

# *Defilements & Enlightenment*

by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

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*In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from [www.suanmokkh.org](http://www.suanmokkh.org) and [www.bia.or.th](http://www.bia.or.th). The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok ([suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com](mailto:suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com)).*

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Tonight we're going to speak about two very important things. These two things are *kilesa* (defilements) and *bodhi* (enlightenment).

Please observe that throughout the day, during each and every day, the mind appears in only two roles – the role of *kilesa* and the role of *bodhi*. These are the only two roles that the mind can play.

We need to observe and study our own minds in order to see these roles which the mind plays and then understand them. And in this way it will be possible to deal with *kilesa*. And then it is the development where the *bodhi*, enlightenment, are increased and *kilesa* decreased. This development can be furthered.

We need to know that the original true state of the mind is just a kind of knowing that we can call 'instinctual.' And in that original true mind there is neither *kilesa* nor *bodhi*. This needs to be understood first of all.

As we talked about last time, when the infant is born from its mother's womb – as it enters the world – there is only the instinctual knowledge. There is only the preparedness to know – readiness to know – but the mind of the infant is still neutral. It doesn't yet know right and it doesn't yet know wrong. It neither knows right nor wrong. It is only ready to know these things. And so in the newborn infant there is neither *bodhi* nor *kilesa*, but only a neutral original state of mind.

So then with this newborn infant and its neutral, original true mind . . . The mind remains like this until there is some sense-activity via the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. Then when some sense-object comes into relationship with the sense-organ – when there is some object making contact with the infant via one of the sense doors – only then . . . and then this object conditions the mind either to *kilesa* (defilement) or *bodhi* (enlightenment).

So then when the infant is touched by some sense-object and then it reacts to this with a feeling such as being pleased and the infant is pleased by something, then we'll start growing the desire – the craving – for whatever it is that pleased the infant.

For example if it is some flavor or is any pleasing thing which the infant takes as delicious, then there is this delicious thing. And then there is desire for this delicious experience. And then there begins to arise the idea or the feeling of an 'I' who experiences the deliciousness – an 'I' who receives, who desires, the deliciousness.

So this is how a sense-experience – how sense-contact – can lead to defilement. The defiled process of conditioning begins in this way.

If the object pleases the infant, there arises a kind of *kilesa* we call *lobha* (greed). This is because in the infant there is no knowledge whatsoever. There is not one itty-bitty bit of knowledge about how this process works. And without this knowledge the infant is powerless to guide it in a correct way. So then there is . . . The infant is pleased by something. Then there arises liking of that, loving of it, craving for it. It wants it. This is one kind of defilement.

Or if the object displeases the infant, then there arises the *kilesa* we call *dosa* (anger). And so the infant has aversion towards that object. It doesn't like it. It hates it. It wants to get rid of it.

These are two kinds of *kilesa* that arise because the infant does not have any knowledge of how this process works.

So at the same time when there is the direct . . . Besides the defiled side that we just talked about, there is the enlightened side of the situation. On the enlightened side, the infant knows only deliciousness and non-deliciousness. That's all it knows. Well it knows a little bit more. It knows how to get more of that delicious thing – for example, mother's milk. It knows how to encourage its mother to feed it some more.

And so on the enlightened side, the infant knows very little. It just has this very small amount of knowledge which is not strong enough to compare with

the defiled side of things. And so in this way, the defiled side increases and grows because there is not enough knowledge on the enlightened side to combat the defiled tendencies.

If we examine this, we see that the developments on the defiled side are very strong, very fast, have a lot of fuel, and are encouraged by all the things around the infant. And so this side of things grows very quickly. Whereas the enlightenment side is developing very slowly. Knowledge is building very very slowly. And so the development on the enlightened side just can't compare with the very rapid growth of defilement.

It's very very difficult for the infant to realize that greed is dangerous or that anger is dangerous. It hasn't had the opportunity to see the punishment – the penalty – that arise[s] from the reactions of greed and anger. And so it hasn't the tools to deal with these. This further demonstrates or explains how the development of enlightenment is still too small. There's just not enough knowledge on the enlightenment side to guide life properly.

So as the infant grows into a child, the defiled side keeps developing very quickly and the enlightened side is always developing much more slowly. It's always behind. So there's just always far too little knowledge. And so the defilements continue to be out of hand.

And then the infant grows. The child grows into a teenager. And this out of balance situation continues, leading to many problems.

Even when the teenager or child is aware that something is *dukkha*, it may see that there is *dukkha* but there still isn't enough knowledge to see where the *dukkha* arises from – what causes the *dukkha*. So knowledge is still too little for the infant to free itself from *dukkha* or even the teenager.

Whenever a defilement arises, it leaves behind a small bit of familiarity with that defilement. And this little bit of familiarity – of having already tasted and sampled defilement – is left in the mind. It's deposited in the mind. And this bit of familiarity makes it easier for defilement to happen again. It makes it easier for defilement to happen more quickly.

And this deposit of familiarity with *kilesa* is called *anusaya* (a-n-u-s-a-y-a). So every time *kilesa* arise, a little bit of familiarity is deposited in the mind. And in this way the *anusaya* build up more and more within the depths – within the foundations – of the mind.

On a very ordinary level it should be easy for you to see that if we get angry very often, we then become very expert and skillful at being angry. So on this level it's quite obvious how the anusaya work.

And so because we have built up so much anusaya, it's very easy for the various kilesa to arise. Because of these anusaya which we have been saving up with great effort, it's very simple for *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (anger), or *moha* (delusion) to arise one-by-one – one after the other.

So now we'll look at the role of the anusaya.

We can take for an example a large clay water jar. If we fill it with water and there's a leak, a small hole . . . if there's not a lot of water, it will leak slowly. It will be a low-pressure leak. But the more water we put in, the higher the pressure and the more quickly the water comes out – the more powerful it will leak.

So the anusaya work the same way. The more we build up these things – the more pressure there is behind the kilesa – the kilesa arise more often, more quickly, more strongly.

Now sometimes the anusaya give rise to kilesa which are aimed at external sense experiences – like we get angry at a certain person or certain event or we get greedy for certain things. But another role of the anusaya is when they are built up to a great extent, then that pressure which they have developed will arise without any external sense-object to call it forth.

There doesn't have to be any contact with anything outside of the mind. But just within the mind itself through the pressure of the anusaya there will arise sort of half-powered kilesa – half-strength, medium-strength defilements – which we call the *nīvaraṇa*.

And please would you all give a great deal of attention to observing and knowing these *nīvaraṇa*. This is a very important subject to study. Be very careful with this word *nīvaraṇa* (n-i-v-a-r-a-n-a) and the word *nirvana* (n-i-r-v-a-n-a). The one *niv-* is the defilement. *Nir-*, Nirvana, is the Sanskrit word for Nibbāna meaning freedom from all defilement. So there's quite a big difference between *nīvaraṇa* and Nirvana. But the words are very similar, so be careful not to confuse them. What we're talking about now is *nīvaraṇa* – a kind of defilement. When all of these defilements are gone, then there is Nirvana.

So we can think of these *nīvaraṇa* as half-strength defilements.

The first of these *nīvaraṇa* is *kāma-chanda* which is basically a kind of greed or lust or sensual desire. And it arises from within without any external

object to call it forth or elicit it. So it's a kind of feeling toward sexuality or sensuality, but most of all towards a sexual feeling that disturbs the mind. This is *kāma-chanda*, the first of the *nīvaraṇa*.

The second *nīvaraṇa* is *byāpāda*. This is a feeling of not liking, of ill-will. If your mind is disturbed by ill-will or not liking but you can't find the cause of it – you don't know why or you don't know what it is you don't like – then there's a good chance it's this *nīvaraṇa* of not liking. It doesn't need an external object or subject. It arises from within the mind.

The third *nīvaraṇa* is called *thīna-middha*. It's when the energy level of the mind drops. The mind is dull, weak, lazy, slow. And it falls to a low level because it lacks energy and strength. And this isn't caused by any external thing. It's just coming out of the *anusaya*.

The fourth *nīvaraṇa* is the opposite of the third one. The third one is when the mind deflates and sinks. The fourth one is when the mind kind of keeps popping up – keeps bubbling and bouncing around, flying around. The third one is a lack of energy; the fourth one is when there is too much energy. The third one is like sleepiness; the fourth one is when one can't go to sleep.

The fifth *nīvaraṇa* is uncertainty about safety. It's not knowing, not being certain, having doubts about what is safe – about what one can take as a safe haven or refuge. This causes the biggest problem when it's doubt about Dhamma – when this uncertainty is about Dhamma – and then one is unable to find any refuge or security in truth or in *puttha* [Thai] (the knowing of truth).

So on this deep level – this fifth *nīvaraṇa* – this kind of uncertainty about where spiritual safety is . . . But on an ordinary level there is also this *nīvaraṇa*. And that is doubts about what is physically safe – about what is healthy – or economic safety, physical safety. And that leads to a lot of uncertainty, wavering, doubts which can really disturb the mind and make it impossible to be calm and peaceful. So this fifth *nīvaraṇa* causes disturbances both on a deep spiritual level and also on the everyday worldly level.

Now it would be very good for you to learn about these *nīvaraṇa* not from our words or not from some book somewhere but from watching them in your own mind. The best place to study – the only real place to study – the *nīvaraṇa* is in one's own mind. So please do so. This is the first point – the first topic – of tonight's talk.

The *nīvaraṇa* can be hard to prevent because as we said they're arising out of the *anusaya* which have been built up in the mind. However once they have arisen they can be gotten rid of through *samādhi* – by this very powerful control

and calmness of the mind – which is developed through the practice of mindfulness of breathing.

So . . . now . . . that was the *nīvaraṇa* which arise out of the *anusaya*. But the *anusaya* can also give rise to full-powered complete defilement. The *nīvaraṇa* are like half-powered defilement. But when there is some external sense-object that touches the mind – makes contact – because of the *anusaya* this will condition the arising of *kilesa*. The familiarity with *kilesa* that is built up in the depths of the mind reacts to that sense-experience and conditions complete full-powered *kilesa*.

This kind of defilement or *kilesa* that is conditioned out of the *anusaya* – as we just described – has a specific name. This we call the *āsava* which can be translated ‘outflows’ – the flowing out from the *anusaya*.

Through mental development such as mindfulness of breathing, if we can destroy the *anusaya* – if we can clean up these deposits – so that the mind is free of them, then the *āsava* have nowhere to flow out from, they have no basis. And so there is no *āsava*. When one is free of these outflows, then one is an Arahant – a perfectly enlightened being, a fully enlightened being.

In the scriptures the Buddha usually describes enlightenment as the end of the *āsava* and this is how it can happen. The word ‘Arahant’ means ‘one who is free of *āsava*.’

Another way of lessening the *āsava* is that whenever there is sense-contact of any kind, that the sense-contact is controlled so that no *kilesa* are conditioned. When the *kilesa* are conditioned, it builds up the *anusaya*. When the contacts are controlled so that no *kilesa* arise, then the *anusaya* lessen and shrink. So this is another way of lessening the *anusaya* and *āsava*.

So we can take this as a very simple and useful principle that whenever the sense-contact is not controlled – when mindfulness and wisdom are not there – then it will condition *kilesa*. And that *kilesa* deposits these little bits of familiarity which build up as *anusaya*. However if sense-contact is controlled through mindfulness and wisdom, then the *kilesa* do not arise and the *anusaya* begin to weaken and lessen. So on one hand, uncontrolled contact builds up the *anusaya*. [While on the other hand,] controlled contact lessens the *anusaya*.

And so let’s try and look at the whole picture.

The newborn infant is born with just instincts. There’s basic instinctual knowledge but there’s no *bodhi* or[and] no *kilesa*. But there’s a sense-contact and because the infant lacks any knowledge about this whole situation – the

way these things work – its feelings just go uncontrolled out from this instinctual knowledge. And then there is liking of this, disliking of that, loving of this, hating of that. And from this gives rise to the ‘I’ that hates, the ‘I’ that likes, the ‘I’ that loves, the ‘I’ that dislikes. The self then is born. And so that self is a foundation for the [a]rising of further defilements. So in this way the anusaya are built up.

And then there are also contacts when it doesn’t go in this way and there is no conditioning of kilesa. And so in normal life the anusaya are going up and down, up and down, depending on the conditioning that grows out of sense-contact – whether the sense-contact is uncontrolled and conditioned in a defiled way, or is controlled. And that’s how the anusaya go up and down moment to moment.

So that’s the defiled side of things. Now let’s look at the enlightened side.

When this process starts to happen and the defilement arises then it leads to *dukkha*. And as the infant begins to experience and understand *dukkha*, it still doesn’t know how to prevent it. And it doesn’t know how to control the kilesa but it begins to see the *dukkha*. And as there begins to be more and more understanding of *dukkha*, then this leads to the arising of understanding or knowledge about that *dukkha*. And this knowledge and understanding of *dukkha* is the basic starting point and foundation of enlightenment or the development on the enlightened side of life.

In a child – even in a very, very young infant – if there is some understanding of *dukkha* and its cause, then that is the beginning of enlightenment. So enlightenment begins even in a very, very young infant with the understanding of *dukkha* and its cause.

Even the knowledge that certain things cannot be eaten – that if it eats this, it will get sick or it will hurt – or the knowledge that if it touches a fire it will get burnt and experience *dukkha*, even this kind of knowing of these physical levels of *dukkha* – even this is the beginning, the early stages, the little itty-bitty knowledge – is the beginning of enlightenment.

Now when there is just one time that there is correct understanding, this also leaves a little bit of familiarity behind. So every time correct knowledge arises – a true wise understanding arises – then it leaves a bit of familiarity which also can be built up. The build-up of familiarity with defilement we call *anusaya*. The building up of familiarity with knowledge – with right understanding – we call *pāramī*, which is often translated ‘perfections.’

So on one hand is the build-up of anusaya. On the enlightened side of things, there is the build-up of the pāramī. The anusaya and pāramī are the same in that they are both a building up of a familiarity within the depths of the mind. This way they are identical. How they oppose each other in[is] that anusaya is defiled familiarity or it's familiarity with defilement, whereas pāramī are enlightened familiarity – familiarity with enlightenment or with knowing.

So in a child there are both of these developing – anusaya and pāramī. The development of anusaya – of defiled familiarity – is a build-up of the mind on a low level. And the development of pāramī is a high level of development. Both of these are happening in the child.

The question is: which is happening more? Which is predominating? Are the pāramīs being developed to enough of a degree that they can overcome the anusaya? This is the important question.

So there are these two building up, and then eventually there begins to be a struggle between defilement and enlightenment, or between the anusaya and the pāramī. And so it's important as which one is stronger to see who will win the war or what side will win.

Many people like to say that life is struggle or that life is a struggle. If we're going to say that then let's look at it on a very deep level and see that life is a struggle between pāramī and anusaya – between defilement and enlightenment.

So whenever there is contact with a sense-object – whenever there is this sense-contact – if there is mindfulness and wisdom, then the pāramī wins and enlightenment is the victor. But whenever there is contact that lacks mindfulness and wisdom, then the *kilesa* (defilement) wins. And so this is how the battle goes. It's determined by whether there is mindfulness and wisdom or not at the sense-contact.

Our duty is to support, develop, improve, aid, raise the enlightenment side and to not support, develop, improve, and raise the defiled side. This is our duty and it's because of this duty that we practice *vipassanā*.

Here's a metaphor to help you understand it. In life there has been planted a seed of enlightenment – a seed of *bodhi*. This seed must be fertilized, watered, tended, cared for, must get an adequate amount of sunlight so that it can sprout, it can germinate, and then grow. And as it develops it needs to be carefully tended, given the nutrients and water and sunlight that it needs, and protected so that it can grow and develop, send out leaves, new shoots, branches, and grow stronger and stronger into a tree. And then it can have flowers and then fruit.

So this is what *vipassanā* is about. It's sprouting and caring for this seed of enlightenment so that it can develop into the path and the fruit of the path.

As for the seeds of defilement, these we need to destroy. Dig them up and throw them away, burn them up, or whatever. Or if they've grown into a tree, we need to cut those trees down, however we can. So this we also do with *vipassanā*. With *vipassanā* we destroy the seeds of defilement and the trees of defilement and everything in between.

Thus the meaning of *vipassanā* is to destroy the seeds of defilement, and to support and raise the seeds of enlightenment.

So take a look and understand that all the time in our ordinary daily life there is this struggle going on between enlightenment and defilement. These little battles are taking place many many times in a day. And so we need to understand what is going on – what this struggle is – and what our duty is regarding this struggle.

We'll be able to successfully deal with this struggle – with these combats, these confrontations – when by developing a clear, concise, detailed, wise understanding of the situation of what is going on . . . When we have this clear precise understanding, then we'll be able to deal with these little battles that are happening all the time.

In a general way this means that we have to know about the four Dhamma comrades which I talked about last night. These four comrades of Dhamma are *sati* (mindfulness), *paññā* (wisdom), *sampajañña* (wisdom in action), and *samādhi*. If we're clever in developing and using these four comrades in Dhamma, then it will be quite easy to destroy defilement and support enlightenment.

So for this reason we need to train, we need to send these things to school. We need to develop them, support them, improve them – these four Dhamma comrades – in any way that we can in order that we'll be very skillful in these things – that we'll be expert and clever with these four comrades – so that they can be successful in destroying defilement and supporting enlightenment.

There must be a sufficient level of wisdom developed. What we mean by 'sufficient' is that everything that comes and makes contact must be seen as *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*. So when enough of this kind of wisdom is developed – so that whatever happens – it is perceived as impermanent, unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and non-self (selfless; completely lacking in any permanent entity). So this is what we mean by 'sufficient wisdom.'

Another way of seeing it is that . . . well . . . These three – anicca, dukkha, anattā – can be summarized by *dukkhatā*. *Dukkhatā* is the thusness or suchness of whatever. So whatever that comes is seen just as it is – exactly, precisely as it is – with no delusion, no confusion. That is to see the *dukkhatā* – the suchness or thusness or just ‘isness’ – of everything that comes. So when the *dukkhatā* of things are seen, then no problems arise because of those things. There is no defiled conditioning arising in response to the things that are seen as *dukkhatā*.

So this seeing each and every thing as just this, just that, just what it is – seeing the *dukkhatā* of everything – means that there will be no ignorant reaction of the mind – of liking this, disliking that, wanting this, wanting to get rid of that, being pleased by, being displeased with, satisfied by, unsatisfied by, whatever that comes.

So *dukkhatā* is able to control the mind – keep the mind balanced – so it’s not pulled out into these ignorant reactions to things. And in this way the kilesa are destroyed – the seeds of kilesa, the seedlings, and the trees of kilesa are dug up and destroyed – through seeing the *dukkhatā* (the suchness) of everything.

If there is constant seeing of the truth of nature in this way, then the *pāramī* develop and enlightenment progresses steadily and increasingly towards *puttha* [Thai] or *Buddha*, the one who knows.

Whenever you hear the word ‘Buddha’ (or Thai phonetic: *put-tha*), understand that it has three meanings: the one who knows, the one who knows things as they are; the one who is awakened to truth, the one who is awakened out of the sleep of ignorance and defilement; and the one who has blossomed forth like a lotus blossom that has opened up to light and to sunshine.

So you’ve gotten to Buddha. That’s as far as enlightenment goes. That’s the completion – the fulfillment, the perfection – of enlightenment. The kilesa have disappeared. They’re completely gone and nothing remains of them.

So this is the story of these two things – defilement and enlightenment. The story has its origins in the instincts of the infant. And when these instincts are developed with wisdom in the correct way, then it is the development of enlightenment. And that enlightenment can progress and develop to its completion and perfection which is Buddha or Buddhahood.

So this is our duty: to develop the instinctual knowledge in an enlightened pure way, to avoid and destroy the defiled progression of conditioning, and give rise to, support, [and] foster the enlightened development.

Someone asked, ‘Why do we practice vipassanā?’ or ‘Why do you practice vipassanā?’ The best answer is to destroy defilement, and support and build enlightenment. This is our duty as human beings. This is the most wise and beneficial use of our birth as human beings. This is the most proper way to make use of this human condition.

So you don’t have to be afraid or have doubts about what will happen as this progress develops and is completed. As enlightenment grows, life naturally follows the Noble Eightfold Path. And when enlightenment is complete, then life continues. It doesn’t stop. But it continues to maintain itself within the Noble Eightfold Path. For once there is enlightenment, the path no longer has to be developed. It just flows automatically from enlightenment – from Buddhahood.

*Bodhi*, enlightenment, gives rise to ‘right view’ – the understanding of dukkha, the cause of dukkha, the end of dukkha, and the path that leads to the end of dukkha. So when there is bodhi, there is right view, right understanding of the world – the world’s cause, its end, and the path that leads to the end of the world.

Then bodhi gives rise to right intention – *sammāsaṅkappa* which is right aim, right intention. It’s the wise wanting behind whatever we do. And then, because of bodhi, there is right speech. There is right action. There is right maintenance of life. The bodily necessities – the necessities of life — are taken care of in a correct way. There is right effort, right mindfulness, and right *samādhi*.

So from bodhi all of these Eight Rightnesses happen automatically. So the Noble Eightfold Path comes and flows out of bodhi.

So because of bodhi, rightness/correctness is perfected. This path is completed and perfected. When this perfection – this rightness, this completeness – is reached, then there is no more dukkha. All problems have been solved. The mind has no more dukkha. It’s not disturbed by anything and it is free. This is the meaning of ‘Arahant.’ It is human perfection – the completion, the fulfillment of human potential. And this perfection – the perfection of an arahant – all comes from enlightenment, from bodhi.

We’re all born as sentient beings or (in Thai) *khon*. *Khon* is the word for ordinary people and we’re all *khon*. *Khon* also means to mix up. So as *khon* we’re just a mixed up kind of mess of feelings, thoughts, experiences, defilement, maybe a little bit of bodhi. This is *khon*.

But through the development of *bodhi* – of right understanding, of wisdom, of enlightenment – then *khon* (ordinary sentient beings) are raised to the level of human beings which in Thai is *manut*, in Pāli *manussā*, [??] which means having a high or lofty mind.

So through enlightenment, the low level of consciousness of an ordinary sentient being is raised to the higher level of consciousness of a human being. We make this distinction between ordinary low-level consciousness and higher or perfected consciousness.

When one is a *khon* – an ordinary sentient being – then one is under the influence of dukkha. That mixing up of that conditioning – that stirring up, that is the spinning round and round of dukkha – is the state of a *khon*. When one is a *manut*, a *manussā*, a truly human being, then one is out from under that influence of dukkha. One is free of the influence of dukkha and that spinning round and conditioning is no longer going on. One is out of that state.

So please, don't be just a *khon*. Please be a *manut*. Don't settle for being an ordinary sentient being but develop and perfect the mind in order to be a human being. Just because you have a body that is shaped like a human being doesn't mean that you are a truly human being. It's not a matter of the body – of physical characteristics. It's a matter of states of consciousness or the level of the mind.

So it should be obvious at this point that *khon* spend all their time with defilement. *Khon*, ordinary sentient beings, are spinning round in a defiled state. *Manut*, truly human beings, are in a state of enlightenment and life is in a state of enlightenment.

So in order to raise the level of life and consciousness from that of an ordinary sentient being to the higher level of a human being, one must understand this matter of defilement and enlightenment. And so that's why we've been talking about it – in order for us to perfect the potential of the human condition.

Within the Dhamma circle of people, when someone says you are just a person or you're just a *khon* – you're not a human, you're just a person – this is a very, very grave insult. It is a very nasty and insulting thing to say that someone is only a person – not a human.

So if you understand this matter of bodhi and kilesa, then you will be able to avoid being insulted in the way we just mentioned. That kind of understanding is not just an intellectual grasp of the words that have been said tonight, but is an understanding that is present on all levels of the mind – not just the

intellectual wordy level, the level of conceptualization, but also on the deeper level of direct intuition. With that understanding and knowledge, no one will ever be able to call you a *khon* again.

So tonight we've had the intention to speak about *kilesa* and *bodhi* – defilement and enlightenment. We've discussed this adequately.

And so we'll end this talk and open it up to questions. So does anybody have a question?

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