

## No joy—no mindfulness!

Ajahn Brahm [Brahmavamso, Peter Betts, 1951- ]. *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond: A Meditator's Handbook*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2006, xii + 292 pages, ISBN: 0-86171-275-7 (paperback: alkaline paper), US \$16.95 (Publisher's discount \$13.56).

Reviewed by

Piya Tan

The Minding Centre & Pali House

<http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>

### Well-structured

For the serious practitioner of our times, this book is, in practical terms, better than Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*. Ajahn Brahm's book<sup>1</sup> is very easy reading (delightfully colloquial), profoundly instructive, and above all, written from firsthand experience of a practitioner of some 30 years. The book is conveniently divided into two parts. Part 1, "**The Happiness of Meditation**," is for those who only "want to meditate in order to relieve some of the heaviness of life." Part 2, "**To Bliss and Beyond**," is "a guided tour...into the supreme bliss of the jhānas," [3] the specialty of a self-confessed "meditation junkie" [36].

The book has **three purposes**: as (1) a course in Buddhist meditation (the key practices being the breath meditation and lovingkindness cultivation); (2) a troubleshooting guide (especially on how to overcome the five hindrances, and how to refine the *nimitta*, or meditation sign leading to jhāna); (3) an exploration of less familiar aspects of Buddhist meditation (including discussions on various controversies and aberrations in Buddhism today).

Chapter 1 fulfils the first purpose, giving clear and comprehensive instructions on **the breath meditation** in seven stages [1-28]. The next two chapters deal with troubleshooting, that is, overcoming the mental hindrances on a general level [29-64], and also on a deeper level later [176-178]. Chapter 6 deals with **the lovingkindness meditation**, walking meditation and "letting go" meditation [65-78, 261-272]. The next two chapters explain the 12 steps of "the beautiful breath" in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (M 118) [81-101], and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (D 22; M 10), an important chapter where the canonical meaning of *vipassanā* is explained [102-124]. Chapters 9-11 deal with the jhānas in detail [127-172], especially valuable is the practical chapter 10 on the *nimitta* [137-151]. The rest of the book (chapters 13-15) deals with the benefits of meditation and the nature of awakening (or sainthood) [185-272].

Then follow the **endnotes** [273-275]—I think the reader would rather forego aesthetics and surely find *footnotes* more expeditious than endnotes—and a useful **bibliography** [276-279]. The book is lovingly **indexed** with helpful headwords both in English and in Pali [281-291]. For example, if you look under "letting go," you will find eight other subheadings and cross-references.

### Originality and depth

The book makes interesting and easy (almost familiar) reading because Ajahn Brahm comfortably uses **the first person**, directly addressing the reader like a personal letter.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, he often forthrightly states that he has coined certain expressions, for example, "She had a severe case of what I now call 'mettā block'" [67]; "All that remains in your mind is what I call disembodied mettā" [71]; and numerous first-person accounts.

Important highlights of Ajahn Brahm's book reflecting **the originality and depth of his thought and spirituality** include the following:

---

<sup>1</sup> For Ajahn Brahm's curriculum vitae, see eg [http://www.buddhistcouncilnw.org/PastEvents/Ajahn-Brahmavamso/ajahn\\_brahmavamso.htm](http://www.buddhistcouncilnw.org/PastEvents/Ajahn-Brahmavamso/ajahn_brahmavamso.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Like many writers, Ajahn is here simply declaring his accountability to the point mentioned or translation made, and state that the statement is not borrowed from elsewhere.

**Ajahn Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, 2006 (Review by Piya Tan, ©2006)**

- (1) the six features of a nimitta [22, 137-151];
- (2) the notions of the doer and the knower [40: see Index under “doer and doing” and “knower and knowing”];
- (3) “the Nālāgiri strategy” (showing lovingkindness towards manifestations of one’s negative qualities) [40];
- (4) a very practical explanation of the 16 steps of the Ānāpānasati Sutta (M 118) [83-101];
- (5) the nature and practice of satipatthana [103-124, 207], especially the mindfulness focussed on sleeping [112] and the nature of mind contemplation (*cittānupassanā*) [116 f];
- (6) that the Buddha discovered jhāna (S 2.7, 45.14-17; A 9.42), and that the formless attainments<sup>3</sup> of Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta<sup>3</sup> “were not the real thing” [127-130];
- (7) the two kinds of *upacāra samādhi* [178];
- (8) four reasons why the doctrine of rebirth is central to Buddhism, and how rebirth recall is possible [185-188];
- (9) the nature of the mind and consciousness [201-207], especially, the famous fruit salad simile (on the “granular” nature of consciousness) [118, 205];
- (10) his “marketing” of the four noble truths as 1. *happiness*, 2. *the path leading to happiness*, 3. *unhappiness*, and 4. *the cause of unhappiness* [214].

Most traditional Buddhist practitioners would find that Ajahn Brahm (at least in this book), does not teach anything new, in the sense that he teaches meditation as presented in the Pali Suttas, and in a very simple and effective way. For example, he shows how to combine mettā meditation with breath meditation: when you have reached what is traditionally called the “breaking the barrier” stage of lovingkindness, you should “forget about all beings... (and) focus your attention instead on the experience of mettā in itself... All that remains in your mind is what I call disembodied mettā, similar to the disembodied grin of the Cheshire Cat... It’s the mettā nimitta” [71]. He then explains how to attain jhāna and insight. He constantly refers to the Suttas to authenticate his statements and for emphasis.

“Smile! You’re meditating” or meditation made easy

In his book, he also reveals some aspects of his own life that attest to his early spirituality. When he was about 11, he found it fascinating to watch a TV show “that showed in gory detail major surgical operations... I found it fascinating to see the innards of a body... I was eager to observe autopsies,” explaining that we should not be “in denial about the nature of our bodies” [112 f]. At 17, after reading some Buddhist books, he decided he was a Buddhist. He describes his jhāna(-like) experience on his first meditation retreat in Cambridge in inspiring detail, centering around how he saw “the most beautiful clump of bamboo in the world” [182 f].

Such stories and statements often move the faith-inclined to attribute charisma to a teacher and invite questions from the wisdom-inclined. When I promoted this book in my meditation and Sutta classes, I often get the resigned remark to the effect: “How I can ever attain jhāna; it’s so difficult.” Perhaps I should have responded as Ajahn did in one of his classes, when he said something like, “Let me brainwash you now. Repeat after me: *It is easy to attain jhāna. It is easy to attain jhāna. It is easy to attain jhāna.*” In other words, aim high, so that whatever you hit would be better than if you had not aimed at all.

Besides the clarity and simplicity of Ajahn’s approach to early Buddhist meditation, he gives us two important hints—two of his simplest yet most efficacious—to catalyze (give the oomph!) to our meditation, that is, (1) *smile*, especially at the distraction and the nimitta, and (2) as in life, so in meditation, learn to “let go” [271]. Apparently, he teaches it’s all right to give a Prozac smile, but with practice (pun meant), the smile will become more authentic when your eye-corners show “chicken feet.”

---

<sup>3</sup> Scholars have pointed out that it is Rāma (not his son, Uddaka Rāma,putta) who is the Bodhisatta’s teacher at M 36, 85 and 100: see EJ Thomas, *Life of the Buddha*, 1949:63; Peter Skilling, *Pāli Buddhist Review* 6,2 1981-82a:99-105. See Ariyapariyesanā Sutta (M 26) = SD 1.11, from <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

### Cannot meditate? There is still hope

Generally, people have difficulty meditating because of two basic problems, that is, those (1) of owning one's pains, and (2) of owning the teacher. **Owning the pain** refers to not seeing oneself rightly in the perspective in a personality, society and world that are essentially impermanent. The bottom line is that one really has no control of anything in this world [198-201]: one is a creature of conditions. So all that one can do is to train one's mind in a positive manner like weeding the garden, pruning and watering the plants, and giving them enough light, warmth and nutriment. The garden will blossom in good time. And remember to simply sit in the garden to enjoy it

**Not owning the teacher** means not looking up to a person as an idol, an arhat, the next Buddha, or a saviour figure, but to keep to the *teaching*. (This is in fact the Buddha's first and last admonitions.)<sup>4</sup> No matter how much one admires the doctor, one would not be healed if not does not take the medicine. And having healed oneself (at least to some extent), one could then be able to heal others. Otherwise, one would be like the proverbial spoon bearing the soup, but not tasting it (Dh 64).

On the other extreme, you could be deluded that you have attained great progress in meditation, even won some spiritual state, and pride in it [251-254]. Even if you have truly benefited from your practice, a nun wisely advises, "If you become enlightened, don't tell anyone, or else you'll spend the rest of your life having to prove it!" [253]

### Stream-winning in this life

As I mention earlier, there are many who find that Ajahn's description of jhāna and call to deep meditation like having to take up theoretical physics in Cambridge University, when they have not yet finished secondary school, or worse, those who have opted to stop there. So is there hope for those who do not, or cannot, meditate? Ajahn answers this question in chapter 14.

Under the section heading, "The Saddhānusārī and Dhammānusārī—Stream Winning without jhāna?" [225 f], Ajahn retells the Vinaya account<sup>5</sup> of **Devadatta's diabolical attempt to assassinate the Buddha**. The first assassin was instructed to kill the Buddha, another two would then kill the assassin, four more would kill the two, then eight would kill the four, and finally sixteen would kill the eight. This way no one would be able to trace who killed the Buddha! However, when the first man sees the Buddha, he is petrified with fear, and the Buddha calms him down. After listening to the Dharma, he becomes a stream-winner. In due course, all other would-be assassins, too, in turn, meeting the Buddha, and hearing the Dharma, become stream-winners. (V 2:191 f)

Ajahn explains this "anomaly" by referring to the two types of people on the path to stream-winning, that is, the *saddhānusārī*, "mostly-by-faith follower," and the *dhammānusārī*, "mostly-by-wisdom follower," mentioned in **the Kīṭāgiri Sutta** (M 70).<sup>6</sup> In terms of the five spiritual faculties (*indriya*),

When samādhi and the resultant wisdom are weak, however, then faith and the resultant energy can compensate. One whose faith and energy are the main driving forces toward stream winning is called a *saddhānusārī*, and one for whom samādhi and wisdom are the main forces is called a *dhammānusārī*. Both, of course, need mindfulness. Perhaps, then, one with the enormous energy that flows easily from such faith, can attain to stream winning without any jhāna. As an old proverb says, "Faith can move mountains."

[225; emphasis added]

Ajahn goes on to state that "[h]owever, such a faith needs to be extraordinarily uncompromising to move the Mount Everest that is delusion..." and goes on to relate the beautiful Dhammapada story of **Tuccha Poṭṭhila** (Poṭṭhila or Poṭhila the Empty).<sup>7</sup> It is said that Poṭṭhila had been a renowned

<sup>4</sup> **Gārava Sutta** (S 6.2/1:138-140) = SD 12.2 & **Mahāparinibbāna Sutta** (D 16.6.1/2:153) = SD 9.

<sup>5</sup> The book gives the reference as V 2,7,3,7-8 ("2" here refers to the Vinaya volume, the other numbers are those of the Culla,vagga sections), ie Cv 7.3.6-8 = V 2:191-192.

<sup>6</sup> For an annotated translation, see Sutta Discovery 11.1.

<sup>7</sup> DhA 20.7/3:417-421. Moggallāna, in powerful imageries, alludes to him at Tha 1174 f.

Dharma teacher throughout the dispensations of all the seven past Buddhas.<sup>8</sup> However, realizing that he has much pride, decides to overcome it through meditation. He quietly retreats into a distant forest hermitage of arhats, and pleads with the juniormost of them, a novice (*sāmaṇera*), to be his teacher, declaring that he will go through fire, if told to do so. The novice, after initial protest, acquiesces and instructs Poṭṭhila to go into a nearby pool, and he does just that. Convinced with Poṭṭhila's tractability, the novice arhat then instructs Poṭṭhila by way of an anthill simile.<sup>9</sup> In the course of Poṭṭhila's meditation, the Buddha appears before him in a holographic image and admonishes him (Dh 282), at the end of which he becomes an arhat.

### The Okkanti Saṃyutta

Ajahn regards the attaining streaming without *jhāna* as an “anomaly” because “[f]aith without wisdom is a gamble. For this reason the path of wisdom is based on *jhāna*, the way of the *dhammānusārī*, is the recommended path” [226]. The Buddha, in his great compassion, however, clearly teaches that *one can attain liberation without jhāna*. We have, to begin with, a set of ten suttas, forming the **Okkanti Saṃyutta** (ch 25). These short but remarkably practical suttas have only one teaching, that is, the reflection of impermanence as the basis of streamwinning in this life. This perception of impermanence can be done with any of these as objects of mindfulness practice:

1. the six internal sense:           **the Cakkhu Sutta**,     S 25.1/3:225;
2. the six external senses:       **the Rūpa Sutta**,       S 25.2/3:225 f;
3. the six sense-consciousnesses: **the Viññāṇa Sutta**,   S 25.3/3:226;
4. the six sense-contacts:       **the Phassa Sutta**,     S 25.4/3:226;
5. the six feelings:               **the Vedanā Sutta**,    S 25.5/3:226;
6. the six perceptions:          **the Saññā Sutta**,     S 25.6/3:227;
7. the six volitions:             **the Cetanā Sutta**,    S 25.7/3:227;
8. the six cravings:              **the Taṇhā Sutta**,     S 25.8/3:227;
9. the six elements:             **the Dhātu Sutta**,     S 25.9/3:227; and
10. the five aggregates:         **the Khandha Sutta**,   S 25.10/3:227 f.

All of them lead to—or “descend” (*okkanti*) into—stream-winning in this life itself—whether one “has faith, who firmly believes” (*saddahati adhimuccati*) in the impermanence of the six senses, etc. (that is, as a faith-follower, *saddhā'nusārī*), or accepts this truth “after pondering over them with some wisdom” (*paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti*) (that is, as a truth-follower, *dhammānusārī*), one is assured of becoming a stream-winner. One would not die without having realized the fruit of stream-winning.<sup>10</sup>

### The Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta

Why then does the Buddha not often speak of this easy path? The answer can be found in the **Sa,upādi,sesa Sutta** (A 9.12),<sup>11</sup> where nine kinds of saints (short of the arhat) are mentioned, namely, five kinds of non-returners, the once-returner and these three kinds of stream-winners, namely, the one-seed stream-winner, the clan-to-clan stream-winner, and the seven-at-most stream-winner.<sup>12</sup>

These Sa,upādisesa Sutta passages are interesting because of their treatment of the threefold training (*sikkhā*). These types of stream-winners are all “accomplished in moral virtue, but is

---

<sup>8</sup> That is, the Buddhas Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa and Gotama. Vipassī arose 91 aeons (world cycles) ago; Sikhī and Vessabhū, 31 aeons ago; and the rest are the Buddhas of our own fortunate aeon (*bhadda,kappa*). See **Mahāpadāna Sutta**, D 14.1.4/2:1) & **Āṭānāṭṭiya Sutta** (D 31.3/2:195 f).

<sup>9</sup> The arhat novice's instruction: “Bhante, there are six holes in an anthill. One who would catch a lizard would stop up five of the holes, leaving open the sixth. So he would catch the lizard at the hole through which it has entered. Even so, you should regard the objects of the six sense-doors. Having closed the other five sense-doors, establish your effort on the mind-door.” (DhA 3:420, my translation)

<sup>10</sup> On lay followers attaining stream-winning, see **Laymen Saints** = Sutta Discovery 8.6 & **The Layman and Dhyana** = SD 8.5(3), esp **Sa,upādisesa S** (A 9.12/4:380-382). See <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

<sup>11</sup> See “The Layman and Dhyana,” SD 8.5(3) (2005) & “Laymen Saints,” SD 8.6(14a). See <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

<sup>12</sup> A 9.12.8-10/4:380-382. Respectively, *eka,bījī*, *kolāṅkola* and *satta-k,khattu,parama*. For details, see “The Layman and Dhyana,” SD 8.5(3), 2005.

moderately accomplished in concentration, moderately accomplished in wisdom” (*samādhismiṃ mattaso kārī, paññāya mattaso kārī*), that is, their meditative attainment are at best “moderate” (*mattaso kārī*), which the Commentary glosses as “limited, not accomplished” (*pamāṇa, kārī na paripūra, kārī*, AA 4:174). This probably means that they are unable to attain full concentration, that is, they are not attainers of dhyana.

It is also possible that the phrase “**moderately accomplished in concentration**”<sup>13</sup> refers the *jhāna* “with mental cankers, partaking of merit, ripening in acquisitions [of the aggregates]”<sup>14</sup> (M 117.7, 13 etc). In any case, it is clear that one does not need to attain *jhāna* to become a stream-winner. The important point of this passage is that even if one is unable to become an arhat in this life, one could still become a stream-winner, and within seven lives at most one would gain liberation.

As such, it is not really difficult to gain awakening. This compassionate remark made by the Buddha at the end of the Sutta confirms such a facility for awakening:

Not until now, Sāriputta, has this Dharma discourse been thus declared to the monks, the nuns, the laymen or the laywomen. What is the reason for this? Lest after listening to this Dharma discourse they become heedless! However, Sāriputta, through my being questioned, I have spoken this Dharma discourse. (A 9.12.10/4:382)

In other words, the Buddha speaks very little regarding the ease with which lay followers could attain stream-winning so as to encourage his disciple to strive for the highest goal, arhathood. In this way, the Teaching could be experienced and taught by the most able, wisest and best of disciples for the benefit of the greatest number of beings.

### Helpful references

Let us return to this book review. Unlike many other well known Buddhist teachers whose works are often poorly translated into English, or lacking proper referencing, Ajahn Brahm’s book would delight scholars who value the primary sources of his ideas and teachings. Decades back I had written about my great concern for those who quote “the Buddha” without proper references, holding the audience hostage to the speaker. When *the teaching* is not taken as the authority, what we get is a “vague Buddhism.”

Happily, Ajahn is not only careful in his referencing, but the book has 47 footnotes—a generous number for a forest monk’s experiential writing, and mostly very brief ones, too—that help the general reader to look up available and authoritative translations (especially of the first three Nikāyas),<sup>15</sup> and also some relevant and interesting scientific papers on the mind, meditation and near-death experiences (NDE) [197 f], and Benjamin Libet’s “readiness potential” [199].

### On the Foreword

One of the delightful surprises that struck me on first opening the book is that its “Foreword” is by **Jack Kornfield**, meditation teacher, author, and psychotherapist, best known in the west as a Vipassana teacher and co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society (IMS), Barre, Massachusetts, and the Spirit Rock Meditation Centre, California, USA. Kornfield, after acknowledging Ajahn’s “*jhāna* and insight as the real true way the Buddha taught,” almost apologetically adds:

But the Buddha also taught many other equally good ways to meditate and employed many skillful means... The teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, Ajahn Buddhadasa, and Sunlun Sayadaw are among a wide spectrum of masters who offer different and equally liberating perspectives... a rich mandala of living Dharma, of which Ajahn Brahm reveals one important facet. [ix]

---

<sup>13</sup> *Samādhismiṃ mattaso kārī*. See “The Layman and Dhyana,” SD 8.5.3b, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> *S’āsavā puñña, bhāgiyā upadhi, vepakkā*. See “The Layman and Dhyana,” SD 8.5.3b, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> At press time, Bhikkhu Bodhi is still working on a new annotated translation of the fourth Nikāya, the *Āṅguttara*.

## Ajahn Brahm, *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, 2006 (Review by Piya Tan, ©2006)

Kornfield was himself a Theravada monk for 5 years, before returning to the US in 1972 (the year that I became a bhikkhu) and began teaching meditation in 1974 (the year when Ajahn was ordained a bhikkhu). Kornfield went on to obtain a doctorate in clinical psychology, followed by a PhD. He has documented teachings of various great living masters in two books: *Living Buddhist Masters* (1983) and *Living Dharma: Teachings of Twelve Buddhist Masters* (1996). In an article well publicized in the Internet, Kornfield confesses that in “Vipassana” practice,

At least half the students who came to three-month retreats couldn’t do the simple “bare attention” practices because they were holding a great deal of unresolved grief, fear, woundedness, and unfinished business from the past. I also had an opportunity to observe the most successful group of meditators—including experienced students of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism—who had developed strong samadhi and deep insight into impermanence and selflessness. Even after many intensive retreats, most of the meditators continued to experience great difficulties and significant areas of attachment and unconsciousness in their lives, including fear, difficulty with work, relationships wounds, and closed hearts.

“Even the Best Meditators Have Old Wounds to Heal,” 1993<sup>16</sup>

Kornfield’s article should be read in full and in the right context.

### Historical and personal notes

Ajahn Brahm’s singleminded message or “motto” to meditators and practitioners is: “no joy—no mindfulness” [65]. And here lies the rub: if you do not try to be happy, you will not succeed in your meditation. I remember during the first talks I heard from Ajahn in Singapore, he admonishes that the first thing we should do on waking up is to *smile* (to which I like to add, tell yourself: “It’s great: I’m still alive!”). If you are unable to do that, then he seriously suggests that you stand before the toilet mirror and use your fingers to push the smiling muscles into being! “For one who is happy, the mind concentrates.”<sup>17</sup>

I am very fortunate to have met and received teachings from both **Mahasi Sayadaw**, the Burmese master of Vipassana meditation, and also Ajahn Chah’s pupils, **Ajahn Sumedho** and **Ajahn Brahm**. I spent the whole of July-August, 1979, in an intensive meditation retreat led by Mahasi Sayadaw in Burgh-Haamstede, the Netherlands. When I met Ajahn Brahm in 2001, his first words to me was “I am grateful for what you did for me back in Thailand.” He was referring to 1974, when he was **sāmaṇera Peter Betts**, and was staying in Wat Srales to receive his ordination from the abbot **Chaokhun Brahmaganabharana**<sup>18</sup> (Kaew Upaseno; currently Somdet Budhacharn).<sup>19</sup> I acted as his interpreter (at the abbot’s request). Ajahn, however, probably already knew some north-eastern dialect (that is, Thai Isan) at that time, but not Central Thai.

As I see it, Ajahn Chah had instructed sāmaṇera Peter Betts to be ordained under the second monastic leader of the Mahānikāya (the larger of the two Siamese ordination lineages, the other being the Thammayut) as an act of great compassion and skillful means to keep a wholesome link between the forest tradition and the urban tradition. Wat Srales, one of central Thailand’s oldest temple, was (and is) a very important centre of Buddhist learning in Thailand, and is closely connected with the Mahachulalongkorn Monks’ University. Chaokhun Brahmaganabhorn has propitiously given him part of his own ecclesiastical title “Brahma” (meaning “perfect or excellent”) and added “vaṃsa” (“lineage”) as his ordination name (*chāyā*). Both Ajahn Chah and Chaokhun Brahm had great foresight that he would do great things for Buddhism in our times.

---

<sup>16</sup> “Even the Best Meditators Have Old Wounds to Heal: Combining meditation and psychotherapy,” in *Paths Beyond Ego*, ed Roger Walsh, LA: Tarcher/Perigee Books, 1993. <http://easternhealingarts.com/Articles/-woundstoheal.html> (2003), and elsewhere.

<sup>17</sup> **Sāmañña,phala Sutta**, D 2.76/1:74 = SD 8.10. See <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

<sup>18</sup> Pronounced as phrom.khun.na.phorn.

<sup>19</sup> I was ordained two years earlier in the same wat under the 17<sup>th</sup> Supreme Patriarch, Somdet Phra Vanarat (Poon Punnasiri of Wat Phra Jetubhon).

Is Ajahn Brahm an arhat?

For those who must know whether Ajahn is an arhat, or who think they already know, there is a sure and easy way of finding out: at the right time, ask him, “Ajahn, do you still have conceit (*māna*)?” (but do be mindfully prepared for his answer). I remember a couple of times Ajahn saying that he still makes it a point to humbly prostrate before even the less deserving of senior monks. *Verbum sat sapienti*. A word for the wise is enough. Those with an inclination for arhat-watching would be advised to study and reflect on the Buddha’s instructions in **the Jaṭila Sutta** (S 3.11) and **the Thānāni Sutta** (A 4.92), on how to truly know a person.<sup>20</sup>

In a Friday talk in Perth in July 2006, Ajahn told this amusing anecdote (here summarized): a young man once decided to find the perfect woman. After interviewing one woman after another, he found them all wanting in some way. Finally, he found just the right one. When he declared his intention, the woman replied, to his utter disappointment, that she was looking for *the perfect man*, and that he was certainly not the one! As the Zen masters say, if you meet the Buddha on the road, “kill” him. The truth is *not* out there: it is within you. In other words, the best way of arhat-watching is to watch the breath and bliss beyond.

Over all, Ajahn’s students will find almost all of his familiar similes, imageries, and a few of his transcendental jokes, systematically presented in their contexts here. It is rare and to our great fortune that we have *a practising and living adept Dharma teacher’s spontaneous and oral teachings crystallized into the written word in his own hands*.

If my library were on fire, this is the one book I would save along with my Sutta Discovery disc. Then again, it might be all right if, despite my effort, I were to lose this book, for I foresee many reprints, even revisions, of it coming. I am nevertheless very much delighted to have the editio princeps, a tome of teachings that are a great support to my own practice and teaching, and a fun and effective tool for propagating the Buddha’s wisdom to others. Ajahn Brahm’s book is clear testimony that awakening is still possible today if we look deeply enough into the beautiful breath. Now it’s time to put down the book and taste the real thing.

Let’s give ourselves the benefit of the doubt and presumptuously take Ajahn Brahm to be an arhat. *This means that he would not be reborn any more*: this is the last time we would be meeting him. As such, let us take this effort to find that turning-around in our consciousness, and head for the stream to awakening. At least, let us finish reading this book and put it into practice.

Piya Tan  
The Minding Centre  
<http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>

19<sup>th</sup> Nov 2006d (3<sup>rd</sup> rev)

---

<sup>20</sup> The annotated translations of these two suttas are found in SD 14.