

~ Navigating Middle Age ~

Heart Advice for a Fulfilling Life

Mingyur Rinpoche

In the middle of life, you have a lot of stress because you may move out from your parents' house and start your own work journey. When you start your work, there is a lot of competition — maybe competition among your colleagues, and then in your group, and another group, or even your company, and another company.

Then we have a lot of achievements. We have a goal, and there is a deadline. And maybe there is a bonus, some promotion, and so many things. Then somewhere there people may look for life partners — for Mr. Perfect/Ms. Perfect — and then they work together. It is a really tough time of life.

Of course, if you look for Mr. Perfect/Ms. Perfect, you cannot find them. Most people come to me and even ask me to bless them: “Please help me to find my soulmate. Mr. Perfect/Ms. Perfect.” Something like that. And they ask me for a special blessing. “May my partner be a meditator, be there, understand me, have the same interests, listen to me . . .” Such a long list! And we cannot find all of this. It is very difficult. So normally I make a joke: there is no such thing as Mr. Perfect/Ms. Perfect, but you can find Mr. Okay/Ms. Okay.

So I think the really important thing is to find balance. Balance is very important. Normally, I give this example: If you want to drink water, there are three styles, right? I have water here. [Mingyur Rinpoche holds up a cup.] The first style is “I need to drink this water! I must! Not drinking it is not a possibility.” So you are tight and very narrow, and then “Water!” [Mingyur Rinpoche pretends to grasp the cup so tightly that his hand and arm shake.] And if you tighten your hand, then reaching from here to here is also difficult. [Mingyur Rinpoche tries to extend his arm toward the water.] Even stretching your hand is

difficult because you tighten all the muscles, and then you might spill the water out. So if you are too tight, the water will spill, also. Maybe you can drink it, but it is not an easy way. That is the first style.

And the second style is that sometimes at the beginning we are too tight, and then we become too loose, or maybe we feel like life has no meaning. Or our jobs. Everything has no meaning. Then maybe we give up and become like this. [Mingyur Rinpoche slumps.] Or maybe we think, “Oh, I need to drink water. Not today. Tomorrow. Today, I will look at my smartphone. Tomorrow water. [Mingyur Rinpoche feigns yawning and looking around in distraction.] What is that?” Sometimes we get lost a lot. So then you cannot drink water.

Now what is the third style? Relax your hand. Do not be too tight. Relax. Grab the cup and drink. Mmm.

So which one do you like? Normally, everybody likes the third style. Why? It has balance. But just because we like the third style does not mean we do the third style. We still do the first style or second style, so we need to find this balance.

How to find that balance? Whatever we do in our life, we can try to find meaning and purpose. In any work you do, there is some meaning and purpose, unless you are a drug dealer, or maybe do illegal things or harm many other people. Then it is difficult, and your work has become nonvirtuous. Otherwise, whether you are a salesperson, doctor, architect, engineer, businessperson, or whatever, because everything is connected and interdependent, all professional work has purpose. But what is most important is your intention and to recognize what the purpose of this work is, what kind of benefits it has. Sometimes the entire company may not follow your direction, but from your side, make whatever positive impact you can to your work, to your company. Finding these things is, I think, really important for inspiration.

Then we say to try your best. Even though you might want to achieve a result, and you might find a purpose, the result sometimes may not follow whatever you wish for. Sometimes it is accomplished, sometimes not. We say life is like the stock market, going up and

down. And actually, the stock market is good, right? With ups, we feel inspired and happy. But with downs, we learn more and grow more. So take everything as having a learning purpose, to grow, to transform. Maybe a problem becomes a solution or an obstacle becomes an opportunity.

Sometimes we say that if you are going somewhere and reach a dead end, and there is a huge wall in front of you, then what should you do? Sometimes, if you are too tight, then you think, "I need to cross this wall." Maybe you bang your head against the wall. If you bang your head against the wall too much, it will get hurt or damaged. Then maybe, when we think "I cannot cross this wall that one way, directly," we give up. But actually, there are so many different things you can do. Think outside the box. Maybe look around. Bring a staircase, a small staircase. You climb it, and put it on the other side, and you can cross the wall. Or maybe you go around. Maybe you can go underneath. Maybe use a rope, like in a rock climbing style. So many ways to cross the wall. So we try our best.

And sometimes, if it does not work one way, let it go. Maybe there is no need to give up. But if you even try all these things and there is no way to cross the wall, it is okay. Change something. You can start something, do something. Even though you do not cross that wall, you get another benefit — a new life, new idea, new possibility. A new door may open sometimes. In the end, it becomes similar to crossing the wall. This is really important — let go, but do not give up.

The second important thing is we need to also manage our time and the behavioural level. If every day you go from home to work, work to home, and home to work, and you even choose the same road, same path, every day, it becomes stressful. Everything is impermanent, so we need to follow the laws of impermanence. Change. Maybe during the weekend, do something totally different than what you do normally. Maybe go into nature, hike a mountain, go to the beach, or maybe sleep. Do physical exercise. Do something different from time to time. Also, if you want to go to your office or workplace, try to change the way. Maybe one day go by car, the next day by public transportation. Maybe one day you can walk if it is not so far. Or if you go by car, choose different paths, different roads. All these are very

important to manage. Also, sleep is very important. Try to sleep early. So if you sleep late or do not sleep, get no exercise, and go from work to home to work to home, that really develops a lot of stress. After a certain level, we feel, “I am becoming like a machine.” In all these jobs, if what we are doing is for the success, for the competition, for the fame, power, money, or whatever, in the end, we lose our lives. We feel like, “Oh, I never see the sunlight.” At a certain level, “I never have a good time with my friends and family. I miss my childhood.” That means it is too tight. Although you do the work, you can manage your time. If you know how to manage your it, time is like rubber. You can have time for exercise, time for nature, time for sleep, and especially meditation — even five minutes of just watching your breath and feeling the sensations in your body, and then connecting it with appreciation, kindness, and compassion. Even just these five minutes can change your life also. So do not forget to practice all these things and integrate them.

Of course, in the middle of life, sometimes we might have a lot of questions, or a midlife crisis. Sometimes at a certain level, we feel like whatever we do is useless. “I want to do something totally different. I want to run away.” Because there is too much stress. Sometimes we feel like that. And of course, if you really want to change your life or whatever, it is up to you. But even if you change it, if you have not transformed inside, the suffering will follow you in different places, environments, times, and situations. So it is really important to connect with your inner well-being — connect with awareness, love and compassion, and wisdom within yourself — and apply this in your everyday life. Even if you cannot totally go into a retreat place and spend your spiritual life there, even if you cannot have that opportunity, no problem. You can join your mundane life and spiritual life together.

I am also in middle life. I do not know — maybe I am experiencing a midlife crisis. I am just kidding! Of course, sometimes I feel stressed, but normally I feel very happy. I feel that whatever I do — my teaching, my work — it connects with my heart, my interests. For me, every day is happy, and it is kind of exciting every day. When I teach, I teach from my own experience. And then, sometimes I teach the same

words, the same story, but for me, it is a different feeling, from a different level, from a different aspect.

And of course I am very busy. I am leading so many projects. Many, many organizations like Tergar International, Tergar Asia, Tergar Monastery, Tergar Charity, Tergar Schools, Tergar Institute. There are maybe twenty different projects that I am running. I am kind of like the founder.

So what I do is do my own meditation most of the time in the morning. For you, maybe you can do it in the afternoon or evening. I do my formal meditation every day, so that really helps. Also, I combine my everyday life with awareness, compassion, and wisdom. I combine these practices with my life. So my spiritual life and my normal work become one. Then, at a deeper level, I do not feel a sense of incompleteness, or like something is missing, or lonely. I do not feel that. Of course, sometimes stress comes on the surface level, but at a deeper level there is still contentment. Even if there is a challenge, even if there are obstacles, I know that there is a challenge and might feel a little bit sad, but at a deeper level there is still contentment.

So these are, for me, the benefits of combining your spiritual life and work life together. Everybody can do that because we all have this wonderful nature. We all have the capacity.

And then sometimes I do my personal retreats — like two days or one week, here and there. Those really help. And sometimes I go into nature, to hike the mountain or go to the beach. Sometimes I just lie down in between teachings. I go on tour sometimes for six months, from continent to continent. And in between teachings, sometimes I have a break, so I just lie down and practice sleeping meditation. I do three things: eat, sleep, and use the restroom. So sometimes I do that, and that really helps. So there is a variety of things. And at a deeper level, we try to bring this spiritual practice and our work together.