

The Driverless Bus

Excerpted from [A Discourse on “Non-Self”](#) by Ajahn Brahm

Often when you start to delve into non-self, there comes a time when you don't want to go any further because you're afraid. I'm not talking about ordinary fear; I'm talking about fear that goes to what you take to be your very “core”. You're challenging all you ever thought about yourself, and you're undermining your whole essence of existence. Your whole reason to be is being challenged by imagining what it would be like if there were nothing there. If you have the courage and the faith to go through that fear and find that what you were afraid of was nothing, you will receive the most beautiful gift — the gift of freedom, the gift of the ending of things, of the work being finished.

Years ago I gave the simile of “the driverless bus”. It's like you're driving through life in a bus, and you get pleasant experiences and unpleasant experiences. You think it's your fault; or you think that it's the driver's fault. “Why is it that the driver doesn't drive into pleasant country and stay there for a long time? Why does he always drive into unpleasant territory and stay there a long time?” You want to find out who is controlling this journey called “my life”. Why is it that you experience so much pain and suffering? You want to find out where the driver is, the driver of these five aggregates (khandhas): body, feeling, perception, mentality and consciousness — the driver of you. After doing a lot of meditation and listening to the Dhamma, you finally go up to where the driver's seat is in the bus, and you find it's empty!

It shocks you at first, but it gives you so much relief to know there's no one to blame. How many people blame somebody when there is suffering? They either blame God, or they blame their parents, or they blame the government, or they blame the weather, or they blame some sickness they have, and in the last resort if they can't find anyone else to blame, they blame themselves. It's stupidity. There is no one to blame! Look inside and see it's empty, “a driverless bus”. When you see non-self (anattà), you see there is no one to blame; it's anattà. The result is that you go back into your seat and just enjoy the journey. If it's a driverless bus, what else can you do? You sit there when you go through pleasant experiences, “just pleasant experiences that's all”.

You go through painful experiences, “just painful experiences, that's all”. It's just a driverless bus.

You think that you have driven a course through these three months of the Rains Retreat that your success or failure, your happiness or suffering is due to you. It's not, it's just nature. You've got no one to blame, and you've got no one to praise. Whatever has happened is just that; so stop shouting at the driver. Stop cursing the driver. There's no one there; you're wasting your breath. Just sit in your seat and “cop it sweet” [*an Australian prison term which means roughly to do one's time gracefully without struggle, as opposed to “doing hard time”*]. When there are nice times, have fun. When there are unpleasant times, have fun. When you've got no one to blame, you might as well enjoy the journey. This is the simile of the driverless bus..

The Answer is “There Is Nothing”

I remember one of the teachings Ajahn Chah gave me personally. He used to come to our monastery at Wat Pah Nanachat every week because we had built a sauna for him there. He found the sauna beneficial as his health was failing by this stage. When he came it was great because he would give us a talk as well. That day he'd come to give a talk. We had fired up the sauna, and as soon as it was ready a few monks went to help him. I would help him sometimes; other times I let other people help.

This time, after giving a very inspiring talk to all the Western monks, he went off to the sauna, and I let some other monks look after him. I went to the back of the hall, sat outside, and had a deep, peaceful meditation. After coming out of my meditation I thought I would check out how Ajahn Chah was, to see if I could help him. Walking from the hall to the sauna, I saw he was already finished and was walking in the opposite direction with a couple of Thai lay people.

Ajahn Chah took one look at me, saw that I'd been in a deep meditation, and he said, “Brahmavamso, Why?”

I was completely surprised and confused, and replied, “I don't know”. Afterwards he said, “If anyone ever asks you that question again, the correct answer is, ‘There is nothing’”.

“Do you understand?” Ajahn Chah asked me.

“Yes,” I said.

“No you don’t,” he replied.

So if you’ve been asking that question, “Why? Why? Why?” I’ve given you the answer now. It’s straight from a great meditation master, Ajahn Chah. The answer to the question “Why?” is, “There is nothing”.

He was really great, Ajahn Chah, and he was correct. That will always remain with me, “There is nothing”. This is emptiness. There is no doer. There is no knower, it’s completely empty! To be able to get to that emptiness, encourage yourself by knowing that if you do find that emptiness, it’s wonderful! All the Enlightened Ones that I have known have always been happy; they haven’t regretted finding out that there’s nothing there. No one has said to me, “I wish I hadn’t found this out”. It’s liberating when you see there is nothing there. There is nothing to hold onto, and when you don’t hold onto anything, there’s no suffering any more.

All of the craving, all of the attachment, and all of the pain that arises because of those cravings and attachments, all have their origin in the illusion of self. That illusion of self creates a sense of “me” and a sense of “mine”, all that I want, all the praise and blame, the “I am” conceit (asmimāna): “I am as good as the next person”; “I am better”; “I am worse”. How many of you are still suffering because of

comparing yourselves to someone else? You don’t have to compare yourself to anybody. You’re not there!

There is no more comparison anymore once you can give the “self” away. You don’t even need to worry about what people think about you: because there is no one there to think about. How much suffering comes from worrying about what you think other people think about you?

Ajahn Brahm was born Peter Betts in London, United Kingdom in August 7, 1951. He came from a working-class background, and won a scholarship to study Theoretical Physics at Cambridge University in the late 1960s. At Cambridge he joined the university’s Buddhist Society and after a few weeks at the age of 18, he saw a monk for the first time. He knew then that was what he wanted to be. After graduating from Cambridge he taught in a school for one year before travelling to Thailand to become a monk and train with the Venerable Ajahn Chah Bodhinyana Mahathera. Whilst still in his years as a junior monk, he was asked to undertake the compilation of an English-language guide to the Buddhist monastic code - the Vinaya - which later became the basis for monastic discipline in many Theravadan monasteries in Western countries. After practising for nine years as a monk, he was sent to Perth by Ajahn Chah in 1983. (see ajahnbrahm.org).

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