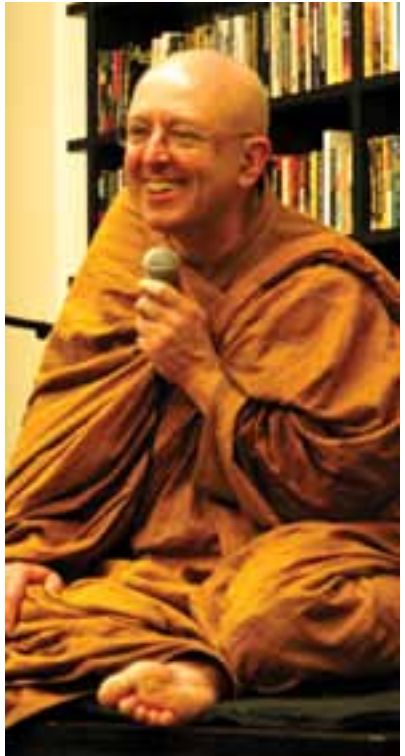
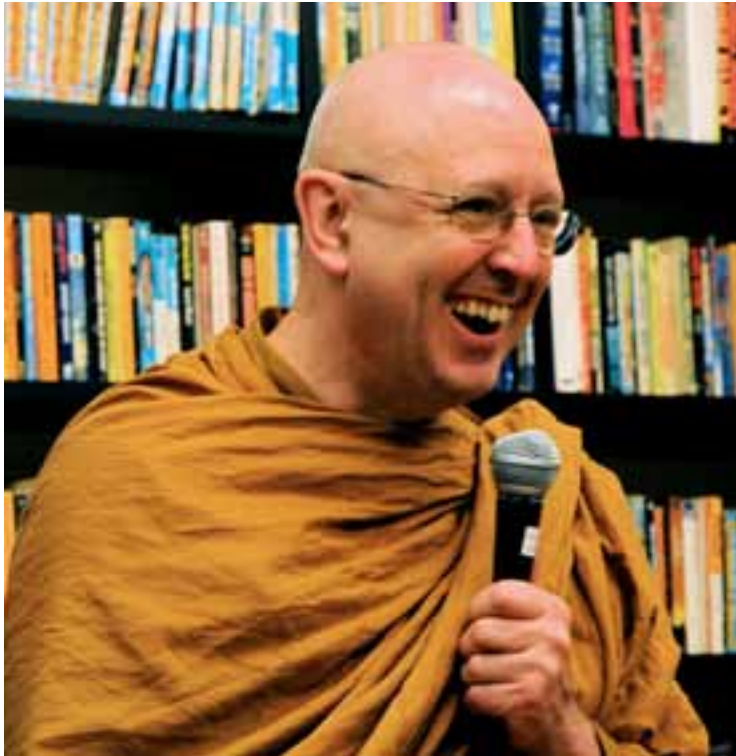
Buddhist Fellowship Executive Retreat, Phuket; World Fellowship of Buddhists, Bangkok

# Sri Lanka | *October 2009 / November 2010*

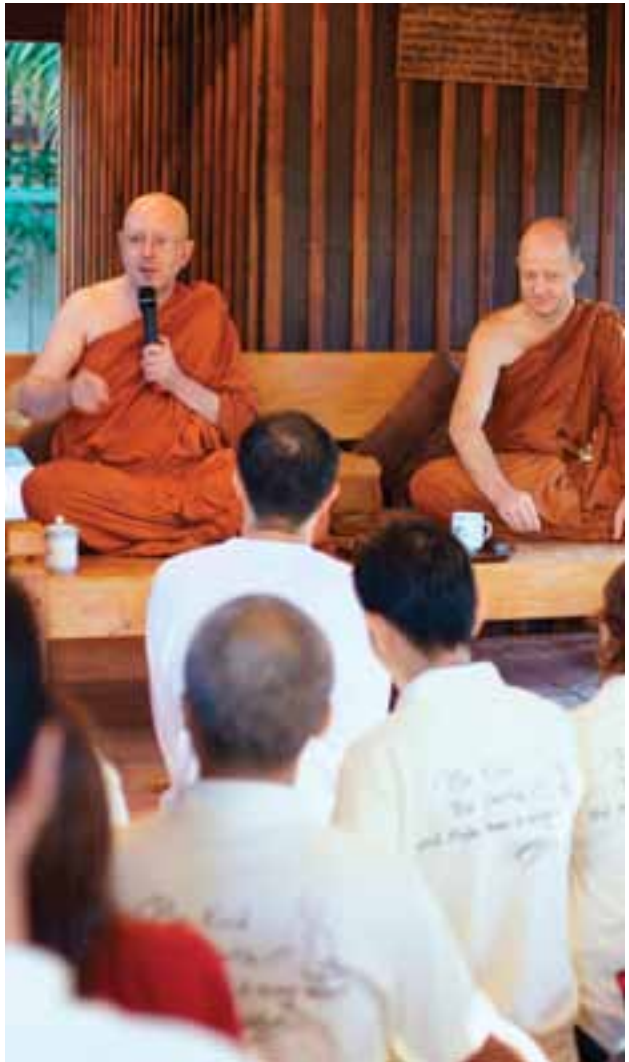




# Norway | *October 2009*



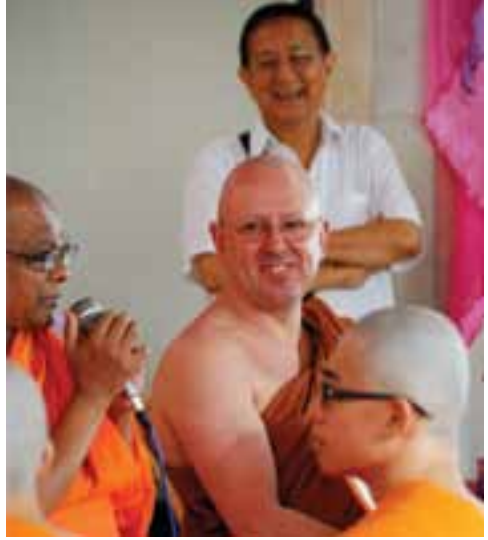
# Malaysia: Terengganu | February 2010



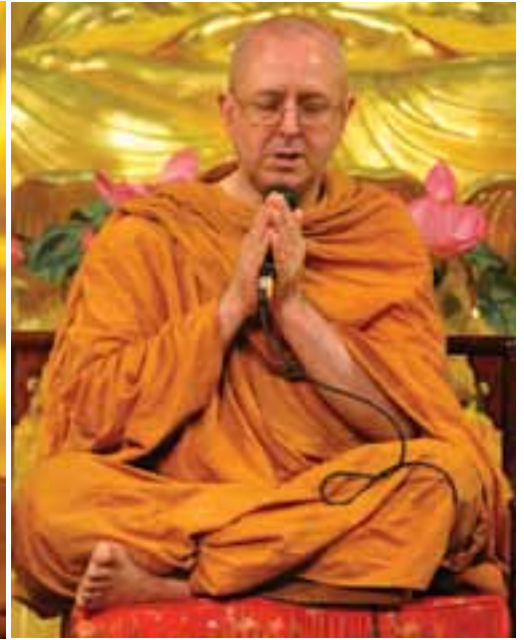
# Germany | July 2010 *(some images from 2008)*



# Malaysia: Melaka | *November 2010*



# Singapore | *November 2010*



# Thailand | *December 2010*



# Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur | December 2010



# Malaysia: Penang | *December 2010*





# Sri Lanka | *January 2011*



# Hong Kong | *February 2011*



# Malaysia: Johor Bahru | February 2011



# Indonesia | *March 2011*





***Congratulatory  
Messages***



**Buddhist Summit**  
**World Buddhist Supreme Conference**

1-2, 5-chome Motomachi-dori Chuo-ku  
Kobe-city Hyogo 650-0022 Japan  
Tel : +81-78-367-6618  
Fax : +81-78-367-6990  
E-mail : wbhq@yahoo.com

## CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE

On behalf of all Buddhists in the world, it is a great pleasure for me to express my sincere respect and congratulations on the occasion of the celebration for the 60th Birthday of Most Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso.

Most Ven. Ajahn Brahmavamso is one of the supreme Buddhist leaders of the world who endeavors to propagate Buddhism in order to realize true peace and serenity for humanity. Being a member of Buddhist Summit, as the representative of Buddhist communities in Australia, His Most Venerable is widely known for virtuous personality and is respected by many Buddhists in the world.

Moreover, His Most Venerable has made great contributions to maintaining peace in Australia through many years of active engagement in religious, educational, and cultural activities, and has strived for realization of peace and serenity for the entire world. The earnest commitment and achievements by His Most Venerable have won widespread admiration from Buddhists of the world.

Buddhism in essence is the teachings of wisdom and compassion, the supreme wisdom that elucidates all phenomena in the present world, and is the religion that can save all sentient beings. In this chaotic world frequently disturbed by conflicts and terrorism, Buddhism is the religion sought by people because Buddhism is the religion of peace that teaches nonviolence, mutual understanding, sympathy, and harmony with others.

For the benefit of the 370 million Buddhists in the world, regardless of differences in

nationalities and culture, we established the Royal Grand Hall of Buddhism, a grand scale Buddhist temple that we can be proud of to the world, in November 2008. It is comparable to the Vatican for Christianity and Mecca for Islam. We are grateful that His Most Venerable, as the representative for Australia, kindly attended the Inauguration Ceremony of the Royal Grand Hall of Buddhism, the Fifth Buddhist Summit, and the Ceremony of Purifying the Ground of Nalanda University.

With the strong leadership of Most Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamsa, we sincerely hope that His Most Venerable will further spread the teachings of wisdom and compassion of Lord Buddha, and contribute to the realization of more and happier society, not only in Australia but also throughout the world.

Yours in the Dharma,

*Ven. Hiroshi Fujikura*

Secretary General of Buddhist Summit  
World Buddhist Supreme Conference



*Ven. Kempo, Ajahn Brahm, Brian Ashen (FABC), Ven. Chi Kwang (ASA) and Laura Chan at 5th Buddhist Summit in Japan, November 2008*



## BHĀVANĀ SOCIETY

A Theravada Buddhist Monastery and Meditation Center

Ajahn Brahmavamso is one of the most renowned and remarkable monks living in Australia today. His many talented gifts as a Dhamma teacher, humanitarian, and visionary, along with his marvelous sense of humor, make him one of the most popular Dhamma teachers and authors today. A man of conscious endeavor, he has honed his skills in homiletics to a very fine degree as shown by his travels to every corner of the world to preach the Buddha's teachings, as well as the popularity of his books even among non-Buddhists.

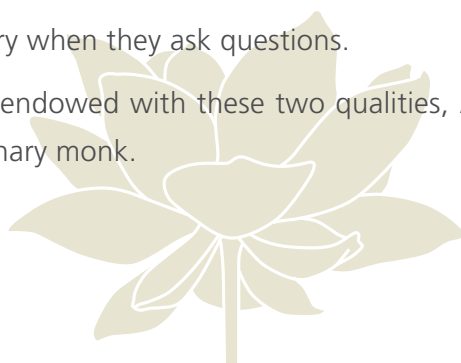
In 1985, while on a visit to Serpentine with several other devotees, I gained incredible insights from watching his total engagement in building the Bodhinyana Monastery. I was very impressed with his dedication and commitment to Buddhism.

Since that first visit in 1985, I have had the privilege to stay many times again in his beautiful monastery and enjoy his kind hospitality all the while surrounded by his many loyal lay and monastic disciples. His knowledge of both the Dhamma and the Vinaya have brought him prominence in not only the scholarly and monastic circles around the world, but also because of his books, to popular circles as well. With his envious position as a leader of Australian Buddhists he has brought together many Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities, earning him the Australian Government's recognition as the peace bridge builder.

In the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Buddha has given two important qualities of a Buddhist missionary. They are:

- (i) to tell people what they have not heard and
- (ii) not to get angry when they ask questions.

In my view, because he is endowed with these two qualities, Ajahn Brahmavamso is also a successful Buddhist missionary monk.





With his excellent knowledge of Buddhism, and the ability to explain the teachings clearly and concisely, he has been able to share his teachings not only in Australia, but all over the world; traveling the globe, and attending many international conferences. It is important to note that his kind and generous spirit is balanced by both compassion and wisdom.

As the abbot and guiding teacher of Bodhinyana Monastery, he has already rendered an enormous service to both Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities alike. We all wish that we had many more Buddhist missionary monks like him. I wish Ajahn Brahm not only good health, but also a long life so that he is able to continue his remarkable *Dhammaduta* work.

With metta,



*Bhante Henepola Gunaratana*

*Craving is a con man. It promises you happiness but is always unfaithful; it never lives up to its promises.*

*Ajahn Brahm*

Buddhist Association of the United States  
Chuang Yen Monastery  
2020 Route 301  
Carmel, NY 10512-3426 – U.S.A.

**FELICITATIONS TO AJAHN BRAHM  
ON REACHING HIS 60TH BIRTHDAY**

I first came across the name “Ajahn Brahm” back in the 1980s, when I was living at the Forest Hermitage in Kandy together with Ven. Nyānaponika Mahathera. In those days we received the bulletin of the Buddhist Society of West Australia, and each issue would include a report by Ajahn Brahm in which he displayed an uncanny ability to take up a word, phrase, or theme and wring out from it a whole series of mind-boggling word plays. During this time we also received a copy of the book *Seeing the Way*, a collection of essays by the Western monastic students of Ajahn Chah. Ajahn Brahm had an essay in this book, of course, and once again I found his writing extremely entertaining, even hilarious in places.

I first met Ajahn Brahm in person in June 1993. I had just returned to Sri Lanka from a trip back to the U.S. to visit my parents. From the airport I came to Vajirarama, the monastery in Colombo where I would usually stay when I had matters to attend to in the city. On my arrival, I heard that Ajahn Brahm and another monk had come to Sri Lanka and were just then visiting Vajirarama. I was delighted at the opportunity to meet him. I came out to the big reception hall, where the two monks from Australia were speaking to Ven. Piyadassi, a senior Sinhalese monk. After we exchanged greetings, I sat down while they wrapped up their conversation. Just as Bhante Piyadassi was getting up, Ajahn Brahm asked him, “Are there any other English-speaking monks here that I should meet?” Bhante Piyadassi recommended a certain erudite Sri Lankan elder. When Bhante Piyadassi left, I told Ajahn Brahm: “Bhante K - is very learned, but if you want a truly memorable experience, I suggest instead that you see the German elder Ven. Nyānavimala. I think you’ll find him extraordinary.”

I brought Ajahn Brahm and the other monk to Ven. Nyānavimala’s room and introduced them. I lingered for a moment, considering whether I should sit down too, but decided to go back to my room. As time went by I kept on hearing Ven. Nyānavimala’s voice rolling in a wave-like rhythm. My curiosity piqued, I would periodically get up to see what was happening, tempted to walk in but afraid I would disrupt their discussion. Twenty minutes went by, a half hour,

a full hour. Finally, about an hour and a half later, Ajahn Brahm almost stumbled out of the room, his eyes twinkling like stars. I asked him, “Well, how did it go?” And he replied: “That was one of the most incredible experiences I’ve ever had. That monk is amazing. I’m so glad you took me to see him.”

I think this meeting established a deep connection between Ajahn Brahm and myself. Even though I have seen Ajahn in person on only a few occasions since then—I recall meetings at the London Buddhist Vihara and Amaravati in July 1999 and in Singapore in late 2001 and early 2002—I have continued to follow his “career” from a distance. I’ve been astonished at his remarkable success in spreading the Dhamma in Australia and elsewhere and in attracting many to the monastic life, women as well as men. Some time ago I compared the number of his Facebook fans with those of a few leading movie actors and rock musicians. Lo and behold, Ajahn Brahm had more Facebook fans than they did.

Now Ajahn Brahm is about to celebrate his 60th birthday and has also passed the landmark of 37 *vassa* as a *bhikkhu*. An honorable member of the Sangha, a great and revered teacher, a creative speaker, he is a pioneer and a breaker of barriers earlier thought to be unbreakable.

I congratulate Ajahn Brahm for his many accomplishments and wish him continued success, health, and joy in our shared journey along the Buddha’s path.



*Bhikkhu Bodhi*



*Ven. Nyānavimāla  
(from Buddhist Publication Society)*

## JOHN CIANCIOSI FORMERLY AJAHN JAGARO

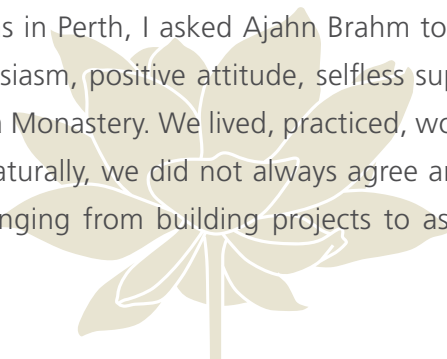
Though I do not know it for a fact, I suspect that when Ajahn Brahm was born he had a smile on his face. I say this because ever since I have known him he has exuded an expression of cheer and joy.

We first met at Wat Saket in Bangkok before he became a novice. At the time I had been a monk only a few years and was living with Venerable Ajahn Chah in North East Thailand. The abbot of Wat Saket was the administrative head of the sangha for that part of Thailand and he had invited Ajahn Chah to come to Bangkok for the ordination of a young Englishman who wanted to become a disciple. Now, Ajahn Chah was already a very highly regarded teacher with many western disciples so it seemed unusual for him to travel all the way to Bangkok, an overnight train ride, just to receive another aspiring disciple. What could be so special about this Englishman? However, Ajahn Chah together with a small group of monks, including me, did indeed go to Bangkok and there met the young smiling Peter Betts.

Later, while living at Wat Pah Pong with him, I was impressed by his sense of peace and contentment. Most newly ordained monks and novices found it hard to adjust to the austerity and discipline of Ajahn Chah's monastery. I certainly did. One day, after the afternoon chores, we were at the bathing area together. I thought to ask him how he was managing and whether there was anything he needed. He just smiled, "Thanks, but everything is fine." How unusual!

On another occasion, after he had already become a monk, we were sitting in the sun drying our alms-bowls after the meal. Venerable Brahm had the usual smile on his face, and I asked him whether he had practiced a lot of Metta meditation in the past. I thought, surely that is why he seems to be always happy. But, alas he told me that he had not done very much Metta meditation. I had to conclude that he was just born that way!

Many years later when I was in Perth, I asked Ajahn Brahm to join me and help establish a forest monastery. His enthusiasm, positive attitude, selfless support, and hard work helped bring into being Bodhinyana Monastery. We lived, practiced, worked, struggled, and laughed together for many years. Naturally, we did not always agree and often had long "debates" about all sorts of things ranging from building projects to aspects of Dhamma. However,



during all that time he was indeed my *kalyanamitta*, the best friend, and I cherish those memories and will always feel a great sense of gratitude to him.

Venerable Ajahn, may your 60th birthday be a joyful occasion for you as I am sure it is for all your disciples. May the power of the Triple Gem continue to keep you in good health, and may your smile be with us for a very long time to come.

With gratitude,



*John Cianciosi*

Former Abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery

*The world thinks winning is happiness. The enlightened ones know winning is suffering. Losing is the happy path. It is the path of freedom, of self-disappearing.*

*Ajahn Brahm*

สำนักงานใหญ่  
องค์การพุทธศาสนิกสัมพันธ์แห่งโลก

616 โนนจันทน์นอกซอย  
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THE WORLD FELLOWSHIP OF BUDDHISTS

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**The World Fellowship of Buddhists  
President's Congratulations  
On the Auspicious Occasion  
Of the 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday of  
The Most Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamsa Mahathera**



It is with great admiration and congratulations that I have the pleasure to extend our heartfelt best wishes and acknowledgements of outstanding contributions to the propagation of Buddhism to the Most Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamsa Mahathera, known to many in respectful affection simply as Ajahn Brahm, on the auspicious occasion of his 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary.

Born in England on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August B.E. 2494 (1951), Ajahn Brahm graduated from Cambridge University before travelling to Thailand where he was trained by Ajahn Chah Bodhinyana Mahathera to be subsequently ordained in Bangkok at the age of 23 by the Abbot of Wat Saket. His ordination was followed by 9-years studying and training in the Theravada forest meditation tradition before assuming duties in Perth, Australia, where he has been instrumental in the development of what has become not only the first but also, the largest dedicated Buddhist monastery in the Southern Hemisphere. His practical hands-on physical approach, plus sound academic knowledge and practice of the dharma, combined with an innate talent to engage and communicate to others the Dharma in an accurate and entertaining manner, has attracted many to appreciate the practice of the Dharma in their own lives.

Much travelled and recognised across Asia, Ajahn Brahm, is the Spiritual Director of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia and Abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery, Serpentine, Western Australia, which is also a Regional Centre of The WFB. The Most Venerable has and continues to provide immeasurable inspiration, guidance and support to both new and established Buddhists, for which we wish that he may long continue to do so.

May the blessings of the Triple Gem guide and protect us all,

Phan Wannamethee  
President  
The World Fellowship of Buddhists

สำนักงานใหญ่  
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**The World Fellowship of Buddhists  
Secretary General's Congratulations  
On the Auspicious Occasion  
Of the 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday of  
The Most Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso Mahathera**



The Most Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso Mahathera,

May I take this opportunity, as you celebrate your 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and 37 years of ordained practice and propagation of the Dharma, to commend and congratulate you for the significant contributions you have made to bringing Buddhism to the novice and laity in a form which is both informative and inspirational. You have demonstrated your total commitment in both assiduous physical toil and spiritual guidance and support for which I offer my deepest respect and appreciation.

The WFB is indebted to you for your support and cooperation when asked to contribute in person and at the Headquarters in Bangkok and through the Regional Centre activities in Perth.

You achievements are considerable as are the responsibilities that you have undertaken in Australia and South East Asia. It is an honour to know you personally and wish you good health and longevity so that you may continue on the noble path you have chosen for the benefit of Buddhism and all mankind.

Respectfully yours in the Dharma,

Phallop Thaiarry  
Secretary General  
The World Fellowship of Buddhists.



**Spiritual Patron**  
Ajahn Brahmavamso

**Patrons**  
Dr Ang Beng Choo  
Dr Tan Choon Kim  
Yeo Guat Kwang

**Advisor Patron**  
Low Teck Suan

## BIRTHDAY DEDICATION

When Ajahn Brahm arrived in Singapore in 2000, he was known by only a few. However, there were rumblings on the ground that there was an English monk who gives great Dhamma talks but not many had heard him speak.

In June 2000, he appeared at the inaugural Y2000 Global Conference on Buddhism in Singapore and impressed the almost 1,000 audience with his wisdom and wit. There was no dispute when he was given the title "Best Speaker" at the end of the conference. A few public talks that were organised at the PUB Auditorium following the conference were so packed that the aisles were filled up and he even shared the stage with the overflowing crowd of almost 2,000 people. He became a big hit!

He was invited back to Singapore, giving talks at the World Trade Centre pavilion, Suntec City Convention Centre, Kong Meng San's Memorial Hall and Buddhist Lodge auditoriums. Advertisements of his talks extended beyond the newspaper to the back of the bus! Crowds packed the venues and Ajahn Brahm enthralled them with mega blasts of Dhamma!

Buddhist Fellowship was most blessed when Ajahn Brahm became its official Spiritual Patron and worked tirelessly to help dispel the myths and superstition that surrounded Buddhism through the centuries of cultural wrappings of rituals, rites and adulteration.

His simple ways, demanding nothing and never ever complaining about the heat, traffic or constant crowd of people who wanted his counsel, has inspired all the members and volunteers who have looked after him during his visits. A monk who doesn't own or spend a credit card, carry cash or drive a car, gave many Buddhists renewed hope that the Vinaya is still very much alive despite the many malpractices witnessed in many communities.



Singapore is grateful for his passion in spreading the Dhamma in contemporary language peppered with modern day jokes! Much has been attributed to him for the growth of Buddhist Fellowship's membership from a meager 150 when he arrived in 2000 to over 4,000 members today! He is truly a blessing to us all. We are thankful that his previous girlfriend ditched him and his mother told him to "Go get a hair cut!" Our lives would have otherwise been so different if he hadn't become a monk.

Ajahn Brahm – Thank you for touching our lives!

With mega metta and gratitude,



*Angie Chew Monksfield*

President (2007 - 2010), Buddhist Fellowship

*Never allow your knowledge to stand in the way of truth. Words are just signposts, not the destination.*

*Ajahn Brahm*



## Buddhist Gem Fellowship

60A, Jalan 19/3, 46300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

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<http://bgf.buddhism.org>

### MESSAGE FROM BUDDHIST GEM FELLOWSHIP (BGF)

Buddhist Gem Fellowship (BGF) would like to offer our highest felicitations and respect to Ajahn Brahm on the occasion of his 60th birthday. To the Malaysian Chinese, the 60th birthday is considered a highly auspicious event, and we rejoice that Ajahn Brahm has arrived at this wonderful age.

Our association with Ajahn Brahm goes back many years, and BGF is fortunate and blessed to be his host when he is up in Kuala Lumpur. His visits to Malaysia are eagerly anticipated and regarded as a highlight in our calendar of events.

No one gives talks like Ajahn Brahm. He can keep an audience engrossed for hours (and days), with his thought provoking and heart stirring talks, laced with quick wit and humour, anecdotes and quotable quotes. Being unique in his teaching style, Ajahn creates the wave of inspirations across all walks of life and opens the doors of Dhamma for those at home, students, busy executives, CEOs and the elderly, among both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. His teachings cover a wide range of topics. Yet, in every talk he gives practical advice on how we can create more happiness in our lives by managing our emotions better, building effective relationships, and finding peace and harmony in whatever situations we are in, even when dealing with sickness and death.

BGF is fortunate to be given the opportunity to organize a day seminar or retreat with him as the speaker when he is in Malaysia. This is true even when he is on a Dhamma tour with speaking engagements in different parts of the country. Many of his talks on CD released by BGF for free distribution are recorded during such seminars or retreats. The CDs are made available through the courtesy of many well wishers who would like to spread the goodness to those who did not have the chance to come for Ajahn's talks. In one case, a couple cancelled their divorce after hearing Ajahn's CD, without knowing who Ajahn is. In another case, a thief broke into a car and stole the CD player. He also took Ajahn's CDs along with him. Hopefully he derives some benefit from that theft beyond the CD player.

Ajahn has given many Dhamma talks at various venues. The number of people turning out for his talks and meditation retreats just keeps on growing. A real challenge faced by organizers has always been finding a venue large enough to accommodate the growing numbers.

Regardless whether it is held at BGF center, temples, school auditorium or college hall, many within the audience received the wisdom and inspiration from Ajahn's talks. Even if they cannot recall much of the content after his talks, they never fail to remember his stories and especially his jokes, which contain key teaching messages. A few people have reported that their jaws ached due to too much laughing.

In the meditation retreats we organize with Ajahn Brahm as teacher, BGF received overwhelming response from people coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds. The retreats give opportunity to many who are curious to try out meditation. Ajahn's meditation guidance and illuminating talks open the door to many to participate in longer retreats.

Ajahn Brahm is a monk of universal peace. He lives a simple and straightforward life. Those of us who had been to his monastery and his cave dwelling can vouch for the simplicity and quietness of his living style. He is also a heavily demanded speaker as more people are attracted by his teachings and style of practice. Despite having a diary packed like a busy international executive, he finds time to address his monks and those in need of his advice.

We all know Ajahn Brahm for his witty ways of delivering the Buddha's teachings. His message has always been consistent in promoting peace within and around us, encouraging kindness and compassion, and putting gentleness in our practice.

He practices and teaches the Buddha's teachings in a simple mantra, 'Make Peace, Be Kind, Be Gentle.'

We appreciate very much his support and encouragement for BGF. We would like to invoke upon the blessings of the Triple Gem so that Ajahn Brahm is blessed with good health, long life, and never to lose his wonderful sense of humour that creates inspiration and opens the hearts of people to Dhamma.



*Datuk Dr. Victor Wee*

President, Buddhist Gem Fellowship

*All craving is about the future.  
All ill will is about the past. Take  
them away and there is no other  
place to be except now.*

*Ajahn Brahm*

## PENANG DEVOTEES AND RETREATANTS

I am very pleased and honoured to be invited to write on behalf of all the retreatants, who come from various parts of Malaysia, from overseas as well and devotees in Penang, this short note on this occasion in celebration of our Teacher the Venerable Ajahn Brahm's 60th Birthday.

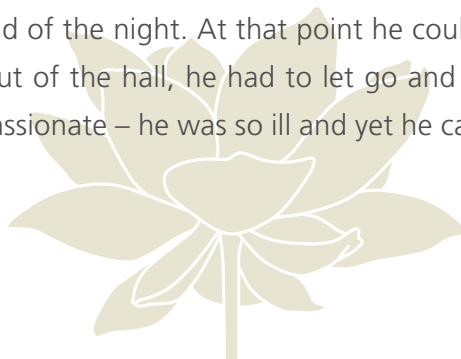
We have had the good kamma and fortune to have the opportunity to have met Ajahn Brahm and to have Ajahn Brahm accept our invitations to come to Penang to teach in Meditation Retreats since 1998/2001. And I might say well before Ajahn Brahm became so well known as a teacher of Dhamma and meditation, and as one monk had put it a "superstar" monk.

Ajahn Brahm has been foremost to teach and inspire us all in Penang and in Malaysia with the traditions and practices of the forest monks and particularly that of Ajahn Chah's tradition. It's almost a decade ago since Ajahn Brahm started to teach in Penang and other parts of Malaysia.

But through all the accolades and adverse reactions of late since the Bhikkhuni ordination, Ajahn Brahm has always remained simple, humble, always happy and smiling and working ever so hard to teach the Dhamma and meditation which is after all at the heart of true Buddhist Practice. Ajahn Brahm can reach across to those whose understanding of Dhamma is perhaps at the early stage and also those whose understanding of the Dhamma is deeper.

However, at close quarters when I have had the opportunity to *upathak* for Ajahn Brahm when he was in Penang, in Ipoh and in Kuala Lumpur, he is even more amazing.

So many occasions come to mind but I recall one occasion when Ajahn Brahm was teaching a meditation Retreat in Kuala Lumpur. He was invited out to give a Dhamma talk to several hundreds of devotees, and then to meet a fellow brother Monk, and after that to give another Dhamma talk to the retreatants and the public at night. Unbeknownst to almost all, Ajahn Brahm was actually not well and had vomited a few times. But out of compassion to the devotees who had come to listen, Ajahn Brahm carried on teaching in his usual unique witty way almost to the end of the night. At that point he could no longer hold it in, and as he hurriedly tried to get out of the hall, he had to let go and out came all the inside stuff. Ajahn Brahm is that compassionate – he was so ill and yet he carried on teaching keeping his commitments as well.



Ajahn Brahm is a monk who really practises what he teaches. He usually arrives in Penang with just his “yam” and a bowl. The resting quarters we are able to provide for Ajahn Brahm are sparse, being in fact a classroom converted to a room. Ajahn Brahm never complains and is quite happy with such simple amenities. One time when I was quite sick organising and running the retreat in Penang, at the end of the Retreat and after I had sent Ajahn Brahm to the airport, as soon as he was out of sight my fever just broke and shot up, I really felt quite ill and dreaded to go back and do all the usual cleaning up after the Retreat. However, when I opened the door to clean out Ajahn Brahm’s quarters, I was moved almost to tears; the bed sheet and pillowcases were all removed and neatly folded, the room was all cleaned up, and Ajahn Brahm had as usual duly left instructions for me on how the requisites were to be discharged.

There are so many other instances of kindness and compassion that time and space here do not allow me to recount. I am not shy to always tell that Ajahn Brahm is the most kind and most compassionate person I know. These are all the true attributes – kindness, compassion, gentleness, peace, wisdom and always so cheerful – of a true Buddhist monk whom I am always happy and shall be ever grateful to call my Teacher.

HAPPY 60th BIRTHDAY DEAR AJAHN BRAHM!



*Cheow Poh*

*On behalf of all the Retreatants and devotees in Penang  
[in all three time frames – past, present and future as Ajahn Brahm  
likes to say]*

*You’re the passenger, not the driver  
in meditation.*

*Ajahn Brahm*



## 登嘉楼佛教会

### TERENGGANU BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION

No. 79-81, Jalan Syed Zain, 20300 Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu Darul Iman.

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web: terengganubuddhist.com

## GREETINGS FROM KUALA TERENGGANU, MALAYSIA

It is an honour for Terengganu Buddhist Association (Malaysia) to take part in this beautiful project to commemorate Ajahn Brahm's 60th birthday.

The teachings from Ajahn are simple, straightforward and effective. Words cannot express our utmost gratitude to our beloved teacher for all his time and effort in order to awaken us, out of *samsara*. He has brought us from the darkness to the brightness. One of Ajahn teachings that we will always remember is, "***Be Kind, Be Gentle and make Peace in every moment.***"

We remember on one occasion that we have asked Ajahn on what to give and show our gratitude towards him. His reply was : "***Meditate everyday!***" This is such a deep teaching and we will continue practicing.

We wish Ajahn Brahm Good Health and Long Life!

*Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!*

With sincere blessing,

*Your Devotees in Kuala Terengannu*

诸恶莫作 众善奉行 · 自净其意 是诸佛教



## **VERY GOOD, WITH AJAHN BRAHM**

### **A Tribute, for His 60th Birthday, from Indonesia**

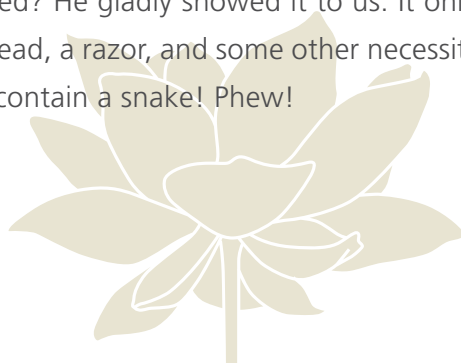
Ajahn Brahm has been in Indonesia in March 2009, March 2010 and March 2011. We feel much privileged to have spent those three happiest 10-day periods with him, seeding the Dhamma in the various parts of Indonesia.

We have even published a book, *Horeee! Guru Si Cacing Datang* (Hurray! The Worm's Master Is Coming), narrating his first visit, complete with all the questions and answers during the tour. It is a "sequel" to the first book, *Si Cacing dan Kotoran Kesayangannya* (The Worm and His Lovely Pile of Dung), the Indonesian version of *Opening the Door of Your Heart*.

During those happy moments, we have closely watched what he did, how he behaved, what he said, etc, much like scientists watching over what their subjects do in their lab experiments! And like scientists getting excited over the new discoveries of novel things that lay bare before their eyes, we, too, feel excited over him, much wishing to tell the whole world what we have come to know about Ajahn Brahm. And, here are a few tidbits, or rather, the whole chunk of it.

- Ajahn Brahm always throws rubbish into the bin by himself, never leaving such little troubles to others. Once, in an airport, he was looking everywhere for a rubbish bin. We offered our help, but he refused. Finally, he found a bin slightly farther away, but still he walked there, carrying the rubbish by himself.
- He has an incredibly high *esprit de corp*. Once, in an airport lounge we offered him a seat while we were queuing for payment. He refused. He decided to accompany us in the queue!

- During the second tour, he managed to sign 3,000 books. His hand and arm were aching, but he didn't show it. He still signed those books, even though he had to be massaged twice at night! And still he said, "Very good...!"
- The strange thing about Ajahn Brahm was that he seldom used escalators. Instead he insisted on using the stairs. He kept saying, "It's healthier, and faster...." And he was right! We used escalators, but somehow he always managed to land upstairs or downstairs first.
- Ajahn Brahm is a natural comedian and actor. Had he not been a monk, we dare to bet that he would have been more famous than John Travolta, Robin Williams, or even Brad Pitt!
- His jokes were funny. Even if they weren't, we would still laugh, seeing the way he laughed by himself.
- Ajahn Brahm is a living meditation master. He only talked when we engaged him in a talk. Otherwise, he would start to meditate, even in a car running on bumpy roads! And he always said there were only 4 places he loved to visit: the first *jhāna*, the second *jhāna*, the third *jhāna*, and the fourth *jhāna*!
- He always tried to make others happy. Whenever someone requested to pose with him, he would pause for a while, look at the camera, and put on his famous two-finger smile, even though he was signing books or walking somewhere. Once in Palembang, some people took his picture when he was bowing before the Buddha's image. Slightly afterwards he asked whether he should bow some more so that they could take more pictures.
- Everytime we offered ourselves to carry his bag and bowl, he always refused first, but then allowed us to do it, saying "Okay then, for you to make merit!" Speaking about his bowl, once one of us, a girl, was wondering what was inside that bowl. Did it contain a snake, as what a stewardess once asked? He gladly showed it to us. It only contained a sewing needle, some thread, a razor, and some other necessities for a monk. We were glad it didn't contain a snake! Phew!





- Ajahn Brahm loves questions. Once during a talk in Jakarta, we wanted to filter the barrage of questions streaming from the audience. Knowing this, he aired his protest to us, saying, "Let them ask. They are thirsty for the Dhamma." And when the Q&A session was over, he looked at us, saying, "Ohh... can't we have some more questions?" At other times, when we said to him, "May we ask you some naughty questions?" He simply replied, "There are no naughty questions. It just shows that you're eager to learn."
- Sometimes, after Ajahn Brahm finished eating, there were some leftovers. In some places, people—being a bit superstitious—would quickly snap up the food, thinking it was "auspicious food". We often wondered, whether these people would do the same, if the food were stuff like whole-boiled frogs, with their internal spare parts (like lungs, kidneys, intestines, urine, etc) intact, like what he used to eat when he was still in Northeast Thailand.
- Once we visited a local Buddhist primary school. The kids ran after Ajahn Brahm like a celebrity. They offered him biscuits and candies. We collected them on his behalf. And later that night before the Dhamma talk, he requested us to distribute those things to other people. Nobody wanted it! Finally, we said out loud, "This is from Ajahn Brahm, this is from Ajahn Brahm...." In a few seconds, those biscuits and candies were gone! They even requested for more!
- When we offered him food, he would invariably request for a "middle-way" portion. And every time, he would say that he wanted 3 scoops of meat or veggies, for the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.
- Whenever we offered him more food, he would always say with an imploring tone and gaze that made you feel that you couldn't refuse what he said, "Please, it's enough.... My master taught me to eat less, speak less, and sleep less...." And we couldn't help but oblige.
- There was one line he always quipped, "Very good...." Whatever we told him or said to him, he would almost always end with this tag-line. It was contagious, like wild fire, to say the least. In the end, we, too, always said the same thing. When we published a book narrating his first 10-day visit, we almost titled it Very Good.

To us, Ajahn Brahm is a perfect embodiment of true Dhamma practice. He had an uncanny ability to make the beautiful Dhamma more down-to-earth and wonderful for his audience.

Of the many wonderful impressions, two are most prominent. Firstly, Ajahn Brahm has an extraordinary capability to relax and to let go. We think this is the chief reason why he's such a great meditator and teacher. And secondly, he's a heartfelt person. He has such a big heart, always wishing for the best for all beings, always enjoying the present moment, while keeping equanimous under all circumstances. His heartfulness is ever reflected in his free and never-pretending two-finger smile. He's truly a unique blend of deep spirituality and a cheerful personality.

From Indonesia, the big family of the Ehipassiko Foundation would like to wish him a heartiest, happiest birthday. And may he ever be ready to come again and again to Indonesia, to spread the wonderful Dhamma, and to make all of us feel VERY GOOD!

*Handaka Vijjananda*





Dr Sunil M. Kariyakarawana *B.A. honours. (Kel), M.A. (Ottawa) PhD (Cornell)*  
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## MESSAGE FROM THE BUDDHIST CHAPLAIN TO HM FORCES

It is with a sense of utmost gratitude that I am writing this on behalf of nearly 3000 serving Buddhists in Her Majesty's Defence Forces (the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the Army) to congratulate the Most Venerable Ajahn Brahm on his 60th Birthday.

The Most Venerable Ajahn Brahm was the keynote speaker at the first ever Armed Forces Buddhist Conference held in 2006 in Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre, Amport House Andover and Ajahn's contribution to the conference remains a landmark in the history of UK Defence Forces Buddhist gatherings.

Since then, on his every visit to the UK, his motherland, Ajahn very generously offered his unfathomable wisdom of Dhamma and unlimited compassion to the serving members of the UK Defence Forces appreciating the hard work the soldiers, sailors and airmen do at the frontline.

I thus consider it a great pleasure and a privilege to send this goodwill message to you as the first and only Buddhist Chaplain to HM Forces on behalf of every serving Buddhist to wish Ajahn long life and good health to continue his valuable service to humanity in every part of the globe in the most effective fashion he always does.

As the Buddha once admonished, the light that a *bhikkhu*, who devoted to dhamma and his practice, can shed to this world is limitless. Ajahn Brahm truly is a fine example of that.

With much respect and appreciation,

*Dr Sunil M Kariyakarawana*

*Now is the only time your future is being made.*

*Ajahn Brahm*



## CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE

I take great pleasure in becoming party to the well deserved publication of a commemorative Booklet in honour of Ajahn Brahmavamso on his sixtieth birthday by his close lay disciples by sending this congratulatory message on behalf of the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Ajahn Brahmavamso is one of those few outstanding Western Buddhist monks who are endowed with a brilliant educational and intellectual background, and a sound theoretical understanding of and practical insight into the profound teachings of the Lord Buddha.

We, in the Buddhist Publication Society consider Ajahn Brahmavamso as a major collaborator in the effort that our Society has also made for over the last five decades, in spreading the noble teaching of the Buddha for the purpose of awakening as many intelligent and insightful persons throughout the world to the truths that lead to the most sublime peace and liberation. The Buddhist Publication Society has already taken steps to get several books authored by Ajahn Brahmavamso to be translated into the Sinhala language, and published and distributed for the benefit of the Sri Lankan readers who are unable to have access to his extremely insightful writings in English. If ever Ajahn Brahmavamso visited Sri Lanka, and delivered public lectures on Buddhism he invariably drew audiences in thousands. His public lectures on the Dhamma on most such occasions happened to be instantly provided with a Sinhala translation through an interpreter. It has been a great source of spiritual joy to listen to his simple and lucid exposition of the Dhamma which has been all the more inspiring because of the deeply experiential quality that characterized it. What I have personally most appreciated in his style of publicly expounding the Dhamma was the way he tempered it with a touch of witty good humor. I wish Ajahn Brahmavamso good health, increasing strength and long life to carry on his noble service to humanity as a great son of the Buddha for many more years to come.

*Dr. P.D. Premasiri*

Professor Emeritus of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka  
 President, Buddhist Publication Society



## AJAHN BRAHM SOCIETY OF SRI LANKA

8 Malalasekera Mawatha, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

Your stay in Sri Lanka in January 2011 when you conducted the nine-day meditation retreat for monks, nuns and the laity in the cool climes of Bandarawela, will never be forgotten.

When members of our newly formed 'Ajahn Brahm Sri Lanka Society' went up to make arrangements for the retreat nearly a year ahead of the event, the mere mention of your name created much excitement. The response was most encouraging and we had more applications to participate than we could handle in a retreat.

Chief monks of the nearby village temples together with their supporters took over the offering of alms to the participants. Officers and soldiers from the nearby Military Academy committed to provide the sound equipment, mats and blankets. Doctors of the local hospital and engineers of Telecommunication Office got together and took over the responsibility of organising the Town Hall for a public Dhamma talk. The Hotel School and the Tourist Board Resort management and staff went out of their way to provide all the facilities the team needed. These are just a few of the highlights of how the locals responded and participated in the event.

Everything went off according to plan. Even the weather was tolerable, with only a light drizzle in Bandarawela while the rest of the hill country was suffering from floods and major land slides.

"It's purely Ajahn Brahm's merit," we believe.

The January (*Duruthu*) full moon day saw seven thousand devotees participating in a full day programme at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH), the largest in the capital city of Colombo. There were many who came to listen to you for the first time. They were from different faiths. They all went back with pleasant memories and are now demanding more such programmes.

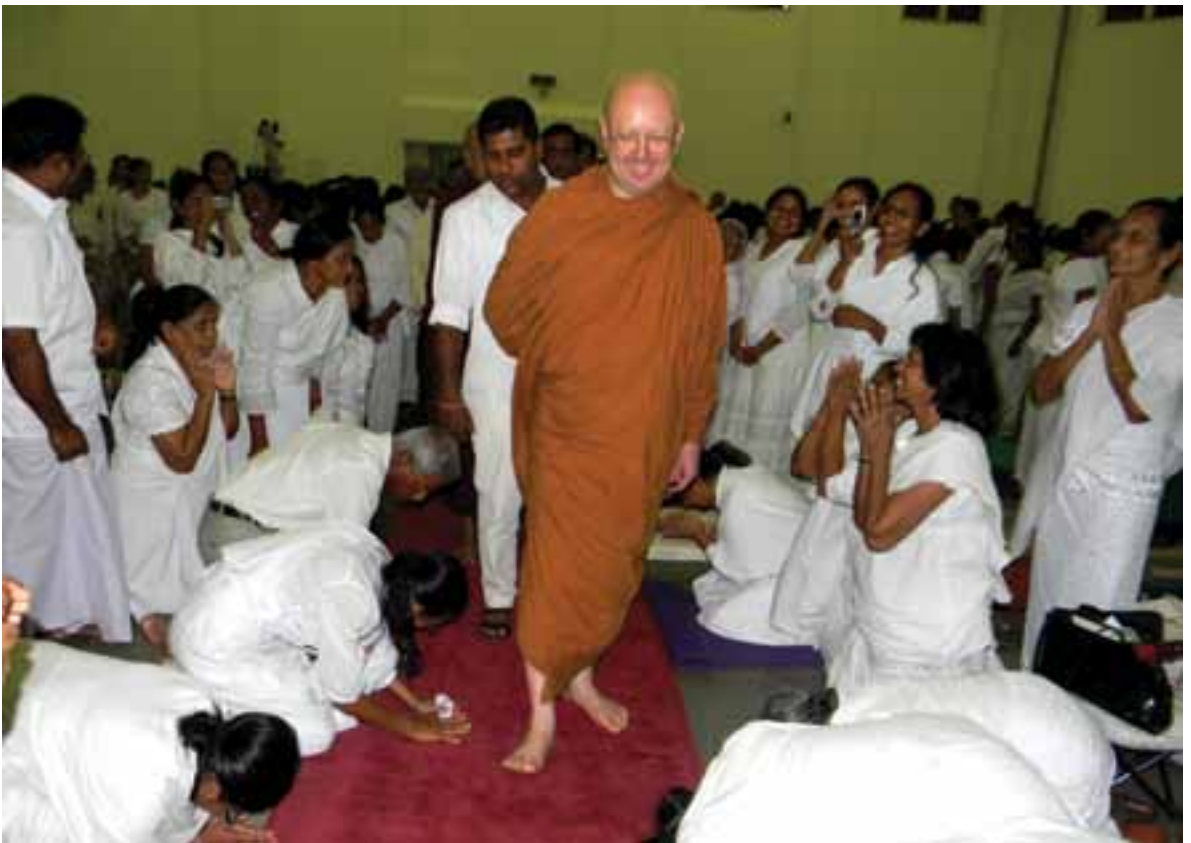
Every full moon Poya day, a Dhamma sermon is delivered from Temple Trees, the President's residence. This sermon is telecast live all over Sri Lanka. 2011 has been declared as the year of Sambuddhatva Jayanthi in Sri Lanka. Your being invited to give the very first sermon of a series of Poya Day sermons to commemorate this special year is testimony to the confidence that the Sri Lankans have in you.

More and more of your writings are being made available in Sinhala – the language spoken by the vast majority in Sri Lanka. With a literacy rate as high as 90%, Sri Lankans are used to reading. Elderly Buddhist devotees are in the habit of reading a Dhamma book whenever time permits.

Ajahn Brahm, on this happy occasion when you are reaching a milestone in life, the organising team in Sri Lanka wish you many more years of strength and vigour to continue your mission. 'Chirang Jayatu'!

*Executive committee*

Ajahn Brahm Society of Sri Lanka



*Ajahn arriving at BMICH, 19 January 2011*

*Being right is not as important as being peaceful, being kind, being gentle.*

*Ajahn Brahm*

# Building Jhana Grove



*Clearing the ground, 16 Nov. 2007*



*Cottage foundations, 29 Mar. 2008*



*Meditation hall formwork, 2 May 2008*



*Site inspection, 2 May 2008*



*Dining complex foundations, 14 Sept. 2008*



*Meditation hall roof, 29 Nov. 2008*



*Walkway to the cottages, 29 Jan. 2009*



*Stupa construction, 29 Mar. 2009*



*Mulch for landscaping, 7 Apr. 2009*



*Lawns completed, 7 Apr. 2009*



*Guardian lions, 8 Apr. 2009*



## "It's Great in Winter"

The first time I spoke to Ajahn Brahm was behind the *sala* at Wat Nanachat in Thailand. He told me the story of the two bricks in the wall.

Ajahn Brahm is famous for this kind of parable and jokes, but that's not what drew me to him as a teacher. I was first exposed to his mind through the Vinaya notes that at that time formed the backbone of our monastic life. But that's not what drew me to him either.

What I was really interested in was the Suttas, the earliest record of the Buddha's teachings, and how they might be applied in practice, especially meditation. Even though I was lucky enough to have had some terrific meditation teachers, it was Ajahn Brahm who really showed me how that fits in with the Dharma. All the marvellous, profound, astonishing gems that normally lie undisturbed in the obscure pages of the Pali canon, Ajahn Brahm brings into the sunshine, dusts off, and makes seem like fresh insights.

His approach was revolutionary. In a Buddhist world that too often trumpets the value of inquiry, only to fall back on unquestioning tradition, Ajahn Brahm stands out as a monk who has made the Dharma more challenging and vital than anyone else, while staying truer to the authentic roots taught by the Buddha.

He has brought this sensibility to bear on a range of challenging questions, whether profound doctrines such as dependent origination, the nature of *nibbāna*, or the role of *jhāna*, as well as the practical aspects of community life.

Recently, of course, he has become famous for his support for bhikkhuni ordination. On this issue, as with many others, he has shown a rare ability to listen and to change his mind. While he has always supported women's ordination, it was only a few years ago he still favoured the lesser 10-precept



platform. But he listened to what the women said and, although he was a senior teacher and Vinaya expert, realized that they were right and, regardless of the considerable personal cost, has stayed solid in his support.

Although Ajahn Brahm has been involved in his share of controversy, he is by no means argumentative by nature. I know, I've been in some serious arguments with him in the past. And of all the people I have ever met, he is the only one who will genuinely, absolutely let go of everything right away. There is not a shadow of resentment or ill-will.

When I think back to all the moments I've had with Ajahn Brahm, there is one that comes to mind. He used to wear - perhaps still does - an old, thickly-patched jacket for work. It needed yet another patch, and Ajahn Chandako, an excellent sewer, kindly offered to do it. He gave the repaired jacket back to Ajahn Brahm at the midday meal time. It was one of those sweltering Perth summer days. Ajahn Chandako remarked, 'That jacket's pretty heavy, it must be really hot.'

Ajahn Brahm just smiled and said, 'Yes, it's great in winter!'



*Bhante Sujato*

Abbot, Santi Forest Monastery

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**Dhammasara  
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### PRESIDENTS OF THE BSWA

On behalf of all the past presidents of The Buddhist Society of Western Australia (BSWA), signed below, we wish you Ajahn Brahmavamsa a very happy 60th birthday. How fortunate our society has been to have you associated with us for so many years.

Many of us remember when you first arrived. Ajahn Jagaro needed a new assistant after Bhikkhu Puriso decided to return to Thailand. We were told that Ajahn Chah was sending his best monk. Ajahn Jagaro told us to expect a Monk's monk. And so you were.

You sat quietly as second monk for those first few years but your sense of humour and dedication was always on display. It is probably fair to say that while your early talks were good, they have continued to improve as your practice has developed. What a joy it is to recall all those happy times.

Your hard work at building Bodhiyana monastery and the deprivations you had to endure are now legendary. We all well remember your insistence on using the door as your bed. The half water tank with sleeper foundations were a great innovation as a kuti and did the job until something more suitable came along.

You were a tough monk in those days, lean and hungry for good practice. Everyone was a beneficiary. Somehow it all seemed to come together. The BSWA was flourishing. We had the best leadership team with Ajahn Jagaro and Ajahn Brahm heading both the building program and the spiritual direction of the society.

When Ajahn Jagaro decided his pathway lay in a direction outside the monastic community, many people thought our Buddhist Society may founder, however truth lay in the other direction. History now shows that despite these travails, our society has continued to flourish under your leadership.

Looking at more contemporary times, with the advent of computers and the internet, the BSWA is now effectively ministering to the world, with many thousands of people from all over the world downloading and listening to your talks. Your vision and drive have built a world class retreat centre. This has been a boon for the people of Perth but is also being used by people from all over the world.

Your life as a monk has not been without its controversy. You have always been there to champion the cause of people in our society who, for one reason or another suffer discrimination. Your support for gay relationships, voluntary euthanasia, through to the full ordination of bhikkunis has marked you out as a compassionate monk who is not afraid to shine a light on injustice when you see it.

Your example and congruence with your practice is easy to see for those who are close to you. The slings and arrows you have received have been addressed with care and compassion. It is plain to see that you are a person who personifies the teachings of the Buddha.

We all feel greatly privileged to have known you and learnt from you. We wish you a very happy birthday and hope we can have many more trips around the sun together.

With metta,



***Dennis Sheppard***  
Current President, The BSWA



Founder President  
***Laksiri Jayasuriya AM***



***Sunny Miller***



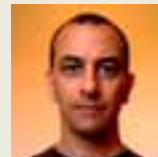
***Jill Hanna***



***Don Casson***



***Kathy Shiels***



***James Pinakis***



***Karen Smailes***



***Chris Anderson***



***Sol Hanna***



***Warren Smailes***



***Jacob Meddin***



***Don Weerakody***



***Binh Anson***



***Rachel Green***

 Jhana Grove Retreat Centre



*An aerial shot of Jhana Grove on opening day, 10 April 2009*

## Hon. Geoff Gallop AC

One of the a great joys of political life is that you meet so many people with different backgrounds, different ideas and different personalities. So it was that I met Ajahn Brahm when he was campaigning to preserve the peace and serenity of Bodhiyana Monastery. He showed then, as he does now, that Buddhism and politics can be friend in the quest for a good society. I think we would call it Mindful Leadership!

I love reading the stories in his book *Opening the Door of Your Heart* and very much admire the way he cuts through so many of the self-serving assumptions in contemporary debates over religion and politics. Illusion and human condition are never too far apart and someone has to bring human beings back to reality even if it is a Buddhist monk who lives in a cave on the outskirts of Perth!

Ajahn Brahm, congratulations on your 60th birthday (1951 was a good year!) and thanks for your contribution to Western Australia. More importantly thanks for your personal support and encouragement over the years. It has been much appreciated.

All the best in health and happiness.



*Geoff Gallop*

(Former Premier of WA also born in 1951)

Patron of Jhana Grove Retreat Centre

## Amandus Santomuni

### Former long-term Anagarika

On one occasion I was driving Ajahn Brahm and the monks to a dana. And Ajahn Brahm needed to go somewhere where he needed his glasses. After driving down Kingsbury Drive onto the Southwest Highway, Ajahn Brahm suddenly looked in his yam and after a while searching in his yam for something he asked me to stop. And he had another look in his yam and mentioned he forgot his glasses and asked me to drive back to the monastery because he needed them for a meeting. And, he looked at me and I couldn't prevent myself from grinning. Looking a bit upset by my grinning, he asked me to turn around and go back to the monastery to get his glasses. And then I said to him, 'how about the ones on your nose?'. So, I didn't need to turn around and we continued the journey. And he said, 'I must be getting old!'



Happy Birthday to you Ajahn.  
Good luck for your old age!

With Gratitude,

*Amandus*

Anagarika at Bodhinyana, 1983 - 2010





## AUSTRALIAN SANGHA ASSOCIATION

*A representative body for monks and nuns of all Buddhist traditions*

### ***Congratulatory Letter to Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso Mahathera for His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday***

My heart felt congratulations to you on this joyous occasion. With my well-wishes are those of the ASA committee, Sangha and many supporters who celebrate with you your honourable 60th Birthday.

During our Dharma friendship over many years, your noble aspirations have always inspired me. With such lightheartedness you convey the complexities of Dharma, while raising awareness to the most relevant and important issues.

Your untiring kindness reflects a rare depth of love and resourcefulness. The magnanimity and passion you share revitalizes and graces this planet with well researched and experienced path. By transcended cultural and religious prejudice, you have encouraged greater equality and respect between all Sangha, and their dignity is held within the unstained truth of the Noble Triple Gem.

The Australian Sangha Association and Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils commend your courage and leadership to embrace with kindness and sincerity the misguided controversy over your supporting the first Theravada Bikkhuni Ordination here in Australia.

So with gratitude and respect, together with the ASA committee, I wish you a wonderful celebration of 60 years well lived. May good health and wellbeing prevail in your future noble aspirations.

Dharma Blessings with sincere respect,



*Rev. Chi Kwang Sunim*

Chair, Australian Sangha Association

## Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils

Serving Australia's Buddhist Communities



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Buddhist Council of New South Wales  
Buddhist Council of Victoria  
Buddhist Council of Queensland  
Buddhist Council of South Australia  
Buddhist Council of Western Australia

### A Celebration of the Life of Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Management Committee and state Delegates of the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC), to wish you a healthy and happy 60th birthday.

Now that you are officially a 'Senior Citizen' of the world, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words about you.

Maeve and I were first introduced to your thought provoking and amusing anecdotes after receiving a CD from a dear and special friend and follower of yours, Mr Chee Wong.

I know you are aware that you have positively altered the lives of so many Australians since first arriving in Perth, Western Australia, in the early 1980's. I am happy to acknowledge I am on of those fortunate people.

We all wish you many more years of good health, to allow you to continue teaching the Dharma to your many students and followers throughout Australia and overseas.

Yours sincerely with metta,



*Mr Kim Hollow*

President, Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils







## **Buddhist Society of Victoria Inc.**

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## **OUR SPIRITUAL ADVISOR – AJAHN BRAHM**

Ajahn Brahmavamsa has been our Spiritual Advisor for over 15 years, ever since we moved into our new premises in Darling Road, Malvern. We always seek his wise counsel for spiritual matters of the Buddhist Society Victoria. He's ever willing to guide us and is only a telephone call away. His annual visit to Melbourne for the Vesak celebrations is undoubtedly the highlight for the BSV and brings a hype of activity to our doorstep. Not only do BSV members eagerly await his visits, but his Vesak program, Dhamma talks and meditation retreats draw large crowds from both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist community. His unwavering support for the Bhikkhuni Sangha did encourage the BSV to establish Sanghamittarama, the Bhikkhuni Vihara in Melbourne.

Ajahn Brahm's style of delivering the Buddha's teachings, with many similes and appropriate jokes (some of which are repeated), in a light-hearted manner appeals to a modern audience, particularly the youth. Listeners sit attentively for hours as he is able to hold their attention with his engaging dialogue.

We respect and are truly grateful, not only for his contributions to the BSV and to Melbourne Buddhists, but for his dedication to Buddhist missionary work far beyond the shores of Australia.

On behalf of the Buddhist Society Victoria, I would like to wish Ajahn a very happy 60th birthday and the Blessings of the Triple Gem.

*Dhananjaya Jayasekera*

President, Buddhist Society of Victoria



雪梨淨宗學會  
**Amitabha Buddhist Association of  
 New South Wales Inc.**  
 A.B.N. 40 326 518 700  
 PO Box 509, BURWOOD, NSW 1805

## CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY

On my own behalf and that of the Amitabha Buddhist Association of New South Wales I congratulate Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso on the achievement of sixty years in this world and making such a magnificent contribution to the propagation of the Dhamma throughout the world and in Australia in particular. Ajahn Brahmavamso is unique in using the skilful means of injecting humour into his Dhamma talks. He has been criticised from some quarters for this Dhamma propagating technique. If one does not attract criticism then one's efforts are ineffective and insignificant. It is my wish that our dear Ajahn Brahmavamso continues to stir up the Buddhist community and awaken them from their complacency. The Dhamma is not merely a matter of performing and attending ceremonies as is commonly the case in many so-called 'Buddhist' countries but a practice as relevant to today's world as it was 2550 years ago in North-East India. Ajahn Brahmavamso separates Buddhism from its institutionalised religiosity and emphasises the importance of practice rather than blind belief.

I have not only had the honour of attending several of his outstanding lectures here in Australia but I have been fortunate in being in his company many times when attending Conferences and Seminars overseas in Thailand, Japan, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. His great wisdom interspersed with humorous anecdotes has made him much in demand throughout the world. May he continue his valuable contribution of spreading the Dhamma in the West for many years to come.



*Graeme Lyall AM*

President, Amitabha Buddhist Association of NSW

Buddhist Chaplain, NSW Department of Corrective Services

Co-Chairman, Sub-Committee on Publications, Publicity, Education,  
 Culture and the Arts, World Fellowship of Buddhists

Trustee, University Buddhist Education Foundation



## 🌸 Formal Recognition

### The Curtin Medal, 2004



Receiving the John Curtin medal from then Chancellor Eric Tan, Curtin University, 2004. Awarded for vision, leadership and community service

### Than Chao Khun, 2006

Ajahn Brahm receiving the Thai ecclesiastical honour of Than Chao Khun, 2006

*“Phra Brahmavamso of Bodhinyana Monastery in Australia is a monk of Royal Grade with the title of Phra Visuddhisamvarathera. May he accept the duty in the Buddha’s dispensation of teaching, settling Sangha business and looking after the monks and novices in his monastery in an appropriate manner. And to develop happiness and well being in the Buddha’s Dispensation.”*

from the Than Chao Khun certificate

# The Thamkrabok Foundation

INCORPORATED IN AUSTRALIA

## 60 NOT OUT AND STILL BATTING

### THE COMMITMENT

About to enter his sixth cycle our Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso, popularly known as Ajahn Brahm, continues to lead us with the same commitment, enthusiasm and dedication that drew us to him when he took over the leadership role as our Abbot and Spiritual Director from the Venerable Ajahn Jagaro. Both, as we all know, being disciples of the late Venerable Ajahn Chah.

From the time he became our leader he has guided us along an amazing path. He guides us all along our respective paths in life in a unique way, not actually telling us what to do, but by offering examples, garnished with his incomparable sense of humour! Personally I gained much inspiration from words offered to me in my voluntary work for the community.

All of us will have a personal tale or three to tell about our Ajahn, and I would like to share with you a few of mine.

Of course we all know that Ajahn is the Abbot of the Bodhinyana Monastery, Spiritual Director of the BSWA, of the Buddhist Fellowship Singapore and all points east. What is not generally known is that he is also the Patron of The Thamkrabok Foundation Incorporated [www.thamkrabok.org.au](http://www.thamkrabok.org.au) Do visit this website and read his message to those who seek to free themselves of their addictions to drugs and alcohol. His message has been there unaltered ever since we created the Foundation back in the early nineties. Thank you Ajahn.

On my many journeys into Thailand and the Thamkrabok Monastery I often travelled via Singapore to attend Masonic meetings. On one occasion I discovered that Ajahn was in town, and that evening he was giving a talk to a large gathering organised by the BF. I went along with several of my Masonic friends, a couple were also Buddhist. We arrived early and the large Temple was empty, so we took some seats at the front. The place soon filled and in no time at all was packed. We sat, we waited patiently, but no Ajahn.

Angie Monksfield, the vice President of BF came over to us and said that Ajahn was stuck in traffic on the other side of Singapore and could I help. "How can I help?" I asked.

The reply from Angie? "Get up there and talk to them until he arrives."

My friends looked at me as if to say sooner you than me! "What are you going to talk about?" They asked. "Dunno. I'll think of something." So up I got. It must have been OK 'cos I didn't get anything thrown at me!!!

About thirty minutes later I spotted Ajahn at the back of the large room. A big smile, and a wave to say, "I'm here." So after giving him a warm introduction I returned to my seat. My friends asked how was I able to do that. My answer? "Easy, there's my teacher. Sit back and listen to the expert."

As always Ajahn came through with a meaningful message interspersed with that touch of humour.

This is just one of several anecdotes I have experienced with Ajahn. There are more but I guess I have already gone past my allocated 150 words.

Ajahn, congratulations as you enter your sixth cycle and also for your support in my commitment to the voluntary work I have been doing over the years. It is you and the late Luangphaw Chamroon Parnchand, Abbot of the Thamkrabok Monastery in Thailand who have been my inspiration and guide as I faced the highs and the lows in helping folk from all walks of life who came with me to Thailand to part with their respective addictions.

May you be with us for many more years to guide us all.

*Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!*



*BE (Brian) Haffenden OAM*

Founder (Now Retired)

The Thamkrabok Foundation Inc.

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AUSTRALIA

[www.thamkrabok.org.au](http://www.thamkrabok.org.au)



On behalf of the Benedictine Community of New Norcia I write to wish you a very happy 60th birthday.

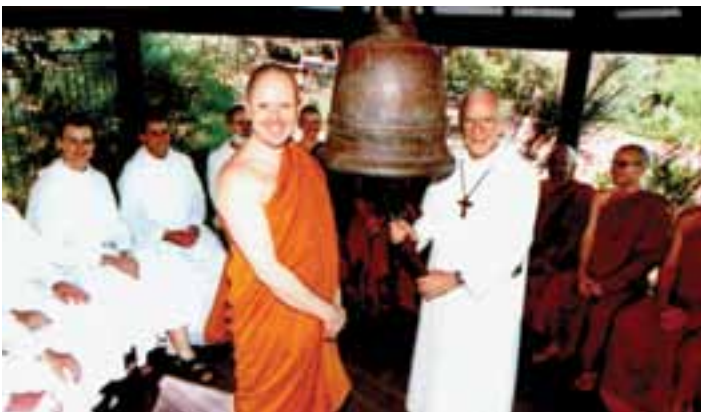
This joyous occasion provides us with the opportunity to acknowledge, celebrate and give thanks for your many attributes and achievements; they are indeed a source of true blessing for the people of Western Australia.

The monks of New Norcia certainly value your presence and the presence of your community, most particularly enjoying the rich encounter in our inter-monastic dialogue.

On this special occasion we offer our blessing and assurance of prayer.

May you continue to be blessed with good health, wholesome wisdom and deep spiritual joy.

Faithfully yours in friendship,



*Picture by Kerris Berrington, The Sunday Times*

*Fr John Herbert OSB*

Abbot

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On behalf of everyone concerned at Karnet Prison Farm, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the occasion of your 60th birthday. The Monastery and Prison have had a long association which has certainly flourished during my time as Superintendent at Karnet.

We have worked well together and I know that personally I have developed a great amount of respect for the Monastery and its operations. This of course is also a reflection of the leadership and the people involved there.

Our thoughts and best wishes are with you.

*Deans McClue*

Superintendent, Karnet Prison Farm

*Don't look for success in getting achievements.  
Look for success in just giving and forgiving.*

*Ajahn Brahm*



*Alcoa supported the regeneration of the airstrip near Boddhinyana*

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**Huntly Mine**  
 PO Box 172  
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 Australia  
 Tel: 618 9530 2800  
 Fax: 618 9530 2816

It is with great pleasure that my staff and I wish you a happy 60th Birthday. As a near neighbour of the Bodhiyana Monastery, Alcoa's Huntly Minesite and its staff have enjoyed working closely with you, and look forward to many more years of a respectful and cooperative relationship.

i would also like to thank you on behalf of the Alcoa Women's Network for your inspiring and humorous discussion at the recent November event. The attendees greatly enjoyed your insight, intelligence and serene acceptance that although all is not as it could be, you work towards equality in all areas of life.

Your hospitality at Bodhinyana Monastery and the devotion you and the monks show in the community is always positive and respectful. I thank you again for your selfless efforts in the community, and your hospitality towards Alcoa.

*Bill Knight*

Manager of Mines, Alcoa World Alumina Australia, WA Operations





# Ordinations, 2011



*Samanera ordinations by Ajahn Brahm in 2011; from top left: Upasama (Bodhinyana in July), Upekkhā and Gotamī (Dhammaloka in March), Bodhidhaja and Mudito (Dhammaloka in May), Nandiya (Santi in March)*

# Acknowledgements

The hagiography was written by Ajahn Brahmāli, who stresses that it is unauthorised.

The talk "The Meaning of Life: Achieving Peace of Mind", was given by Ajahn Brahm at Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre, Nollamara, WA, on 16th January 2009.

*The Simile of the Driverless Bus* was included in the talk "The Ten Fetters", given by Ajahn Brahm at the April 2011 BSWA Meditation Retreat at Jhana Grove.

The authors of congratulatory messages are thanked for their texts and photos.

We are also very grateful to lay supporters for the photographs of Ajahn's Dhamma tours particularly in Thailand, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Norway and Sri Lanka. The Buddhist Society of Western Australia is thanked for the images from its archives, as are Wisdom Publications and others for miscellaneous pictures.

Kerris Berrington of The Sunday Times, Buddhist Gem Fellowship, Buddhist Publications Society and Curtin University are thanked for permission to use pictures as indicated.

Tony Betts is thanked for the snaps from Ajahn's early years.

Xandria Ooi and Yuri Wong are thanked for permission to include their wedding photo.

Steve Cadman published the image of the Front Court of Emmanuel College, Cambridge under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license. Accessed 20 May 2011 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Chapel\\_Emmanuel\\_College2.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Chapel_Emmanuel_College2.jpg).







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*Make peace, be kind, be gentle*



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