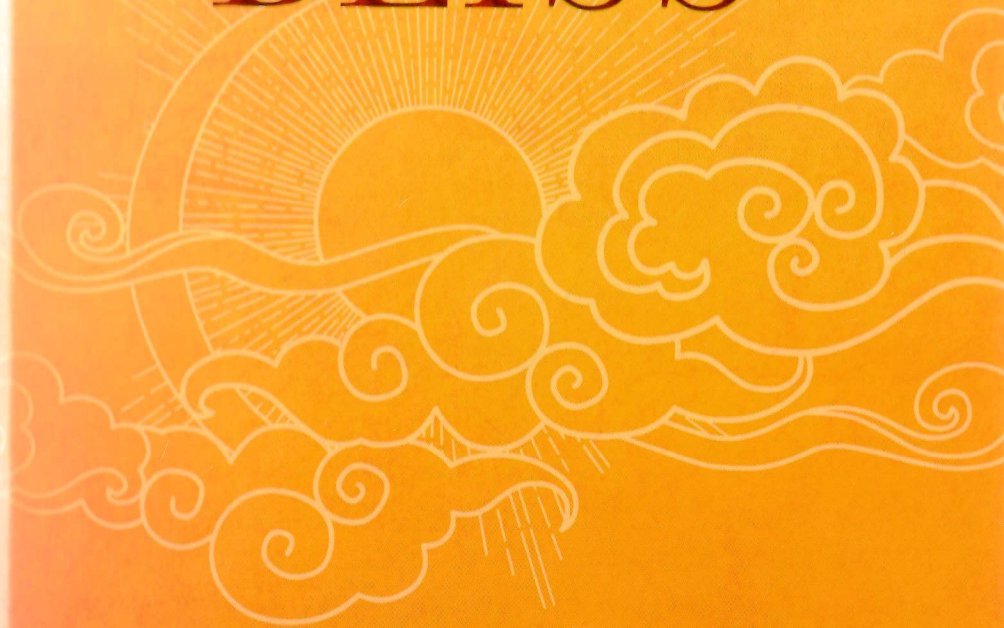


WISDOM

*Is*

BLISS



Four Friendly Fun Facts That  
Can Change Your Life

ROBERT  
THURMAN

### Navigating Karmic Evolutionary Action

There is a story that, in a previous life of the Buddha, he received a set of teachings from a great sage who wanted him to value them so much that he demanded the bodhisattva, enlightening hero, use his own skin as a sheet of paper, make a quill pen from one of his own finger bones, and write down the pattern of the tenfold path with his own blood for ink. The sage then recited the negative ten and positive ten together, which the bodhisattva wrote down in the briefest shorthand—he had skin in the game, you could say, so worked for brevity.

To put the unskillful and skillful evolutionary actions together, the three unskillful and skillful bodily actions are:

1. Not taking lives; saving lives.
2. Not taking what is not given; giving everything.
3. Not engaging in harmful sex; engaging in beneficial sex.

The four unskillful and skillful verbal actions are:

1. Not lying; telling the truth.
2. Not speaking divisively; speaking reconcilingly.
3. Not speaking harshly; speaking sweetly.
4. Not babbling pointlessly; speaking meaningfully.

The three unskillful and skillful mental actions are:

1. Not hating; forgiving and loving.
2. Not coveting; being detached and generous.
3. Not being unrealistic; being realistic and wise.

Mental thoughts are actions that have evolutionary consequences. You can kill (hate), steal (covet), abuse sexually (be unrealistic, uncaring) by thought, or save (love), give (be generous), and benefit sexually (be realistic, caring) by thought. This means you must learn to think with love, generosity, and care. Hence your natural focus on being mindful is for your own evolutionary benefit, and luckily, what benefits you inevitably benefits others.

The human form is more expansive than crocodiles and rhinoceroses, with greater variety of thought and behavior. It can expand endlessly through memory and imagination and can also contract dramatically. Killing another living being diminishes the killer's empathetic incorporation of life. The killer thinks he or she drives the victim out of the world and away from her or him forever. But actually, he only cuts the victim's mind's connection to the victim's body. Further, he cuts off his own empathetic connection to the victim's form of life while reinforcing the paranoia that all others want to cut off his, the killer's, life. The victim resents the killer for taking her or his life and carries on into his or her next embodiment an at least subliminal intention to take the killer's life in revenge.

It is said that the Roman Emperor Constantine's wife insisted that the emperor ban the teaching of rebirth in future lives and execute the patriarch Origen, who vigorously taught the law of "metempsychosis," the reincarnation of souls in other bodies, because as empress, she had ordered many executions. She feared some of the executed might take rebirth as a being wishing to take revenge on her, so she wanted the possibility banned, naively thinking that an imperial ban could stop the actual consequences of her actions! Before that, reincarnation or

metempsychosis was commonly accepted in Mediterranean cultures.

By contrast, the lifesaver embraces the other's life, identifies with it, expands their own sense of life force by identifying with the other. Saving someone's life is virtually saying, "Your life is connected to mine; I identify with you. I don't want to deprive your mind of its body. My life is greater through your presence: you are present in me, and I would be less without you!"

Similarly, when taking what is not given to me—when stealing—I disregard your ownership, I negate your mind, take your thing from you, discount and disidentify with your sense of self as invested in your possessions, and decrease my identification with your life. When I give to you, I enjoy your ownership of the thing I owned; I enjoy it more through your enjoyment of it. I become greater by enjoying with you more things than I can enjoy just on my own.

When I lovingly merge with you, which I can only do when I offer you the freedom to give yourself lovingly, we become one and, at least subliminally, we experience self-transcendence in communion with one another. We open our very most sensitive hearts and experience freedom as joy, tasting the true safety of reality beyond the fear of harm or death. Sexuality is the place where any animal, and all the more the human mammal, naturally identifies with another, even if it's often only momentary. Your self-giving human nature is mobilized and you experience the melting of boundaries into one another. You expand your sense of identification; you touch the deepest forms of expansion through bliss. Therefore, to use that occasion to be harmful, physically or emotionally, either by rape or social destructiveness, breaking others' relations through adultery, causing social conflict, endangering the

other—this disconnects you from expanding your identification with the life of someone with whom otherwise you and he or she can experience tremendous interconnection.

Speech is the form of action where the self interconnects with others by sharing experience through language. Being heard is being given the privilege of temporarily occupying another's mind; listening is opening one's own mind to another.

When you lie and deceive others, you imprison them in an unreality; you excise them from your reality and lose connection. When you reveal whatever you know of truth to others, you expand your world and invite them into it.

When you speak divisively to put others into conflict with one another by slandering and backbiting, you endanger them and sever your connection with them both; even though you may think you get closer to the one, you alienate yourself from the other. When you reconcile them with each other, you share your world wherein they can love each other. Then, actually, they both can feel your friendship and you expand your world by being accepted into their worlds.

When you abuse the privilege of being heard by speaking harshly, you trash their sensitivity and mentally harm them, destroy their receptivity, distance them from you, and disconnect yourself. When you speak sweetly, melodically, poetically, pleasantly, you draw closer to them, the sweetness comes from your attunement to what causes them pleasure, and your sense of identification with them expands. The great performer—artist, opera singer, rock-and-roll artist, actor—opens their heart into vulnerability, and what comes out of their mouth reaches straight through the conceptual defenses of their audience and touches their hearts. Mutual identification occurs, elevating both performer and audience into a self-transcending moment.

When you babble mindlessly, disrespecting the privilege of being with the listener, you lead them into disconnection from reality, into chaos and loss. When you speak meaningfully, you share your own revelations from the insights of enlightened beings—those who have become truly realistic—you share your own realism and you help your listener confront their own reality. Reality is always liberating, energizing, encouraging, though maybe challenging sometimes, and you come together with the listener as you both brace yourselves for evolutionary progress, with your sharing of responsibility in freedom of choice.

The mind is the subtlest but most powerful of the three levels, since it directs the activities of speech and body. Buddhist scientists, not being dogmatists, consider mind in at least two ways in different contexts: both as different in kind from phenomena of the physical level, and also, previously only esoterically, as the most super-subtle of the physical levels. The materialist scientists should like this flexibility of ideology, since it validates materialistic reductionism in some contexts, especially the medical and nowadays the technological. They get more worried about the opposite contexts, where mentalistic or spiritualistic reductionism is also validated and immensely useful—as in developing psychological well-being and unleashing the subtle supernormal powers of the mind, such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, enhanced memory, precognition, telepathy, and telekinesis. It is very important for spiritual philosopher-scientists to recognize the mind as equally approachable as the super-subtle physical, not only in the practical sense that it affects things around you through the instruments of speech and body, but also on the super-subtle energy plane where, through

morphic resonance, it acts directly on the super-subtle level of other minds.

### Going Deeper into Common Sense

The three mental evolutionary actions in themselves are parallel to the three physical ones—killing/saving, stealing/giving, sexual harm/help.

Hateful, malicious mind thinks destructive thoughts and imagines killing and destroying, and so cuts you off from the larger identification with the living. Loving, benevolent mind imagines union with others, identifies with their lives and wishes their happiness, and expands your own life and evolution.

Covetous, greedy mind wants to take away others' things or even their identities, just like the physical act of stealing, and cuts you off from enjoying their possessions through their doing so, and from mentally rejoicing about others' wealth and beauty (supreme antidote for envy). Generous and freely detached mind enacts a giving action in thought, wanting others to have more and better things, likes them enjoying their things and wants to give them more, and so expands your sense of abundance.

Unrealistic mind disconnects itself and encloses you in the narrow world of self-centeredness—you think you are great, others are nothing (never mind that you are nothing along with them), and you fear and recoil from connectedness, like by doing harmful things with sexuality to create distance even in situations of closest intimacy. Realistic mind embraces causation and connectivity; it not only skillfully reinforces all good qualities and responsible tendencies, habits, and instincts but also enables you to move past fear and expand your connection to the world,

realizing the benefit both to yourself and others of opening your heart and mind and feeling one with others.

Realistic mind also leads you to discover that the absolute reality of nirvana and all buddhas' reality body is nondual, not separate from the world of causality. It thus enables you to enjoy an immutable deathless bliss virtually beyond causal interference or entanglement, without ceasing actually to engage with the causal world of other suffering beings. The reality of this is inconceivable, stunning, amazing grace, and goes beyond expressibility except for paradoxical statements such as "in but not of the world," "wisdom and compassion indivisible," "bliss-freedom indivisible," and so on.

The great sayings of all world teachers reflect this level of enlightened interconnected consequentiality: "Who lives by the sword dies by the sword!" and even such common sayings as "What goes around, comes around!" All these sayings indicate the common awareness that the way you behave affects your state of being. Ancient people in general, and many people still today, have recognized the reality of the present being affected by happenings in former lives, and so consider how what they do in the present will affect the quality of future lives, just as we normally recognize the effect of prior actions in this life on the present, and are normally concerned with the effect of present actions on our future in this life.

### **The Impact of the Karmic Evolution Theory**

Buddha as a scientist, once he had perceived the deepest nature of ultimate reality as free emptiness/engaged relativity, started this conversation with more ignorant beings, explored how beings progress and regress, and elaborated this biological causal theory. He showed beings