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Subject: The Story of 998 Bricks

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I have a lot of gratitude for Ajahn Brahm, a meditation master in Perth, Australia. Here is a story from his days as a young monk.

After about eight years practicing in the forests of Thailand, his teacher Ajahn Chah sent him to start a monastery in Australia. Since hired workers were very expensive there, the monks themselves had to learn to lay bricks.

Ajahn Brahm's Cambridge education had taught him no such skills! Nevertheless he took to the task with great enthusiasm. He decided he would approach the task of laying bricks as though it was a meditation. So with great diligence and care, Ajahn Brahm set each and every brick.

Ask any brick layer, this is not as easy as it seems! The ability to evenly balance bricks in mortar takes slow and careful labor. After several days of careful work, Ajahn Brahm stood back to admire his work. He was horrified: there were two crooked bricks!

"How can I ever be enlightened if I can't even make a simple wall properly?" he thought. So he pleaded with the Abbot, could he break the wall and start again? Could he atleast grind the bricks so they look even with the others? He was denied permission and told that the wall was good enough. There were other important projects to work on.

However "good enough" wasn't what Ajahn Brahm wanted. For several months whenever he passed the wall he inwardly berated his poor workmanship. It reminded him of all his previous failures and all the imperfections in his life.

Then one day, a visitor came and Ajahn was asked to show him around the monastery. Usually, out of embarassment Ajahn Brahm avoided taking people past the wall he had built. Some how on this day they happened to walk past that wall. As they were walking the visitor sponatneously remarked "Thats a fine wall. Did you make it?"

Ajahn Brahm was stunned. "Sir, have you left your glasses at home? Can't you see those two crooked bricks?" he asked.

"Yes I can," smiled the visitor, "but I can also see the 998 good ones."

This simple statement changed Ajahn Brahm's life. He realized that his whole life he had been focusing on what was WRONG, what was MISSING, what was IMPERFECT in his life. Nothing he did was ever good enough! In his anxiety about the two bad bricks, he had failed to notice the 998 good bricks that he had set perfectly despite having no prior experience in brick work!

His whole outlook changed from blaming and complaining to one of acceptance and gratitude.

Ajahn Brahm often reminds his students not to take themselves too seriously in life and on the spiritual journey. His talks are filled with joy and humour. And while people are laughing, he pops a wisdom pill into their open mouths!

How many times in life do we see only the bad bricks, the flaws in ourselves and our life? Doesn't everyone have

something in their life that is a little "crooked"? If we continuously focus only on what's WRONG in our life that's all we'll see and we are sure to suffer. Is it possible that there are also 998 good bricks, or blessings in our life? Is it possible that 99.8% of our life is already blessed and the remaining 0.2% is essential to help us grow?

Contrary to what our education system teaches us, in life, whoever makes the most mistakes wins! It is usually the people who make the most mistakes and learn from them who are the most successful and wise, not those who never ventured forth for fear of failure.

Condemning ourselves for our mistakes leads to guilt and guilt eventually leads to self-condemnation. Ajahn Brahm says he sees far too much condemnation of others' actions "So I can't judge, I can only offer understanding." His words and his delightful stories continue to draw listeners from around the world.

What is a practical way we can move our attention from the bad bricks to the good bricks? Try this process:

- (1) List the top 10 things you DON'T want in your life experience
- (2) List 10 things you DO want (opposite of 1)
- (3) List the FEELINGS ████ experience if these 10 things were already true for you. Everyday spend sometime FEELING that you already have these 10 things
- (5) List 10 immediate action steps you can take
- (6) Replace any doubts/anxieties with love/gratitude.