

## Ajahn Brahm

### “Dealing with difficult people”

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Source: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jniaUr\\_7438](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jniaUr_7438)

So, in a few minutes I'll try materialize a talk. So those of you who wanna go out – go out – make a run for it quickly before I start my jokes. Those of you who have got more tolerance of bad humour, please stay. Okay.

Somebody again, this evening, gave me a great suggestion for a talk, which is concerning how we put these teachings into practice in life. And the talk this evening is on “How to deal with difficult people”.

I feel that's relevant to your life, I don't know why there is so many difficult people in the world, but I'm sure you've met many of them and even today. And [the] reason I give talks like this is to show just how we can apply these great insights from meditation and buddhism to help solve many of the problems in this world, because the whole point of buddhist teachings is to lessen suffering, to give more freedom, as we go closer and closer and closer to the pure freedom and bliss and ease and enlightenment.

Just this afternoon, giving a talk at Curtin University, reminded me of something I said last even last Monday night some people that have never heard of buddhism before were asking the old question: “Is buddhism a way of life, or is it a religion?”. You should know the answer to that question: it is a religion - for tax purposes. We have to be practical about these things, you just ask our treasurer. But it's also a way of life, it's a way of dealing with the problems of life, it's many many things. And I usually focus on the practical aspects of buddhism in this Friday night talks and today “How to deal with the deaficult people you see from time to time in your life, when you meet with them.”

And don't think that just because I'm a monk and you live in nice monasteries you don't have your share of difficult people. Because I don't know what it is like, sometimes as a monk you attract difficult people. I'm not saying that you're diffucult. Because people got nowhere else to go, and sometimes a monk's kindness and compassion means that, you know, you accept everybody.

But, first of all, how you deal with difficult people [is] to know that difficult people are part of the course. And so when we understand that, we understand that it's not unusual to have difficult people. No matter what you do and where you go and how you behave you always gonna meet them. So, first of all, there's nothing wrong with having difficult people. In fact, we can look upon difficult people, as my teacher Ajahn Chah says, as great blessings to our life. They teach us patience, they teach us compassion, they actually lead to so much wisdom. Really, you don't learn so much from the nice guys and the nice girls of life, do you? You have a good time with them, but where you really learn your lessons is where the difficult ones [are].

Which is why that I learn from my teacher in Thailand, you know, Ajahn Chah, you know “Ajahn” means “teacher”. And he said that anything which is irritating you, anything which is troubling you, THAT is your teacher. So being in north-east Thailand, we’d always call the mosquitos “Ajahn Mosquito”. Coz I’ve learned so much from those damn mosquitos! That’s what I thought at that time, those mosquitos, even when we used to do the loving kindness. For those of you who are buddhist, you know that we spread loving kindness to all people, all beings, all genders, no matter what you are and who you are: may all beings be happy and well. However, as a young man, being a monk in Thailand, I just could not do that. It’s impossible. So I did the best I can, I used to chant: “May all beings be happy and well, except mosquitos! May all beings be free from suffering, but not those mosquitos, they don’t deserve after what they’ve done to me!”

I’m sure that when you ever do the “spread loving kindness”, you’ll also have exceptions. But it didn’t work well when I had exceptions, so I learned how to learn from those mosquitos, to be kind to them. Sometimes I was so kind to those mosquitos I let them bite me. They would land on my hand. I said: “Come on, mosquito, you can bite me. The door of my heart is open to you. It’s only a little bit of blood, I know that you need this to have your dinner, like I have my dinner as well, especially as a monk. Now this is your dinner, so have something to eat”. You know what some of these mosquitos did? Sometimes difficult people and difficult beings are like this, they take advantage of you. They put their nose into the skin, and it’s irritating, so you just enjoy that, but it’s only a few seconds. But these mosquitos, that was just an exploratory drill, they took their nose out, walked a few steps and tried somewhere else. They were fussy! And you’d have three or four bites, just from one mosquito, they were taking advantage of my kindness! But whatever, that’s just the nature of mosquitos, it doesn’t matter, I’ve got plenty of blood. And I’ve learned a lot from that.

So number one, first of all, know that the difficult people and difficult beings and difficult situations in life – that’s common, there’s nothing wrong, you never find any place where you can run away and hide and escape from difficult people, or difficult mosquitos or difficult experiences. So number one: you have to accept them, you have to learn how to deal with them. [Number] one is [to] learn that they are part of life and you can learn so much from them. And number two: just to realize that really most of the difficulty with difficult people is actually coming from you, the way we react to them.

Somebody once said, if you ever see a difficult person remember, you only have to enjoy them for maybe a few minutes, a few hours at most. Even if you live with them, it’s your husband, or your wife. Don’t know why you chose that person anyway, that’s your karma. But anyway, why did you choose them? Even if they are that close to you, you only have to live with them for a short period of time, but they have to live with themselves all day. And sometimes when you think how irritating they are for you, they’ll be equally irritating towards themselves. Those poor people have to live with that mind 24 hours a day. It’s a wonderful reflection, when you see difficult people, you know that if they are that difficult for you to live with, they’re also difficult to live with themselves.

And that gives you so much compassion, so it takes away the hurt which you feel and you notice the hurt that they feel, why they are so difficult to you. So it’s actually empathising with the other person, taking the pain away from yourself, “why do I have to deal with that person” and get an idea of what they are going through in their head and their mind and their life. And some of these people, if they are that difficult to you, and you’re an ordinary person, imagine, they probably got no friends, noone they can really relate to, because they are just such an incredibly difficult character to live with, they’re so lonely.

So that actually arouses a bit of compassion to such people. When you have compassion towards such people, your endurance levels go up enormously, you can actually bear with dealing with such difficult people, coz you know they are not going to be around for long. They're going to walk out from your office, or they are going to go home to somebody else. And if you can't escape from them, you can always come on a retreat in my monastery, or the Dhammasara Monastery, there's always some place you can go away. So that's one thing you can do.

But there's also to know that the difficult people in life, you CAN actually change them. It's a wonderful thing to know that difficulties which you face in life, or difficulties which they experience, they are impermanent, they're not always there, it's just a phase which people go through in life being difficult. Of course, that phase might last from birth until death, but it ends eventually, it's not forever. But it's nice to know you can actually change people, you can actually see them grow. And how you change people is a wonderful psychology which I've learned as a teacher, how you can interact with people and take the cause of their being difficult to themselves and others and actually just move that, nudge that in a sense of them to be more kind, more sensitive, less demanding and less of a pain to live with. It's wonderful you can do that. And HOW is that done?

I was mentioning in a talk this afternoon at Curtin University, I mentioned it a couple of weeks ago, this was a powerful little experience which I had about a month ago, maybe longer – 6 weeks ago – in Singapore I was invited to give a talk at a conference at the Institute of Mental Health. It was one big anniversary of the hospital, so they invited me over with all these other psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors and professors, as a monk, to give a talk on how to deal with mental health. And what I was talking about there was the things which you've heard here before, but what I was really impressed with was afterwards there was a devout christian, who was Head of one of the wards, Departmental Head, and he invited me to his ward to do some buddhist chanting. And he told me not to tell anybody, now I've blown it. I said: "Why did you say that?" He said: "Because what you've said just made some much sense and [he said] I really respect that wisdom. What I respect most of all is you're telling us something which we've only recently been practising: where we don't focus on the times of a day when our patients are sick and difficult, the times when they experience delusions and psychosis and are disfunctional. We just put that aside. And the times that they are apparently healthy, when they are relating to themselves and their environment in a sensible way."

Because when a person has a mental disfunction it's not 24 hours a day, they have periods, times when they are in some sort of delusional state and times when they come out afterwards. He said they were focusing on the times when they weren't delusional. And he said [that] by focusing on the times when they were healthy [he said] a healing was happening. The times when they were healthy were extending, and the times when they were disfunctional were decreasing. And I've been teaching that for years. It's wonderful to see that has got into a modern health system, in the only mental hospital which they have in that city state.

And I know that's the same with difficult people. If you focus on their difficulties and make a big deal out of that, you actually encourage those difficulties, you're feeding them. And eventually they will get worse and worse and worse.

There's a classic story and I've used it so many times. If you haven't heard this before, it's a very good one to hear. If you have heard it before, you're learning how to be patient with a

difficult monk who keeps on repeating the stories. Either way, it works. And that's a great story of the demon who came into the emperor's palace.

Demon coming into an emperor's palace, and [the] emperor was away. Because he was away, there was a monster, a big, ugly, terrifying demon came and strolled right in to the palace. He was so frightening, so terrifying, everybody froze in horror at this ugly, disgusting, slimy demon. Allowing the demon to go right through into the heart of the palace and sit on the emperor's throne. And as soon as he sat on the emperor's throne, that was just too much for the guard and the ministers, they came to their senses. And they said: "Get out of here! Who do you think you are?! This is our emperor's seat, not yours. Get out, or else...!" And at those harsh words the demon grew an inch bigger, more ugly, more smelly and the language got far worse. And that made the soldiers and the ministers even more upset. They got out their swords, they got out clubs, they clenched their fists. But at every unkind word, every angry deed, even every unkind thought, the monster just grew an inch bigger, more ugly, more terrifying, more smelly and the language from the monster got worse and worse and worse. And this had been going on for quite some time before the emperor came back. And at this time that demon was so huge, he took up half the throne room, he was massive. And talk about ugly and frightening. I've never seen [an] alien movie, but people said the alien is pretty terrifying and imagine the alien multiplied by a thousand! This was so terrifying, not even Dream Works could manufacture such a terrifying and horrible spectacle as this ugly demon.

And according to the story the smell, the stench coming off this demon's body would make maggots throw up. It takes a lot to make a maggot sick. And the language coming from this demon was worse than you'd hear in Northbridge after both the Eagles and the Dockers lose. So this was a problem, a real difficult being coming into the palace. But when the emperor came back – the reason he was emperor [was] because he'd been to Nollamara and he heard the talk, so he was wise. I always change these stories every time this way or that way, so you always hear a new angle. So the emperor, who also read "Opening the door of your heart", which is available at the bookshop for \$25... I've also learned marketing.... I was at an entrepreneur business conference this afternoon. But anyway, the emperor said: "Welcome! Oh, monster, thank you so much for coming to visit me! Why have you waited such a long time to come and pay me a call?" And at those few kind words the monster grew an inch smaller, less ugly, less smelly, less offensive. And all the people in the palace realized their mistake. Instead of saying "Get out of here, you don't belong, what are you doing in here, you don't belong in here!" they started saying: "Welcome". And one of them said: "Actually, do you want something to drink? We've got some orange juice, freshly squozen – squeezed, squozen, I don't know, who cares – Would you like something to eat? We've got some nice curry puffs, they're available this evening, we've got some sandwiches, we've got the pizza – monster size, of course, for someone like you". Someone gave the monster a foot massage. Have you ever had a foot massage? Imagine a monster with such big feet, it took about ten of them to give each feet a massage. Someone asked: "Maybe a cup of tea? We have English tea, we have peppermint, it's good for your health, or a cup of coffee, latte, cappucino or Brazilian?" I don't really know what I'm talking about with coffee, I just take whatever I'm given.

So anyway, at every kind word, or kind deed or kind thought the demon grew an inch smaller, less ugly, less offensive, less smelly. It wasn't such a long time, even before the Monster Pizza arrived, he was back down to the size when he first began, when he first came in. And they kept on laying on the kindness until that demon got so tiny, one more act of kindness and that demon vanished completely away. And the Buddha told that story in the Udala, but there was no mentioning of pizzas and peppermint tea, I made that up. But the Buddha told that

story in the Udala and he said we call those things “anger eating demons” – when you give them anger they get bigger, more ugly, more offensive, more smelly and the language gets worse. He said the only way we can overcome the anger eating demons in life is with kindness. “Welcome, thank you for visiting me.”

Now, maybe the difficult people you meet in life ARE anger eating demons? You give them anger, you say “Get out of here, you don’t belong in here!” – it actually does get worse. So instead of saying “Get out of here, you don’t belong!”, [to] some of the difficult people you say “Welcome, thank you for coming to bother me.” We don’t actually say that, we say “Thank you for coming to visit me” and give them kindness.

Now, sometimes people say: “Well, that doesn’t work. It might be okay for you as a monk, you know, maybe Ajahn Brahm has got psychic powers and can get into their heads and minds and sort of rearrange their neuro pathways so they’re not difficult with you”, but no, it does work.

One of the first times, over twenty years ago when I told this story, it was when I was teaching in prison, in Karnet Prison Farm, just down the road from our monastery. We still go there most Fridays. And when I was teaching down at Karnet Prison Farm one of the prisoners complained and he said: “That is just like New Age rubbish, it doesn’t work in the real world, especially in a prison, prisons are tough places. If you’ve got a difficult person, you gonna stand up for yourself, that’s the only language they understand.”

And of course, I wasn’t having any of that, I said: “I don’t believe you”. He said: “You don’t live in prison”. I said “Well, [in a] monastery we have cells, we have a wall around. Actually they don’t have a wall around Karnet, we have a wall around our monastery. Actually, sometimes people in the early years would actually drive all the way to Karnet Prison Farm and ask: “Where are the monks?”, it was very embarrassing, locking away any of my monks in it.

But anyway, I challenged this guy, I said: “Okay, in this prison, who is the most difficult person you have to deal with?”. And the prisoner I challenged, it was with a number of other prisoners, he said: “The Chief Officer.” “The Chief Officer”, he said, “my job is to serve him tea and coffee every day, that’s my job in prison. I HATE that guy. He’s always really nasty.” And he told me a story which happened a week before. One of the prisoners in Karnet, he hardly ever had a visit from his family because it’s such a hard place to get to, there’s no public transport and if you’re poor and haven’t got a car, you just have to find a friend who can actually take you all that way. It’s a difficult place to get to. He said: “This man’s wife had managed to get a lift to come and see him, but before you can go and see your relations in prison you have to check in, say your name, go through all the security stuff. And the Chief Officer had seen this woman checking in and knew that she had come to see this prisoner and decided to be cruel to the prisoner. On the PA system he said: “So and so, we got a job for you on the other side of Karnet Prison Farm” and sent him to a place where the PA system didn’t reach. And it’s a huge Prison Farm, he did it on purpose. Because as soon as his wife had checked in, the PA system announced: “Prisoner so and so, your wife is here, please go to the visitor’s area.” But he couldn’t hear it from where he’d been sent. The message was repeated two or three times, they went to search, to try and find him. They did find him, but by the time they found him and he came back: “Visiting hours are over, better luck next time.” He said the Chief Officer did this on purpose, with no reason other than spite and trying to give the prisoners a harder time than they deserved. He said: “That’s why in the time in prison he was called the Dog.” And I said: “You hate him” and he said “Yes, really big

time. He's just so difficult, he never respects us, never says anything to us, he always puts us down and treats like dirt." I said: "Great! This is a challenge. You meet him everyday, serving tea and coffee. Be kind to him, don't embrace him with your arms, you'll get in trouble that way, but at least you can embrace him with your heart. The way you can do that is: every time you serve him tea or coffee, try and put some love and care into that tea and coffee, try making it the most beautiful, delicious cup of coffee you possibly can make. Find out what he likes and be kind, give it lots of love and compassion whenever you serve him tea and coffee."

So all credit to this prisoner, he tried it. For a week. And when I came back after a while and asked how it was going, he said: "Look, it's a complete waste of time. I'm really trying hard to be kind to this guy, but every time even when I put a lot of effort in making it a nice cup of tea and coffee, he completely ignores me, as if I don't exist, as if I'm lower than a cockroach. Even to the cockroach he says 'Get out of here!', but not me." So I told him: "Carry on."

And it was about, I'm not sure how long, maybe a couple of months, I had to encourage him and force him to do this before we got what I called the big breakthrough. Coz one day I actually came to visit and he couldn't wait to tell me this, he said he made this prison officer a beautiful cup of coffee with cream or whatever he found, just the type he thought the prison officer liked and managed to find some biscuits, which he noticed the prison officer liked and said: "Here you are, sir, have this coffee, and I found some special biscuits which I know you like." And the prison officer said: "Errgh." He grunted! That was a breakthrough! It was the first time he acknowledged that this prisoner actually lived and existed and breathed. So that grunt, I said: "Wow, this is exciting! That is a crack in a dam wall!" And I was right. It was only one or two weeks later, prisoner managed to find him special cup of tea, a sandwich or whatever, handed it to this prison officer, the Chief Officer, who was "The Dog", and the Chief Officer turned around and said: "Thank you."

And all the other prisoners were telling me this and they were all looking at me and they said: "You don't realize just how the Prison Farm works, that has gone to every prison in the state that this Chief Officer could say 'thank you' to a prisoner – was unbelievable." I won the challenge. I knew I'd win eventually. Even such a "dog", you can change into like a cuddly little puppy, with lots and lots and lots of kindness. You CAN turn difficult people around, but it just takes a lot and lot of patience, a lot of kindness. Some of you may not be able to do that, it's too much for you, so you have to know your limitations. But it does work if you really push at it. The most difficult people can become the best of your friends.

And sometimes it's a challenge which is worth facing in life. You have people in your office, give them kindness. But when they give sort of unkindness back to you and difficulty to you, know your limitations, you have to tun away – fine. If you have to sort of talk to them, point out what it feels like.

What I've talked about this afternoon in the conference, it's also what I've talked about here, the old "Sandwich Technique": if you do have to tell a person that, you know, "you are being difficult to me, I've got my own space I need to protect" or whatever – you don't go blurting the negative stuff out straightaway, that will never work. Whenever you're talking to someone and you wanna bring up a difficult problem, in other words to criticize them, to tell them they're making a problem for you – "Sandwich Technique" – two or three pieces of praise first of all: "you're a really nice person, just the way you work, you're so dilligent, you're so well-dressed" or whatever, something which praises them, and THEN you tell them. You know, you tell them... it's like if someone wanted to ctiticise me, you say: "Ajahn Brahm,

you're such a nice monk, coming all the time and giving these talks, they are very inspiring" – when you say things like that I open up to you, oh wow, you like me, I'm listening to you. And then you say: "But your jokes are sometimes a bit over the top...But I know you do sort of look after the monasteries, look after the Buddhist Society" – you praise afterwards.

And if you actually sandwich your criticism between heaps and heaps of praise, people actually listen to it. So if you are dealing with a difficult person and you really need to tell them, they really need to listen to you to know exactly what they're doing and the problems they are causing. Please praise them first of all, get them on the right side, because then they know they're not being attacked. And I push this back at you: isn't that what you need when you're being told off? Because you are being difficult people as well sometimes, aren't you? It's always somebody else, but sometimes we create difficulties for others.

So if I was going to tell you off, this is how I would do it, I would praise you first of all, butter you up, make you know that I appreciate and value and care for you. Coz if we just give criticism straightaway, what we feel is that person, why are they my enemy? Why are they just saying this to me? Don't they realize how hard I work and the difficulties and problems I have to face? When you get criticism straightaway, you just get defensive, you justify yourself, you just don't listen to the other person, you don't take it on board. So by just getting that sort of acceptance, they very fact that you're accepted, you're appreciated, you're valued – means you're opening up. Then you put the criticism in, you butter over afterwards, I really like you, you're really valued, thank you for being who you are. And then people can actually listen. A lot of times people don't realize they are being difficult to you. It's weird, but they think they're being a friend. They think they're just being them, or being funny or they're being whatever. So sometimes we do need feedback to know exactly what we're doing and how we come across.

I remember playing this game once with one of my fellow monks about 32 years ago. We just sat down and we wrote what we thought of each other. And then we passed it to each other and it's amazing for me to listen to what another person thought of me. It wasn't what I thought he thought of me, and what I thought of him wasn't what he thought I thought of him, completely different. The way that we relate to each other is not actually the way that we are thought of. So sometimes people don't realize they're being difficult, so they do need some feedback, but it has to be done on the Sandwich Technique at the right time and place and then people will take it on board and then they can change. And how do they change?

Make sure they're not put in situations when that difficulty arises from in the beginning. One of the reasons why people are difficult, why sometimes you are difficult, coz people are too stressed out. When you're stressed out at work you take it back home, give people a hard time at home and then because of your hard time at home you have family problems, when you go back to work you're stressed out at work, even before you begin your day.

The cycle of negativity and stress, so much so, that we really should deal with that problem, whether at home or at work, to learn how to destress. And to be able to destress, little bit of meditation really works. You know the old story: How heavy is the cup? The longer I hold it, the heavier it feels. If I keep holding it for five minutes, my arm aches, ten minutes – I'm in great pain, if I keep holding this for half an hour – I'm a very stupid monk. So what should I do when it starts to get heavy? Put it down for five minutes. If you don't believe me, you can try this at home. It works, after five minutes you pick it up again, it's much lighter. It feels lighter, it's exactly the same weight – it feels lighter because you have rested.

So your stress is nothing to do with how much work you have. The amount of responsibilities and duties you have – that is not the cause of stress. The cause of stress is when it gets too heavy to bear you don't know how to put it down. You're afraid of putting it down, for a few minutes to rest, to get your energies and strength back up. And you will find, as any psychologist or monk will tell you, actually we teach psychologists, that's where they get all the ideas from. We should be paid by them, but we give things out for free. This work you have, you find if you put it down for five or ten minutes, it's not five or ten minutes wasted! It's actually an investment of time, because when you're rested, afterwards the quality of your work improves enormously, you get more done in less time, too. You become more efficient.

And sometimes at work we mistake the quantity of work for its quality and efficiency. Giving yourself a break, ten minutes of meditation, rest or whatever, and I recommend the toilet as a great place to meditate. Put on a "engaged", no one will bother you, you can always say you're constipated and you're not lying, coz your brain was constipated. And then rest for a few minutes. When it comes out afterwards, you make up that ten minutes you spent in the loo very quickly. So you get more work done, more efficiently, higher quality and you're not stressed out, so when you go home you can enjoy the company of your relations and your kids, your wife, your husband, and even you can actually enjoy your dinner. Because when you enjoy the company at home, again, home is a place you're supposed to destress, you can relax, have a good dinner, meet the people you love and care for. So when you have a nice rest in the evening, you go back to work in the morning and then you're sort of calm.

It's a cycle which you can either have a vicious circle of stress and argument at home or work and you get really crazy, or you can break that cycle, rest a little bit at work, you get more done, you come home, you relax, everything is going well at home so you're happy at work as well, you get more done there. That's a cycle when you don't become a difficult person to live with.

That's why I say to people when they come here on meditation retreats, or they're doing a meditation here on a Saturday afternoon or beforehand: Why do you meditate? Because other people have to put up with you. That's one of the great reasons to meditate. And if you meditate, you're a much nicer person afterwards.

Many times when I've been teaching meditation, especially down at Armadale, I don't know why it always happens down at Armadale group. An Armadale group sometimes after the meditation, talking to people afterwards and very often people say: "You know, this evening I never wanted to come. It's Tuesday evening, I've been at work and I'm tired and I told my kids I'm not going this evening. And my daughter said 'Mummy, you must go to meditation' - I don't feel like it, darling, I'm tired, 'Mummy, you must go to meditation!' - no, not this evening, 'Mummy, GO TO MEDITATION!' - why, darling? 'Because you're a much nicer mummy when you come back!'"

And so they go. Many of the kids actually understand that, they can see the change in you when you destress. So you're not such a difficult mother, or a difficult father to your own kids. So this is actually how you can see and practise: a little bit of rest makes people less difficult people to live with. So you're seeing the cause of those things, it's not just being compassionate and kind, it's actually knowing the causes of being difficult and dealing with them. And giving yourself a little bit of rest, being destressed.

And one of the other things about being a difficult person, you know what it is like sometimes when so much stuff comes on top of you, you've got so many things to do. I've had an



indredibly busy week, but when I get a busy week I try really hard never to get negative, sometimes I'd think: "Oh, why me?! Why do I have to deal with all these crazy people? Why do I have to take all these calls." Sometimes from overseas people ring up, they're crazy, that's why I've called it "Dial a Monk Service". Sometimes even people have lost their dog over in sort of Canada, somewhere, and they say: "Can you do some chanting for me over the phone?"

I was saying today that I was in Japan three or four weeks ago. And Japan is such a high-tech country. If we ever actually maybe do a fund raise to buy a robot monk, you know, like a cyborg. It can look like me or any other monk, put a robe on it. If anyone need a chanting, just put in a donation in the little slot in here, press the button and he can give you the blessing services. But even on a Friday night if I'm not feeling myself and just want a bit of rest, I can put myself, my cyborg up here, you put one of the old CDs in there with your favourite talk, press the button and noone [will] know the difference! This idea has got some potential.

But I would never do that, because sometimes I'd think: "Oh, why do I have to work so hard?" Coz when you get sort of negative, you do become a difficult person to live with. So I know that whatever you have to do in life, you embrace it, have fun with it. It teaches you to have fun with the difficulties of life, to embrace them. Then you find you never get a difficult character. So to see a person who is a difficult person to live with, it is because they're fighting their life and they're angry at just what life gives them. And they are probably working too hard, "Why do I have to do all of this? Why do all the things are happening to me? Why is this life so tough for me?" and they take it out on you and all the other people they live with.

Hope I never take it out on the monks which I live with. Instead, you know, you just embrace it, take it on board, it's just life, you can't change life, but as I've said many times: you can change the attitude you have to life. It's an attitude problem we have, that's all. What's wrong with working hard? We can only do one thing at a time, that's all I ever do. That's why we never get angry at people who never turn they mobiles off, we embrace that. Thank you so much for giving me an oppurtunity to explain just how you can embrace the difficulties of life! And so I have a choice, I can get angry with someone not turning off their mobile phone, why get angry about it, it's already been turned on, big deal.

So you don't get angry at life, you just embrace it, people make mistakes, I make mistakes. I made a big mistake – I hope she's not here today – last Sunday I was doing a marriage service for one of the people who comes here regularly, she's married to a nice young boy – you always have to get married to a boy if you're a girl, I suppose. I don't know why I said that, but anyway, she was getting married and after the service, the blessing service, I said to him – this elderly man came to stand next to him and I said: "Oh, is that your father?" and the old man said: "No, I'm the the best man." He was not very happy at me.

Like I was telling a funeral director on, when was it – on Wednesday or Tuesday – ah, Thursday, yesterday – told the funeral director about one of the funerals I did once for a couple who comes here, one of their parents died, and doing the funeral service and saying: "Oh, it's such a shame that your mother passed away. She was such a good Buddhist and she had done so much." And then this old lady stood up from the back and said: "It't not me, it's my husband! I'm alive, it's he who's dead!!"

So I do stupid things, many times. But when you make a stupid thing, instead of getting tense about it, being a difficult person, you laugh at life. And I actually try to collect all my stupid

mistakes and try telling you all about them, so then you laugh. When you make a mistake it's like a wonderful opportunity to make people laugh. That's why one of the sayings: "When you even make a stupid mistake and people laugh, you laugh as well. Coz then the world never laughs at you, it only laughs with you." So we laugh as well at the stupidity of life and making a mistake. And that way we embrace and accept things, even the difficult things. We don't become a difficult person. No matter what you have to deal with, you can embrace and make it work.

So if you learn that, then you're not one of the difficult people in life. There's always other people that are difficult. I wonder who those other people are. They're US. So when we learn how not to be difficult, we can maybe give those skills to other people. But don't be so demanding of life, but have an attitude which is more accepting of life. When there's a problem we know how to deal with it with – what's it called – the "Sandwich Method". And that way the other people and yourself can actually live peacefully together.

But I've already mentioned: the most difficult person in your whole life is not the boss from hell, the most difficult person is not sort of the person you married, or your mother-in-law. Somebody actually told me: You know, "mother-in-law" is an anagram, you can actually change the letters of "mother-in-law" and it comes out: "Hitler woman". I may get in trouble for that one! But it's true, work it out, write down "mother-in-law"... but many mothers-in-law here are very nice people.

But whoever is the difficult person in your life – sometimes that can be you. The most difficult person in your life is yourself, isn't it? The one you have the hardest time living with at peace and embracing him, being kind to is you. And it's important to recognize that. Learning to live with difficult people – first of all, you have to learn how to live with the difficult you. And what's the difficulty with you anyway? Who do you wanna be? And of course, if you want to be something other than you are, if you want to be the great meditator who can fly through the air on a Friday evening – I've never seen that before, that would make it interesting – if you always wanna give the best talks, or if you always wanna be the wisest and skilful comedian and get everyone to always laugh at your jokes.

Actually, one of my favourite comedians, he once said he wrote his autobiography and he said when he was young, he always wanted to be a comedian. He said his friend would laugh at him for wanting to be a comedian. Now that he is a comedian, they don't laugh anymore... One of his other favourite jokes was he said: "When I die – he was contemplating on death, which is a Buddhist thing to do, so this is almost a Buddhist joke – he said: when I die, I wanna die in my sleep, just like my father, he died in his sleep. Not like the passengers in the bus he was driving at that time, screaming and shouting!" It was a nice joke.

Anyhow, I wasn't going with this story. So being kind to yourself and accepting yourself is actually learning not to be your own enemy, not to be a difficult person to yourself. So you know, I've got my own idiosyncrasies and they are all being on display for the last twenty years in this place, you know, you know who I am, but you accept yourself as you are, you relax, you allow yourself to make mistakes, you allow yourself to be who you are. You have this beautiful sense of embracing yourself with all of your idiosyncrasies. In other words, you become at peace with yourself. And that's actually what many people do when they come to a place like this, they learn how to accept themselves as they are, to be at peace with themselves and not being the most difficult person in the world to live with.

Strange thing that as a monk I spend many many hours by myself. And sometimes people ask that: “As a monk you never had a wife, have’t got kids, aren’t you ever lonely? Sometimes on retreat you never speak to a person two weeks to the six months retreats once never spoke to a person or saw anyone for six months, weren’t you lonely?” I have to answer them when they ask that question: I’m never lonely, I never feel sort of wanting to have to be with people. But I like people, but I don’t have to be with people. So even at times of solitude I never feel lonely. When they ask me that question first I think: why not? And I realize actually that there’s always somebody around – me. And because I’m a friend of myself, coz I like me, I’m always with my best friend. At night time in my cave where I live at Serpentine I always go to sleep with my best friend – me. And because I’m at peace with myself and accept myself, I understand I’m not perfect, but I’m good enough, then I’m never lonely. Lonely people are people who don’t like themselves, people that are afraid of themselves. So when noone else is around, you’re with this strange and terrifying being called “me”, which you haven’t really made peace with yet, haven’t understood yet.

But once you understand who you are, you accept yourself with some kindness, you become at peace with yourself. Actually, you like yourself, you find one of the greatest insights you can ever have is “I’m okay” insight. To realize there’s actually nothing wrong with you. As you are, you are perfect. You don’t believe that, which is why you keep trying to change yourself. When you make peace with yourself and accept yourself for who you are, then you are a friend to yourself, you never feel lonely, coz you’re there all the time. Only people who don’t like themselves feel lonely. They are the biggest problem, they are the difficulty.

And something strange happens, once you actually solve that difficulty, YOU, can make peace and ease with yourself, noone else in the world will ever be difficult for you. There won’t be difficult people anymore. Because the difficulty of other people is just a projection from yourself. That’s why I’ve noticed, when people criticize others: “he talks too much”- I’ve noticed – the person doing the criticism also talks too much. And I’ve seen people say: “You eat too much” – it’s only fat people say others eat too much. It’s amazing how people criticize because it’s something in their character they don’t like about themselves, which they project onto other people. I’ve noticed that and I think it’s a common sort of psychological trait.

So the only reason you find other people difficult is because you find yourself difficult. So if you can actually heal the problem with coming to peace with yourself, being at ease with yourself, accepting yourself, then you can find you can accept just about every other being.

And of course, as a monk I’ve come at peace with myself a long time ago. So there’s crazy people come and talk to me, stupid people come and talk to me, wise people, beautiful people – they are all beautiful people, it’s just who they are. So I respect people. And of course, I’ve been in these jails and saw these real crooks in jails, I’ve been talking to politicians, saw the crooks on the outside as well – they’re no real crooks, they are just, you know, people who are trying to do their best, but sometimes they’ve got their defilements as well. So when you start to see people for who they are and you can accept them and be with them as they are, then there’s no such thing as a difficult person anymore.

I remember this one lady, no other monk would be able to talk with her, she’d come on a telephone, I think so-and-so knows what I’m talking about, and she would swear – F-words, “bloody” words, “Bloody monks, I’m gonna come up there with an M-16 and shoot you all.” I said okay, that’s a nice thing to do. I understood her, she’s a really difficult person. You know, but because I never reacted back, I always reacted kindness, she almost loved me, said:

“Yeah, you’re the only person that understands me.” And of course, she never came to our monastery with an M-16 to shoot us all, she was just taking her venom on somebody who would listen and not take it seriously, so I could understand where she was coming from, the pain of her life, the difficulties of her life and embracing her for who she was. And then she’d calm down and became very peaceful and tell me all about her life. A very painful, difficult life. She was not a problem, she was not a difficulty, coz I understood myself, I could understand her.

So you can actually calm down the so-called difficult people in this world when you have learned how to calm down yourself. And then everybody in the world is not difficult anymore. And it’s not as if they continue those bad habits which other people think as difficult. Because you can calm them down and accept them peacefully, they don’t need to express that difficulty anymore in those dysfunctional ways. It’s exactly the same as in a hospital, you’re focusing on the beautiful parts of them and the beautiful parts of them grow.

How you can deal with difficult people in life. And not just difficult people, the difficulty in ourselves and the difficult situations in life which occur again and again and again in life. Your flight gets cancelled coz Bangkok airport is closed – wonderful, you can spend more time in Perth! Those people in Bangkok – what a great place to stay, you get two extra days of holiday and your boss can’t actually blame you. It’s always: why do we make life difficult instead of exploiting life? When life doesn’t go the way we want it – great, wonderful! And even when people criticize you unfairly – what a wonderful experience that is to be criticized and test yourself out.

Don’t know when the last times was I told this story about the donkey who fell in a well? Once upon a time there was a donkey just walking happily along in a forest, just munching and minding his own business. And because it wasn’t mindful, he fell into a well. The well was dry, so it didn’t drown, and he didn’t really sort of injure himself, just a few bruises and scratches. But when the donkey sort of came to his senses, he realized he’s at the bottom of a well and there’s no way up, coz donkeys can’t climb. So the only thing the donkey thought he could do was to cry for help to get someone’s attention, otherwise he would die down there of starvation. So he started crying for help: “Eeyyy, eyyy, eeyyy!!!” – I can’t really do donkey noises. As I think now you have understood coz probably I have no previous incarnations as a donkey. Those people who imitate animal noises – it must be your last life as an animal. But as for me, I wasn’t a donkey in my last life, so “eeyy, eeyy, eeyy” is the best I can do... “Eeyyy, eyyy, eeyyy!!!” said the donkey again and again and after a couple of hours actually somebody heard him. And it was a local farmer. What’s making that noise? And so he came over and saw this coming from the well, looked down: “My goodness! A donkey has fallen down that well!”. And that farmer never liked that donkey. The donkey was always eating his farm produce and was being very stubborn, never do what the farmer wanted. And he also realized that well was a very dangerous thing, someone might fall in that well, a human. So he thought of a wonderful idea: he could get rid of that dangerous well AND the donkey at the same time. He got out a spade and started filling that well with earth. The cruel farmer!

Now, if you do something like that, it’s called “bad karma”. If you do any bad karma, you’re gonna get unpleasant consequences, as you will see as the story develops. And so this donkey at the bottom of the well thinking at first the farmer would help him realized the farmer is trying to kill him by shovelling all this dirt over the donkey. And when the donkey realized that, “eeyy, eeyy, eeyy” – even louder! But that didn’t stop the farmer, he just kept shovelling more dirt over this donkey, more and more dirt, trying to fill in the well and bury the donkey alive! And after a while the donkey went quiet and never said anything. Farmer thought: “I’ve

killed him! I've buried him, good rhythms" – and kept on shovelling. But the donkey hadn't died. The donkey, who must have also gone to Nollamara in the previous life, had insight. He was a very smart donkey. Never underestimate donkeys. His insight was this: instead of complaining when people throw dirt all over you, instead of complaining, just shake it off, tread it in – and he found he was growing a centimetre taller. The next shovel full of earth: shake it off, stamp it in – he was another centimetre higher. So every time, every shovel of earth, he was getting closer and closer to the top of the well. Now, the farmer thinking the donkey had died already paid no attention at all, shovel and shovel, when a pair of donkey ears appeared above the top of the well. Shovel, shovel, shovel, shake it off, stamp it in, until the donkey head appeared on top of the well. And before the farmer realized, the donkey was close enough to the surface, it jumped out and bit the farmer on the backside. Not because the donkey didn't like the farmer, but because he had to show the farmer the law of karma. It's just an Asian, of course, and run away. And that's how the donkey escaped from the well.

And the moral of the story is – and I told that to politicians, I even actually told this to the President of Sri Lanka a couple of years ago, the Sri Lankans are here, he loved that story, coz being a politician, people always try to throw dirt on you. Shrug it off, stamp it in and you get higher moral ground. So it's the same with you, people criticize you, your husband calls you ugly, you call him stupid, whatever it is, just shrug it off, stamp it in and you get closer to the top of the well.

That's how to deal with difficult people. So if people sort of call me sort of lazy, because I haven't got a proper job, I say: "Well, in this time of economic difficulty, I'm freeing the labour market up for you people to get jobs rather than taking it myself." If people say: "Oh, you are scared of relationships, coz you don't have children" I say: "I'm making the planet sort of more carbon-neutral, because when you have kids, how much of carbon footprint you get with kids?" So I'm being celebrate, but I'm doing my bit for overpopulation.

So whatever it is, when people criticize you, you can always turn it round, shrug it off and you don't have to think that they're making life difficult for you. You only make life difficult for yourself and noone else does. There's no such thing as a difficult person basically, except yourself. So you get yourself right, make peace with yourself, you find that everything in life will then also be at peace. And all the difficult people will just be people, that's all, human beings just being human beings, mosquitos being mosquitos, donkeys being donkeys, farmers being farmers.

How to deal with difficult people. Thank you for listening.

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