

Does Life Suck?

By Ajahn Brahmavamso

Ok, so now we can start this evening's talk. I was having a very busy week last week and many things went wrong, like they always tend to do. Just because you're a monk, it doesn't mean that things go right. So little things like our monastery car just has been to the, to the... fixers-up, to the garage, about two or three times and now has to go back again. So it is a black hole for the money which you donate, it seems, so everything seems to be going wrong. And the people over in Bangkok I'm going to Thailand this evening for the United Nations Vesak's ceremonies. They're messing around with everything so I have to redo the whole tickets. And I just remember a few days earlier that I was busy working in the retreat center, just still doing some plumbing getting myself nice and dirty. You know like boys being boys. You know I'm still a boy underneath, messing around with the plumbing and the dirt. And going back to the monastery and finding that there is no water in the shower.

So these are just things which happen in life. And so just a couple of days ago, on the vehicle which we're using, which somebody donated to us, an old Magna car, no one had washed the windscreens so I used my finger to write on it that "samsara sucks". Samsara is a Buddhist (laugh), Samsara is a Buddhist word for sort of life. Yeah, we were using that car to come in this afternoon, and on the freeway we were behind the taxi. And on the taxi there was an advert on the back, and all the monks when they saw it, they burst out laughing, because on the advert it was "If you hear anyone saying that life sucks, send them to (laugh)..." And I've just been saying that life sucks. We didn't actually see where we're supposed to send them to. And it must be the Buddhist society of Western Australia, I reckon. So if you hear anyone saying 'life sucks' send them here, 'cause we understand this.

So it is sometimes what happens in this life, isn't it? That things go wrong. So the talk this evening is: "What to do when things go wrong in life?" And I'm not sure about you, but when I was young, I tried to fix up life. I worked really hard trying to fix things up. It didn't make much different, actually usually it made things much worse. And sometimes you're trying to fix up life and I'm trying to make things better. It's worth a while doing, trying to fix up the world but I don't know – the world goes it's own directions, in spite of me, and it sort of sometimes you wonder, you know, what's happening?

And in life we go round our life and our years and things go right, things go wrong. And after a while, when you get old, you should start to realize that this is the nature of life. And the Buddha actually taught the first Noble Truth. He called it the Truth of Suffering but I call it "Life Sucks". That's the first Noble Truth, that's what Buddha said and if he was speaking modern language that's what he would say. It's suffering. But you don't have to be depressed about this because there is a solution. What he's saying is that life is troublesome. We all get into disappointment, frustrations, things go wrong and — I know this in myself — that sometimes you think 'why did it go wrong'? Why is it, that when people put in the vanity units in the toilets in our retreat center, they put the screws right through the water pipes?

It's only a narrow water pipe, they got this whole big wall. The water's actually going right through the center of the water pipe, so you can't actually (laugh)..... And of course, cause this is what happens, isn't it? This is like, if ever you've built a house, I'm sure you've had even worse experiences.

So after a while, sometimes, I get to the point, they say, what do you expect Ajahn Brahm? And it's a lot of times it's my expectations of the cause of the suffering. And you should learn by now, you talked to all the other people, that just before we did our opening ceremony of our retreat center. And I told you that we were working until 2 o'clock in the morning. This monk was working till 2 o'clock in the morning trying to finish things off. And then people say, yeah, that was what it was like when we had built our house. Yeah, that's what when we did our project. The builders always take the very last minute to finish things off.

So I mean what do you expect? Really, I should've expected that from the very beginning. Actually I was telling people we'd probably finish at midnight, on the night before. I was actually wrong, it wasn't midnight – it was 2 a.m. But, a lot of times the suffering in life is when we expect life to be somehow different, and few years ago when a person in Singapore asked me – he said 'I'm in a bit of a rush, I've got an appointment to go to – can you please teach me what is life in brief?'. When I said that 'life is suffering' and he said 'Why? C'mon, be quick about this – what is suffering?' You know what it's like in modern life, sometimes people don't have time for a whole hour's talk – this is a luxury to be able to come here and actually listen to a talk. The only reason probably you can come to a talk on a Friday night is because you probably have been laid off because of the economic crisis. I don't know, whatever. Anyway, or you are just you know, doing sort of part-time work. But anyhow, most people are very very busy, so however it is coming I love actually being challenged sometimes, because when you're really challenged, and you have to teach very quickly – really you dig deep and you get these great answers coming up. And the answer was that: 'Look sir, the suffering is asking from life what it can never give you.' I always liked that definition: "is asking from life what life will never be able to supply" – and that's called suffering. That's why life sucks sometimes. It's not actually about life, 'cause life has always been this way, but what it is, is our expectations and our requests, what we want out of life.

And I want the best retreat centre in the whole world. I want all the toilets to work straight away! I want to get a car and have it serviced and never go wrong, especially just the day after the warranty expires and of course it never happens that way, does it? I remember this motorbike I had when I was just... Can you imagine me on a motorbike? – I had long hair in those days and a big motorbike, it was an average size motorbike and I was going backwards and forwards on my motorbike. It was only one year it had a warranty. And I didn't believe it, the actual day after, the very day afterwards, it was going fine until then and it sort of started developing problems. Of course, I don't know how they actually do this, they must be very clever, these Japanese makers of motorbikes. They actually time it, that it's perfect for one year, but one day afterwards it breaks down and costs you a lot of money.

Or this poor person – I don't know if he is here this evening – I was sort of going alms-round on a Saturday morning, and he told me what just happened when he got his \$900 from the government from Mr. Rod.* He got up that morning and he was driving and his car broke down that afternoon, the clutch had gone and it cost him \$880. At least he made 20 bucks – and anyway, apparently that's what you're suppose to do with that \$900 - put it back in the economy, and he did straight away – a really good Australian (laugh).

** Roderick Eddington - Infrastructure Australia chairman Rod Eddington said the global financial crisis had ravaged the Government's original plan to pump \$20 billion of its own money into infrastructure projects...*

But these are such simple stories to pick up, because you got your own stories of what happens in life. Gee, we always expect something else but it never happens, and so life is always a struggle. And that's what life is all about – to struggle. If it was so easy, it wouldn't be worth living life. And so is struggle, so is disappointment which tests us. They're our learning experience, the ones I use to call "the growing pains". Without pain there is no real growth in this life, we have to learn from these things. So after a while you say you expect things to go wrong. You expect to get sacked from work, expect your partner to say 'bye bye' (laugh), you expect to get sick, do you? So often all I can do is say 'ok come and get real guys, girls, you know you are getting old, you're gonna get sick, things are falling apart, you feel that inside'. You fall apart so much and there is no much the doctor can do and after a while the doctor can't do anything else for you, so you have to be taken to the wrecker's yard – Karrakatta Pinnaroo or Fremantle. (laugh)

So this is our life, so what do you expect? The problem is in life "why do people suffer?" when things go wrong, that very word - things go wrong. Just a red line should come on – what do you mean that things are going wrong? There's nothing wrong with dying. There's nothing wrong with sort of people putting the screws through the water pipes. There's nothing wrong, just you know with things being late. There's nothing wrong with this thing, nothing wrong with me making mistakes or saying stupid jokes. It's just who I am. Somebody told me this terrible joke last Saturday, I can't (laugh), I can't resist telling you. Anyway, I'm going away this evening, so I can actually get out of the country before the repercussions really hit (laugh). And this is, and this reminded me because of that I'm talking sort of cars and car accidents, and Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse were in a car accident. And Minnie Mouse was very very severely injured but Mickey Mouse saved her life. How did he save her life? Mouse-to-mouse resuscitation (laugh). If you wanna go now, I can completely understand.

Anyway, what do you expect on a Friday night? You'd been coming here for many years, you know my reputation, so it doesn't get any better than this. No need to suffer for it, because... But anyway, going back to what goes wrong in life, do we understand actually how life actually flows? Understanding life and understanding the world, understanding politics, understanding policemen, understanding other people. When you understand, we actually have realistic expectations of life. Now, on a Friday night can't we move this place to where there's no dogs? (laugh) And is there any place at all without dogs? There's always somebody barking. Anyway, if you move this where there's no dogs, there's somebody who'd do the lawn mowing. That's one of the reason about daylight saving. I'm gonna probably you know, if I had

a vote I'd vote against it, because sometimes if it's very early when we have the evening talk, the other people would just be out there mowing their lawns and making big noise and you can't even hear what you're saying. But anyway it doesn't really matter, whatever you want to vote.

When it comes down to it, these things actually happen. Now what do you do when things go wrong in life or so-called go wrong, we think they go wrong, what happens? We get upset. We get angry. We create all this tension inside of us, which is not necessary. Why does a stupid dog make you suffer? It's just a dog being a dog, what do you expect dogs to do? All the dogs that I've ever met – they all bark. So what do you expect? All places you go to – now, they're all noisy. Isn't it amazing? There's so many people here sitting quietly but they're not all quiet, there's always somebody coming early or somebody coming late or somebody's gonna let off winds and probably just right in front of you (laugh). There's always somebody gonna disturb you and that's the nature of things. And now, what we got now? People are really worried about swine flu. What do you expect? I mean, there are so many bugs in the air in the world, there are too many people anyway you know, and we need to sort of do a cull. Now what are you afraid of anyway? You're anyway gonna die, you're gonna die anyway. It's much better to die soon and don't have to worry about nursing homes, an old-age impalliative care and all this to cost a lot of money for the government. So you're doing a wonderful thing for the economy by dying early (laugh). Why do people really obsess about these things? There's nothing wrong with this. If you look at history, there's always been this epidemics whether it's the Plague or the Black Death or this sort of, you know, Influenza in the 1918 or the SARS. I'm just really sort of surprised that people, just how people overreact to these things.

Even today somebody just rang me from Singapore and they were just worried to come to Perth, and whether it is safe to fly, 'cause so many people have got swine flu', and that's what happened to me once when I went to Singapore during the middle of the SARS crisis. Been here, done that before. And as I landed in Singapore Airport, I actually read the newspaper on the plane and on the front page the headlines, and distance making the newspapers survey well is a big black bold "100 people dead". And I think 'Gee... 'and it sort of, when I rode to Singapore I had all the heat cameras on you, so I was thinking 'Come on, think cool, think cool, think cool'. You never know if these things work or not. But anyhow, they're gonna be probably there again tomorrow morning when I arrive; but we got the heat cameras and all my disciples they were just lined up outside 'What should we do, what should we do, what should we do?' They'd hide the convention center just for my talk, just me alone. It must have cost a fortune to hire this place. They said 'Should we cancel?' The Singapore government had requested no public meetings. The schools are being closed. They put so much money into this event. Four days of talks and I said 'How many people in Singapore?' They said 'About 4 million', that means 3 999 900 people haven't died of SARS. Why is it, that when we see how many people have got a sickness, we forget that most people haven't. The chances of you flying and getting swine flu, on those days SARS, were so small compared to sort of just crossing a road or doing the other things we do in life. Why is it, that people just are so afraid of these things that they overreact? So when I said that everybody laughed, it would leave all their tension and we went ahead with our program and no one got SARS. No one that went to my talk, check that out. 'Cause no one actually got SARS after that time we arrived, it was already finished with basically. But anyhow, if you are

gonna protect yourself from sickness, what's the best to do? To worry about it and stay at home or not? Every doctor knows, and the few doctors here, your immune system actually gets improved when you're happy and when you laugh at stupid jokes (like that mouse-to-mouse resuscitation jokes). I just improved your immune system. I made you even stronger and especially when you laugh, you know many of these things are respiratory problems, so when you laugh you're exercising your lungs and actually they get stronger. You're actually doing a very positive thing to actually to stop getting these sicknesses. So, coming to a good talk and inspiring yourself and getting uplifted – that actually makes you more protected. So this evening you're getting your dose of anti-swine flu venom. No, venom – that's the wrong word. Virus or whatever it is, you know. But anyway, you sort of, any time you laugh and you're happy you get healthier and we all know that.

Seriously, coming is a wonderful thing to do, so the point is - why worry about these things? You're gonna get it, you get it anyway. I was actually telling the monks, if I do go to, but I'm not actually going to Singapore, I'm going to Thailand for this United Nations Vesak. If I do get swine flu it'd be great, I'd have a rest. I can be in a hospital and no one will be allowed to visit me. No one'll be up to ask me these questions about their personal life or their husband or their kids or their financial problems. No one'll be able to ring me up. It'd be like having a bit of a rest would be like going on a retreat. And I really do need a retreat, I do work so hard. So it'll be wonderful if that happens to me. That's one of the days that I'd remember. If I ever get sent to prison for something, because sometimes you don't do anything, sometimes people are put into prison for things they didn't do. That Andrew Marlotti was accused 13 or 14 years since now for something he never did. I thought it would be great as a monk to go to prison. You know, have a nice bed to sleep on, because I sleep on a floor down in my monastery. And at least when you get food, you actually get it into separate compartments, all my food goes into the same bowl.

And you actually get more choice, I think in modern Australian prisons. And most of all, if I did ever get sent to prison, and I'm very positive about this, I'll make sure I misbehave, so I can get sent to the solitary confinement and that would be my goal. A monk in solitary confinement – that would be the best retreat of all (laugh). So you can see just how you can deal with the problems of life. Attitude! There's one thing which I've found out and I'm sure that you should know by now – life is so hard to change. Other people, they're just so tough to change them or teach them, or nudge them this way, or nudge them that way, it's just so tough to do. You can argue with a person that's just so stubborn. What do you expect? Everyone's like that, I'm like that, you ask the other monks. 'Can you change my mind?', 'Oh no, not Ajahn Brahm.' - That's why you know that we have two rules for our monastery. You've got the monks rules, which is for all monks, you know throughout the world, but every monastery's got its own set of rules just applying to that monastery.

And that first rule is "the abbot's always right". Rule number one. And rule number two – "if the abbot's wrong, go back to rule number one (laugh)". But people are stubborn, that's just their nature. But what do you expect? What I've found, is that this is our life, I've learned to understand what life actually is. Instead of fighting life learn how to make peace with life. Accept people for who they are. It's a wonderful thing, when you don't expect too much out of the people you meet and you know, and you are with. You don't expect too much out of them. You don't measure them. When you

don't measure them, then you can love them. If you really expect something out of your partner, you're gonna have a terrible relationship. When you try and measure them, you know, compare your husband to Brad Pitt, compare your wife to – I don't know who's the siren of these days, Angelina Jolie? Angelina Jolie, is getting old now, isn't now? I have to do some more research on who's the siren of the modern age. Maybe on the aircraft this evening I'm gonna have a look in the brochures for the movies and find out who's starring in them, so I got some more idea of who's gonna be the modern siren or anyway whatever - you know what I mean. But if you try and measure your partner then you're gonna get so critical and you're gonna be judging them, and comparing them, and expecting somehow something out of them, that they will never be able to supply. People are not like that, they're not like in the movies, life isn't like in the movies. So when we drop our expectations, then we can actually love somebody. Loving them is accepting them for who they are, not fighting them. That's one of the nice things of being a monk, because you know, you can love everybody 'cause you don't judge them, and some of the people that come to me are sometimes, they're so stupid. Sometimes they do the most amazing crazy things (laugh). But then long time you're just not judging and actually you can like people then. So when you don't expect anything out of people, they make much more peace and thus you can be much kinder – and this is just with people. Even with the other monks I'm suppose to be training - you don't expect so much out of them, and then they do much better. There's an old saying which our monks - abbots use towards, used to each others when they meet, this is almost like a traditional greeting in the Thai Forest Tradition. When two abbots meet with each other, they ask each other 'How are your monks? Are they easy to train?' And a few years ago I went to see the man, the monk who took over from Ajahn Chah, a monk who Ajahn Liam – a very good monk – and I asked him one day when I was visiting Thailand, I said 'How are your monks? Are they easy to train?' and he said 'Ah, they're just no problem at all to train'. The way he said it, it was such nonchalance. I said 'Well, what's your trick? How do you train your monks, when they are so easy to train?'

He said 'Very easy. If they wanna go this way, let them go that (this) way. If they wanna go that way, let them go that way. They're so easy to train'. So I'm gonna try that (laugh). But he was a very powerful monk. What he was doing – he was saying 'I'm not controlling them. I'm encouraging them without controlling them' – and this is actually how we live our life. Encouraging life but not controlling things. He was that same monk I was really really impressed with him once. Now this was now one of my Ajahn Chah, my master's senior most disciples, and he was looking after Ajahn Chah and doing all the jobs, basically being acting abbot for many years. When Ajahn Chah died, he was in charge of all the funeral services and the king of Thailand attended this, this was a big show. So this monk built actually the funeral, a crematorium for him, which actually doubled as a Stupa – a monument which is still there now. He put all this time and money into building this place where his great master would be cremated. And I was there at the time, you know I went there and Ajahn Jagaro was there, my predecessor, and Ajahn Sumedho, all these monks and the king was there. When they lit, sort of, the pile inside this box, the box exploded. Flames came out from everywhere. It was a disaster and there were monks with hoses trying to hose the thing down and people were running around, it was just a complete mess. And what the monk responsible, is Ajahn Liam, and what did he do? Instead of worrying about anything he took one look and then went to bed (laugh). Had a sleep. I thought 'Wow! Now that's a real monk, I wish I could do that when

everything goes wrong. Just 'Aah never mind, I'm just gonna have a nice rest'. Can you do that? No! You worry and worry and worry and run around: 'What can I do? How can I fix this?' and he said just 'Ah just never mind', he did his best. Doesn't matter his master won't get cremated that day, they can always do it tomorrow. Now that's how you react when things go wrong. You can't fix it – just go to bed. Have a cup of tea, whatever it happens.

Now, great people can do that. There is a poem which I remember. So I read this in a Buddhist book you know, when I was very very young. It's a great poem, I just remember, it's actually 40 years ago I first read this. And it says 'It's easy enough to be happy when life goes along like a song, but the one worthwhile is the one who can smile when everything goes all wrong'. Can you do that when things go wrong? Now one of the great monks, many of you know K Sri Dhammananda, he's got a few books in a library. Sometimes it's very easy to write a book. But actually can you live by what you write? And one of his great, sort of events which is a part of his legacy now, he died a few years ago. When he was diagnosed with cancer he burst out laughing (laugh). And his doctor said 'I've never seen this before in Malaysia. Someone is diagnosed with cancer and they just laugh'. Could you do that? Someone says 'terminal cancer', 'a month to live', 'few months to live' – and burst out laughing? Why not? You might as well. Getting anxious is not gonna, sort of, help you survive. Laughing – as soon as the doctor heard him laugh he probably gave him a few extra months to live. Someone like that is not gonna die very easily. It is true, that if our attitude can change the things in life we can't change... What do you expect? We're all gonna die anyway. So when we don't expect things which life can never give us, we don't expect what our wife can never supply, what our husband can never supply, what our kids can never supply. How much do you ask of your kids? Now how many people come up and complain about their children? Now, when I listen I say 'Yeah, that's just exactly the same as the last parent said, that's what the last parent said. They're all like that.' Don't think you got a wrong one or you've done something bad and they're not sort of behaving – they're all like that. Even I read this how hard it is to get your kids up in the morning to go to school. Well I read this, this is science you know, facts. Teenagers are genetically programmed to stay up late at night and get up late in the morning. It's in their genes, they can't do anything about it, poor things. It's not them, they're not the problem. It's the school that should start much later, during the day not as sort of, you know. What time does school start here? 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock? But anyway, so they start too early poor teenagers and they're just not wired up for starting that early, they are wired up for staying up late at night. So poor old teenagers, I feel sorry for them. So what do you expect? Do you expect your kids to do well at school? Your expectations are – I mentioned this to the monks last night, just to show how our expectations and how we don't live in a real world. This was a little party trick which I've done a few years ago here, I can do it again now.

You can do this if ever you're giving a talk that makes a few people laugh, but it also makes a very powerful point of how deluded we are. I gotta ask you to really be honest right now. Be really straightforward. If you think you're above average intelligence, please put up your hand. Wow! How many dummies we got in this Buddhist society (laugh)? Gotta be honest, I don't need to sort of get you pull up your hand, because about honest 80-90% of you think you are of above average intelligence, don't you? Only 50% of you are above average intelligence. Only 50% of

people can be above average intelligence. We always think that we're more intelligent than other people, that's a deceit which we live in in our life. I know many of you have been long enough, I've already told you – if Ajahn Brahm asks you to put up your hand, don't do it 'cause you'll always get into trouble afterwards. But anyhow, you know those people. So in deceit we expect even more of ourselves than we can give ourselves. So what if your kid doesn't do well at school just be kind to that kid for goodness sake. And you've heard me say before, many of you here are Buddhists, I hope. Of course, you could be spies from the Christians or undercover agents. But most of you I expect to be Buddhist, and what's the most important teaching? Well look, any person here is a Buddhist whose children come in the top 5% or the bottom 5% at school, you're bad Buddhists. It's not a good Buddhist family. Top 5%, bottom 5% is not good, 'cause in Buddhism we believe in the middle way.

And actually it's much better if the kid's being in the middle. There's a lot of stress if you're in the top excellence. Of course a lot of problems if you're in the bottom, but it doesn't matter if you're in the bottom. Because this I've mentioned this usually in the monastery, and so the retreat – if your kid is the bottom of the class and getting really bad results, remember this story. This was one of my heroes. This was a kid in Thailand who went to grade 1 and failed grade 1. Imagine that. I don't know how you can fail grade 1. You know, whether you couldn't draw properly or you couldn't, I don't know what else do they do in grade 1? You couldn't make sort of things out of sort of card or whatever. But anyway, he failed. So he had to repeat the year. And the teacher gave him extra attention. But even with the extra attention and the best one in the world she couldn't pass him, so all his friends went ahead and he had to repeat grade 1 for the 3rd time. And after three years of grade 1, it was a waste of time. So the teacher said 'I'm sorry we just can't actually educate you. You have to leave.' Imagine that – failing grade 1. I see people sometimes have to repeat a year at a university, but failing grade 1, that really takes something special. So what do you do with someone who is so dumb, they can't even pass grade 1 at school? In Thailand they send him to the monastery to make him a monk. (laugh) Not all monks started out like that. So they send him to a monastery. In the monasteries, where the monks are very very kind and we got very patient. And so the abbot of this village monastery where they sent this guy was so patient and tried to teach him how to do a little bit of chanting and learn something about the Four Noble Truths. 'You know, what's the second one again?' – he kept on saying. He didn't know the first one and the chanting and that, and that and that. Na... Na... What's the next syllable in Namo tassa... It was hopeless and after three years this monk who was so patient just gave up on him. 'I can't deal with you'. So he was really really dumb big time. Now, what do they do with somebody like that in Thailand? They send him to – the forest monasteries! That's my lawn. But this fellow, he was just such a simple mind, that when they told him, just be in the present moment, be silent and watch your breath he could do that with no problem at all as long as he wanted. He got this incredible deep meditation and became a famous meditation teacher. When he had to do the chanting, this is just in the side, the only way he could actually chant, which sometimes monks have to do, because of his very powerful deep meditation he could recall a past life, when he did learn the chanting.

He actually accessed a past life when he had to do a chanting to actually get the chanting through, so he could actually chant with other monks but in this life he just couldn't learn it. It's an amazing story. So if you got a child like that send him to me.

(laugh) We could have this great monk or this great nun for the future of Buddhism, a great teacher. So the point of this story is: it doesn't matter if your child is not so doing well. Love them for who they are. They could be a great monk or nun in the making and you're making them feel bad about themselves. I remember that's a story in the book "Open the door of your heart". 'Cause I was a school teacher and sometimes as a school teacher – you know those school teachers here. You know, you're in this sort of (umm) situation, you're supposed to do things and sometimes something inside of you says 'This is not right. Why do I have to keep marking all these kids and making their life so difficult with encouraging them to pass exams?'. There's always a dilemma with any sort of job and the teacher's dilemma is you know, what you really think, you know, education should be what the system says it is. But anyway, you had to play by the rules and so I gave the exams and in the end of the year this gave the report cards in my class. There's this poor kid. When I gave him the report card he read it: 30th, bottom of the class in a class of 30. And I could see, I saw his face, 'cause I knew Neil came bottom. People who came top would say 'yeah yeah we came top' and this poor kid – his jaw dropped, his shoulders hunched – he looked so sad. He was really suffering. Imagine you have to take that report card back to your parents.

- 'How'd you do son?'
- 'Bottom, dad.'

That's suffering for a, you know, a young kid, he must have been like 12 or 13. And so, even then I was a very compassionate teacher, I was kind. You can't just ignore the person who's suffering like that. So I went up to him and sort of stood by him, and I said 'You came bottom of the class?' 'Yes sir [he replied] How am I gonna show this to my dad?'. I said 'Look, you actually deserve a medal for this. And I taught him a bit about Buddhism. In Buddhism you got something called a bodhisattva. Now, a bodhisattva is someone who sacrifices everything for other people. It's out of great compassion, and bodhisattva sacrifice sometimes a whole life for the benefit of others. I think that's what you are. You've taken this terrible position of bottom of the class, so none of your friends will have to actually, to take this position. You've done this so selflessly, all the other conceited arrogant people they just want to become top, but you've taken the humble position and taken that suffering on yourself, so no one else has to enjoy what's coming to you from your mum and dad this evening. I said 'You're such a kind and wonderful person. In Buddhism we'd actually praise you for doing things like that' and he looked at me as if I was crazy. But it stopped him getting sad and, I said, he laughed afterwards. It's not the end of the world coming bottom of the class. What's the big deal anyway? We keep on saying it's great when you fail an exam, 'cause then you don't have to take one next year. Look what happened to me. I kept passing the exams, they were endless and never stopped. 'Cause when you're passing an exam there's always another one next week or next year. If you fail one at least you get out of the way, you fail and so, great you don't have to do exams anymore. There are much more important things to do in life than exams, aren't there? But anyway, it was the attitude to becoming bottom or the attitude to becoming top. The attitude to the things in life – that was the problem not the world or the way people look at it. And you cannot change the world, really. You can alter it a tiny bit, which is good to try, but come on. Are we gonna try and make politicians not argue? Are we gonna try to make people not be greedy and fraudulent? We're gonna try. We're gonna try so there's no criminals on the streets. We can try, it's worth trying. But we're not gonna achieve it, are we? But instead, we

can learn how to cope to make peace. To not take such things so seriously. To expect life to just be as life is and to love her as she is, not as she should be. And the same way you treat your partner you can treat life. Yeah, it would be wonderful if we never got sick. It would be wonderful if our cars never broke down. It would be wonderful if our flights weren't delayed. It would be wonderful if there was no SARS and no wars, no cancer, would it? Sometimes you ask that question – 'Would it be so wonderful if these things never existed?' It's a radical question to ask. Sometimes, something, I was talking to someone who has a severe brain cancer, don't know how long she's going to live. It's a wonderful experience. Now you're the center of this beautiful loving community. Your family and friends are now actually coming and saying how much you mean to them. If they only said that before. Sometimes we do need a cancer, we do need a tragedy to, actually, to inspire ourselves, to express our love and our concern, our kindness and compassion our softness. So maybe there is a reason for such things in this world. Sometimes it is the suffering, the so-called tragedies and so-called difficulties which actually inspire something inside of us. Something which we're too lazy to really generate, except in times of difficulty. Perhaps there is a reason for these so-called tragedies, and there is, and you see it, and it brings out the best in humanity. It brings beauty into our world and life goes along perfectly without any problem.

How it really does encourage and insight the most beautiful part of human nature? That's why whenever there is climate change, economic disaster, when it's so-called "things go wrong" there's also "many things go right" as well. It's never all tragedy and where's no tragedy, there's always a beautiful heart and beautiful edges. And if you're there and you see it, it's strange but it's there. I remember reading a long time ago sort of a book about a person who was in Auschwitz. This was - I couldn't say this, I wasn't there - you can only imagine the horror and the terror of such a place. He said that "we still told jokes, we laughed, many days we had a wonderful time together". When I read that, I thought 'How can that happen?' When you're in a camp seeing your friends and relations die everyday and you could be called out the next day – how can you do that? But it happened. It does happen. Human nature is amazing. Despite those difficult times, we can rise above things. When things do go wrong in life, when life does suck, human beings don't need to suck. Our attitude doesn't need to suck, as I say. We can't change the world, at least it's hard to, but we can all change our attitude and the way we look at life. It is possible to be like that person worthwhile who can smile when everything goes all wrong. It is possible to be less demanding of life, to be more realistic and not to think that the politicians are making the mistakes. Why do they do such stupid things? And not to think that the bankers, which are just so greedy, what would you have done if you had the opportunity? Why do we keep thinking 'My husband is just so insensitive!'. "What, are you insensitive too?" "Oh, no, not me!" When we actually see just what life truly is, we can change our attitude towards it. And the whole path of spirituality is getting a more wiser, more accepting, more loving attitude towards life and towards people and towards the differences which we have. Yeah, we got these little differences, and we do say stupid things. We do do stupid acts but that's no reason to hate somebody or to get angry at life.

That's why I was actually taught – no one can make you angry, only yourself. No one can make you hate, you allow yourself to hate, you allow other people to upset you. You allow the dog to spoil your meditation, you allow your husband to spoil your

marriage. You allow the telephone to spoil the beautiful talk today. It is a telephone, my gosh, but there's so many people in this room, there's always gonna be one person who forgets. It's just, it's not a big thing anyway. It's just a telephone, what's the big problem about it? We're not gonna shoot you, not till afterwards anyway. (laugh) So when we don't get upset and angry about things, we don't allow other people to upset us. Again one of those great insights. Why allow other people to control your happiness? Why allow other people to upset you? They can say whatever they want, they can do whatever they want – I'm not gonna get upset just because, you know, you're being stupid. So why do you allow other people to control you?

Now, let's extend that – why do you allow life to control your happiness? So, you get diagnosed with cancer, terminal. Laugh, why not? Can you do that? You're gonna die anyway, you're just gonna be reincarnated, you're just go around bit quicker than you expected, that's all. And when you miss your plane. So? Big deal, there's always another one going and you'll get on there somewhere or other, if you do miss the plane, you don't get to Thailand you can stay here instead. There's always something positive in life. You've had many tragedies in your life so far. You've been divorced, you know, people have died, people you loved sort of died and so many tragedies. You know, you got married and that's another tragedy (laugh) but you got through that. Why are you laughing? You've been through all these tragedies. You survived and you got through it. All the time there is a tragedy and there's a big problem, sometimes we're just obsessed about it, we just overreact to things. Yeah, it's only swine flu – big deal! It's only, just terminal cancer – big deal! It's only, sort of, divorce – big deal! It's only... can you do things like that?

There's an old simile and I love this simile, because it's really easy to explain, especially in front of a camera. How big is my hand, simile? How big is my hand, you know you may say, what is it 4 inches and 2 inches, I've been actually working. It's really interesting being a monk, I was just on the roof and digging trenches last week. It's really interesting being a monk, because you know, next week I'm going to Thailand hanging out with the crown prince of Thailand or whatever. It's amazing that one day you're in the gutter, literally, and the next minute you're hobnobbing with royalty. It's a great life being a monk. I don't know where I belong, actually I prefer in the dirt, it's much more real. But anyway, what was I saying now? Ah, my hand, that's right. Thank you very much for waving the hand about to me. See, I make mistakes and just, if you make mistake or say something stupid, you know that sort of great saying. If you make a mistake, say something stupid and people start laughing - you laugh as well, and then the world never laughs at you, it only laughs with you. A simple saying, but it's great. So you make a mistake? We all make mistakes, we all do stupid things. I've done my share of stupid things, it's not gonna end, I'm gonna make more stupid things and they're gonna be on camera, and you can actually get Ajahn Brahm's bloopers. But anyway – the hand, yeah. How big is my hand? And again – it's where you put your hand is what 'how big it is', because when my hand is right here it's so big I can't see any of you. I can't see anything of the world except my hand. Is it my hand's problem? No, it's where I put it. I'm just far too close to it. I should put it where it belongs, at the end of my arm, now I can see my hand but I can also see all of you, and I can see that the lights, there's a Buddhist statue outside. It's the perspective that is the problem. Death. I'm dying. It's not the dying that is the problem, you got it in the wrong position. Yeah, you're dying, we're all dying, what

else is happening? Put it where it belongs – it's not the biggest thing. Get perspective for goodness' sake. Swine flu. Can't see anything else but swine flu, should I travel today? Oh my goodness, I shouldn't go to Thailand - I'm gonna get swine flu. Put it in a way: but yeah, swine flu but the chance of you getting it is just so small. So now, divorce. Death. Retrenchment. Climate change. All things gonna... Imagine, how many tragedies are gonna get you if you actually survive swine flu then you're gonna get done by the economic crisis. Survive the economic crisis you'll probably get cancer, 'cause cancers are on the rise. If you don't get cancers then all these migrants and bugs are gonna invade and take over Australia. If that doesn't get you, something else will.

Geez, it's a very dangerous world, isn't it? Chances you're getting that are very small. So just look at life in proper perspective. It's an attitude problem – suffering. That's why you can get people who don't suffer, who get cancer, who get divorced, who get these pains and disappointments, who can actually laugh in the greatest of tragedies. How can they do that? How come, that you just lost the person you loved the most and you're at peace? How come that, you know, you got this terrible disease and you're hurting very badly but you don't complain? How come you lost your job but you're laughing? How can you do that? You've seen people do that. They do that because they understand the simile of the hand and the attitude. It's mortal life and just the tragedies and we can expect that to be a part of life. We actually expect that people will die and leave us. It's a part of life. We can expect the economies to go up and go down. We can expect, sort of, wars to happen and then wars to stop. We can expect people to do stupid things and to do some very smart things. We can expect yourself to do some really really stupid things and some very very kind things, and sometimes some selfish things. You're a human being, so don't feel proud when you do something wonderful and don't feel guilty when you do something bad. It's just you being you, what do you expect? And then you can be at peace with yourself.

You'll be at peace with life. You can understand and accept things and then life does get much better. Life will get so much better when people are not struggling so hard to change it, we're actually changing the wrong things. We are changing people, not things. We should really be kind to people and get people more accepting of themselves. Instead of having economic development, material prosperity just the development of the heart and the inner wealth of peace, inner happiness and your ability to enjoy simple things. You could enjoy simple things long time ago. So why do we have to worry about economic crisis? So you get retrenched? You have no job – great, you can actually have a sleep on a Monday morning. Or isn't it wonderful, when you don't have to go to work and you got no money, you don't have to bother going to the shops – you can't afford it anyway. Or you can save so much time. There's so many benefits, no matter what happens and if you keep that positive attitude, you can change attitude, so if ever you're suffering, it's not life's fault. Don't blame your husband, don't blame your wife, don't blame your kids, don't blame the government, don't blame the economic crisis, don't blame swine flu and please don't blame your monk. They have nothing to do with that. It's just your attitude which is wrong. What do you expect? So lower expectations, get your expectations in line with life. Then it means we can love life. Loving life, open the door of your heart to life. Unconditionally. A wonderful word – unconditional love, means loving life as it is. Loving your partner as they are, unconditionally and loving yourself as you are – stupid, sometimes wise, sometimes saying silly things, sometimes being lazy,

sometimes being energetic – so love yourself as you are. Can you see how it all fits together? Making peace with yourself you can make peace with your partner, you can make peace with the whole world, you can be free, but if you want something else you just want like that great monk Ajahn Liam, if you want the cremation to go so perfectly when it goes wrong, you really suffer. Coz when you actually make peace with that or you can say I tried my best, you can just go and have a nice rest. To sleep soundly when everything is going all wrong – now that is a sign of a great being. So, when it says or that taxi said ‘If anyone says life sucks, send them to’ – it must have meant, I’ve never saw what was on the bottom, it must have said ‘send them to Dhammaloka Buddhist Center on a Friday night’. Thank you for listening. Okay, anyone got any questions or comments or complaints about tonight’s talk?

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