

# DON'T WORRY

Inspiring Stories  
for Making the Most  
of Each Moment

# BE GRUMPY

AJAHN BRAHM

author of the bestselling  
*Who Ordered This Truckload of Dung?*

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# Preface

Bananas are profound.

They are so commonplace we think we know everything about them. In fact, we don't even know the correct way to peel a banana! Most people peel the banana from the stalk. However, monkeys, the experts on bananas, always hold the stalk and peel their bananas from the opposite end. Try it and see. You'll find it much less troublesome following the "monkey method."

In the same way, meditating Buddhist monks and nuns are experts on separating the mind from the difficulties that surround it. I invite you to follow the "monk method" of dealing with life's problems. Like with peeling a banana, you'll find life much less troublesome.



## 80. HOW to catch a Mango

In my first few months at Wat Pah Pong monastery with my teacher, Ajahn Chah, he would repeat the following story again and again. It was such nonsense that I dismissed it as some cultural anomaly. Yet somehow I remembered it. Later in my life as a monk, I recognized the metaphor as the perfect description of how enlightenment happens, offered by the most brilliant master I ever met.

Wat Pah Pong is a mango orchard, whose trees were planted by the Buddha. The trees are now mature, with thousands of ripe mangoes ready to be eaten. Because of the great wisdom and compassion of the Buddha, monks and nuns today, and lay followers too, don't need to climb the tree to get a mango. Nor do they need to throw sticks up, or shake the tree, to get a mango to fall.

All one needs to do is to sit perfectly still under the mango tree, open a hand, and a mango will fall into it.

Such is the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha.

I knew mango trees. If you just sat underneath a mango tree, you would have to wait many days for a mango to fall. The birds would probably eat them all first. Moreover, if one did actually fall, it would more likely drop on my bald head, knowing my luck, than into my hand. This was a stupid simile!

Now I realize that it was I who was stupid. Nothing is gained in the

spiritual life when you go “shaking the tree” or “throwing up sticks” or “climbing the tree” to make things happen. When you learn to be perfectly still, without a desire in the world, and open up your heart with unconditional love, only then do the mangoes of enlightenment fall softly into your hand.

## 81. Forbidden Fruit

A poor farmer had a lot of moldy hay. Instead of wasting it, he tried to feed it to his cows, but the cows would rather go hungry than eat the bad-tasting grass.

So the farmer mixed the moldy hay with some fresh hay and gave it to his cows. The cows simply separated the good hay from the bad and ate the good stuff. Still the moldy hay remained.

Then the farmer noticed something strange. Even though there was plenty of grass in the paddock, the cows would often be seen pushing their heads between the wires of the fence to eat the grass just outside the paddock. So the farmer left the moldy hay just outside of the fence, close enough for a cow to reach with a stretch. The moldy hay was all eaten in a couple of days.

Forbidden hay, even when moldy, tastes sweet.

I used this simile to help a good friend who had a problem with her husband. He was a good man but never saw the point in religion, not even in meditation. She told me that he would surely benefit from the practical Buddhist teachings if he would take the time to hear them, but he just wasn't interested. So she asked for my help.

"Easy," I said, "just buy one of my books. Take it home and, when you see your husband, tell him to keep his hands off *your* book. Firmly forbid him from reading it."

This she did.

Of course, one day soon after, when she was out shopping and her husband was at home alone, her husband thought something like: "What does she mean by forbidding me from reading her book!"

Then he picked up the forbidden book, read the first story, and did not put it down until he had completed the last tale. Now he comes to my temple every week.

## 82. The Bully

Wherever there are hierarchies, there will be those who deliberately try to intimidate or persecute those who are weaker. There are bullies in the schoolyard, bullies in the workplace, and even bullies in a monastery, as the following anecdote describes.

In my first year as a monk, while I was squatting on the ground after lunch washing my alms bowl and spittoon, a more senior monk strode up to where I was sitting, loomed over me with monstrous menace, and screamed, “*Brahmavamso!* That is a *filthy* habit! You should *not* wipe your alms bowl with the same cloth that you use to wipe the spittoon! Stop it *at once!*”

Junior monks are expected to show deference to their seniors, but this was too much. The senior monk was trying to intimidate me. Moreover, every other monk was doing what I was being rebuked for. It was unfair, picking on me.

Fortunately, I had the answer for this bully. I calmly did what he asked.

Even though I was churning inside, I used all my powers of self-restraint to keep my mouth closed, walked slowly to where some rags were kept, picked one up, returned even slower to my seat, and wiped the waste vessel with the rag. All the while, I felt the eyes of the many other monks following me. Then I looked up at the bully. All the other monks looked at him as well. They were waiting to see how

he would react to my unexpected compliance. All was still for a long two minutes, at the end of which his face went a red brighter than a fire engine. Then he retreated. He never tried that on me again.

Bullies want to prove that they are superior to you. In a spiritual community, such as a monastery, the above method works only when the bullying occurs in public. In an office or a school, or in a private setting, it may be perceived that you are just weak and deserve to be dominated. So if you cannot outsmart the bully or stand up to them, report them to their superiors.

The goal should be to prove that you are at least their equal in wisdom and courage, if not better than them.

## 83. Bureaucrat Bullies

Government departments are notorious bullies. They have the power, and they often feel the need to demonstrate it.

An Australian Buddhist, who was a member of the Tactical Response Group (SWAT team) of the Western Australian police force, was at an Australian consulate in Asia trying to get a visa for his wife. The official was so unhelpful that he politely complained. She replied, “See that security guard over there! One more complaint out of you, and I will tell him to shoot you!”

Being experienced in hostage situations, he successfully negotiated his way out of trouble, but he told me that he never expected to have to use such skills as an Australian in an Australian consulate.

A second example involves a friend who owns a car repair shop in Perth. When he arrived at his workshop one morning, he could not get into his premises, as a car was illegally parked across his driveway, completely blocking all access. Nor could any staff or customers get in or out. So he called the local council to have the vehicle removed.

The officer at the council explained that they would send a council official to put a sticker on the car but, according to the regulations, they could only tow it away after one week.

“That would mean my customers would be unable to bring their

cars in or take them out when they are repaired. My business will have to close for the next seven days!" complained the owner.

"I am sorry, but regulations are regulations," said the government worker.

Fortunately, my friend was smart and courageous. He drove his van to the council offices and carefully parked it across the exit to their parking garage, so no cars belonging to council officers, nor delivery vans and visitors' cars, could come out. When the officials asked him to move his large van, he replied, "Just put a sticker on it. It will be moved, according to your regulations, in seven days' time!"

After brief negotiations, the car blocking his business was swiftly relocated, and shortly after, so was his own van blocking the council's garage.

That's one way to deal with bureaucrat bullies.

## 84. A Boardroom Bully

Jane, a friend in Sydney, had started her own small business. A big company in the UK became interested in her products and entered negotiations toward a lucrative deal. Soon she received an email requesting her to come to London as soon as possible to sign the contract. This would be the big break for her business that she had dreamed of.

Jane had a cute little baby called Erica. Even though it was hard to leave her very young daughter for a few days, the deal was too important for her family's future to let slip.

Jane booked the first available flight to London and, when she arrived, had only enough time to check in to her hotel, shower, and get changed before getting a taxi to the company's head office. When she walked into the boardroom, the other directors were waiting but not the CEO.

"You have wasted your time," one of the directors told Jane. "You may as well take the next plane back to Australia. Our CEO is in a filthy mood. No way is he going to approve your contract. Go home!"

Jane was not going to give in that easily, especially having traveled halfway around the world for this meeting. "If it is all the same to you," Jane said defiantly, "I will wait to see the CEO myself." Then Jane sat quietly on a chair in the corner of the boardroom.

Jane was a meditator. Her preferred method was meditation on

loving-kindness. She was joyfully generating the emotion of compassion to all beings when the CEO burst into the room.

“Who the *hell* is *that*!?” screamed the CEO on seeing Jane sitting so still with her eyes closed. “What does she think she’s doing in *my* boardroom?!”

Meditation makes you so calm that even exploding CEOs do not rattle you. Jane calmly stood up, walked toward the volcanic alpha male with neither fear nor arrogance, and told him, “You have such beautiful blue eyes, just like my baby Erica back in Sydney.”

Jane told me that those words just came out of her mouth by themselves, with no prior thought at all. The effect was stunning. The CEO did not know what to make of this. His brain had blown a fuse. He stood there for over a minute drowning in complete confusion. The intense expression of anger melted in front of Jane’s eyes, and the CEO finally said, smiling, “Really?”

Jane’s contract was signed within the next five minutes, and the shell-shocked CEO left the room. Jane then went to leave the boardroom to take a well-earned sleep after such a long journey, but the other directors surrounded her.

“How on earth did you do that? We’ve never seen anything like that before. Before we let you go back to the hotel, you have to teach us what you did!”

## 85. I AM NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Most bullies have low self-esteem. They try to compensate for their own lack of self-worth by dominating another. It makes them feel higher when they intimidate someone else.

The Buddha revealed that there are three forms of conceit.

1. Thinking that one is better than someone else
2. Thinking that one is worse than someone else
3. Thinking that one is the same as someone else

The second form of conceit, often unrecognized as a “conceit,” is the main cause of bullying. If we could only stop judging each other, then we might stop judging ourselves. As a result, the need to bully, verbally or physically, would be much reduced.

At a reception, a well-dressed guest proudly introduced himself to the host as a doctor.

“I’m a doctor too,” said the host warmly. “I’m in general practice.”

“Only a GP? I am a brain surgeon,” said the guest, raising his nose. “Being a GP is hardly brain surgery!”

“I too am a doctor,” said the host’s wife. “I work for *Medecins Sans Frontieres* and have just returned from six months treating injured children in a war-torn region of the Middle East. It was extremely dangerous work, but someone has to help those poor kids.”

“It must be difficult doing charity work,” replied the self-important guest, holding his nose even higher, “but you must admit, it is hardly as difficult as being a brain surgeon!”

“I am a doctor as well,” interrupted the host’s son. “I have a PhD in physics, and I work for NASA building rockets. You must admit, Doctor, brain surgery is hardly rocket science!”

Then the well-dressed guest’s nose fell down, together with his self-satisfaction.

If you find joy thinking that you are better than someone else, then you will find suffering in equal proportions when you meet someone better than you. It is better not to compare yourself at all.

## 86. I AM GOOD ENOUGH

When you have a healthy sense of self-worth, then you don't need to play the "I am better than you" game. You don't need to prove yourself. A healthy sense of self-worth comes from realizing the true meaning of being perfect.

A woman walked in a forest looking for a perfect tree. All she saw were crooked trees, trees with missing branches, and trees with damaged bark. Then she went into a government-managed plantation, where she saw all the trees perfectly arranged in rows and lines, perfectly straight, with all the branches perfectly in place.

She realized that the damaged trees in the natural forest were far more beautiful and calming than the "perfect" trees in the artificial plantation. Then she also understood that so-called damaged people are so much more beautiful than artificial people.

She began to feel at home with herself, as much as she felt at home in the natural forest with all the gnarled and crooked trees.

She understood the real meaning of perfection. She had been for a long time "good enough." Only in the forest did she realize it.

## 87. The Answering Machine

Monks like to spend their time meditating rather than answering the phone. Some people assume that monks have nothing else to do all day than man—I mean “monk”—the phone, answering every caller’s problems about marriage and mental health or about giving blessings. I call this the “Dial-a-Monk Service.”

So we recorded a new voicemail message at our monastery:

“If you want to hear a recorded blessing chant for good luck, press 1.

“If you want to speak to one of the monks, you are out of luck, so press 1 anyway!”

Now we can meditate in peace.

## 88. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT NOT TO BE HAPPY

In today's world, if you are not happy, then some assume that there must be something very wrong with you. You need therapy. You may be encouraged to visit a happiness clinic. Some companies even have a "chief happiness officer" to rid their staff of the perceived problem. Happiness is the must-have commodity of the modern age. Soon there will be fines for those who dishearten others by being unhappy in public and jail terms for those serial offenders who are persistently miserable!

Recently, when I was teaching a retreat in beautiful surroundings with very delicious food, a young woman confessed to me that she felt grumpy for no reason.

"I know I should not be unhappy, because I am upsetting everyone else, but I can't help it. I just feel miserable," admitted the girl, guiltily.

So I went to my office and quickly composed and printed out the following "grumpy license":

### GRUMPY LICENSE

This document officially grants to the bearer  
a perpetual right to be grumpy,  
for any reason or no reason at all,

without let or hindrance.

Let no one infringe this right.

*Signed, Ajahn Brahm*

When I handed her the license to be grumpy, she started laughing.

“You are missing the point!” I protested.

## 89. The Happiness License

I have also had to print out many happiness licenses. We have to get a license to drive a car, get married, own a dog, and many other things in the modern world—why can't we obtain a license to be happy?

There are many people who think that they do not deserve to be happy. Perhaps they have done some terrible thing in the past for which they cannot forgive themselves. Or maybe they have suffered abuse from another and have lost their sense of self-worth.

At a retreat that I was teaching in Germany, a young man was having trouble meditating. He told me that he was also experiencing many other problems in his life. He couldn't hold down a steady relationship. His career was going nowhere. And he felt that he was living in an endless winter of gloom. Whenever any opportunity for happiness came along, he would habitually chase it away. He subconsciously believed that he did not deserve to be happy. There are many people like him.

I did notice that he had a great respect for me. His friends told me that he regarded me as his all-knowing, all-loving, spiritual master! That was rather excessive, but an advantage nevertheless. I gave him a happiness license, signed by someone he considered infallible. Me!

He respected that license so much that he took it seriously. He framed it and put it on his wall. It was a constant reminder that he had been permitted by someone in authority to be happy. Conse-

quently, he stopped rejecting moments of joy and allowed himself to be happy. Many of his difficulties, including in meditation, vanished.

The only trouble was that he told a friend who posted a copy of my happiness license on Facebook. I was soon inundated with so many requests for signed happiness licenses that I lost my own happiness for a while, having no time to meditate!

So I've put an official happiness license at the back of this book. You can insert your name, cut it out, and put it in your wallet if you want to keep with you a reminder to let yourself be happy. I've given each one my seal of approval!

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