



THE MIDLIFE TORRENT

Alongside the well-known hormonal changes, 'Midlife' brings with it deep emotional, physical, mental and spiritual challenges. One way to understand these and work with them constructively is to see this stage of life as an opportunity to work with a huge torrent of energy – seen here, metaphorically, as water.

We who have entered our forties and fifties know this torrent at some stage, in some place within us, in a big way or small. We may or may not be menopausal, quite yet, but we do feel some dramatic changes within our mind, body and emotions. At times it is as if we have a great surge, a raging torrent of energy within us. It may, at first, seem like trapped emotions welling up, needing to be released after ten, twenty, thirty, maybe even forty years of captivity – and yes it is partly that, but it is also much, much more. It's bigger and deeper. It's our life-force gathering momentum, wanting to surge forth with a sense of "now or never", "be or not be", "this is who I need to be", "do or die".

It is like we have a huge torrent of water rushing through us. Where there are relatively clear and defined channels for it to travel through the flow is fast and forceful. The torrent can then be constructive - filling up, energising, utilising those channels, as it makes its way to its completion, its resolution, like the river flows to the ocean. This is when things in our life and within us flow, when we really feel "I have made it!", "I can soar!", "Yes, this is who I am!". We feel this where we've done enough work on ourselves to open up the right channels and allow the torrent its passage.

Where the channels are blocked, too narrow or too few, where we've collected a lot of debris or there are dead ends, the torrent becomes raging whirlpools, blow-holes and geysers. The water surges, trapped, confused, making a lot of noise and

disturbance, uncontrolled and unpredictable, untamed and unguided. We all know those feelings, don't we – we've experienced them before, most likely in adolescence and possibly at other times too. They're urges from within that are driving us to change, to move on, to break with past patterns, even go against logic, to follow those dreams. There are parts of our selves and our lives that we've blocked or avoided and this is where the torrent hits dead ends and rages within us. It might burst through a whole lot of debris and release a blockage – opening up a new part of our self (you know the scenario – the person who decides in their late forties to learn to fly, or maybe for the first time pierce an ear, or become the quiet one after always being the 'life-of-the-party'). Or perhaps the built up pressure will find some old, disused channels and open them up again. That's when we are shocked and horrified to find ourselves regressing to an old and unhelpful pattern of behaviour, one that we thought we had well and truly moved on from. I for one am rediscovering impatience, irritability and physical ailments that I thought I had overcome. It's not that we really have regressed that much. It's just that the torrent that is flowing through us has found its way to the withered, disused channels and it's testing how well we've closed them off and, most importantly, how plentiful and how open the alternative channels are.

If we have too few channels through which we can be ourselves, express our true self, or if we've mostly controlled and dammed past urges – the previous torrents – then we can feel a depression that comes from trapped emotion and trapped drive. We feel overwhelmed, confused, dull, unable to see it clearly, unable to deal with daily life, let alone the torrent within us, and the massive channels it requires. Thus the despondency and depression that many of us feel, to varying extents during mid-life ("what have I done with my life?").

Whatever our reaction, the torrent inevitably finds our blockages. That's our task in mid-life – to work with the energy we feel surging within us and release as many blockages as possible. We can create new channels and broaden and deepen the best of the old channels through which our life-force can flow and thus express more of our true self.

It really is like working with a torrent of water – all we need to do is take the first steps to begin a new channel and the flow of water will do the rest (remember when we used to play in the sand at the water's edge and dig moats and channels?). Yes it can be that simple! We just need to take a few little steps away from those old, unwanted or tired patterns and do something new (even if it is just taking a new route to work) and be open to the new opportunities, ideas and drives that may show themselves (however unexpectedly). And we need to be prepared to take ourselves to new heights and new levels of responsibility in the areas of our life we feel good about and do well in.

We won't expect an easy or smooth ride if we remember that the nature of the torrent is to seek out resistance and thus create challenge and conflict and noise. But we can feel good about the 'new' self we are creating to take us through the second half of our life.

Lynn Romeo, *Living Now*, April 2005