



MIND & LIFE

Mind & Life Podcast Transcript Bob Thurman - Wisdom is Bliss

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Opening Quote – Bob Thurman (00:00:04): *Science is all important—and even materialist science, what they are discovering is very important—but then where are they going once they get there? The role of science is to produce wisdom, which is bliss. And people find it in themselves, and when they do, then their intelligence increases and their compassion increases. And the root of compassion is wisdom. Every scientist should be well trained as a philosopher actually. So, the science people who learn about meditating are all important. A little bit of calming their mind down, noticing what's going on within the mind is good, because they'll find their common sense.*

Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:00:45): Welcome to Mind & Life, I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. My guest today is Buddhist scholar and author, Bob Thurman. Bob is one of the foremost scholars in the world on Tibetan Buddhism, and he played a major role in bringing Buddhism to America. He's a professor emeritus of religion at Columbia University, a longtime friend of the Dalai Lama (as we'll hear in this conversation), and he co-founded Tibet House US, a nonprofit dedicated to the preservation and renaissance of Tibetan civilization.

(00:01:20) I chatted with Bob last fall about his latest book, *Wisdom Is Bliss*, and we covered lots of other interesting territory as well. We start with his own story and how he got interested in Buddhism and ended up traveling to India, and then befriending the Dalai Lama. Then Bob dives into some links between Buddhism and science, and explains why he thinks of Buddhism as only one sixth religion. He reflects on enlightenment and emptiness, problems with scientific materialism, and shares some interesting details from the story of the Buddha's life. Then we get into Bob's latest book, which is a really accessible tour of many aspects of Buddhist philosophy and how they can impact your life. He explains the Four Friendly Fun Facts (which is his version of the Four Noble Truths), and we talk about realistic versus "right" approaches on the contemplative path. Bob shares about Buddhist ethics, practices to push against essentialism, the key role of compassion and enlightenment, and how he thinks about reincarnation and continuation of consciousness. We wrap with Bob's reflections on the role of science in the contemplative space, and stick around till the end to hear Bob's parting fun fact.

(00:02:41) If you know Bob or his work, you know you'll be in for a bit of a wild ride here. I love Bob's energy and humor, and his depth of knowledge on these topics is amazing. You can tell we're only scratching the surface in this conversation. There's lots more in the show notes, including a link to Bob's own podcast, which is subtitled, *Buddhas Have More Fun*.

(00:03:03) I also need to mention that we've reached the end of yet another season of this show. We'll be off for a couple months making new episodes, and we look forward to being back in your feeds in

September. In the meantime, stay tuned to the Mind & Life Institute newsletter and social media for lots more at the intersection of science and contemplative wisdom. OK, I really hope you enjoy this chat. I think you will. It's my great pleasure to share with you Bob Thurman.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:03:35](#)): I'm joined today by Bob Thurman. Bob, thanks so much for being here.

Bob Thurman ([00:03:41](#)): Thank you, Wendy. It's very nice to be with you.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([00:03:44](#)): I'm really excited to talk to you about your new book, *Wisdom Is Bliss*, but I'd love to start first with a little bit of your personal story. So, could you share how you came to be interested in Buddhism originally?

Bob Thurman ([00:03:57](#)): Yes. Well, I was interested in Buddhism originally because I was told by two sides in my youthful education at St. Bernard's School in New York, which was like English type school, Latin in the third grade (I wish they'd done Greek in the third grade, although I would've howled had it happened), and then Exeter and so on... And I sort of discovered Buddhism in high school at Exeter.

([00:04:23](#)) The reason I liked it is because the religious people insisted I believe in God, which I didn't from youth, and I said it makes no sense to me—because it was a big compassion thing and loving God and all this, and then His son is hanging up there every day in the church, which I don't really enjoy seeing and I'm sure He didn't enjoy. So I think He was a bad dad, A. And B, and yet you say He's omnipotent, and it makes no sense to me. So why do you say that? "Well, because you can't know anything else, and it doesn't have to make sense to you, it makes sense to Him." And I said, "Well, if I'm ignorant, I presume you are ignorant too, because none of us humans can understand anything." He said, "That's right." I said, "Well, then why are you telling me something with such definite authority?" From little, I said that. "Don't you know the universe is infinite?" is what I always used to say, I don't know why. Former life, I think. Then therefore anything is possible. So you can't just say that, when you admit you don't really know, who are you repeating? What are you saying? So that I didn't like.

([00:05:32](#)) Then on the science side, which I did like, and actually I was horribly good at math. I just aced every math thing, like it was just effortlessly. And I hated it. I wanted to be a poet and a playwright and just I didn't want math, but that's the one thing I was really good at. But then the scientists on the other hand, they say you should be rational and you study this here and that... But you know, like Socrates, "The more you know, the more you don't know." And I didn't like that either. If you don't know, and if everybody doesn't know, why are they saying something that they think is really, you have to listen to?

([00:06:07](#)) So Buddhism, I learned from the beginning when I first noticed it, "Oh, you're supposed to experience nirvana. You're supposed to know the nature of reality." I sort of got that. Although I made it a little bit wrong, what the reality was, when I was early on. I was thinking nirvana was somewhere else, which I didn't mind, because I saw the mess in the world actually. Although I was also pretty happy I was the eight letter in at Exeter, Lacrosse, pounding people over the head and so on, and hockey and things like that. But on the other hand, I didn't think that the American triumphalism that I was inducted into in such schools (and including then later Harvard) was going to succeed actually. It looked wrong to me.

([00:06:57](#)) And at the senior year in high school with a Mexican friend on a dare, I left school to join as a mercenary, Fidel Castro's revolution at the age of 17, like an idiot. Luckily for me, they rejected me. They rejected us both. And in fact, they had a good laugh because I was 6'3" and quite skinny. And my friend

was 5'3" and was heavier than me, quite rotund. So they said, "Oh, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are coming to save the revolution!"

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:07:29): Oh my gosh. *[laughter]*

Bob Thurman (00:07:30): I didn't even know they were communists. I thought he was a poet. You know what I mean? I was so ignorant. But luckily... I would've been killed I'm sure if I had joined. At least that's what they told me. So then I went back and went on and went to Harvard and so on. But then I was very attracted to Buddhism. But on the other hand it was two tracked, because American culture, elite, blah, blah—impoverished gentry, my family, I wasn't wealthy. My family wasn't wealthy, but they had been. So I had to go to those schools and so on.

(00:08:00) So I would've maybe freaked out at 40 at whatever I was in, economics or whatever. But luckily (although very unluckily, I thought at the time), I lost my left eye in a garage accident, a completely foolish thing. But that gave me a midlife crisis at 20! And that's the right age to have it! *[laughter]* Because by that time I was a junior in Harvard approaching my senior year, but I didn't really take it seriously. In fact, I dropped out again and went to India. This time because, I told my wife at the time—I was married very young—I told my wife, let's go to India. And we've got to attain enlightenment in this life. We can't just run around with a college degree and this and that. And she freaked out, so we broke up, et cetera. She wasn't into it. So then I could identify with Shakyamuni. I left my wife et cetera, and went off to conquer the inner devil, the inner obstruction. And it was so lucky for me. Then I met the Tibetans, eventually after hiking to India—before they were hippies. There were no hippies. I was the first... And so most of the people in the Muslim world, as I hiked through there, and Asia, they thought I was a German, Wandervogel, because they'd never seen an American, impoverished and begging for lunch. Because I was trying to do it the "real way." They were awfully nice to me actually, the people were.

(00:09:26) And then I met the Tibetans, and then this and that. Then I studied for a year or two. And then I had to be a monk, but the old Mongolian, my original teacher said, "No, you're not going to be a monk. Long term, that's not your karma." I wouldn't listen. He then took me to the Dalai Lama to make me a monk. But he told Dalai Lama, that naughty man, "Don't make him a monk. He's very sincere. He already speaks Tibetan." (By that time I was fluent in Tibetan from living with him in New Jersey.) "He's very sincere and he loves the Dharma. But he's not going to be able to stay a monk—his karma. But you're the Dalai Lama, you decide. I'm an old Mongolian." Then His Holiness hesitated because of what he was told.

(00:10:14) But then we got to be so close, and in a way I was his first Mind & Life, but a very poor version. Because whatever I had gleaned at Harvard and Exeter and these places, he was getting me to download. And he didn't teach me directly, he would have me study with his teachers, because we were close in age—four or five, six years different. So we had this—I didn't even know how wonderful they were, just had that time with him, and make up all kinds of words for scientific terms, and the ego and whatever it was. And that while I was learning from the senior people as well. So that was a wonderful two years of studying Buddhism.

(00:10:55) And then sure enough, eventually when I came back to America as a monk, the civil rights movement, Vietnam war protests, the whole thing, all my peers out there struggling against the bad guys, and me being drawn into it. Then the Mongolian guy back at the original monastery in New Jersey where I started, he was saying, "You can't go out and march like a Vietnamese monk in these protests

and things from here, because we are not really well established in this country, and you either stay here or you have to live somewhere else."

(00:11:28) And then I realized there's no real monastery. That was a very ethnic Mongolian community, Tibetan monastery, but it wasn't really for Americans. I wasn't really suited to be a local priest for the Mongolians. So in a way, the sociological insight of my original teacher prevailed, and I reluctantly resigned my robes. And then I became a Western seeker, which is in the university. I became a seeker of truth and of reality in the university, so I could keep studying and then be a teacher. So I went back to Harvard, and then I got a PhD, and then I got a job.

(00:12:07) In that process, once a layperson, I fell in love with a wonderful woman who became my third big guru, major guru. After the Mongolian guy and His Holiness, she became my main guru actually. Learned a lot from her. Although she hasn't really accepted me as a graduate yet. She doesn't consider... She's Swedish, and she says that men come out of adolescence at around 60 or 70, and then they could mature by 80 or 90. *[laughter]* So I have another maybe decade if I can survive. Actually His Holiness ordered me to live to 104. Which means I'll make it to Ray Kurzweil's Singularity. That's 24 more years, because I'm just 80 now. So if I can make it to the Singularity, then I can be a robot maybe, and keep studying Buddhism as a robot. *[laughter]* So that's my story.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:13:03): Fantastic.

Bob Thurman (00:13:04): I've known his holiness for 57 years, and I love the guy. And actually in a way for the first decade or two, I had other older teachers, who he himself was studying with. And we were more like debate partners or something, a little bit. I deeply respected him. Although in a way, when I was a monk, I was really annoying because I said, "Look, you're a monk, why are you running the country? You should resign from all that, and then naturally everything will happen, because people will love you so much. And you'll be a great guru," and whatever, you know? And I was really, I imagine, insufferable, being a purist like that. Terrible. Lucky for them I didn't remain a monk. Really.

(00:13:45) So anyway, it's been wonderful. And I love Mind & Life because I'm really more, like in my book, you'll see that I'm into how Buddha was the scientist, how Buddha was an educator, not really a prophet. And of course, Max Weber and all the great sociologists of religion, people like that, they always can't quite fit Buddhism in because there's no God. It's not belief. I think even they translated noble truths as "truths" because they were thinking, this is a religion. They've got to have a credo, or something they believe in.

(00:14:19) But the Four Noble Truths—or the four, as I call them, Friendly Facts—are not to be believed in. They are to be dealt with in different ways. They're to be acknowledged (the first one), to be understood (the second one), to be experienced and realized (the third one), and to be traveled on and practiced (the fourth one). So the belief is not actually, necessarily the big thing. So therefore it doesn't fit, in modern social scientific definitions of religion, Buddhism really doesn't fit. Except for the laity, in illiterate old fashioned societies, where they just believe that whatever Buddha and the monks are doing is good and then they just support it out of faith. And they just have faith. They don't have really a reason for that, except that they're nice people. And on the other hand, they're not encouraged, however, to have blind faith. And they're not encouraged into idolatry, as Westerners and Muslims thought when they saw all the Buddha statues, and they're not. They know perfectly well, that's just a statue. It's like a photo in your wallet of your daughter or something. It's not the daughter. They know that. So they're not doing idolatry. But in a way you could say they're a little bit religious. His Holiness

agrees with me, he said, one sixth maybe. We agreed, we kind of came to agreement. Maybe it's one sixth religion, Buddhism.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:15:30): *[laughter]* How did you figure that out?

Bob Thurman (00:15:32) Well, because if you take Buddhism, and what is known as practice Buddhism or realizational Buddhism. And the first one is the higher education in ethics. And then there's the higher education in mind, which is where meditation comes in. Then there's the higher education in wisdom, which is not meditation at all. It is knowing what is reality, your own inner reality and also external reality, material reality, they don't deny the importance of material reality. So two out of three are nothing to do with religion, you know? And the meditation one, you could say, if you say half of it is analytic, it's simply creating a more powerful analytic instrument for research, which is the wisdom part. So it's reinforcing the wisdom. And then you say, well, half of it is like one-pointedness, into a good direction even maybe before you fully understood what is the good direction. So OK, there, you have just a fixation of the mind on something hopefully good. And that you could say is religious, in a sense. That it doesn't require right away experience. (It will lead to it, but it doesn't require it.) So that's the one sixth, you follow? You divide one of the thirds, the meditation part, and you use the shamatha part of that. And you say the shamatha and also the thematic part where you're just inculcating compassion or something, which is not having to do with understanding. So the ethics is not religion, it's practical. And the wisdom is science, totally.

(00:17:05) And therefore in that light, the famous "emptiness" is not a mystical thing. What emptiness really means is relativity. Everything is interconnected. That's what it really means. What is empty is all of these humanoid, projected false absolutes into everything. Like, God is the absolute, or this dogma is the absolute, or that dogma is the absolute. Or what materialists have fallen into without realizing it is, nothing is the absolute—or nothingness is the absolute. Where they're going to go when they die, they're going to join that absolute. Because the human tendency is to project absolutes, stemming from the human sickness—from Buddha's psychological analysis—of thinking that the self is a fixed, absolute thing. And therefore its relations to things is problematic. So the idea of the absolute soul or mind (and Buddhism doesn't really even deny either soul or mind, but just an absolute one is the only thing it denies). So that's what everything is empty of, an absolute core reality, projected from the human who thinks they're absolute. Like me, me, me... We've seen a few of them lately in the news.

(00:18:21) So that always was my view, so I therefore love Mind & Life. And also, although I might be critical of scientific materialism, I love scientific materialists. I just wish they could be released from that dogma, which has trapped them, I feel. But on the other hand, I know that they needed that dogma for about 300 years—to escape from all of those horrible inquisitions and Protestant, Puritan, orthodox, fanatic theologians and people like that—to have the Western enlightenment. But that enlightenment fits into the Buddhist one, in my opinion. I know that some of my fellow translators nowadays are freaking me out, because they don't like the word enlightenment. They insist on everything's awakening. They're only going to say awakening, awakening, awakening. And that's not correct. That's only half of enlightenment. The other half is expanding knowledge over every relational thing in order to be able to help people effectively. And that's just like what the Western enlightenment was trying to do—observing nature and seeing it as a reality (even though it's with some illusory elements), but trying to rearrange it in the best possible way for everybody else.

(00:19:36) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:20:05): So this is interesting—it's making me think, again, in your book you present the Buddha as a scientist. And you talk a lot about science. I would love to hear more about... Is that kind of what you were just talking about, in terms of investigating?

Bob Thurman (00:20:20) Yeah. So, therefore, that's a physical discovery, the discovery of total relativity. Einstein even remains, there was a kind of absolute, which is the speed of light, because at that point, mass becomes infinite, which is to say light is everywhere. So then nothing can exist beyond that. And so that makes an absolute sort of boundary to his relativized universe, which he could never come up with a grand unified theory about. He couldn't bring gravity into it. And as was brilliant and wonderful as he was, he was totally great, but he was constrained by materialism. And then he was reduced to leaving loose ends, like "spooky action at a distance" when those two atomic particles spin suddenly and they seem to be affecting each other at an inconceivably huge separation. There's no way of explaining it, because the speed of connecting is not there; it's instantaneous.

(00:21:17) Whereas mind wouldn't have that problem, because mind can instantaneously traverse distances and so forth supposedly. And actually in a way, mind is physical, although His Holiness never wants to let the materialist know. *[laughter]* Buddhist philosophy is so truly Popperiate, and Buddhist science, that it never wants to say, for the highest level of it, that it's all mind. Some people will say, if you listen to some Buddhist teachers even, "Oh yeah, it's all mind." No, they won't agree with that. But they say, it's great for a certain moment in your progress. You should stick with "it's all mind" if it keeps you on the ball, and ethical, and connected to causation of a certain kind. But ultimately if you take either mind or matter, where it's not the opposite of the other, all meaning and language is relational and dualistic, then it has no meaning. If you say it's all matter, then matter doesn't mean anything; it's just a matter of subtlety. If you say it's all mind, then mind doesn't mean anything. Because mind is practically material in some cases, if you follow me.

(00:22:27) So that's the Prasangika one, which is really more alert to using the dualism in the illusory level of the world, where people are caught suffering, to the maximum effect non-dualistically—which sounds paradoxical and it is paradoxical, but it's not an unencompassable. It's understandable, actually. So therefore, for example, karma. Buddha is celebrated, and the one mantra that's like the epitome of Buddhism: "Of all those things that arise from causes, the realized one says what are those causes, and also how to interfere with them, or how to terminate them." And that is the teaching of the great "vacationer," I call it. People usually translate it as the great aesthetic because he left the household life, his family and kingdom and throne and everything. But actually he was having more fun without the property and without the whole thing, actually. In other words, he was more fulfilled and more blissful. The household is a kind of job.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:23:34): I've always actually wondered that. Can I ask you... The Buddha left his family life and all that.

Bob Thurman (00:23:40): Yes.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:23:41): So, was he walking out on his responsibilities?

Bob Thurman (00:23:46): Well, yes. Depending on how you define them. Yes. His father said to him, you can't do that, and actually locked him up, because he said your duty is to be a king and so forth. And Buddha debated his father and he said, "Well, why is it my duty to be a king? Why are you a king?" He asked his father. "Well, protect people and see their prosperity and all this." He said, "Okay, health,

education, and welfare. I agree. But actually I noticed that people get sick anyway, they die, they grow old, and that really bothers them. And I think I can do something about their true problems, not some surface thing and fighting some war, being commander in chief. So I'm going to serve them at a deeper level. I'm confident I can," he said.

(00:24:29) And the dad of course didn't believe that, he didn't know what was a Buddha, he wasn't one lately around. And so, he locked him up. And then he escaped, right? Then he comes back and then his wife becomes enlightened. His foster mother becomes enlightened. Even his father becomes an arhat. It's you know, what they call arhat. They don't become Buddhas right away, but they all become much happier than they were just in the household. And he doesn't have to wage war on people. There are some wars that go on around him, which he can't stop, but maybe he had a plan, long term. Maybe we reached a point now on the planet—on his planet, that he took responsibility for. He also didn't leave. Parinirvana doesn't mean final nirvana as they translate it. Pari only means total; thorough nirvana. So thorough Nirvana means being everywhere, present in every subatomic molecule, every cell of the universe. And empathetically one with every being, and therefore automatically helping them out of their suffering. Sort of like God, actually, except no creator, he didn't create it. Didn't create their problems. And therefore it's the maximum help for them. But that's the Mahayana vision, you know. And I hope it's true. And I'm still not absolutely sure, of course—I could be crazy, and they all could have been crazy all these thousands of years, but I don't think so. So that way, he was doing a higher duty.

(00:25:58) And the typical example, the story I love, is when he came back at some point to his home nation, and was teaching everyone and they were all loving it. Ruining their military, actually—he'd already been ruining it, because the father kept sending soldiers to persuade him to come back many times, and then they'd always join up with him, because there was such a great vibe, internal openness and blissfulness. They wouldn't come back, he kept losing them. So then more was happening when he came back. But the one person who didn't go to hear him was his ex-wife, Yaśodharā. She didn't go. And actually when he left, even she complained not that he left, "He didn't take me with him!" She was ready to dump the kid too, on all the many foster mothers and grandmothers and whatever it was, to go with him. Like, "I want to seek enlightenment, what is this crap?" I always think actually, secretly, she's really the one who told him (because otherwise it's too stupid, he didn't know about being sick or growing old. Do you know what I mean? That's really too dumb. He wasn't that dumb. He was super smart.) But I think she made him take a look at the seamy side, past the Potemkin village the father had him living in. I'm sure of it. Because women always know what is going on outside the door, and the back room and everywhere. They know everything. Men are like arghhh, charging off some place all the time. That's the problem with them.

(00:27:26) Anyway, she wouldn't come. Fine. And she wouldn't let her son Rāhula come, and he was getting more frustrated. "Everybody loves dad, he's teaching the great thing! I wanna go. I wanna go." And he's bugging her. "No, you can't go see your father." So finally he said, "Look, mom, I'm going. You can't stop me. I got to go see my dad. He's a great teacher. I want learn what he wants to say." She said, "Okay, alright, I'll give you permission." She said, "But on one condition. Ask him for your inheritance. You promise me." "All right, mom I'll do that." Of course, he [the Buddha] was a beggar. He was a bhikshu, a mendicant. Someone who has to beg their lunch. Only lunch—free lunch, no free dinner, no breakfast, just lunch.

(00:28:11) And so then he goes, and he has a great time listening to Buddha. Buddha's teaching something really, just his mind, the doors are opening in his mind, like wonderful. Then at the end, people are leaving and he sort of goes up, says, "Uh, Shakyamuni, sir... Dad... You know, you're my dad."

"Oh great, Rāhula!" he says. Then he says, "I apologize for this. I don't mean to be rude, but Mom insisted. I promised Mom I would ask you... Can I have my inheritance please?" And so then so Buddha said, "You want your inheritance?" "Yes, Dad." And then he says, "Come here mendicant." And of course some deities or spirits shaved him and changed his clothes. But then when he came into the shadow of the Buddha, he came to where the sun didn't hit him anymore, in the shadow of the Buddha, he did attain nirvana. He became an arhat. Because he had that sort of karma, why he chose them as parents, and so on. So then Buddha says, "How is that for an inheritance?" *[laughter]*

(00:29:23) And so then they had to inform the mom. So then Buddha went to see the mom, who lost her layman son for a happy nirvanic son. Of course, she was herself—I mean, in the Mahayana, they see them all as kind of already bodhisattvas who came with Buddha to enact this story—in the autobiography of the Buddha, which is the Mahayana sutra called the Lalitavistara (which literally means the greatest show on earth, like a circus), she also became an arhat.

(00:29:55) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:30:13): So in your book, I love how you present the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. And that's a topic that comes up from time to time on this show, but I don't think we've actually ever gone through them on this show. So, I love how you approach them, because you call them the Four Friendly Fun Facts, instead of the Four Noble Truths. Can you describe why you call them that, and then maybe we can go through them?

Bob Thurman (00:30:36): Yes, exactly. Well, I call them the Four Friendly Facts because a friendly person is someone who empathizes with you. That is to say they have some degree of empathy and therefore altruism, because they see your perspective in things. They're not just only in their own shoes all the time. They put themselves in your shoes, see things from your point of view. So automatically, that's a friendly person. And that's what he meant by "noble" in the ancient time. He was changing from a class—because he was shattering the class system actually, or he was putting holes in it. I call him the Swiss cheese-ification of the monistic society, creating holes for people to have mobility other than by war. That's what his job was, he thought, to help people. So that's the "friendly."

(00:31:23) And then the "fact" is, challenging the term truth, because truth can be a reality, but it can also be a proposition about reality. Religions have credos and dogmas and unquestionable truths that you have to believe in, whether they make sense to you or not. So I think that's why that word has that ambiguity. So fact, I think is more like it. Because it really it's a medical diagnosis, is what it is. Buddha looks at the human beings, and he sees them as having a certain dis-ease or uneasiness as someone I know translates it. They're all kind of uneasy for this reason that they're wired to think that their own drive of existence is absolute. That's their absolute. And then they have a dualistic binary language. So absolute is the opposite of relative. It's the real important ultimate thing, the absolute.

(00:32:18) And so he noticed that, so this is his prescription. So that's the hardest one, is the first one. His noticing of the symptom, which is that we suffer. And what's fun about that, as Sharon Salzberg asked me for example, but then I could just point to her own book on *Faith*, if you ever read it, you realize that one of the things that attracted her to Buddhism was she had suffered a lot as a child, very difficult family situation, et cetera, et cetera. And she was delighted that it was normal that you should suffer. It made her happy to feel well, I'm not the only one who's suffering here. That everyone is. That was a fun fact for her, to discover that was normal for her state, and that that could be corrected. That made it fun.

(00:33:06) But it's not fun you see... It's not a fact for a self-centered person who keeps thinking, well, I didn't enjoy this that much, because it ended. This pleasure that I had. And also it isn't as good as the one that could be, if I was in another circumstance, if I was a famous person, if I was a billionaire, if I had 10 wives, instead of one, if I had 10 husbands instead of one. All kinds of things. And the really self-centered person who's wrapped around their absolute really strongly, never enjoys anything. But they think they're going to. "When I'm president, then I'll be really happy." Give me a break! And their hair turns gray in a week if they're not dying it, if they have any real hair.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:33:48): That made me think of a line in your book that I just loved, that you said something like, "Isn't it funny how everybody is anxious, but they feel safe being miserable."

Bob Thurman (00:34:00): Yes. Well that's me—Protestant ethic, Presbyterian, supposed to be. I mean, I never... My mom even told me when I became a Buddhist monk for a while. My mom told me, "Oh, I should have known. When we took you to be christened, you kicked up such a fuss in that Presbyterian church." You know, Presbyterians, they don't like rich ritual. So they have a little tiny dish there, like an urn, a thing with little legs with water in it. And I kicked it over and drenched the priest! And then he kind of rung out a few drops, was a flailing feet because I was having a fit for some reason, she said. So that was what you were saying. But on the other hand, I consider myself baptized many times. I love Jesus. I think He's Buddha, actually. We think Jesus is a Buddha, and maybe misunderstood a little bit by some. More like people who, according to some mystic that I know cries when they make war in His name, like, "Onward Christian soldiers." Because he taught the Beatitudes, which is the Dharma, like non-violence. But anyway, so that's the first friendly fun fact is, if you're self centered and very stuck in the mis-knowing and thinking yourself absolute, and infinite numbers of other beings don't agree with you, *[laughter]* that you're the absolute, it's very frustrating. And your own body doesn't agree. Like, you have a little pleasure in some way, but then it ends, and then you compare it to what you imagined and then it's no good. So worldly happiness or ignorant happiness being the suffering of change, because it doesn't last. So that's the first one.

(00:35:41) Then the second one is the diagnosis. Why is it like that? Well, it's like that because you mis-know. It's not just that you don't know, it's that you mis-know, because you think I'm the one. Like Neo, I'm the one, I'm the absolute. And then nobody agrees, except mom temporarily, feeds you milk at the breast. And after that, forget about it. So the analysis is you are not in the real world, so you have to understand why that is so, and you have to work on replacing it.

(00:36:15) And then comes the prognosis. Well, if you do, if you substitute wisdom for mis-knowing or mis-knowledge, ignorance, but more actively mis-knowledge, if you substitute wisdom, you're going to be in nirvana. All your suffering will cease. And then the big misunderstanding of that prognosis is that you have to quit life for that to happen. And he even allows that to some people, the dualistic Buddhist is what we call, because they can't imagine being totally blissful in the midst of it all. Still in the thick of it, for the sake of others, they can't imagine that. So then, "Oh, I don't believe that. That's hopeless." And then they become very disillusioned, and there's no hope for them. So he let them think that, but he just was very careful not to make it too clear. When they would ask, "What happens to me after nirvana?" "Well, you just attain it and you'll find out. Don't speculate." In other words, he wouldn't quite say that. So then that's the prognosis, is the human form. And this relates to his own theory of evolution, his own Darwinian theory, which was not an ordinary theory in India at that time, as I will explain to you. And his theory, the human life form is the ideal life form to really realize that nirvana. Because gods are smarter (some of them)—they were humans, and they did really good things and they

became gods. But the problem with them becomes, then, they get very complacent. Because they have very long lives. They have a lot of worldly pleasures, like really extreme in the way they describe it. And long lives and they think they're going to be like that forever. And it's just so cool. And like, why bother? They sort of maybe know everything is relative, but they don't want to think about it, until it's too late. Whereas the human has that same level of intelligence—enough to investigate reality, and is vulnerable, and sees the harsher ways of living, then doesn't want to fall back into them. So it's ideal.

[\(00:38:21\)](#) Then the fourth Noble Truth is the therapy, and it's the three higher educations. And they are higher educations. They are not just trainings. Everybody insists on translating them trainings, three higher trainings. Why do they do that? Because they have their PhDs and they have their BAs and their MAs. And they think of themselves as highly educated and they're still totally miserable. And they're just freaked out, and they don't know what's going on still. So then they think education is useless. Let's meditate. And then all that education didn't do me any good. Well, maybe that's the Western arrogance. If our education didn't do it, nobody's did. Well, I'm sorry. Europe and China and Korea, North East Asia and Europe were way backward compared to Persia and India, especially India. They were the richer areas, Eurasia you know.

[\(00:39:16\)](#) So anyway, so that's the Four Friendly Facts. And they're all fun because it's fun to know what's causing your problem. It's fun to realize that the problem is normal. You weren't taught, you didn't know, you didn't understand. It's fun to be encouraged that you can understand and that when you can, that really has a great benefit to you. And then on top of that, the non-dual version of it, what we would think of is a little more advanced, that you can keep that nirvana and be totally engaged with other beings, all your beloved ones. And by intensifying your memory, by developing much higher intelligence, you are aware of your former life inter-relations with all of them. Everybody was your mom. Everybody was your beloved. (They were your enemies too, but why harp on that?) Because of beginning-lessness of the illusory relative life. So you kind of love all of them, and you effortlessly feel that. And what is love? What makes you able to love them and be compassionate for them, is that you feel so good in the release of nirvana, you feel so ecstatic, and you see that they have that potential. Even somewhere deep inside, they do feel it. Even I would say the essence of Ayurveda and all Indian medicine and particularly the Buddhist version of Ayurveda, people's health is their inner bliss. That is their health. That's what holds the cells together. That's what gives them strength. And any party pooper like a tumor or something, they're not going to tolerate it. "No, no, get out, you go back and be nice. Fit in to our community." And then when they get really unhappy, weird, and they lose complete track of their inner bliss, then they kind of become vulnerable to that, in a way.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:41:08\)](#): Interesting.

Bob Thurman [\(00:41:09\)](#): In some deep level, core way. I mean, not... Of course, we live in a soup of toxicity of our distorted industrial confusion. We do. So the body, it's a miracle that we do so well, actually, in the middle of it all.

[\(00:41:23\)](#) – *musical interlude* –

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:41:42\)](#): Can I ask, you were speaking about changing your understanding through the three educations. In your book you talk about the first one as having... Well, first of all, you call them realistic instead of, what's normally translated as the "right" way.

Bob Thurman (00:42:02): That's right! I got it from Alan Wallace. I give Alan Wallace the attribution. I saw that in some book he wrote, but then he removed himself. He doesn't use it that anymore. He goes back to right and wrong. But he did use it in some book, I don't remember which one. But oh, when I saw that, Alan got it there. And then it grew on me more and more, and then I really think that's the best.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:42:25): Yeah, I love removing the right and wrong ideas of it. But anyway, so the first is realistic worldview. And you reflect in your book how the later ones are more about meditation and transforming the mind, and how you kind of wanted to just do that right away, and jump into that. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Bob Thurman (00:42:50): That's right. Well, I was 21 years old by then, and I missed my friends and I missed my ex, and I missed my daughter and I missed things. And then the Vietnam war, and the racists were killing the civil rights merchants, beating them up, the mid '60s. So the idea that there was this place of bliss to be found, and that the four immeasurables—love, compassion, joy, and equanimity—and that we sort of could leave the old body behind with all its worries and woes. Then it sort of popped, it seemed effortless to me and I just wanted to go there. And he just kept interrupting me, my early teacher. He clearly was clairvoyant. He would catch me at three in the morning in my own bedroom, in the little monastery that we built there. And he'd knock on the door or just open it and say, "Let's grab some yogurt. Why aren't you sleeping?" I maybe would run away and go in the woods someplace a little bit, and he'd find me. He'd pretend he was walking the dog at three in the morning *[laughter]* and he'd find me and say, "What are you doing over here? The neighbors will think we're crazy, and you'll be arrested. And they'll think everyone in the monastery is mad. You're out in the middle of the night." Whenever I would get just at that point almost of slipping out into the immeasurable, immense love vibe and going into the form realm and sublimating that bliss of being a monk—because I lived as a monk, before I was a monk. That's why I wanted to have robes and actually have it sort of sealed. For a few years after I left my family. He would just interrupt that and, "Oh no!" And I would get so upset.

(00:44:25) And then even after I became a monk and came back from India, at some point, temporarily I was going to go back to India when I could figure out how to finance it. And he would still do that. He even came and he said—the one I remember that I tell as a story—I was a monk and I was, three in the morning with a candle in the temple, quietly meditating. And he comes in, turns on the lights. And he says, "What are you doing?" And I say, "What do you mean, what am I doing? Of course I'm meditating. I'm a Buddhist monk." He says, "Oh, why are you meditating?" I said, "Well, I want to attain enlightenment, of course." He says, "Oh, you can't attain enlightenment. You're an American!" He says. *[laughter]* So then I said, "I don't care if I'm an American by birth." I said, "I totally know about former and future life. I'm totally into it. I totally know about the mind."

(00:45:15) He says, "No, no, no." He said, "What gets enlightened is the mind." He says, "And you guys grow up and you are conditioned to think there's no such thing. You're just this biological thing." I mean, he didn't add that second part. He just said, "You don't have one. So therefore you can't become enlightened." "No," I argued "that's not me, blah, blah, blah." Went on for weeks, that argument again. Then finally I kind of did realize that I too, it's like, I don't believe so and so bended the fork, you know what I mean? Because that's our conditioning, we grew up. That's the consensus reality around us. We don't believe in miracles, we don't. Now 50 years later, 60 years later, I'm almost getting to where I'm open minded. Theoretically I was always open minded to a miracle, but on a visceral level, I never really believed in one. I did not.

[\(00:46:14\)](#) So I did not believe in the definition of a Buddha's... The immense, and then nowadays I would call it theistic, nature of a Buddha, which is this Dharmakaya body, body of all reality. Imagine that, if you suddenly felt you were the house, the wall behind you, the painting, me, everybody you know, everybody in Charlottesville, everybody in America, everybody and other planets as well. And you were this vast cloud of awareness. And you totally knew it. And the good part, you saw everybody had a core awareness of relativity and therefore causation. And therefore they only held it together because there was this sort of invisible to their normal being, a feeling of well-being in that relativity, a feeling that all is possible, somewhere deep in them. But not as the static thing, but just that was the nature of the inter-relatedness because the Buddhas are in every one of us in other words. It's like the pantheistic heresy, from a Western theological point of view, of projecting an absolute being outside of the universe. That's considered a heresy. But this is a God who didn't create our problem, but is maximum in trying to help us out of it.

[\(00:47:35\)](#) And in the Mahayana Sutras, if you read them, the Sutras... The Abhidharma is the wisdom side, the organized teaching. The Sutras, which are Buddha's own direct... sort of the presence of the Buddha comes through the Sutras, from his speech and also the setting around him and so on. And then that's the meditation one. So it's like all the Sutras are like guided meditations. So they kind of create a different culture in the mind if one reads them very, very extensively as now it's probably has become somewhat possible in English.

[\(00:48:08\)](#) But then let's go back to the ethics one, because that's where evolution comes in. The Buddhist are total evolutionaries or evolutionists—more radical than Darwin—because in addition to the genetic thing, there's also the individual, what I would call the mental gene, the third gene, with the third bunch of chromosomes that has to fit the two of the mother and father. And the third one comes from through the Bardo, through the between state, and matches that, and therefore is attracted to either the male or the female, et cetera, the way they explain it. Although all of their scientific explanations are purely Popperian, because they say there's no absolute theory. All theories are relative, about the relative. And therefore they're all in a context more or less valid and useful for beings to understand what's happening around them. The only one that's sort of very rigorous, you could say, is the negation of emptiness, or freedom, or...

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:49:17\)](#): What does that mean—negation?

Bob Thurman [\(00:49:19\)](#): Well, when you look, if someone says, is there an elephant in your room? And then you look around for the elephant. And then you don't find an elephant in the room. And then you didn't find the non-elephant, because there's no such thing; you just didn't find the elephant. So in other words, the negative cognition is a mind opening sort of thing. Because then you're aware of what else is in the room. You're not worried that there's an elephant in there any longer. And anyway, it's always imperfect, there could be a little mini elephant or somebody's charm bracelet with a little mini elephant. You know what I mean, it could be. But there's a sort of limit to how much you can examine. But when you do, then your mind opens from a negation.

[\(00:49:59\)](#) So the negation is the negation of these falsely projected absolutes. Not only in ourselves, but once we have it in ourselves, which is the root of it, we project it into the table, like Plato, there's a table that is an absolute form, which is instantiate in the table, blah, blah, blah. There's always some sort of essential thing. And that's a human habit. It isn't necessarily just a philosophical mistake. It's a human habit, and in a way is describing what people do do.

(00:50:28) And the modern one where they don't do that is all great, but what they didn't realize is they still have the habit, and they project it into nothingness. And they think that's... In other words, if right now you and me, if we were sort of being really frank about what our mind is—we may have some other bunch of beliefs we would like to be entertaining—but we might think, well, if everything was disassembled about us (like Daniel Dennett or one of those materialists, or Pinker, took every piece apart), and then some quantum guy shattered even the subatomic particles, and came up with some statistical probabilities about it, we would think, well, it ends up in a dark space. We sort of have a picture in our mind of there being a dark space. Because if we fall asleep, it's dark and we snore there. The cemeteries are called heavenly rest. So we would think that's where we end up. So in a way that's sort of our final, what we're reduced to, as if it's something. So actually that's an absolutizing of nothing as if it were something, which is actually a bit wacky. Don't you think? *[laughter]*

(00:51:33) You know, I'm so indoctrinated in it myself, it took me 40 years of debating with my natural science colleagues to realize that the simple termination of it, to open their minds to think more about it is—not necessarily winning, but just opening their mind—is, which person got the Nobel Prize for discovering the nothing that awaits you at death? Who got it? Carl Sagan got it? Who came back and testified, "I had the empirical experience of nothing." Who did that? Then at first they start calculating, thinking. They think about some mathematician maybe, who came up with some treatment of the zero... And actually the Indians developed the zero, invented it, not the Arabs, the Indians. And the word shunya, emptiness, is the same word for zero in Indian mathematics, by the way. And as a notation system, of course, the nothing of the zero is like the point on a Cartesian graph. It has no size. It has a function in conceptual reality. Sure. But in reality, it's not there. That point is not there, in two or three or four dimensions. There's no point, just like there's no instantaneous present moment. Because the instantaneous present one has no duration. So there's no "now" to be here now in, in fact, you know?

(00:52:54) So anyway, and that's a negation. And that one, if pursued analytically with anything that... Because what our mind will do is, anything we entertain in the mind, we'll see it as if it was a substantially real thing. Made with its own real core essence. And so that's when then the shamatha comes and empowers the vipassana, and the vipassana drills down into that—with the diamond drill, as they say—and it drills into it and then it just goes apart, and it doesn't withstand analysis. It's a negation. And then the last danger, because then there's a feeling of release when that thing is not there, especially when you're going inward to the so-called self.

Wendy Hasenkamp (00:53:39): Right, that's what I wanted to ask about.

Bob Thurman (00:53:41): Yes. There's a feeling of release, vast space and they talk about spacing out, and vast space and Paramatman, the Hindus talk about supreme self. And Buddhists also have expression of supreme self—supreme self of selflessness. They combine that too because that also is a self, it's an experience. And there's a danger of being trapped there because, apparently, when you fully achieve it, it doesn't seem like a relational experience. It seems like you've hit the absolute, and that's what you wanted. But in fact, there was the time before you were not there, which you forget about, but if you have really strong vipassana and if you have strong realistic worldview, and what's called the Royal Reason of Relativity, then you won't forget about it. You'll realize, since I'm experiencing this, but not in words at that stage, or even you'll be in space and well, which is west, east, west, north, south, up, down in this space? And then the space will disappear. And the disappearance will disappear. And then who's there but Wendy Hasenkamp? *[laughter]* Smiling happily in Charlottesville, Virginia, in her happy job, talking to lots of fun people. That's wonderful.

[\(00:54:56\)](#) – musical interlude –

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:54:56\)](#): So this process of going inward with this negation, countering the essentialism... I assume that's kind of the most important or core process or realization to go through in these—is the understanding of the self as not essential?

Bob Thurman [\(00:55:38\)](#): It is a very core experience. But the thing about it though is, that it has that danger that I said. That then one can absolutize, it's can be sort of where the projection becomes final. In other words, it's ultimate psychosis in a way also. It's a mystical psychosis of, it's just all one and it's all me, but actually I don't feel guilty leaving everybody out because I'm everybody, but they're also the same as me. They're not here either. So I'm not here and they're not here and it's all one, and it's great and no more problem. And we can't bump into each other because we're all not here!

[\(00:56:17\)](#) So even though that's a blowout experience, yes, it's still not nirvana. Therefore, before it, that's why His Holiness—what is Buddhism? Compassion. The bodhisattva thing is essential, because that is somehow your vow, and your connectedness to everybody, and all your mothers and all your beloveds, and your will that they also enjoy total freedom. And that vow, you could say, projects through the spaciousness and the releasedness of that. And it pushes you to probe even the feeling of freedom. And then you can become free of that freedom (is the only way of putting it.).

[\(00:57:04\)](#) And then that takes you to a point sort of beyond clear cut, yes/no binary rationality. It takes you to a place where, as F. Scott Fitzgerald said, great guru of mine—the sign of a great mind is the ability to encompass two opposing facts without crushing themselves, without collapsing one into the other, and hold them both simultaneously. So you could say Buddha is the ultimate tolerance of cognitive dissonance.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:57:41\)](#): Wow. How true that would be today.

Bob Thurman [\(00:57:44\)](#): It's something like that. And the cognitive dissonance is the compassion side, and connecting back with those who are stuck in the embodiment. Then all of those statements in Buddhism of "no more birth" are reinterpreted, meaning no more involuntary birth. Then you can create a new you. You can find it, you can even go through the process of finding a good mom, and performing what I call the ultimate Buddhist astronaut achievement, a "womb shot." *[laughter]* A successful womb shot, and landing in a new body. Although if you go in some areas, you can also just be born by apparition, they say. If you don't want to go through that process.

Wendy Hasenkamp [\(00:58:34\)](#): So a lot of what you're sharing is based... it kind of assumes this belief in reincarnation or continuation of consciousness between bodies or lives. So what would you say to those who don't have that worldview?

Bob Thurman [\(00:58:52\)](#): Right. Well, the first thing I would say to them is what I said before, which is you only go on what you know empirically, and you don't push dogmas and theories that are beyond falsification or confirmation. So we don't push former and future life like that, at all. If you can't confirm it, then forget about it. Dalai Lama always says, "Oh, forget about it, that's not your business. That's my business." And he talks to you, he's like just really letting you off the hook, way too easy actually. But the point is, that's fine. You have to find it, the plausibility of it.

(00:59:25) But then on the other hand you have to put the shoe on the other foot. You have to question the implausibility of holding out a specific form of very subtle energy which is your consciousness, which you traced all kinds of lightning bolts, mini super subtle lightning bolts, splattering around in the neurons in your brain. And you trace it, but that's all energy. Then even if it formulates itself into a cognition, which you think maybe that's an illusion. Well, it's all illusion. I mean, maybe it's all illusion, but the point is it's energy. And you have your law of thermodynamics, of there's no destruction of energy. So why are you accepting this one, and you have no reason to do it. You have not had an empirical experience of nothing. And you cannot have that actually, if you think just for two minutes A, B, C. No one can experience nothing. There's no experience of nothing. There can be experience of a simulation, and a projection of a dark space. Yes, you can call that nothingness, but that's not nothing. It's an experience. So since nobody discovered it, it's not really a foundation of science. It's just a dogma of materialism that you're stuck with. Which was good, because you escaped from your fear of hell. You know, Descartes and those guys, they didn't deal with what poor Galileo had to deal with. So the point is, you have no empirical basis of that. So you have to question it—that's one.

(01:00:50) But then two, I appreciate that you got there, because you discovered so many great things by looking at the Book of Nature. And that's great, but you didn't find "nothing" among the things in the Book of Nature. You did not find that. And pretending that you did is a new kind of dogmatism on your part. You have a new kind of inquisition there, with Asimov and Sagan and whatever you call it, just destroying some physicists out of tenure, because they think there might be a vital... Or Helmholtz, who destroyed Goethe because of saying there's a vital principle in the universe. And so, you have to bag that—two.

(01:01:25) And then three, you also are wonderful and you are brave, in that you feel you are very brave to be not afraid to be nothing. You think we people, the vast majority of humanity who expects to continue in some form, you feel they're all childish and they just want to always keep their ice cream in next life, and so on and so on. Whereas actually, anybody who really thinks they might have another life, who believes in it like you believe in the throughway—it's not a mystical thing at all, it's just that common sense of people who believe in it. And you think they're just childish, but people who believe in that are scared of that, because they don't know where they're going to be and what code of life they're going to have. They might be born in some horrible state, and they're scared of it.

(01:02:06) But here's the thing. Because you consider it takes courage to accept nothing, that shows that subliminally, your deepest unconscious mind knows that continuity is the rule in nature. Nobody's scared of the darkness in the alien movie when you're walking down the dark spaceship of the alien. You're only scared of an alien that might jump out at you. So the fact that you're scared of nothing, whereas when your tooth is being drilled, you want insensitivity, you want anesthesia. When you're having an open heart operation, you want to be knocked out, 100%. So that's not scary, please do it. You don't like pain. That means that you subliminally know for a fact, contrary to your dogma, that you can expect continuity by common sense. And as a scientist, you should not bracket common sense. Don't tell me just because particles behave weirdly, that common sense is not reliable. Common sense at the deepest level is highly reliable.

(01:03:13) I hope many of the people listening are scientists, and I hope they haven't freaked out already. But anyway, think about who found nothing, and you should stay calm.

Wendy Hasenkamp (01:03:23): Thinking way back to our discussion of the Buddha as a scientist, and now talking about how science shows up today, with a lot of materialism, and all of this. And then of

course science engaging with these worlds of meditation, and the whole study of meditation from a scientific perspective. I'm just wondering what you think of as the role of science in this whole space right now?

Bob Thurman (01:03:49): The role of science is to produce wisdom, which is bliss. Which is the bliss that will save us. And people finding it in themselves, and when they do then their intelligence increases, and their compassion increases automatically, because the root of compassion is wisdom. And reason. Wisdom in the illusory level is reason, up to a point. It doesn't cast reason aside initially because then you're just stuck in the original mis-knowing. So it's sophisticated and complicated and every scientist should be well trained as a philosopher actually, which means they have to study Nagarjuna and such people, rather than only Plato and Wittgenstein and Richard Rorty. But Richard Rorty is reaching there, totally—but not quite, because of the materialism. Because that's a taboo, that's like inquisitorial, it keeps you out of the inquisition, if you accept that as card carrying. And that's a mistake, that's imprisoning science. So science is all important. And even material is science, what they are discovering is very important. Nobody is saying it isn't. But then where are they going once they get there?

(01:05:06) Also I want to say about Mind & Life, the science people who learn about meditating are all important. Even though, like my teacher interrupting me, if you don't develop some philosophical clarity about causality and relativity ahead of time—which automatically begins to erode the shell of self-absolutizing, as it surrounds your deep inner energy of good feeling, that is your health and your vitality, which those people all have—it enforces that shell too much. So therefore, to just really only go for only one point, and not back and forth, and not do compassion and not do other things, is maybe not so good. But also just doing even any of this most superficial level of mindfulness is good, because they'll find their common sense. Because they are smart people. And so a little bit of calming their mind down, noticing what's going on within the mind, becoming a little bit able to not just do immediate things, charging ahead. So the scientists and the Mind & Life, it's no wonder His Holiness loves it so much. It is so important, and I totally love it. So anyway, that's it. That's all I have to say.

Wendy Hasenkamp (01:06:24): Well, thank you so much.

Bob Thurman (01:06:26): Thank you so much. And I hope everybody reads Wisdom Is the Bliss, and realizing that wisdom is not mysticism. Wisdom is what scientists need. Not just knowledge, but where knowledge gets really deep and experimental and experiential, it becomes wisdom. And they are capable, and they must understand holistically how their knowledge relates to everything. And they must tell the people. And they can get up and speak their mind, and don't be afraid.

(01:06:58) These are friendly fun facts. My definition of a fun fact, I never heard of the expression of fun fact until my friend Alan Hassenfeld told me, I have to give attribution. He is the founder of Hasbro Toy company. We were on a board of a different non-profit, and we had a dinner where everybody had to come with their fun fact. So his fun fact was that he is no longer CEO of his company, he is the executive chairman. And then he said, "Lest people think that that's something really great, I want them to know, my fun fact is, that it's like presiding over a cemetery. Many people are below you, but no one is listening."

Wendy Hasenkamp (01:07:39): *[laughter]* That's great.

Bob Thurman (01:07:41): So that's my fun fact. Those are my fun facts.

Wendy Hasenkamp ([01:07:43](#)): Well, thank you so much, Bob. This has been really great. I appreciate you taking the time.

Bob Thurman ([01:07:48](#)): All right, Wendy, thank you.

Outro – Wendy Hasenkamp ([01:07:53](#)): *This season of Mind & Life is supported by the Academy for the Love of Learning, dedicated to awakening the natural love of learning in people of all ages. Episodes are edited and produced by me and Phil Walker, and music on the show is from Blue Dot Sessions and Universal. Show notes and resources for this and other episodes can be found at podcast.mindandlife.org. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts, and share it with a friend. And if something in this conversation sparked insight for you, let us know. You can send an email or voice memo to podcast@mindandlife.org.*

[\(01:08:33\)](#) *Mind & Life is a production of the Mind & Life Institute. Visit us at mindandlife.org, where you can learn more about how we bridge science and contemplative wisdom to foster insight and inspire action towards flourishing. If you value these conversations, please consider supporting the show. You can make a donation at mindandlife.org, under Support. Any amount is so appreciated, and it really helps us create this show. Thank you for listening.*