



MIND & LIFE

## Mind & Life Podcast Transcript

### Mingyur Rinpoche – Awareness, Compassion, and Wisdom

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**Opening Quote – Mingyur Rinpoche (00:05):** *[The] unhealthy sense of self is not flexible. It's fixed, wanting to control everything. It makes a lot of stress, a lot of pain, a lot of worry... Easy to hurt, easy to cry, easy to burn, easy to disappear. So, the unhealthy sense of self is like ego, selfish. The healthy sense of self is more like connected—interconnected—like compassion and impermanence, wisdom. So once you're connected with the healthy sense of self, you cannot survive without others. You and others are interdependent.*

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**Intro – Wendy Hasenkamp (00:45):** Welcome to Mind & Life. I'm Wendy Hasenkamp. Today, I'm speaking with Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Mingyur Rinpoche. Rinpoche is the son of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, who was one of the most renowned meditation teachers within the Dzogchen tradition. So Mingyur Rinpoche grew up studying and practicing meditation from a very early age. He's been teaching Buddhism and meditation to Western audiences for many years, and he's also been a major contributor to the early scientific research on meditation, working with Richard Davidson and John Don among others.

(01:23) Rinpoche and I cover a lot of topics in this conversation, broadly looking at how contemplative practice can lead us to awareness, compassion, and wisdom. He first describes his involvement in early contemplative research, and we get into some of the challenges in translating concepts between Buddhism and science. Rinpoche then delivers some pretty powerful teachings. We talk about what Buddhists mean by the term emptiness, moving beyond concepts through meditation, and experiencing a kind of foundational open awareness. He also describes the three types of self, and which one is like shaving foam (that'll make sense when you listen). And how these views of self relate to the way that we view others. Importantly, Rinpoche then goes into some of his own experiences with panic attacks when he was younger, and describes how he learned through meditation to make friends with difficult emotions instead of pushing them away, and how healing that's been for him. And we end with some reflections on his experience during what's called a wandering retreat. This is a style of contemplative retreat where you live—often for years—with no home and no money, surviving on the generosity of strangers. And relatedly, we get into discussing the role of trust in transformation and contemplative practice.

(02:51) I'm so happy to be able to share this episode with you now, especially as Rinpoche will be joining us again soon at Mind & Life's upcoming online summit, 'The Science and Wisdom of Emotions.' In our conversation for the podcast, as you'll hear, he reflects on the impact of one of the earliest Mind & Life

dialogues with the Dalai Lama, which Rinpoche attended when he was 19 years old. The topic of that meeting was Destructive Emotions, and it led to a book by the same name written by Dan Goleman, which continues to be very popular today. That meeting took place in 2001 and in a number of ways, it was a real catalyst for the beginnings of the whole field of contemplative science. So this year we're revisiting that meeting and exploring its impact, bringing together over 30 experts across various disciplines, along with the Dalai Lama, to dig into the latest scientific insights, share practices for cultivating emotional well-being and emotional intelligence, and to see how developing a wisdom around emotions can contribute to our collective well-being. The summit is a free online event taking place from May 2-5 (2021), and it's shaping up to be a really amazing gathering. I hope you can join us. You can find more information and register at [scienceandwisdomofemotions.com](http://scienceandwisdomofemotions.com).

[\(04:16\)](#) Mingyur Rinpoche has a real gift for making some very complex philosophical topics accessible through story and metaphor. But don't be fooled by his lighthearted delivery—these are some really deep teachings. So I hope you benefit from and enjoy this conversation. And as always, there's lots more in the show notes in addition to a full transcript, which I recommend checking out. And with that, it's my great pleasure to share with you, Mingyur Rinpoche.

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**Wendy Hasenkamp** [\(04:50\)](#): I am joined today by Mingyur Rinpoche. Rinpoche, thank you so much for taking the time to be with us.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** [\(04:57\)](#): You're most welcome, very happy to be here.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** [\(05:00\)](#): You have played a major role in some of the early experiments and research between Buddhism and science. Can you share some of your own interest in science, and also how that has interacted with your training in Buddhism, and you becoming a Buddhist teacher?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** [\(05:20\)](#): Yeah. So, in Buddhism everything... You can take it if you understand, you can get some experience, but you don't need to take it because the Buddha says so. So there's some kind of what we call analytical meditation, which really tries to understand the nature of reality, who you are, about the world. So for science, it's almost like a thought experiment. So analytical meditation is kind of like, you try to do an experiment with a different aspect. And of course we have different types of meditation—what we call resting meditation. And the resting meditation is based on experience. So when you practice like that, you will get some experience like that. Then you can go to the next level... It's kind of a science also.

[\(06:24\)](#) So we have this tradition. And then when I was young, I was learning meditation from my father. First time I learned meditation when I was nine years old. The reason is I had panic attacks. So when I was young, yeah, I was not happy. And my mother suggested that I learn meditation from my father, but I was shy and I didn't ask my father; my mother ask on behalf of me to my father. My father is was great meditation teacher, Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche. So I learned meditation from him. Then while I'm there learning meditation with him, many people from all over the world, come to learn meditation from my father. So sometimes great scientists also come. One of them is Francisco Varela. He came there and received teaching, and I heard that he's a great scientist.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** [\(07:22\)](#): So did you know him?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (07:23):** Yes. I met him there. And normally I have kind of an interest about science, especially cosmology, the stars, how far it is, and the relationship between all of this. And I had a little interest about quantum physics. And I asked him this, about the cosmology. Of course, he knows a lot, and he told me a little bit. Then he also told me about the brain—how the brain works, and how the perception [works] a little bit. And I was fascinated, you know?

**Wendy Hasenkamp (07:55):** Amazing.

**Mingyur Rinpoche (07:55):** Yeah, for me, it was amazing. For me, it's kind of like, what I'm learning from the meditation aspect, and what the scientists are saying is kind of becoming one, but it's different aspects. A different perspective, yeah.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (08:09):** That's so interesting. So how old were you when you met Francisco Varela?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (08:14):** I think when I was 10 years old. Yeah.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (08:17):** And then did you continue to have any interactions with him?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (08:21):** Yeah. [From] time to time, I had some conversation with him. And then I went to a three-year retreat. So then after I finished my three-year retreat, he came to Nepal again, and we had some further discussions.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (08:34):** Francisco Varela, obviously one of the co-founders of the Mind & Life Institute. So very influential for our work. Were you involved in any of the early dialogues between the Dalai Lama and other scientists like Varela?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (08:50):** Yes. So then after I finished my retreat, two years later I was 19 years old, and there's a Mind & Life meeting. So then they all recommend that I join the Mind & Life meeting. The topic of that meeting was about emotions, destructive emotions.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (09:12):** Ah, Destructive Emotions [meeting], yeah.

**Mingyur Rinpoche (09:14):** Yes. So at that time I was 19 years old. So I joined that meeting. And the Dalai Lama talked about how to join these two traditions—ancient meditative tradition and modern science—together, and to help society. And we can offer [things] from each aspect. Because what I learned from science, there's a lot of discovery, but from the Buddhist perspective, there's a lot of inner work, how to apply to your life and to your experience. So the Dalai Lama said if you can join these two together, there will be a lot of benefit.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (09:51):** Yeah. So, and then is that how you came to know Richie Davidson?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (09:57):** Yes, I met Richie Davidson in that meeting.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (10:00):** Oh, okay. So it's funny—if you Google "Buddhism and science" your picture is one of the first one that comes up, a very famous picture of you with all the electrodes on your head.

**Mingyur Rinpoche (10:13):** Oh, EEG.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([10:13](#)): Yeah, the old EEG study that you were involved in. Is that from Richie's lab from a long time ago?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([10:18](#)): Yes. That was 2002, I think.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([10:21](#)): Do you remember what that study was, about or your experience doing it? Was that the first time you'd engaged with scientists?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([10:27](#)): Yes. So the first time I went to the laboratory, and I became a Guinea pig, you know. *[laughter]*

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([10:34](#)): Yes! So yeah, what was your experience like?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([10:37](#)): Yeah, I went to Madison, Wisconsin. So the first day I went to the machine, there's a MRI machine, very big. And the room is very cold, the temperature has to be cold. And then the machine looked like a white coffin, very big.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([11:00](#)): *[laughter]* Yeah, and you go slide inside...

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([11:02](#)): And then, lying down, I cannot move my head. If I move my head a little bit, then the image becomes fuzzy. So they tied my head and everything. And I pretend like I'm a corpse. *[laughter]*

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([11:14](#)): It's like a death meditation.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([11:17](#)): So then I go inside the machine, it looks like I'm going into a dark tunnel. Then I have to stay there about three hours.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([11:26](#)): Oh my gosh, three hours!

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([11:28](#)): And the meditations are about... One is concentration on an object. And one is compassion, lovingkindness and compassion. Another is open presence, meaning your mind is just present, you are not particularly focused on anything, but you are not lost. A sense of openness, a sense of presence, sense of just being. And then visualization, like imagining something. So a few different meditation techniques. The scientists are in the next room, having coffee and hamburgers...

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([12:03](#)): *[laughter]* Having a great time while you're lying in the coffin.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([12:07](#)): They are very nice, of course, kind, and they told me what's going on, what is the purpose [of these experiments]. They are really nice, I'm very happy. And they're giving the instruction through the microphone, "Four minutes, concentrate on the dot. Now stop concentration. Concentrate again. Stop concentration. And compassion— compassion four minutes. Stop compassion. Compassion again. No compassion."

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([12:34](#)): How was that? Was it very difficult to switch on and off? Cause that doesn't seem like a normal way of doing a meditation.

**Mingyur Rinpoche (12:39):** Yeah. Normally nobody asks me to not practice compassion. *[laughter]* Sometimes it's confused.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (12:46):** Well, yeah. You were one of the first expert meditators to become involved in science. Those were the very early days when this kind of thing was not well accepted at all in neuroscience or traditional science.

**Mingyur Rinpoche (13:01):** Yes. That time, this research is very new, and then nobody knew what the direction would be, and how to do these tests with the meditators. And also, [it's] two different worlds. So, to communicate [between] two different worlds is quite difficult.

(13:22) But one thing they found is, from the naked eye, when the long-term meditator meditates, a big change comes. The gamma [waves] synchronize. Gamma synchronization.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (13:34):** Yeah. Gamma synchronization. That was one of the early findings, that comes from the EEG recordings (from when you have the electrodes on your head). That's for measuring those gamma waves. Yeah. And that was some of the early findings, that advanced meditators had a very unusually high level of synchronization.

**Mingyur Rinpoche (13:53):** Right.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (13:53):** And then have you continued to be involved in research studies?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (13:57):** Yes. I've joined Mind & Life in a different places in America, in Europe. I also have a lot of discussion with scientists like Richard Davidson, Antoine Lutz, about how to do research, what meditative technique is easy to do for research... Yeah.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (14:15):** Yeah, exactly. I was going to ask, in all of those conversations it's been so helpful for scientists to engage with Buddhist experts and practitioners like yourself. What are some of the challenges that you all have discussed in terms of bringing those worlds together, like you were talking about?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (14:35):** One of the biggest challenges is, from the Buddhist perspective, when we go into a deeper level, beyond concepts. So when we go beyond concepts, then the measurements are not really... [It] kind of doesn't work very well, because every concept has to be put "into the box" [of a research paradigm]. So more deeper levels of the view, and meditation, or [going] beyond concepts—that becomes very fuzzy, yeah.

**Wendy Hasenkamp (14:59):** Can you say more about that? I know that you are a teacher, and your father was a teacher, within the Dzogchen tradition, which is often about this moving beyond a conceptual mind. I think for many of our listeners that might be a little unfamiliar... It's of course always hard to talk about, since words are concepts.

**Mingyur Rinpoche (15:19):** Yes, yes. So beyond concepts is... what we call non-meditation is the best meditation. So basically, the meditation is just be present, and to recognize your fundamental nature within yourself—what we call awareness. So, to connect with awareness, our normal habit is we have this goal, and we have this strategy, and we have a lot of structures for how to achieve that goal. Very clear. But then when we go into the non-conceptual meditation, we let go of this. The only thing is what

we call, "Don't get lost." You're not lost. You've not become a zombie. You will not lose the presence. But at the same time, even, you're not meditating. So totally be in the natural state of your mind. So once you [can] be in that, your mind becomes more and more open. Actually your mind becomes nonjudgmental, spacious, creative, more open, more brave in a way, more confident.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([16:36](#)): And how does this relate to the concept of emptiness that is so often discussed in Buddhism?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([16:41](#)): Yeah. So this is a more experiential practice. Emptiness you can begin by analyzing. So for example, you can look at quantum physics. When you really look at the atom, an atom is not single, not permanent. An atom has a lot of pieces and these are changing all the time. Then in the end, when you really look, in the end it loses meaning. But that is the meaning of what we call empty. So what we call empty and ness, there's two things. Empty meaning—it doesn't inherently exist. Ness meaning—not nothing. Everything can appear. So, possibility. So these two are one [empty and ness]. Though it does not exist, yet a lot of possibility, potential can manifest. These two together. In neuroscience, we talk about perception. So what we perceive mostly is in our mind.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([17:46](#)): Created by the mind?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([17:47](#)): Yeah, created by mind. It does not really exist out there, but at the same time, it's not nothing; you're experiencing that. You can still perceive that. So the emptiness meaning these two are a union—like what we call fire and heat, or water and moisture. So the emptiness meditation, then you apply this in the meditation. So then you look at the sense of "me." So normally the sense of me is so strong, so dry, so sensitive, black and white. Easy to cry, easy to disappear. And it is very small, tiny and narrow. A lot of things that we believe are false beliefs, not real. ME... something like that. ME has to be number one, ME have to achieve this. So much tightness.

([18:46](#)) So when you look at that, the sense of me, what do you see is slowly, slowly, [it becomes] more flexible, actually. Not like an atom.... in the beginning we think an atom is single, one. But there's more subatomic particles, right? Me has some more sub-components—maybe your experience, maybe your status, maybe your education, maybe your belief, maybe your body, your mind. So many components. And they are interdependent, and they are changing. And then in the end, you cannot really grab it. Yet you can have me. And that me can be anything. So me at the office can be different than me at your home. Me at the home can be different than me with your friends. So, flexibility.

([19:39](#)) – *musical interlude* –

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([19:39](#)): You've spoken about three kinds of self. Can you discuss those?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([20:00](#)): Yeah, yeah. Normally what we call 1) unhealthy sense of self, 2) healthy sense of self, and 3) the luminous self. Unhealthy sense of self is not flexible. No flexibility, it's fixed. What we call permanent, narrow, independent, want to control everything. So combine these together, it makes a lot of stress, a lot of pain, a lot of worry, no flexibility. But when we look at that [self] through the view of emptiness, view of meditation, the awareness, just aware, just seeing that is wisdom.

([20:44](#)) Normally I give an example—I had panic when I was young. So when I didn't look at the panic, panic looked like a piece of rock. Solid. When I looked at the panic, panic become like shaving foam. Panic has so many different pieces. There's images, there's automatic voice, there's body sensation,

temperature, there's a belief. All this combined together is panic. If you take out images, no panic. If you take out sensation, no panic. If you take out the belief, no panic. So similarly, the me [unhealthy self] is like that. So strong, piece of rock. But when you look at it, it's like shaving foam. So when you see that you become more relieved, open. So that is what we call healthy sense of self.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([21:40](#)): Yeah. The more open [one].

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([21:41](#)): More open. Not the single me, but interdependent me. Me is changing. Then when you look at it more, more, more, in the end, you cannot find it. Yet there's such freedom, openness. So that's the luminous self.

([21:58](#)) So unhealthy sense of self, is like ego... kind of like, selfish. Healthy sense of self is more like connecting interconnected, like compassion. And impermanence, wisdom. So what call healthy sense of self is awareness, compassion, wisdom self. And the luminous self is the beyond conceptual self.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([22:26](#)): Yeah. We also often hear in Buddhism that the sense of self is an illusion. So, which of those selves is an illusion?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([22:36](#)): The unhealthy sense of self. It's just an illusion. You see it as like rock, but actually it's not rock; it's shaving foam. [*laughter*]

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([22:49](#)): So, and that kind of understanding and awareness can be achieved through analytical meditation, as you were discussing?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([22:57](#)): Yeah. Analytical meditation—first you have to analyze, then you need to rest. Analyzing too much, [then you're] tired, confused. It will not get the experience. To get the experience, you need to rest after analyzing. So the resting meditation, we start with watching the breath. Breathing in, breathing out. You don't need to analyze if the breath is impermanent or not impermanent, or emptiness, not emptiness. Don't care. Just knowing the breath. Breathing in—oh, now I know. Breathing out—oh, now I know. Breathing in, just simple. That is the resting [meditation].

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([23:39](#)): Like a concentration meditation.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([23:41](#)): Yeah, concentration. Not very strong.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([23:42](#)): Not too tight. Yeah.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([23:44](#)): Not too tight. If you're too tight, then you will have more thoughts. So normally what we call [thinking] "no pizza," you will think more pizza.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([23:51](#)): [*laughter*] Right!

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([23:53](#)): So then you can mix that with the analyzing, or then look at the sense of me, with the same as watching your breath. Now you look at the me [sense of self]. Then you'll see things clearer, clearer, clearer.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([24:09](#)): And then how did these senses of self influence our perception of others?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (24:17):** Yeah. So of course, self is really mysterious normally. It comes only... just [from] belief. When you look at it, you cannot really find it. But when you don't look at it, you can feel it very strongly. So then when there's self, of course, there's other. Other and self is interdependent. Then how other people look at you, it depends on how you hold your own self, right? If you connect with a more healthy sense of self, and other people look at you, you're more kind, more flexible, more soft, more open. More wise sometimes. But if you fix on that unhealthy sense of self, [then people will feel] "Oh, I don't want to be close to that person."

**Wendy Hasenkamp (25:04):** Yeah. It's again, this kind of interdependence, it sounds like. Between the self and other. And so how you are perceiving yourself will then impact...

**Mingyur Rinpoche (25:13):** Yes. It changes. So, if you believe in the healthy sense of self, the self with awareness, compassion, and wisdom, you meet nice people. And people are nice to you. And relationships become better. And then you believe more about, "Oh, this thing works! There's a lot of nice people." Maybe one or two not nice people, but eventually you have more nice people. So it's kind of good for you, good for others. Win-win situation, you know?

**Wendy Hasenkamp (25:47):** Yeah. So thinking about then, moving kind of into a larger scale, beyond an individual impact, what do you think about the role of shifting our sense of self in problems we see in the world today, like racism or tribalism, where people feel like their group is the best?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (26:09):** Yeah. I think this is really important to connect with the healthy sense of self. So once you're connected with the healthy sense of self, you cannot survive without others. You and others are interdependent. The other is part of you. So then there's awareness, then there is wisdom. So those are connected with a healthy sense of self. Unhealthy sense of self says, you have to be the first. What about me? But if you listen to that, at a deeper level, you will not feel really happy. You'll feel something is missing. You will never be satisfied, no matter how much you feel like you achieve. But if you follow the healthy sense of self, like you can do social work, you really feel happy, on a deeper level. For the unhealthy sense of self, that is breaking the law of unhealthy sense of self, right? You break my law. *[laughter]*

**Wendy Hasenkamp (27:11):** What do you mean the law of unhealthy sense of self?

**Mingyur Rinpoche (27:13):** You are important, others are not important. That's what the unhealthy sense of self says. That's the rule—what about me, me first, me first! But if you follow that, you will not be happy. But if you help others, you feel really happy. So helping others is also helping you, because you and others are interdependent. So, win-win situation.

**(27:36)** Then also the wisdom. So if you learn more about reality, if you know more about the truth of reality, you feel happy, on a deeper level. And awareness also. Just the watching the breath, you feel happy, because you're connecting with the healthy sense of self. So these three—the compassion, wisdom, and awareness, are related to healthy sense of self. So I think it's important that everybody try to connect with that.

**(28:07)** And then, it's also important to focus on transforming yourself first. If you transform, then there's automatically a nice influence that comes. Maybe you can help two or three people transform, they can help other two or three people transform, then the world would become a better place. When we look at history, a lot of problems come because someone wants to change the world, right? If

someone wants to change the world, but they don't want to change themselves, then it ends up [with] war. War in the world.

[\(28:38\)](#) – musical interlude –

**Wendy Hasenkamp** [\(28:56\)](#): You've mentioned a couple times your own experience with panic, when you were younger. How has your path with meditation... Has it helped, and what's been your experience in dealing with those difficult emotions?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** [\(29:11\)](#): Yeah. I had a panic when I was seven, eight years old. I think I had panic when I was seven, but I didn't recognize it much. But then when I was eight years old, very strongly I felt this fear. I could not go out. And especially, I had fear for strangers. And in my hometown—I was born in Nepal, in the Himalaya mountains—we have a lot of winter snow storm. [In] summer, the thunderstorms. So the fear was very strong. So I was looking for a lot of solutions. Sometimes I go to top of the mountain, but panic followed me up there. I'd go deep into the valley—we have the river with the thick forest—go into the valley, and panic followed me down there. So then I learned meditation and when I was nine years old, so I feel good. I learned this from my father. But I'm lazy, you know? *[laughter]* I liked the idea of meditation, but I didn't like the practice of meditation. When I meditate about... I thought maybe I already meditated 20, 30 minutes. But actually it was only 10 minutes.

[\(30:20\)](#) But then when I meditate, it's good. I feel better. So when I feel better, then I forget meditation... Then panic comes again, and then I meditate, "Hello, panic! You, get out! I'm meditating." So then I shared this with my father. My father said, "Don't fight with the panic, you have to welcome panic." So if you fight panic, panic becomes bigger. That's true—for me, fear of panic is worse than panic. Panic of panic is stronger than panic. So then my father said to welcome [the panic]. So then I began to welcome my panic, "Hello panic, welcome." Much better! But my main motivation is: if I welcome the panic, then panic will not come back again.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** [\(31:11\)](#): So still the motivation is to get rid of it.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** [\(31:13\)](#): *[laughter]* Yeah. Still want to get rid of it. But even though it's not perfectly welcoming, but beginning to welcome it really helps. Even though it's not really true, it's faking, but it helps. Then when I was 13 years old, I was in India, near Dharamshala, the Sherabling monastery in India, near Dharamshala. There I'd start the traditional three-year retreat.

[\(31:42\)](#) I thought I should go do this retreat because I'm lazy. So if I go to retreat, it will be good for my laziness, then good for my panic. So I push, asking everybody to have this permission then.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** [\(31:54\)](#): Was it unusual to be so young going on a...?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** [\(31:57\)](#): Yeah. A little bit, not so common, you know?

**Wendy Hasenkamp** [\(32:01\)](#): Yeah.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** [\(32:02\)](#): But finally I'm in the retreat. I was very happy. For the first month, I was not lazy, and the panic was also okay. After one month later, lazy came back. (Without my permission, you know?) *[laughter]* So now the problem is my lazy and my panic, those two become good friends. Panic became worse. So then I thought, what should I do? Should I leave the retreat? Or if I leave the retreat,

I'll feel embarrassed because I told everybody I can do this retreat. But if I continue to stay, [I'll have] more than two years with the panic! So I thought, what should I do?

(32:46) Then in the end I made a decision that I wanted to learn how to live with my panic. Using my meditation training. All the meditation training [was showing me] how to make friends with the panic. So for example, when I watch my breath, the breath becomes a support for my meditation, right? You can watch panic also—watch the sensations, images, voices, beliefs, blahblahblah, yaddayadda [babbling speech]. All these become a support for the meditation, just like the breath. So I feel quite happy.

(33:22) So then after a few weeks later, me and my panic became very good friends. When the panic comes, I'm quite happy, excited! But the symptoms are still there—the physical sensations, the heartbeat, the tightness at my neck, and headaches, and all the unpleasant sensations. Everything is there, but I feel quite happy. "Now I feel like I cannot breathe, oh..."

**Wendy Hasenkamp** (33:46): So you're using it as investigation?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** (33:49): Yeah. Just like the breath. I feel very happy. Then, me and my friend panic became very good friends—I love my panic. What I call, panic is my teacher and best friend. Then what happened in the end? After that, the panic says bye-bye and it's gone. *[laughter]* I miss my panic.

(34:10) – musical interlude –

**Wendy Hasenkamp** (34:38): You recently went on a wandering retreat for several years, and I know you had some pretty intense experiences there. Do you want to share anything about that?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** (34:48): Yeah. So this is a wandering retreat. First, we do retreat as a solitary retreat, or retreat in a group with a particular environment, and intensive practice together. So once we have some experience, then we do a wandering retreat. So wandering retreat is more like, we face a lot of challenge in our life. So for me, I went to wandering retreat for four and half years. So this is a really great experience for me. I learned two things. One is, it really helped for my meditation. And second, I learned a lot about life. For example before, I didn't know how to cook for myself; now I know how to cook. I didn't know how to make fire; I know how to make fire. And now I know where to go and where to get free food also.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** (35:44): So yeah, in a wandering retreat, you don't have a place where you're staying, is that right?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** (35:48): Yeah. There's no particular plan for the lodging, where to stay, and no particular plan for... there's no really money. I had a few thousand Rupees at the beginning, and that finished within one month. Then [it was] based on begging.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** (36:05): Wow.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** (36:06): Yes.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** (36:07): So there's something similar, I think, between when you were speaking about how to deal with these difficult emotions, and becoming friends with them...

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([36:17](#)): Yes. Similar, same practice as panic. So how to make panic as a friend. So now you can make more friends with these challenges in life.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([36:29](#)): Yeah, yeah. So I think both of those approaches—it's kind of counterintuitive, right? To move towards negative or difficult experiences. And similarly on this kind of retreat, you're actively moving towards a situation where you don't have the security of a place, or money.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([36:48](#)): Yes. Right.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([36:49](#)): So in both those situations, it strikes me that you need a lot of trust.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([36:54](#)): Yeah. First, to make fire, you have to make it the right... in good circumstances. Once the fire becomes bigger, then you can add wood, and wind, all these are no problem. So yeah of course, first you have to have some kind of a core practice, otherwise then it will not really become much.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([37:16](#)): Yeah. So is that where you build the trust, in order to feel safe moving towards difficult emotions, for example? First, building in a practice without working with negative things?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([37:32](#)): Yeah. Step-by-step practice. Yes. That's true.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([37:35](#)): So then the trust becomes really in yourself or in your own mind?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([37:39](#)): Yeah. Not just trust, of course there is experience. There's a view, there's a tool, there's a skill that you can learn step-by-step.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([37:49](#)): And that relates to awareness, or just all forms of meditation?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([37:53](#)): Yes. Awareness, compassion, wisdom. So three things. And that is related with our healthy sense of self. And eventually the luminous self.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** ([38:03](#)): Can you say just a few words about awareness, compassion, and wisdom?

**Mingyur Rinpoche** ([38:08](#)): So the awareness is like, we all have this wonderful nature. This is kind of the essential quality of our mind, which is the knowing. So, the knowing is kind of what we call, the traditional example is like sky. And then we have thoughts, emotions, perception, memory—all these are like clouds. So all these thoughts and emotions come and go, and come and go, in that knowing, in that awareness. So awareness is like sky. Sky is not the clouds, but the clouds come in the sky. So awareness itself is beyond thought and emotion. Yet the thoughts and emotions come within that awareness. So basically, at the beginning, how we can connect with awareness is just knowing. So for example, right now, we are having this broadcast. So you know that you are having this broadcast, you know that you are listening to this sound. That means you're beginning to connect with awareness.

([39:22](#)) So then there's love and compassion, which is looking for happiness, looking for meaning, looking for something genuine. So that is with us all the time, what we call longing to your real home,

longing to your real authentic nature. So looking for happiness is love. And looking for freedom from suffering is compassion. So that is also together with awareness with us all the time.

(39:55) Then there's wisdom. The wisdom is the knowing, the recognition of the awareness, recognition of compassion, recognition of who you are. When you connect with the awareness and compassion, then eventually you can discover your true nature—unlimited discovery within yourself. Yes.

**Wendy Hasenkamp** (40:16): Well Rinpoche, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

**Mingyur Rinpoche** (40:20): You're most welcome. Thank you.

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**Outro – Wendy Hasenkamp** (40:28): *This episode was edited and produced by me and Phil Walker. 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](http://podcast.mindandlife.org). If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on iTunes and share it with a friend. If something in this conversation sparked insight for you, we'd love to know about it. You can send an email or a voice memo to [podcast@mindandlife.org](mailto:podcast@mindandlife.org). Mind & Life is a production of The Mind & Life Institute. Visit us at [mindandlife.org](http://mindandlife.org), where you can learn more about how we bridge science and contemplative wisdom to foster insight and inspire action towards flourishing. There you can also support our work, including this podcast.*