

STUDY GUIDE TO THE WRITINGS OF PEMA CHÖDRÖN

The ESSENTIAL PEMA

Preface by Tim Olmsted

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PREFACE

Pema Chödrön has been many things to the many people whose lives she has touched over a lifetime of sharing the teachings of the Buddha and her own life. She has been a shining example of what it means to be a student of the path, a powerful inspiration when we needed to be reminded of what is true in our lives and a good friend during all of the times when that was the one thing that we needed. She has shown up in our lives always at just the right time, as a fellow traveler, grandmother, nag, teacher and cheerleader.

I have known Ani Pema since we first offered a drop-in meditation teachings together in Boulder in the late 70s. Even then, Ani Pema had the remarkable ability to just be one of us, a simple student exploring the teachings, while at the same time, somehow, being way out in front in the subtlety of her understanding and her ability to embody that understanding. Throughout the years, her teachings and writings have always been infused with warmth, with texture drawn from a life lived on the path, and a sly sense of humor gained from the realization of the paradox that we can never really get “there,” while at the same time, we can never really be anywhere else.

Over the years it has become apparent to me that, while there are many thousands of people who consider Ani Pema to be their mentor, or “spiritual friend,” Ani Pema has taught on so many topics that it might be hard for someone to know just how to use her teachings as a basis for one’s practice and study. It is with this in mind that I first approached Ani Pema with the idea of creating a guide for her work. She liked that idea and suggested that her long time student and friend, Lelia Calder, might be willing to help out.

Lelia stepped up to the challenge and created this wonderful guide that provides direction for us, her readers and students, as we navigate Ani Pema’s vast body of work. With the help of this guide, even those who are brand new to her work will understand the stages and logic of the path as Ani-la herself learned and practiced it. Our ability to hear and to know Ani Pema has been made possible only through the interest, dedication and support of fellow students like you. Thanks to Lelia’s years of hard work and generosity in compiling this guide, we can now offer it to each of you in the hopes that you will find it as enriching and illuminating as we do.

Tim Olmsted, President

The Pema Chödrön Foundation

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Let me first acknowledge my great debt of gratitude to Ani Pema herself. I first came to know her writings in 1991 with *The Wisdom of No Escape* and, as a wandering bee, was truly magnetized and delighted.* As her student, I have been blessed by a more personal acquaintance with her and have received the benefit of her wisdom and guidance for many years. The creation of **The Essential Pema** has been a priceless opportunity for me to offer something in return.

Pulling together threads from her published teachings, this tapestry is designed along the lines of *ground, path* and *fruition*, the traditional developmental journey of the Mahayana student. Transformed by the magic of her special gift with words, these stages become *befriending ourselves, benefiting others, and opening to the world as it is*. A collection of pith instructions, rather than a comprehensive index, this Guide draws our attention to the many inspired expressions of skillful dharma teaching so characteristic of Ani Pema's work.

What you have received in digital form, that you are welcome to print and hold in your hands, is Tim Olmsted's idea finally come to fruition. In the spirit of his original intent, it is our hope that this effort will be helpful for anyone who wishes to study Pema's teachings on the Dharma through this lens. My heartfelt thanks to Tim for his constant support and helpful suggestions.

For the generous offer of a second pair of eyes I am indebted to Laura Kaufman. To Sweet Design, gratitude for the beautiful graphics, patient reformatting, and always cheerful assistance with the apparently endless task of proofreading. I apologize for all mistakes and misjudgments. These are entirely my own. It is my earnest wish and deepest aspiration that, despite these, Ani Pema's great kindness and wisdom will shine through the words I have chosen and continue to enlighten us all.

This gift, from the heart of one whose life has been immeasurably blessed, is given in celebration of her 80th birthday with much love and gratitude. May it be of benefit.

Lelia Calder

** Generated from immense merit,
The blossoming water-born lotus,
Whose splendor magnetizes and delights wandering bees –
May the light of sublime dharma remain firm.*

Long Life Prayer written for Ani Pema Chödrön by Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche in honor of her 79th birthday.

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BUDDHA NATURE – BASIC GOODNESS

“The Buddha taught that there is no enlightenment and no wisdom outside our own minds. From this perspective, what we gain from teachers, from scriptures, or from following the spiritual path through all its stages is not something new or external to us. When we follow the path, we simply gain more skillful methods to uncover our own wisdom and our own enlightenment.”

Dzogchen Ponlop, *Wild Awakening*, 16

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“We already have everything we need. There is no need for self-improvement. All these trips that we lay on ourselves – the heavy-duty fearing that we’re bad and hoping that we’re good, the identities that we so dearly cling to, the rage, the jealousy and the addictions of all kinds – never touch our basic wealth. They are like clouds that temporarily block the sun. But all the time our warmth and brilliance are right here. This is who we really are. We are one blink of an eye away from being fully awake.”

Start Where You Are, 3

“Being a Buddha isn’t easy. It’s accompanied by fear, resentment, and doubt. But learning to leap into open space with our fear, resentment, and doubt is how we become fully human beings. There isn’t any separation between samsara and nirvana, between the sadness and pain of the setting sun and the vision and power of the Great Eastern Sun, as the Shambhala teachings put it. One can hold them both in one’s heart, which is actually the purpose of practice.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 113-114

“When you come from the view that you’re fundamentally good rather than fundamentally flawed, as you see yourself speak or act out, as you see yourself repress, you will have a growing understanding that you’re not a bad person who needs to shape up but a good person with temporary, malleable habits that are causing you a lot of suffering. And then, in that spirit, you can become very familiar with these temporary but strongly embedded habits. We all carry around trunk loads of old habits, but very fortunately for us, they’re removable.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 28-29

“This path entails uncovering three qualities of being human, three basic qualities that have always been with us but perhaps have gotten buried and been almost forgotten. These qualities are natural intelligence, natural warmth, and natural openness. If we are not obscuring our intelligence with anger, self-pity or craving, we know what will help and what will make things worse. Natural warmth is our shared capacity to love, to have empathy, to have a sense of humor. It is also our capacity to feel gratitude and appreciation and tenderness. The third quality of basic goodness is natural openness, the spaciousness of our skylike minds. We can connect with that openness at any time. For instance, right now, for three seconds, just stop reading and pause.”

Taking the Leap, 5-6

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“Trungpa Rinpoche explained buddha nature in various ways. He taught that all beings have ‘enlightened genes’ – murderers and buddhas alike. Beings suffering the agony of hell have exactly the same innate ability to wake up as those enjoying the bliss of enlightenment. He also presented this teaching as ‘basic goodness.’ The ultimate nature of everything tends toward goodness and there’s no way to stop it, no matter what we believe.”

No Time to Lose, 221-222

“Ego could be defined as whatever covers up basic goodness. From an experiential point of view, what is ego covering up? It’s covering up our experience of just being here, just fully being where we are, so that we can relate with the immediacy of our experience. Egolessness is a state of mind that has complete confidence in the sacredness of the world. It is unconditional well-being, unconditional joy that includes all the different qualities of our experience.”

When Things Fall Apart, 62

“At some point, we need to stop identifying with our weaknesses and shift our allegiance to our basic goodness. It’s highly beneficial to understand that our limitations are not absolute and monolithic, but relative and removable. The wisdom of buddha nature is available to us at any time.”

No Time to Lose, 334

Related subjects for study:

Lighten up – *How to Meditate*, chapters 23 and 24

– *Start Where You Are*, chapter 15

Fearlessness – *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, chapter 94

THREE KINDS OF SUFFERING AND FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

“There are three categories of suffering or pain in the Buddhist tradition: all-pervading pain, the pain of alternation and the pain of pain. All-pervading pain is the general pain of dissatisfaction, separation and loneliness. The sense of alternation between pain and its absence, again and again, is itself painful. And then there is the pain of pain. Resisting pain only increases its intensity.”

The Myth of Freedom by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 9-11

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“In the first teaching of the Buddha – the teachings on the four noble truths – he talked about suffering. I have always experienced these teachings as a tremendous affirmation that there is no need to resist being fully alive in this world. The first noble truth says simply that it’s part of being human to feel discomfort. If we resist it, the reality and vitality of life become misery. The second noble truth says that this resistance is the fundamental operating mechanism of what we call ego. The third noble truth says that the cessation of suffering is letting go of holding on to ourselves.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 38-41

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“There’s an important distinction that needs to be made about the word ‘suffering.’ When the Buddha said, ‘The only thing I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering,’ he used the word *dukkha* for suffering. *Dukkha* is different than pain. Pain is an inevitable part of human life, as is pleasure. The Buddha did not say that, ‘I teach only one thing: pain and the cessation of pain.’ He said pain *is* – you have to grow up to the fact, mature to the fact, relax to the fact that there will be pain in your life.”

How to Meditate, 3-4

“The word *dukkha* is also translated as ‘dissatisfaction,’ or ‘never satisfied.’ *Dukkha* is kept alive by being continually dissatisfied with the reality of the human condition, with the fact that pleasant and unpleasant situations are part and parcel of life.”

How to Meditate, 4

“We suffer, not because we are basically bad or deserve to be punished, but because of three tragic misunderstandings. Because we mistakenly take what is always changing to be permanent, we suffer. Because we mistake the openness of our being for a solid, irrefutable self, we suffer. Because we mistake what always results in suffering for what will bring us happiness, we remain stuck in the repetitious habit of escalating our dissatisfaction.”

The Places That Scare You, 21-22

“What keeps us unhappy and stuck in a limited view of reality is our tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain, to seek security and avoid groundlessness, to seek comfort and avoid discomfort. This is how we keep ourselves enclosed in a cocoon. Life in our cocoon is cozy and secure. The mind is always seeking zones of safety, and these zones of safety are continually falling apart. That’s the essence of *samsara* – the cycle of suffering that comes from continuing to seek happiness in all the wrong places.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 23-24

“People have no respect for impermanence. We take no delight in it; in fact, we despair of it. We regard it as pain. We try to resist it by making things that will last – forever. Somehow, in the process of trying to deny that things are always changing, we lose our sense of the sacredness of life. We tend to forget we are part of the natural scheme of things.”

When Things Fall Apart, 61

“Instead of asking, How can I get rid of my difficult coworker, or how can I get even with my abusive father, we might begin to wonder how to unwind our suffering at the root. We might wonder, How do I learn to recognize I’m caught? How can I see what I do without feeling hopeless? How can I find some sense of humor? Some gentleness? Some ability to let go and not make such a big deal of my problems? What will help me remain present when I’m afraid? This is a work in progress, a process of uncovering our natural openness, our natural intelligence and warmth.”

Taking the Leap, 50-51

“Before we can know what natural warmth really is, often we must experience loss. We go along for years moving through our days, propelled by habit, taking life pretty much for granted. Then we or someone dear to us has an accident or gets seriously ill, and it’s as if blinders have been removed from our eyes. We see the meaninglessness of so much of what we do and the emptiness of so much we cling to.”

Taking the Leap, 75

Related subjects for study:

“Nothing to Hold On To” – *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, chapter 94

“Lighten Up” – *Start Where You Are*, chapter 15

TAKING REFUGE

“We take refuge in the Three Jewels – the Buddha, the dharma, and sangha. The Buddha is like one who has walked a certain road and, by virtue of having reached the destination, knows the route and can show us the way. The road itself is the dharma. And those with whom we travel, those who offer us support and on whom we rely, comprise the sangha.”

Chagdud Tulku, *Gates to Buddhist Practice*, 102

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“I’ve always thought that the phrase ‘to take refuge’ is very curious because it sounds theistic, dualistic, and dependent ‘to take refuge’ in something. I remember very clearly, at a time of enormous stress in my life, reading *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice became a heroine for me because she fell into this hole and she just free-fell. She didn’t grab for the edges, she wasn’t terrified, trying to stop her fall; she just fell and she looked at things as she went down. Then, when she landed, she was in a new place. She didn’t take refuge in anything. The fundamental idea of taking refuge is that between birth and death we are alone. It expresses your realization that the only way to begin the real journey of life is to feel the ground of loving kindness and respect for yourself and then to leap.

The Wisdom of No Escape, 66-67

“The Buddha is the awakened one and we, too, are buddhas. We are the awakened one – the one who continually leaps, who continually opens, who continually goes forward. Taking refuge in the Buddha means that we are willing to spend our life reconnecting with the quality of being awake. So when we say ‘I take refuge in the Buddha,’ that means I take refuge in the courage and potential of fearlessness.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 113-114

“Taking refuge in the dharma – the teachings of the Buddha – is what it’s all about. From a broader perspective the dharma also means your whole life. The teachings of the Buddha are about letting go and opening: you do that in how you relate to the people in your life,

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how you relate to the situations you are in, how you relate with your thoughts, how you relate with your emotions. You have a certain life, and whatever life you are in is a vehicle for waking up.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 71

“Taking refuge in the sangha means taking refuge in the brotherhood and sisterhood of people who are committed to helping one another to take off their armor. If we live in a family where all the members are committed to taking off their armor, then one of the most powerful vehicles of learning how to do it is the feedback that we give one another, the kindness that we show to one another.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 71-72

“Therefore taking refuge in the three jewels doesn’t mean finding consolation in them. Rather, it is a basic expression of your aspiration to leap out of the nest, whether you feel ready for it or not, to go through your puberty rites and be an adult with no hand to hold.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 66

Related subjects for study:

Becoming a warrior – *The Wisdom of No Escape*, chapter 1

Cool loneliness – *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, chapters 78 and 86

Not causing harm – *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty*, chapter 3

Outer and inner renunciation – *The Wisdom of No Escape*, chapter 11

THREE MARKS OF EXISTENCE – THREE FACTS OF LIFE

“Ultimate liberation, according to Buddhism’s foundational teachings, is the direct realization of three particular aspects of reality – impermanence, dissatisfaction, and non-self – which eradicates the very root of afflictive mental tendencies and suffering.”

B. Alan Wallace, *Minding Closely: The Four Applications of Mindfulness*, 88

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“The Buddha taught that there are three principal characteristics of existence: *impermanence*, *egolessness*, and *suffering or dissatisfaction*. The lives of all beings are marked by these three qualities. Recognizing these to be real and true in our own experience helps us to relax with things as they are. That nothing is static or fixed, that all is fleeting and impermanent, is the ordinary state of affairs. Everything is in process. Everything – every tree, every blade of grass, all the animals, insects, human beings, buildings, the animate and the inanimate – is always changing, moment to moment. It means that life isn’t always going to go our way. It means that there is loss as well as gain. And we don’t like that.”

The Places the Scare You, 17-18

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“How do we celebrate impermanence, suffering and egolessness in our everyday lives? When impermanence presents itself, we can recognize it as impermanence. When your pen runs out of ink in the middle of writing an important letter, recognize it as impermanence, part of the whole cycle of life. When suffering arises in our life we can recognize it as suffering. When we get what we don’t want, when we don’t get what we do want, when we become ill, when we’re getting old, when we’re dying – when we see any of these things in our lives, we can recognize suffering as suffering. This is a twenty-four-hour-a-day practice.”

When Things Fall Apart, 62-63

“Sometimes egolessness is called *no-self*. The Buddha was not implying that we disappear – or that we could erase our personality. He was pointing out that the fixed idea we have of ourselves as solid and separate from each other is painfully limiting. That we take ourselves so seriously, that we are so absurdly important in our own minds, is a problem for us. We are certain of who we are and who others are and it blinds us. Are we going to hold on stubbornly to ‘I’m like this and you are like that’? Or are we going to move beyond that narrow mind, aspiring to reconnect with the natural flexibility of our being and help others do the same? The teaching on egolessness points to our dynamic, changing nature. We are not trapped in any identity at all, neither in terms of how others see us nor in how we see ourselves. Every moment is unique, unknown, completely fresh. For a warrior-in-training, egolessness is a cause of joy rather than a cause of fear.”

The Places that Scare You, 19-21

“Our suffering is based so much on our fear of impermanence. Who ever got the idea that we could have pleasure without pain? Pain and pleasure go together. They can be celebrated. Pain is not a punishment; pleasure is not a reward. Inspiration and wretchedness complement each other. The gloriousness of our inspiration connects us with the sacredness of the world. But when the tables are turned and we feel wretched, that softens us up. It ripens our hearts. It becomes the ground for understanding others.”

When Things Fall Apart, 61-62

“When I begin to doubt that I have what it takes to stay present with impermanence, egolessness and suffering, it uplifts me to remember Trungpa Rinpoche’s cheerful reminder that there is no cure for hot and cold. There is no cure for the facts of life. This teaching on the three marks of existence can motivate us to stop struggling against the nature of reality. We can stop harming others and ourselves in our efforts to escape the alternation of pleasure and pain. We can relax and be fully present for our lives.”

The Places that Scare You, 22

“Often peace is taught as the fourth mark of existence.* This isn’t the peace that’s the opposite of war. It’s the well-being that comes when we can see the infinite pairs of opposites as complementary. Wisdom and ignorance cannot be separated. Cultivating moment-to-moment curiosity, we just might find that this kind of peace dawns on us.”

When Things Fall Apart, 64

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Related subjects for study:

Fear – *When Things Fall Apart*, chapter 1

Curiosity – *The Wisdom of No Escape*, chapter 1

Resistance – *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change*, chapter 1

Staying present – *How to Meditate*, chapter 5

Peace – *Taking the Leap*, chapter 10

*There is another presentation of these essential principles, described by Dongzar Khyentse Rinpoche as follows: “Buddhism is distinguished by four characteristics, or ‘seals.’ If all these four seals are found in a path or a philosophy, it can be considered a path of the Buddha.” They are:

All compounded things are impermanent.

All emotions are painful.

All phenomena are empty; they are without inherent existence.

Nirvana is beyond extremes.

“The Four Seals of Dharma are Buddhism in a Nutshell,” *Lion’s Roar*, March 2000

MAITRI – UNCONDITIONAL FRIENDLINESS TOWARDS ONESELF

Maitri or loving-kindness is the first of the Four Limitless Ones (also called the Four Immeasurables). It is the wish that all beings be happy, including oneself. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche translated maitri as “unconditional friendliness with oneself.”

-ed.

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“Some people find the teachings I offer helpful because I encourage them to be kind to themselves – but this does not mean pampering our neurosis. The kindness that I learned from my teachers, and that I wish so much to convey to other people, is kindness toward all qualities of our being. The qualities that are the toughest to be kind to are the painful parts, where we feel ashamed, as if we don’t belong, as if we’ve just blown it, when things are falling apart for us. *Maitri* means sticking with ourselves when we don’t have anything, when we feel like a loser. And it becomes the basis for extending the same unconditional friendliness to others.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 73

“If you really want to live fully, if you want to enter into life, enter into genuine relationships with other people, with animals, with the world situation, you’re definitely going to have the experience of feeling provoked, of getting hooked, of *shenpa*. You are not just going to feel

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bliss. The message is that when those feelings emerge, this is *not* a failure. This is the chance to cultivate *maitri*, unconditioned friendliness toward your perfect and imperfect self.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 74-75

“If you are willing through meditation to be mindful not only of what feels comfortable but also of what pain feels like, if you even *aspire* to stay awake and open to what you’re feeling, to recognize and acknowledge it as best you can in each moment, then something begins to change.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 123

“But loving-kindness – *maitri* – toward ourselves doesn’t mean getting rid of anything. *Maitri* means we can still be crazy, we can still be angry. We can still be timid or jealous or full of feelings of unworthiness. The ground of practice is you or me or whoever we are right now, just as we are. That is what we come to know with tremendous curiosity and interest.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 11-12

“Curiosity involves being gentle, precise, and open – actually being able to let go and open. Gentleness is a sense of good-heartedness toward ourselves. Precision is being able to see clearly, not being afraid to see what’s really there. Openness is being able to let go and to open. When you have this kind of honesty, gentleness, and good-heartedness, combined with clarity about yourself, there’s no obstacle to feeling loving-kindness for others as well.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 12

“Openness doesn’t come from resisting our fears but from getting to know them well. The first thing that takes place in meditation is that we start to see what’s happening. Even though we still run away and we still indulge, we see what we’re doing clearly; We acknowledge our aversions and our cravings. We become familiar with the strategies and beliefs we use to fortify our cocoon. To the degree that we’re willing to see our indulging and our repressing clearly, they begin to wear themselves out.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 47

“Traditionally it is said that the root of aggression and suffering is ignorance. But what is it that we are ignoring? Entrenched in the tunnel vision of our personal concerns, what we ignore is our kinship with others. One reason we train as warrior-bodhisattvas is to recognize our interconnectedness – to grow in understanding that when we harm another, we are harming ourselves. So we train in recognizing our uptightness. We train in seeing that others are not so different from ourselves. We train in opening our hearts and minds in increasingly difficult situations.”

The Places that Scare You, 41

“Our personal attempts to live humanely in this world are never wasted. Choosing to cultivate love rather than anger just might be what it takes to save the planet from extinction.”

The Places that Scare You, 41

Related subjects for study:

- 'Compassionate Abiding' practice – *Practicing Peace in Times of War*, chapter 5
- *How to Meditate*, chapter 6
- Traditional Bodhichitta practices – *The Places that Scare You*, chapters 6 and 7
- *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, chapter 35
- 'Pause' practice – *Taking the Leap*, 7-10
- Forgiveness – *The Places that Scare You*, chapter 14
- The middle way – *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty*, chapter 5

FOUR REMINDERS – FOUR THOUGHTS THAT TURN THE MIND TOWARD THE DHARMA

The Four Reminders are referred to as the common preliminaries because these four truths provide inspiration and preparation for further study and practice of the Dharma. His Holiness, the 17th Karmapa, has said they are the most important contemplations that a student can undertake. Pema Chödrön calls them “the four thoughts that turn the mind to the dharma.”

-ed.

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“The traditional four reminders are basic reminders of why one might make a continual effort to return to the present moment. The first one reminds us of our precious human birth. The basic thing is to realize that we have everything going for us. We don’t have extreme pain that’s inescapable. We don’t have total pleasure that lulls us into ignorance. When we start feeling depressed, it’s helpful to reflect on that. We are always in a position where something might happen to us. We don’t know. Life can just turn upside down. Anything can happen. How precious, how really sweet and precious our lives are. Beginning to realize how precious life is becomes one of your most powerful tools. We are actually in the best and easiest situation. It’s good to remember that. It’s good to remember all the talks you’ve ever heard on basic goodness and basic cheerfulness and gratitude. What we do to recognize our own precious human birth can be an inspiration for everybody else.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 97-100

“The second reminder is impermanence. Life is very brief. Also, its length is unpredictable. If you realize that you don’t have that many more years to live and if you live your life as if you actually had only one day left, then the sense of impermanence heightens that feeling of the preciousness and gratitude. Remembering impermanence motivates you to go back and look at the teachings, to see what they tell you about how to work with your life, how to rouse yourself, how to cheer up, how to work with emotions. Still sometimes you’ll read and read and you can’t find the answer anywhere. But then someone on a bus will tell you,

or you'll find it in the middle of a movie. If you really have these questions you'll find the answers everywhere. But if you don't have a question, there's certainly no answer."

The Wisdom of No Escape, 101-102

"The third reminder is karma: every action has a result. Fundamentally, in our everyday life, it's a reminder that it's important how we live. Every time you are willing to acknowledge your thoughts, let them go, and come back to the freshness of the present moment, you're sowing seeds of wakefulness in your unconscious. You are conditioning yourself toward openness rather than sleepiness. You're sowing seeds for your own future, cultivating this innate fundamental wakefulness by aspiring to let go of the habitual way you proceed and to do something fresh. The law of karma is that we sow the seed and we reap the fruit. To remember that can be extremely helpful."

The Wisdom of No Escape, 103-104

"The Buddhist teachings on karma, put very simply, tell us that each moment in time – whether in our personal lives or in our life together on earth – is the result of our previous actions. The seeds the United States has sown in the last year, 5 years, fifty years, hundred years are having their impact on the world right now – and not just what the United States has sown but all the countries that are involved in the world situation today. Many of us feel a kind of despair about whether all this can ever unwind itself. The message of this book is that it has to happen at the level of individuals working with their own minds, because even if these tumultuous times are the result of seeds that have been sown and reaped by whole nations, these nations are made up of millions of people who, just like ourselves, want happiness. So think in terms of sowing seeds for your children's future and for your grandchildren's future and your grandchildren's grandchildren's future."

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 85-87

"The fourth reminder is the futility of continuing to spin around on this treadmill that is traditionally called samsara. The essence of samsara is this tendency that we have to seek pleasure and avoid pain, to seek security and avoid groundlessness, to seek comfort and avoid discomfort. The basic teaching is that this is how we keep ourselves miserable, unhappy, and stuck in a very small, limited view of reality. The mind is always seeking zones of safety, and these zones of safety are continually falling apart. Samsara is preferring death to life."

The Wisdom of No Escape, 106-107

"The opposite of samsara is when all the walls fall down, when the cocoon completely disappears and we are totally open to whatever may happen, with no withdrawing, no centralizing into ourselves. That is what we aspire to. That's what stirs us and inspires us: leaping, being thrown out of the nest, going through the initiation rites, growing up, stepping into something that's uncertain and unknown. Basically you *do* prefer life and warriorship to death."

The Wisdom of No Escape, 107-108

Related Subjects for study:

“Hopelessness and Death” – *When Things Fall Apart*, chapter 7

“Heartbreak with Samsara” – *No Time to Lose*, 269-301

“Abandon Any Hope of Fruition” – *Start Where You Are*, chapter 16

THREE POISONS – FIXED MIND

The Three Poisons – attachment, aversion, and ignorance – are the primary ways that the mind reacts in its mistaken attempt to create, consolidate and defend a separate sense of self. A mind that is under the influence of one of these, or one of the myriad other “mind poisons,” or “kleshas” in Sanskrit, is afflicted, restless and constricted. Pema calls this “fixed mind.”

-ed.

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“There are three main poisons: passion, aggression, and ignorance. We could talk about these in different ways – for example, we could also call them craving, aversion, and couldn’t care less. Addictions of all kinds come under the category of craving, which is wanting, wanting, wanting – feeling that we have to have some kind of resolution. Aversion encompasses violence, rage, hatred, and negativity of all kinds, as well as garden-variety irritation. And ignorance? Nowadays, it’s usually called denial.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 105

“The three poisons are always trapping you in one way or another, imprisoning you and making your world really small. When you feel craving, you could be sitting at the edge of the Grand Canyon, and all you can see is this piece of chocolate cake that you’re craving. With aversion, you’re sitting on the edge of the Grand Canyon, and all you can hear is the angry words you said to someone ten years ago. With ignorance, you’re sitting on the edge of the Grand Canyon with a paper bag over your head. Each of the three poisons has the power to capture you so completely that you don’t even perceive what’s in front of you.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 105-106

“But it’s only when the fearful ‘I’ is not pushing and pulling at life, freaking out and grasping at it, that full engagement is possible. We become more fully engaged in our lives when we become less self-absorbed. As we have less and less allegiance to our small, egocentric self, less and less allegiance to a fixed notion of who we are or what we’re capable of doing, we find we also have less and less fear of embracing the world just as it is. Letting go of the fixed self isn’t something we can just *wish* to happen, however. It’s something we predispose ourselves to with every gesture, every word, every deed, every thought.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 109

“It is said that all deep satisfaction, all happiness, all spiritual growth, all feeling of being alive and engaged in the world happens in this realm of dynamic flow when we connect with the

fluid, changing flow of things. In some way, all of us are at least five-minute fundamentalists. In other words, where we fix it, we freeze it. Rather than being with the flow, we have a fixed view of somebody else: a fixed view of a brother or a partner, a fixed view of ourselves, a fixed view of a situation. There's so much clunkiness in the whole thing. If you think about it, fixing and freezing is so boring compared to the real morphing quality of things."

How to Meditate, 134

"The pith instruction is, whatever you do, don't try to make the poisons go away. When you're trying to make them go away, you're losing your wealth along with your neurosis. The irony is that what we most want to avoid in our lives is crucial to awakening bodhichitta. These juicy emotional spots are where a warrior gains wisdom and compassion. Of course, we'll want to get out of those spots far more often than we'll want to stay. That's why self-compassion and courage are vital. Without loving-kindness, staying with pain is just warfare."

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 106

"In post meditation, when the poisons of passion, aggression, or ignorance arise, the instruction is to drop the story line. Instead of acting out or repressing, we use the poison as an opportunity to feel our heart, to feel the wound, and to connect with others who suffer in the same way. We can use the poison as an opportunity to contact bodhichitta. In this way, the poison already is the medicine. When we don't act out and we don't repress, our passion, our aggression, and our ignorance become our wealth. We don't have to transform anything. Simply letting go of the story line is what it takes, which is not all that easy."

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 90

Related subjects for study:

"Three Futile Strategies" – *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, chapter 32

"Uncovering Natural Openness" – *Taking the Leap*, chapter 8

"Changing our Attitude towards Pain" – *Practicing Peace in Times of War*, chapter 4

SHAMATHA – CALM ABIDING

"Choose a quiet and uplifted place to do your meditation practice. Place your attention lightly on the out-breath while remaining aware of the environment around you. Be with each breath as the air goes out and dissolves into space. At the end of each out-breath, simply rest until the next breath goes out. For a more focused meditation, you can follow both the out-breaths and the in-breaths. Whenever you notice that a thought has taken your attention away from the breath, just say to yourself, 'thinking,' and return to following the breath."

Melvin McLeod, "Basic Breath Meditation" in *A Beginner's Guide to Meditation*, 3

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Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“The method for taming the mind is *shamatha* meditation. *Shamatha* is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘calm abiding’ or ‘the development of peace.’ In this practice, we generally work with the breath as our object of meditation. But whatever object we use, the instruction is always the same: when we see that our mind is wandering, we gently bring it back. In this way, we come back to the present, back to the immediacy of our experience. This is done without harshness or judgment, and it is done over and over again.”

No Time to Lose, 103-104

“The practice is to train in not following the thoughts, not in getting rid of thoughts altogether. That would be impossible. You may have thought-free moments and, as your meditation practice deepens, longer expanses of time that are thought free, but thoughts always come back. That’s the nature of mind. The basic instruction is to let the thoughts go – or to label them ‘thinking’ – and stay with the immediacy of your experience.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 16-17

“Because meditation emphasizes working with your mind, it’s easy to forget that you even have a body. When you sit down it’s important to relax into your body and get in touch with what is going on. Then at any time during your meditation period, you can quickly tune back in to the overall sense of being in your body. You are sitting. For a moment you can bring your awareness directly back to being right here. There are sounds, smells, sights, aches; you are breathing in and out. You can reconnect with your body like this when it occurs to you – maybe once or twice during a sitting session. Then return to the technique.”

The Places That Scare You, 25-26

“The innocent mistake that keeps us caught in our own particular style of ignorance, unkindness, and shut-downness is that we are never encouraged to see clearly what is, with gentleness. Instead, there is a kind of basic misunderstanding that we should try to be better than we already are, that we should try to improve ourselves, that we should try to get away from painful things, and that if we could just learn how to get away from the painful things, then we would be happy. That is the innocent, naive misunderstanding that we all share, which keeps us unhappy.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 14

“Meditation is about seeing clearly the body that we have, the mind that we have, the domestic situation that we have, the job that we have, and the people who are in our lives. It’s about seeing how we react to all these things. It’s seeing our emotions and thoughts just as they are right now, in this moment, in this very room, on this very seat. It’s about not trying to make them go away, not trying to become better than we are, but just seeing clearly with precision and gentleness. That means getting to know it completely with some kind of softness, and learning how, once we have experienced it fully, to let it go.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 14-15

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“That’s the value of sitting meditation practice. You train in coming back to the unadorned present moment again and again. Whatever thoughts arise in your mind, you regard them with equanimity and you learn to let them dissolve. There is no rejection of the thoughts and emotions that come up; rather, we begin to realize that thoughts and emotions are not as solid as we always take them to be.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 76

“Gradually, through meditation, we begin to notice that there are gaps in our internal dialogue. In the midst of continually talking to ourselves, we experience a pause, as if awakening from a dream. We recognize our capacity to relax with the clarity, the space, the open-ended awareness that already exists in our minds. We experience moments of being right here that feel simple, direct, and uncluttered.”

The Places That Scare You, 24

“When we study Buddhism, we learn about the view and the meditation as supports for encouraging us to let go of ego and just be with things as they are. You don’t exactly have to be able to grasp this view, but it points you in a certain direction. The suggestion that you view the world this way – as less than solid – sows seeds and wakes up certain aspects of your being.”

Start Where You Are, 22

Related subjects for study:

“The Spiritual Friend” – *The Places That Scare You*, chapter 21

“The Wisdom of No Escape” – *The Wisdom of No Escape*, chapter 5

“Not Too Tight, Not Too Loose” – *The Wisdom of No Escape*, chapter 10

“Discipline” – *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, chapter 70

SHAMATHA-VIPASHYANA

“The meditation instruction that Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche gave to his students is called *shamatha-vipashyana* meditation. He told his students to simply open their minds and relax. If thoughts distracted them, they could simply let the thoughts dissolve and just come back to that open, relaxed state of mind.

“After a few years Rinpoche realized that some of the people who came to him found this simple instruction somewhat impossible to do and that they needed a bit more technique. At that point, without really changing the basic intent of the meditation, he began to give the instructions a bit differently. He put more emphasis on posture and taught people to put very light attention on the out-breath. Later he said that the out-breath was as close as you could come to simply resting the mind in its natural open state and still have an object to which to return.”

Pema Chödrön, *When Things Fall Apart*, 18

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Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“Most meditation techniques use an object of meditation – something you return to again and again no matter what’s going on in your mind. Through rain, hail, snow, and sleet, fair weather and foul, you simply return to the object of meditation. In this case, the out-breath is the object of meditation – the elusive, fluid, ever-changing out-breath, ungraspable and yet continuously arising. When you breathe in it’s like a pause or a gap. There is nothing particular to do except wait for the next out-breath.”

When Things Fall Apart, 19

“He would tell students to ‘touch the out-breath and let it go’ or to ‘have a light and gentle attention on the out-breath’ or ‘to be one with the breath as it relaxes outward.’ After some time, Trungpa Rinpoche added another refinement to the instruction. He began to ask us to label our thoughts ‘thinking.’ We’d be sitting there with the out-breath, and before we knew what had happened, we were gone – planning, worrying, fantasizing – completely in another world, a world totally made of thoughts. At the point when we realized we’d gone off, we were instructed to say to ourselves ‘thinking’ and, without making it a big deal, to simply return again to the out-breath.”

When Things Fall Apart, 20

“There’s a traditional form of meditation that involves very closely observing the kinds of thoughts that are arising and labeling them accordingly – harsh thought, entertainment thought, passion thought, angry thought, and so on. But since there is judgment involved in labeling thoughts in this way, Chogyam Trungpa taught instead to drop all labels that characterize thoughts as virtuous or unvirtuous and simply label thoughts ‘thinking.’ That’s just what it is, thinking – no more, no less.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 47

“Why don’t we pay attention to the out-breath *and* the in-breath? Inherent in this technique is the ability to let go at the end of the out-breath, to open at the end of the out-breath, because for a moment there’s actually no instruction about what to do. There’s a possibility of what Rinpoche used to call ‘gap’ at the end of the out-breath. As you begin to work with mindfulness of the out-breath, then the pause, just waiting, and then mindfulness of the next out-breath, the sense of being able to let go gradually begins to dawn on you. So don’t have any high expectations – just do the technique. As the months and years go by, the way you regard the world will begin to change. You will learn what it is to let go and what it is to open beyond limited beliefs and ideas about things.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 19-20

“When something stops your mind, catch that moment of gap, that moment of big space, that moment of bewilderment, that moment of total astonishment, and let yourself rest in it a little longer than you ordinarily might. Interruptions themselves – surprises, unexpected events, bolts out of the blue – can awaken us to the open, spacious quality of our minds and the warmth of our hearts.”

Start Where You Are, 79, 78

“The view and the meditation – both shamatha-vipashyana and tonglen – are meant to support a softer, more gentle approach to the whole catastrophe. We begin to let opposites coexist, not trying to get rid of anything but just training and opening our eyes, ears, nostrils, taste buds, hearts, and minds wider and wider, nurturing the habit of opening to whatever is occurring, including our shutting down.”

Start Where You Are, 25

“Meditation teaches us how to let go. It’s actually a very important aspect of friendliness, which is that you train again and again in not making things such a big deal. Our problems are a big deal for us. So we need to make space for an attitude of honoring things completely and at the same time not making them a big deal. It’s a paradoxical idea, but holding these two attitudes simultaneously is a source of enormous joy: we hold a sense of respect toward all things, along with the ability to let go. The space that opens up here is referred to as *shunyata* or ‘emptiness.’ It’s basically just a feeling of lightness.”

How to Meditate, 153-154

Related subjects for study:

“The Six Points of Posture” – *How to Meditate*, chapter 3

FURTHER PRACTICES

“Moment by moment we can choose to go toward further clarity and happiness or toward confusion and pain. In order to make this choice skillfully, many of us turn to spiritual practices of various kinds. Working on ourselves and becoming more conscious about our own minds and emotions may be the only way for us to find solutions that address the welfare of all beings and the survival of the earth itself.”

Pema Chödrön, *Taking the Leap*, 1-2

Meditation practices and post-meditation practices (on or off the cushion):

Compassionate Abiding practice

“When something unpleasant occurs, our conditioning automatically clicks in and we have a strong reaction. There is a practice we can do right then to help us stay present and awake. It is called *compassionate abiding*.

“For the purpose of trying to do this practice, try to connect with a feeling of aversion to something. Whether this is a smell, a sound, or a memory of a person, an event, dark places, snakes – whatever it is, use your discursive mind to help you contact the feeling of aversion. And then apply the technique of letting the thoughts go so that you can abide in

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the experience of aversion as a felt quality. For some people it's just felt in the body. Sometimes it's more atmospheric. Imagine someone asking you, 'What does aversion feel like?' You want to find out."

"Once you've contacted that, then breathe in; instead of pushing the feeling of aversion away, invite it in. We contact the feeling of aversion, experiencing it as fully as possible as we breathe in, and then we relax as we breathe out. Then you breathe the feeling in and relax outward again and again. You could do this for five minutes or for hours anytime, on the spot, when aggressive feelings arise."

"We do this for ourselves and all other people who feel prejudice and disgust and have no way of working with it so it escalates into self-denigration, into jealousy, and violence, and creates endless suffering all over the world."

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 79-82

"Simmering" practice

"As a way of working with our aggressive tendencies, Dzigar Kongtrul teaches the nonviolent practice of *simmering*. He says that rather than 'boil in our aggression like a piece of meat cooking in a soup,' we simmer in it. We allow ourselves to wait, to sit patiently with the urge to act or speak in our usual ways and feel the full force of that urge without turning away or giving in. Neither repressing nor rejecting, we stay in the middle between the two extremes, in the middle between yes and no, right and wrong, true and false. This is the journey of developing a kindhearted and courageous tolerance for our pain. Simmering is a way of gaining inner strength. It helps us develop trust in ourselves – trust that we can experience the edginess, the groundlessness, the fundamental uncertainty of life and work with our mind, without acting in ways that are harmful to ourselves or others."

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 51-52

"Pause" practice

"*Pausing* creates a momentary contrast between being completely self-absorbed and being awake and present. You just stop for a few seconds, breathe deeply, and move on. You pause and allow there to be a gap in whatever you are doing. Throughout the day, you could choose to do this. It may be hard to remember at first, but once you start doing it, *pausing* becomes something that nurtures you; you begin to prefer it to being all caught up."

Taking the Leap, 7-8

"What I have noticed about people whom I consider to be awake is this: They're fully conscious of whatever is happening. Their minds don't go off anywhere. They just stay right here with chaos, with silence, with a carnival, in an emergency room, on a mountainside: they're completely receptive and open to what's happening. It is at the same time the simplest and the most profound thing – rather like one continual pause."

Taking the Leap, 14

Forgiveness practice

“There is a simple practice we can do to cultivate forgiveness. First we acknowledge what we feel – shame, revenge, embarrassment, remorse. Then we forgive ourselves for being human. Then, in the spirit of not wallowing in the pain, we let go and make a fresh start. We don’t have to carry the burden with us anymore. We can acknowledge, forgive, and start anew. If we practice this way, little by little we’ll learn to abide with the feeling of regret for having hurt ourselves and others. We will also learn self-forgiveness. Eventually, at our own speed, we’ll even find our capacity to forgive those who have done us harm. We will discover forgiveness as a natural expression of the open heart, an expression of our basic goodness.”

The Places That Scare You, 82

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RELATIVE BODHICHITTA – SOFT SPOT

bo-dhi-chit-ta (bo'di-chi'ta) *n.*, Sanskrit. 1. awake heart/mind. 2. noble heart; genuine heart; wounded heart; open heart. 3. soft spot; tenderness for life; natural warmth; compassion. 4. the longing to awaken so that we can help others do the same – **relative bodhichitta**.

-ed.

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“If we were to ask the Buddha, ‘What is bodhichitta?’ he might tell us that this word is easier to understand than to translate. He might encourage us to seek out ways to find its meaning in our own lives. He might tantalize us by adding that it is only bodhichitta that heals, that bodhichitta is capable of transforming the hardest of hearts and the most prejudiced and fearful of minds. *Chitta* means ‘mind’ and also ‘heart’ or ‘attitude.’ Bodhi means ‘awake,’ ‘enlightened,’ or ‘completely open.’ Sometimes the completely open heart and mind of bodhichitta is called the soft spot, a place as vulnerable and tender as an open wound. It is equated, in part, with our ability to love. Even the cruelest people have this soft spot.”

The Places That Scare You, 3-4

“Bodhichitta has three qualities: (1) it is soft and gentle, which is compassion; (2) at the same time, it is clear and sharp, which is called *prajna*; and (3) it is open. This last quality of bodhichitta is called *shunyata* and is also known as emptiness. Emptiness sounds cold. However, bodhichitta isn’t cold at all, because there’s a heart quality – the warmth of compassion – that pervades the space and the clarity. Compassion and openness and clarity are all one thing, and this one thing is called bodhichitta.”

Start Where You Are, 11

“In order to feel compassion for other people, we have to feel compassion for ourselves. In particular, to care about people who are fearful, angry, jealous, overpowered by addictions of all kinds, arrogant, proud, miserly, selfish, mean, you name it – to have compassion and to care for these people means not to run from the pain of finding these things in ourselves. In fact, our whole attitude toward pain can change. Instead of fending it off and hiding from it, we could open our hearts and allow ourselves to feel that pain, feel it as something that will soften and purify us and make us far more loving and kind.”

When Things Fall Apart, 93

“Prajna is the wisdom that cuts through the immense suffering that comes from seeking to protect our own territory. Prajna makes it impossible for us to use our actions as ways of becoming secure. Prajna makes us homeless; we have no place to dwell on anything. Because of this, we can finally relax.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 131

“When you have this kind of genuine connection with yourself and the world, you may begin to encounter wakefulness. You suddenly feel as if you are in a vast, wide-open space with

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unlimited breathing room. This is the place of just being. It is not an otherworldly, ethereal place. You haven't transcended the ordinary details of your life. Quite the opposite. They have become a doorway to what is called sacred world. Sacred in the sense of precious, rare, fleeting, fundamentally genuine and good. Emptiness and form are forever inseparable. What we see, our perception of ordinary, no-big-deal sights – is the form, the manifestation of emptiness, of awakened energy.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 103-4

“Emptiness is not a void, blank space where nothing is happening. The whole point is that discovering basic goodness – discovering the awakeness, the is-ness, the nowness of things – doesn't just happen by transcending ordinary reality. It comes from appreciating simple experiences free of story line.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 104

“Basic wakefulness, natural openness, is always available. This openness is not something that needs to be manufactured. When we pause, when we touch the energy of the moment, when we slow down and allow a gap, self-existing openness comes to us. It does not require any particular effort. It is available anytime. The next time you're getting worked up, experiment with looking at the sky. Go to the window if you have one in your home or office, and look up at the sky.”

Taking the Leap, 70-71

“These days the world really needs people who are willing to let their hearts, their bodhichitta, ripen. There's such widespread devastation and suffering. It's a hard time. We who are living in the lap of luxury with our pitiful little psychological problems have a tremendous responsibility to let our clarity and our heart, our warmth, and our ability ripen, to open up and let go, because it's so contagious. Doing tonglen is a gesture toward ripening your bodhichitta for the sake of your own happiness and that of others.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 59

“The most straightforward advice on awakening bodhichitta is this: practice not causing harm to anyone – yourself or others – and every day, do what you can to be helpful.”

The Places that Scare You, 109

Related subjects for study:

“When the Going gets Rough” – *The Places that Scare You*, chapter 20

“Sending and Taking” – *The Wisdom of No Escape*, chapter 12

“The Healing Power of Bodhichitta” – *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, chapter 2

The Bodhisattva Vow – *No Time to Lose*, 67-73

“The Way of a Bodhisattva” – *How to Meditate*, chapter 28

SHENPA – BITING THE HOOK

“We utilize thoughts and emotions by watching them arise and dissolve. As we do this, we see they are insubstantial. When we are able to see through them, we realize they can’t really bind us, lead us astray or distort our sense of reality. The expectation that thoughts and emotions should cease is a misconception. We can, however, choose to welcome and work with them.”

Dzigar Kongtrul, *It’s Up to You*, 8

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“In Tibetan there is a word that points to the root cause of aggression, the root cause also of craving. It points to a familiar experience that is at the root of all conflict, all cruelty, oppression, and greed. This word is *shenpa*. The usual translation of it is ‘attachment,’ but this doesn’t adequately express the full meaning. I think of *shenpa* as ‘getting hooked.’ Another definition used by Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, is the ‘charge’ – the charge behind our thoughts and words and actions, the charge behind ‘like’ and ‘don’t like’.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 55-56

“You can actually feel *shenpa* happening. It is a sensation that you can easily recognize. Someone looks at us in a certain way, or we hear a certain song, or walk into a certain room and boom. We’re hooked. Now if you catch *shenpa* early enough, it’s very workable. You can acknowledge that it’s happening and abide with the experience of being triggered, the experience of urge, the experience of wanting to move. In these moments, we can contact the underlying insecurity of the human experience that is inherent in a changing, shifting world.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 57-58

“If we catch it when it first arises, when it’s just a tightening, a slight pulling back, a feeling of beginning to get hot under the collar, then we have the possibility of becoming curious about this urge to do the habitual thing, this urge to strengthen a repetitive pattern. We can feel it physically and, interestingly enough, it’s never new. When you begin to get in touch with *shenpa* you feel like this has been happening forever.”

Taking the Leap, 23

“Whenever there’s discomfort or restlessness or boredom – whenever there’s insecurity in any form – *shenpa* clicks in. And so it is here: we are urged to acknowledge our *shenpa*, see it clearly, experience it fully – without acting out or repressing. There’s some wisdom that becomes accessible to us – wisdom based on compassion for oneself and others that has nothing to do with ego’s fears. It’s the part of us that knows it can connect and live from our basic goodness, our basic intelligence, openness, and warmth. Over time this knowledge becomes a stronger force than the *shenpa*, and we naturally interrupt the chain reaction before it even starts. We naturally become able to prevent an epidemic of aggression before it even begins.”

Taking the Leap, 25-26

“When you’re meditating, and even in your everyday life, notice when you’re hooked. Notice when you’re triggered or activated. That’s the first step: you acknowledge that emotion has arisen. Next, drop the story line and lean in. Just pause, and for a second connect with spaciousness, with openness. Then you lean in to the quality or the texture or the experience, completely touching in to the emotion, without the story. How does the sadness feel? How does the anger feel? Where is it in your body? You let the feeling of the emotion become the object of your meditation. Emotions are actually very empowering; I call working with the emotions ‘accelerated transformation.’ When you experience difficult emotions in your sitting practice, and you let go of the words and the story behind the experience, then you’re sitting with just the energy.”

How to Meditate, 80

“Over time, when we stay with our emotions and breathe with them, the emotions can morph. Here is where we really develop the understanding that emotions are just energy; energy that we attach our thoughts and stories to. Anger morphs into sadness, or it morphs into loneliness, or perhaps it even morphs into happiness. All of this can happen. And what I’d say when you begin to notice this is ‘Welcome to the lineage of meditators’.”

How to Meditate, 106

Related subjects for study and practice:

- Making friends with ourselves – *Start Where You Are*, chapter 6
- *When Things Fall Apart*, chapter 3
- Don’t believe what you think – *The Wisdom of No Escape*, chapter 8
- Detox – *Taking the Leap*, chapter 5
- Tonglen – *The Places That Scare You*, chapter 9

RENUNCIATION – INNER AND OUTER

“Give up your life. Give it all up. Do not base your life on what can be taken from you - wealth, possessions, health, family, friends, fame, respect, even your own life. If you have the good fortune to have family, friends, wealth or respect, savor them, knowing that they all must come to an end, sooner or later. But do not base your life on holding on to them. Instead, do what life calls for in each moment, and do so without any gaining idea, any thought that you will ever see or enjoy the results of your actions. Do it because your life calls for it - nothing more.”

Ken McLeod, *Reflections on Silver River*, 42-43

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“Renunciation is realizing that our nostalgia for wanting to stay in a protected, limited, petty world is insane. Once you begin to get the feeling of how big the world is and how vast our potential for experiencing life is, then you really begin to understand renunciation. Every

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time we are willing to let the story line go, and every time we are willing to let go at the end of the out-breath, that's fundamental renunciation: learning how to let go of holding on and holding back."

The Wisdom of No Escape, 52

"How do we work with this tendency to block and to freeze and to refuse to take another step toward the unknown? The journey of awakening is one of continually coming up against big challenges and then learning how to soften and open. In other words, the paralyzed quality seems to be hardening and refusing, and the letting go or the renunciation of that attitude is simply feeling the whole thing in your heart, letting it touch your heart. You soften and feel compassion for your predicament and for the whole human condition. You soften so that you can actually sit there with those troubling feelings and let them soften you more. The whole journey of renunciation, or starting to say yes to life, is first of all realizing that you've come up against your edge, that everything in you is saying no, and then at that point, softening."

The Wisdom of No Escape, 54-55

"Many of our escapes are involuntary: addiction and dissociating from painful feelings are two examples. Anyone who has worked with a strong addiction – compulsive eating, compulsive sex, abuse of substances, explosive anger, or any other behavior that is out of control – knows that when the urge comes on it's irresistible. The seduction is too strong. So we train again and again in less highly charged situations in which the urge is present but not so overwhelming. By training with everyday irritations, we develop the knack of refraining when the going gets rough. It takes patience and an understanding of how we're hurting ourselves not to continue taking the same old escape route of speaking or acting out."

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 31

"Outer renunciation puts you in touch with what is happening *inside*; the clinging and fixating, the tendency to avoid the underlying queasy-feeling groundlessness. Refraining from harmful speech and action is outer renunciation; choosing not to escape the underlying feelings is inner renunciation."

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 31

"*Don't act, don't speak.* That's the outer work. And then there's also the inner work of exploring what happens next when you don't act and don't speak."

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 34

"When you are refraining – when you are feeling the pull of habitual thoughts and emotions but you're not escaping by acting or speaking out – you can try this inner renunciation exercise: Notice how you feel:

What does it feel like in the body to have these cravings or aggressive urges?

Notice your thinking:

What sort of thoughts do these feelings give birth to?

Notice your actions:

How do you treat yourself and other people when you feel this way?"

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 35

"In Tibetan there's an interesting word: *ye tang che*. The *ye* part means 'totally, completely,' and the rest of it means 'exhausted.' Altogether, *ye tang che* means totally tired out. We might say 'totally fed up.' It describes the experience of complete hopelessness, of completely giving up hope. This is an important point. This is the beginning of the beginning. Without giving up hope – that there is somewhere better to be, that there is someone better to be, we will never relax with where we are or who we are. It expresses the renunciation that's essential for the spiritual path."

When Things Fall Apart, 38

Related subjects for study:

Using the precepts as a path to renunciation

– *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change*, chapter 3

Practice renouncing one thing

– *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change*, chapter 3, 36

SIX PARAMITAS – SIX TRANSCENDENT ACTIVITIES

"The path consists of six transcendental activities which take place spontaneously. They are: transcendental generosity, discipline, patience, energy, meditation, and knowledge (prajna). These virtues are called the six paramitas, because 'param' means 'other side' or 'shore,' 'other side of the river,' and 'ita' means 'arrived.' Paramita means 'arriving at the other side or shore,' which indicates that the activities of the bodhisattva must have the vision, the understanding which transcends the centralized notion of ego. The bodhisattva is not trying to be good or kind, but he is spontaneously compassionate."

Chogyam Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, 170

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

"Suppose there were a place we could go to learn the art of peace, a sort of boot camp for spiritual warriors. Instead of spending hours and hours disciplining ourselves to defeat the enemy, we could spend hours and hours dissolving the causes of war. Such a place might be called bodhisattva training – or training for the servants of peace. The methods we learn might include meditation practice and tonglen. They might also include the six *paramitas* – the six activities of the servants of peace. The word *paramita* means 'going to the other shore.' These actions are like a raft that carries us across the river of samsara."

When Things Fall Apart, 98-9

"There are six traditional activities in which the bodhisattva trains, six ways of compassionate living: generosity, discipline, patience, enthusiasm, meditation, and prajna – uncondi-

tional wisdom. Each one is an activity we can use to take us beyond aversion and attachment, beyond being all caught up in ourselves, beyond the illusion of separateness. Each paramita has the ability to take us beyond our fear of letting go.”

The Places That Scare You, 93

“The essence of generosity is letting go. Pain is always a sign that we are holding on to something – usually ourselves. When we feel unhappy, when we feel inadequate, we get stingy; we hold on tight. Generosity is an activity that loosens us up. By offering whatever we can – a dollar, a flower, a word of encouragement – we are training in letting go.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 133

“Without the paramita of discipline, we simply don’t have the support we need to evolve. At the outer level, we could think of discipline as a structure, like a thirty-minute meditation period. We sit down in a certain position and are as faithful to the technique as possible. On the inner level, the discipline is to return to gentleness, to honesty, to letting go. The discipline is to find the balance between not too tight and not too loose. Discipline provides us with the support to slow down enough and to be present enough so that we can live our lives without making a mess.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 135-136

“Traditionally, it is taught that patience is the antidote to aggression. So when you’re like a keg of dynamite just about to go off, patience means just slowing down at that point – just pausing – instead of immediately acting on your usual, habitual response. You refrain from acting, you stop talking to yourself, and then you connect with the soft spot. But at the same time you are completely and totally honest with yourself about what you are feeling. Patience has nothing to do with suppression. If you wait and don’t fuel the rage with your thoughts, you can be very honest about the fact that you long for revenge; nevertheless you keep interrupting the torturous story line and stay with the underlying vulnerability. That frustration, that uneasiness and vulnerability, is nothing solid. And yet it is painful to experience. Still, just wait and be patient with your anguish and with the discomfort of it. This means relaxing with that restless, hot energy – knowing that it’s the only way to find peace with ourselves or the world.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 38, 41-42

“The paramita of enthusiasm works like a miracle ingredient that brings eagerness to all we do. What the bodhisattva commits to isn’t a trivial matter. Without enthusiasm, we might push too hard or give up altogether. The trick is not getting caught in hope and fear. We can put our whole heart into whatever we do; but if we freeze our attitude into for or against, we’re setting ourselves up for stress. Instead, we could just go forward with curiosity, wondering where this experiment will lead. This kind of open-ended inquisitiveness captures the spirit of enthusiasm, or heroic perseverance.”

No Time to Lose, 225-226

“Meditation allows us to walk more and more into insecurity until it actually becomes more and more our home ground. Life is just as uncertain and unpredictable as it ever was, but we begin to like surprises. Resistance to change and newness starts to melt. Your heart opens to the degree that you can allow difficult situations and step into them. As you become enlightened you increasingly see how our choices perpetuate suffering. And so this business of stepping more and more into groundlessness, or relaxing with groundlessness, becomes something you wish for everyone. We find love in ourselves. If you begin to connect with the fact that you have this good heart, and that it can be nurtured and woken up, then everything becomes the means for awakening bodhichitta. Your life is it. There’s no other place to practice.”

How to Meditate, 173-175

“Prajna is the wisdom that cuts through the immense suffering that comes from seeking to protect our own territory. Prajna makes us homeless; we have no place to dwell on anything. Because of this, we can finally relax. When we work with generosity, we see our nostalgia for wanting to hold on. Working with discipline, we see our nostalgia for wanting to zone out and not relate at all. As we work with patience, we discover our longing to speed. When we practice exertion, we realize our laziness. With meditation we see our endless discursiveness, our restlessness. The foundation of the prajnaparamita is mindfulness, an open-ended inquiry into our experience. With this unfixated mind of prajna we practice the other paramitas, moving from narrow-mindedness to flexibility and fearlessness.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 131-132

Related subjects for study:

No Time to Lose (see also the study guide in the Appendix)

See also Shantideva, *Bodhicharyavatara* (The Way of a Bodhisattva)

FOUR IMMEASURABLES – FOUR LIMITLESS QUALITIES

“May all sentient beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness.

May we be free from suffering and the root of suffering.

May we not be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering.

May we dwell in the great equanimity free from passion, aggression, and prejudice.”

Traditional Chant

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“Particularly powerful are the aspiration practices of the four limitless qualities – loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. In these practices we start close to home: we express the wish that we and our loved ones enjoy happiness and be free of suffering. Then we gradually extend that aspiration to a widening circle of relationships. We just start where we are, where the aspirations feel genuine. We locate our current experience of

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these four boundless qualities, however limited they may be: in our love of music, in our empathy with children, in the joy we feel on hearing good news, or in the equanimity we experience when we are with good friends.”

The Places That Scare You, 37-38

“It is never too late or too early to practice loving-kindness. It is said that we can’t attain enlightenment, let alone feel contentment and joy, without seeing who we are and what we do, without seeing our patterns and our habits. This is called maitri – developing loving-kindness and an unconditional friendship with ourselves.”

When Things Fall Apart, 26

“Compassion practice is daring. It involves learning to relax and move gently toward what scares us. The trick to doing this is to stay with emotional distress without tightening into aversion; to let fear soften us rather than harden into resistance. It can be difficult to even think about beings in torment, let alone to act on their behalf. Recognizing this we begin with a practice that is fairly easy. We cultivate bravery through making aspirations. We make the wish that all beings, including ourselves and those we dislike, be free of suffering and the root of suffering.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 71-72

“One of the meanings of compassion is ‘suffering with,’ being willing to suffer with other people. This means that to the degree you can work with the wholeness of your being – your prejudices, your feelings of failure, your self-pity, your depression, your rage, your addictions – the more you will connect with other people out of that wholeness. And it will be a relationship between equals. You’ll be able to feel the pain of other people as your own pain.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 75

“Compassion is threatening to the ego. We might think of it as something warm and soothing, but actually it is very raw. When we set out to support other beings, when we go so far as to stand in their shoes, when we aspire to never close down to anyone, we quickly find ourselves in the uncomfortable territory of ‘life not on my terms’.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 65

“A traditional aspiration for awakening appreciation and joy is ‘May I and others never be separated from the great happiness that is devoid of suffering.’ This refers to always abiding in the wide-open, unbiased nature of our minds – to connecting with the inner strength of basic goodness. We can practice the first step of the aspiration by learning to rejoice in our own good fortune. We can train in rejoicing in even the smallest blessings our life holds.”

The Places That Scare You, 62

“By practicing maitri, compassion, and rejoicing, we are training in thinking bigger, in opening up as wholeheartedly as we can to ourselves, to our friends, and even to the people we dislike. We are cultivating the unbiased state of equanimity. Training in equanimity is learning to open the door to all, welcoming all beings, inviting life to come and visit.”

The Places That Scare You, 69-70

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“This practice is like a workout that stretches the heart beyond its current capabilities. We can expect to encounter resistance. We discover that we have our limits: we can stay open to some people, but we remain closed to others. We see both our clarity and our confusion. We are learning firsthand what everyone who has ever set out on this path has learned: we are all a paradoxical bundle of rich potential that consists of both neurosis and wisdom.”

The Places That Scare You, 38

“The aspiration practices of the four limitless qualities train us in not holding back, in seeing our biases and not feeding them. Gradually we will get the hang of going beyond our fear of feeling pain. This is what it takes to become involved with the sorrows of the world, to extend loving-kindness and compassion, joy and equanimity to everyone – no exceptions.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 67

“If we acknowledge the love, compassion, joy, and equanimity that we feel now and nurture it through these practices, the expansion of those qualities will happen by itself. They have the power to loosen up useless habits and to melt the ice-hardness of our fixations and defenses. In this way we come to know the difference between a closed and an open mind, gradually developing the self-awareness and kindness we need to benefit others.”

The Places That Scare You, 39

Related subjects for study:

Practicing the Four Limitless Ones – *The Places That Scare You*, chapters 6-12
– *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, 66-78

NEAR AND FAR ENEMIES

“It is not so easy to take a straight look at what we do. There is a traditional teaching that supports us in this process: the near and far enemies of the four limitless qualities. The near enemy is something that’s similar to one of these four qualities. Rather than setting us free, however, it burdens us. The far enemy is the quality’s opposite; it also gets in our way.”

Pema Chödrön, *The Places That Scare You*, 75-76

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“The near enemy or misunderstanding of loving-kindness is attachment. It is characterized by clinging and self-involvement. Loving-kindness is not based on need. It is genuine appreciation and care of another person, a respect for an individual’s value. The far enemy or opposite of loving-kindness is hatred or aversion. When a relationship brings up old memories and ancient discomforts, we become afraid and harden our hearts.”

The Places That Scare You, 76

“There are three near enemies of compassion: pity, overwhelm, and idiot compassion. Pity or professional warmth is easily mistaken for true compassion. When we identify ourselves

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as the helper, it means we see others as helpless. If we have ever been on the receiving end of pity we know how painful it feels. Instead of warmth and support all we feel is distance.”

Ibid., 77

“Overwhelm is a sense of helplessness. We feel that there is so much suffering – whatever we do is to no avail. There are two ways I’ve found effective in working with overwhelm. One is to train with a less challenging subject, to find a situation we feel that we can handle. Starting with something workable can be powerful magic. The second way of training with overwhelm is to keep our attention on the other person. This is the same as keeping our heart open to the pain. If none of these is yet possible, we engender some compassion for our current limitations and go forward.”

Ibid., 77-78

“The third near enemy of compassion is idiot compassion. This is when we avoid conflict and protect our good image by being kind when we should say a definite ‘no.’ Compassion doesn’t imply only trying to be good. It is said that in order not to break our vow of compassion we have to learn when to stop aggression and draw the line. The far enemy or opposite of compassion is cruelty. We protect our vulnerability and fear by hardening. Cruelty when rationalized or unacknowledged destroys us.”

Ibid., 78-79

“The near enemy of joyfulness is over excitement. Authentic joy is not a euphoric state or a feeling of being high. Rather, it is a state of appreciation that allows us to participate fully in our lives. We train in rejoicing in the good fortune of self and others. The far enemy of joy is envy. Until I started working with the practice of rejoicing in the good fortune of others, I never realized I could be so envious. To say that this was humbling is an understatement.”

Ibid., 79

“The near enemy of equanimity is detachment or indifference. Especially in spiritual practice, it is easy to mistake dangling above the unkemptness of life for genuine equanimity. Feeling emotional upheaval is not a spiritual faux pas. It’s where we learn to stop struggling with ourselves. It is only when we can dwell in these places that scare us that equanimity becomes unshakable.”

Ibid., 79-80

“The far enemy of equanimity is prejudice. We get self-righteous about our beliefs and set ourselves solidly for or against others. We take sides. We become closed-minded. We have enemies. This polarization is an obstacle to the genuine equanimity that informs compassionate action. If we wish to alleviate injustice and suffering, we have to do it with an unprejudiced mind.”

Ibid., 80

“There is a richness to all of the smelly stuff that we so dislike and so little desire. The delightful things – what we love so dearly about ourselves, the places in which we feel some

sense of pride or inspiration – these also are our wealth. These practices show us how to accept ourselves, how to relate directly with suffering, how to stop running away from the painful aspects of our lives. They show us how to work openheartedly with life just as it is.”

Start Where You Are, 3-4

Related subjects for study:

“On-the-Spot” Equanimity practice – *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, pages 175-176

LOJONG – MIND TRAINING

“The basic mahayana vision is to work for the benefit of others and create a situation that will benefit others. Because of that vision of mahayana, because you adopt that attitude, and because you actually find that others are more important – with all three of those together, you develop the mahayana practice of training the mind.”

Chogyam Trungpa, *Training the Mind*, 1

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“In the eleventh century Atisha Dipankara brought the complete bodhichitta teachings from India to Tibet. In particular he emphasized what are called the *lojong* teachings, the teachings for training the mind. What is so up-to-date about these teachings is that they show us how to transform difficult circumstances into the path of enlightenment; what we most dislike about our lives is the meat and potatoes of the mind-training practices of Atisha. What seem like the greatest obstacles – our anger, our resentment, our uptightness – we use as fuel to awaken bodhichitta.”

The Places That Scare You, 31

“The lojong practice has two elements: the practice, which is tonglen meditation, and the teaching, which comes in the form of slogans. The basic notion of lojong is that we can make friends with what we reject, what we see as ‘bad’ in ourselves and in other people. At the same time, we could learn to be generous with what we cherish, what we see as ‘good.’ If we begin to live in this way, something in us that may have been buried for a long time begins to ripen. Traditionally this something is called *bodhichitta*, or awakened heart. It is something that we already have but usually have not yet discovered.”

Start Where You Are, 6-7

“The first slogan of the seven points of mind training is ‘First train in the preliminaries.’ The preliminaries are the basic meditation practice – beneficial, supportive, warm-hearted, brilliant shamatha-vipashyana practice. When we say, ‘First, train in the preliminaries,’ it simply means that without this good base there’s nothing to build on. Without it we couldn’t understand tonglen practice and we wouldn’t have any insight into our mind, into either our craziness or our wisdom.”

Start Where You Are, 12

“The mind-training slogans present us with a challenge. When we are escaping the present moment with a habitual reaction, can we recall a slogan that might bring us back? It encourages us to ask ‘How can I practice right now, right on this painful spot, and transform this into the path of awakening?’”

The Places That Scare You, 32-33

“‘Be grateful to everyone’ means that all situations teach you, and often it is the tough ones that teach you best. If we were to make a list of people we don’t like – the people we find obnoxious, threatening, or worthy of contempt – we would find out a lot about those aspects of ourselves that we can’t face.”

Start Where You Are, 57, 56

“There is a saying that is the underlying principle of tonglen and slogan practice: ‘Gain and victory to others, loss and defeat to myself.’ The Tibetan word for pride or arrogance, which is *nga-gyal*, is literally in English ‘me-victorious.’ Me first. Ego. That kind of ‘me-victorious’ attitude is the cause of all suffering.”

Start Where You Are, 8

“‘Always maintain only a joyful mind’ might sound like an impossible aspiration. Yet as we train in unblocking our hearts, we’ll find that every moment contains the free-flowing opening and warmth that characterize unlimited joy. As we use the bodhichitta practices to train, we may come to the point where we see the magic of the present moment; we may gradually wake up to the truth that we have always been warriors living in a sacred world. This is the ongoing experience of limitless joy.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 211

“‘All activities should be done with one intention.’ Breathing in, breathing out, feeling resentful, feeling happy, being able to drop it, not being able to drop it, eating our food, brushing our teeth, walking, sitting – whatever we’re doing could be done with one intention. That intention is that we want to wake up, we want to ripen our compassion, and we want to ripen our ability to let go, we want to realize our connection with all beings. Everything in our lives has the potential to wake us up or to put us to sleep. Allowing it to awaken us is up to us.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 39

“Whether it’s pain or pleasure, through lojong practice we come to have a sense of letting our experience be as it is without trying to manipulate it, push it away, or grasp it. The pleasurable aspects of being human as well as the painful ones become the key to awakening bodhichitta.”

Start Where You Are, 7

Related subjects for study:

Lojong Slogans, commentary and CD - *Always Maintain a Joyful Mind*

Book, CD and cards with the 59 slogans and their commentaries - *The Compassion Box*

Tonglen practice – *Start Where You Are, 36-43*

“The Big Squeeze” – *Start Where You Are, chapter 20*

EIGHT WORLDLY DHARMAS - EIGHT WORLDLY CONCERNS

“We take what is transitory – money, fame, power, relationship – to be real and base our lives on achieving what cannot last – happiness, wealth, fame, and respect. When we base life on what can be taken from us, we give power over our lives to anyone who can take it away. We become dependent on others and on society for a sense of well-being.”

Ken McLeod, *Wake Up to Your Life*, 92

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“One of the classic Buddhist teachings on hope and fear concerns what are known as the eight worldly dharmas. According to this very simple teaching, becoming immersed in these four pairs of opposites – pleasure and pain, praise and blame, fame and disgrace, and gain and loss – is what keeps us stuck in the pain of samsara.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 55

“First, we like pleasure; we are attached to it. Conversely, we don’t like pain. Second, we like and are attached to praise. We try to avoid criticism and blame. Third, we like and are attached to fame. We dislike and try to avoid disgrace. Finally, we are attached to gain, to getting what we want. We don’t like losing what we have.”

When Things Fall Apart, 46

“We try to hold on to fleeting pleasures and avoid discomfort in a world where everything is always changing. Our attachment to them is very strong, very visceral at either extreme. But at some point it might hit us that there’s more to liberation than trying to avoid discomfort, more to lasting happiness than pursuing temporary pleasures, temporary relief.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 54-55

“To begin with, in meditation we can notice how emotions and moods are connected with having lost or gained something, having been praised or blamed, and so forth. We can notice how what begins as a simple thought, a simple quality of energy, quickly blossoms into full-blown pleasure and pain. We have to have a certain amount of fearlessness, of course, because we like it all to come out on the pleasure/praise/fame/gain side. But when we really look, we’re going to see that we have no control over what occurs at all. We have all kinds of mood swings and emotional reactions. They just come and go endlessly.”

When Things Fall Apart, 48

“The irony is that we make up the eight worldly dharmas. We make them up in reaction to what happens to us in this world. They are nothing concrete in themselves. Even more strange is that we are not all that solid either. We have a concept of ourselves that we reconstruct moment by moment and reflexively try to protect. But this concept that we are protecting is questionable. It’s all ‘much ado about nothing’ – like pushing and pulling a vanishing illusion.”

When Things Fall Apart, 47-48

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“We can spend a lifetime chasing after pleasure and trying to get away from pain, never staying present with the underlying feeling of discontent. Even when fame *is* achieved, does it bring the happiness that people anticipate? Consider how common it is to have wealth and fame, but be miserable. What if, by contrast, we trained in staying in the middle – in that non-grasping open space between seeking what’s comfortable and avoiding what is not?

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 55-56

“We might feel that somehow we should try to eradicate these feelings of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disgrace. A more practical approach is to get to know them intimately, see how they hook us, see how they color our perception of reality, see how they aren’t all that solid. Then the eight worldly dharmas become the means for growing wiser as well as kinder and more content.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 55-56

Related subjects for study:

- Hope and Fear – *Fail, Fail Again, Fail Better*
– *When Things Fall Apart*, chapter 7
- The Middle Way – *When Things Fall Apart*, 53-55
– *Practicing Peace in Times of War*, chapter 4

OBSTACLES AS PATH

“In your very imperfections you will find the basis for your firm, way-seeking mind.”

Suzuki Roshi, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, 34

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“As people who wish to attain enlightenment, or simply feel more settled in our life, we must be willing to work with even the most difficult circumstances. I’ve seen people meditating wholeheartedly for years and years and years – people who have experienced the nature of their mind, people who have experienced stillness and calm – but as soon as a relationship goes bad or they get fired from a job or they find out they have a serious illness or that someone they love is sick, they collapse. It’s as if they never meditated a day in their life, and they are completely taken away into anger or despair or a dark depression.”

How to Meditate, 145

“There is a path quality to your meditation practice, and the way becomes much less clear when you hit the toughest points. Believe it or not, sometimes these tough moments are the very things that teach us the most; sometimes they are the very things that open us up to life and to connection with others. Aching emotions and harsh thoughts can be the perfect teacher for us on our path.”

How to Meditate, 145-146

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“Being satisfied with what we already have is a magical golden key to being alive in a full, unrestricted, and inspired way. One of the major obstacles to what is traditionally called enlightenment is resentment, feeling cheated, holding a grudge about how you are, where you are, what you are. This is why we talk so much about making friends with ourselves. We can lead our life so as to become more awake to who we are and what we’re doing rather than trying to improve or change or get rid of who we are or what we’re doing. The key is to wake up, to become more alert, more inquisitive and curious about ourselves.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 6-7

“When we are putting up barriers and the sense of ‘me’ as separate from ‘you’ gets stronger, right there in the midst of difficulty and pain, the whole thing could turn around simply by *not erecting barriers*, simply by staying open to the difficulty, to the feelings that you’re going through; simply by not talking to ourselves about what’s happening. This is a revolutionary step. Becoming intimate with pain is the key to changing at the core of our being – staying open to everything we experience, letting the sharpness of difficult times pierce us to the heart, letting these times open us, humble us, and make us wise and more brave. Let difficulty transform you. And it will. In my experience we just need help in learning how not to run away.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 71

“I think this is what we need a lot of help with: this feeling that there is something wrong with us, that we actually are a failure because of the relationship not working out, the job not working out, or whatever it is, botched opportunities, doing something that flops. Heartbreak of all kinds. One of the ways to sort of pull yourself up is to begin to question what is really happening when there is a failure.”

Fail, Fail Again, Fail Better, 43

“Obstacles occur at the outer and inner levels. At the outer level the sense is that something or somebody has harmed us. We feel disappointed, harmed, confused, and attacked. As for the inner level of obstacle, perhaps nothing ever really attacks us except our own confusion. Perhaps there is no solid obstacle except our own need to protect ourselves from being touched.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 165

“The way we label things is the way they appear to us. We get so hung up on like and dislike, on who’s right and who’s wrong, as if these labels were ultimately real. Yet the human experience is an experience of nothing to hang on to, nothing that’s set once and for all. Reality is always falling apart. As we move in the direction of seeing more space around our fixed ideas, around our limited sense of self, around our notions of right and wrong, around the labels we’re so invested in, the crack in our conventional way of experiencing life will get wider and wider. At that point it may dawn on us that if we want to change the movie of our life, we will have to change our mind.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 77-78

“The basic creative energy of life – life force – bubbles up and courses through all of existence. It can be experienced as open, free, unburdened, full of possibility, energizing. Or this very same energy can be experienced as petty, narrow, stuck, caught. We are the only ones who know what wakes us up and what puts us to sleep. This is the process of making friends with ourselves and with our world. Not just the parts we like, but the whole picture, because it all has a lot to teach us.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 21-23

Related subjects for study:

“Poison as Medicine” – *Start Where You Are*, chapter 5

“Turning Arrows into Flowers” – *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, chapter 21

“The Big Squeeze” – *When Things Fall Apart*, chapter 18

Start Where You Are, chapter 20

Comfortable with Uncertainty, chapter 81

FURTHER PRACTICES

“Wherever we are, we can train as a warrior. Our tools are sitting meditation, tonglen, slogan practice, and cultivating the four limitless qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. With the help of these practices, we will find the tenderness of bodhichitta in sorrow and in gratitude, behind the hardness of rage and in the shakiness of fear. In loneliness as well as in kindness, we can uncover the soft spot of basic goodness.”

Pema Chödrön, *Comfortable with Uncertainty*, 5-6

Meditation practices and post-meditation practices (on and off the cushion):

“Refraining” practice

“Refraining – not habitually acting out impulsively – has something to do with giving up entertainment mentality. Through refraining, we see that there’s something between the arising of the craving – or the aggression or the loneliness or whatever it might be – and whatever action we take as a result. There’s something there in us that we don’t want to experience, and we never do experience, because we’re so quick to act.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 33

“For one day (or one day a week), refrain from something you habitually do to run away, to escape. Pick something concrete, such as overeating or excessive sleeping or overworking or spending too much time texting or checking e-mails. Make a commitment to yourself to gently and compassionately work with refraining from this habit for this one day. Really commit to it. Do this with the intention that it will put you in touch with the underlying anxiety or uncertainty that you’ve been avoiding. Do it and see what you discover.”

“When you refrain from habitual thoughts and behavior, the uncomfortable feelings will still be there. They don’t magically disappear. Over the years, I’ve come to call resting with discomfort ‘the detox period,’ because when you don’t act on your habitual reactions, it’s like giving up an addiction. You’re left with the feelings you were trying to escape. The practice is to make a wholehearted relationship with that.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 36

Lojong Slogans

“Ordinarily we are swept away by habitual momentum and don’t interrupt our patterns even slightly. When we feel betrayed or disappointed, does it occur to us to practice? Usually not. But right there, in the midst of our confusion, is where the slogans of Atisha are most penetrating. The easy part is to familiarize ourselves with them. More challenging is to remember to apply them. To remember a slogan right in the midst of irritation – for example, ‘Always meditate on whatever provokes resentment’ – might cause us to pause before acting out our resentment by saying something mean. Once we are familiar with it, a slogan like this will spontaneously pop into our mind and remind us to stay with the emotional energy rather than acting it out.”

“When we are escaping the present moment with a habitual reaction, can we recall a slogan that might bring us back? Rather than spinning off, can we let the emotional intensity of that red-hot or ice-cold moment transform us. It encourages us to ask, ‘How can I practice right now, right on the painful spot, and transform this into the path of awakening?’ On any average day of our lives, we have plenty of opportunities to ask this question.”

The Places That Scare You, 32-33

Tonglen practice

“In its essence, this practice of tonglen is, when anything is painful or undesirable, to breathe it in. That’s another way of saying you don’t resist it. As unwanted feelings and emotions arise, you actually breathe them in and connect with what all humans feel. This breathing in is done for yourself, in the sense that it’s a personal and real experience, but simultaneously there’s no doubt that you’re at the same time developing your kinship with all beings. If you can know it in yourself, you can know in everyone. This practice cuts through culture, economic status, intelligence, race, religion. People everywhere feel pain. The story lines vary, but the underlying feeling is the same for us all.”

Start Where You Are, 36-37

“In essence the practice is always the same: instead of falling prey to a chain reaction of revenge or self-hatred, we gradually learn to catch the emotional reaction and drop the story lines. Then we feel the bodily sensation completely. One way of doing this is to breathe it into our heart. By acknowledging the emotion, dropping whatever story we are telling ourselves about it, and feeling the energy of the moment, we cultivate compassion for ourselves. Then we could take this a step further. We could recognize that there are mil-

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lions who are feeling the way we are and breathe in the emotion for all of us with the wish that we could all be free of confusion and limiting habitual reactions. When we can recognize our own confusion with compassion, we can extend that compassion to others who are equally confused. This step of widening the circle of compassion is where the magic of bodhicitta training lies.”

The Places That Scare You, 33

See also:

Pema Chödrön. Tenzin Ötro, ed. *Tonglen: The Path of Transformation*

“Just Like Me” practice

“Whatever pleasure or discomfort, happiness or misery you are experiencing, you can look at other people and say to yourself, ‘Just like me they don’t want to feel this kind of pain.’ Or, ‘Just like me they appreciate feeling this kind of contentment’.”

“When things fall apart and we can’t get the pieces back together, when we lose something dear to us, when the whole thing is just not working and we don’t know what to do, this is the time when the natural warmth of tenderness, the warmth of empathy and kindness, are just waiting to be uncovered, just waiting to be embraced. This is our chance to come out of our self-protecting bubble and to realize that we are never alone. This is our chance to finally understand that wherever we go, everyone we meet is essentially just like us. Our own suffering, if we turn toward it, can open us to a loving relationship with the world.”

Taking the Leap, 83

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ABSOLUTE BODHICHITTA – AWAKENED HEART-MIND

“We must develop the desire to bring about the welfare of all sentient beings, and we must strengthen the aim to attain Buddhahood for their benefit. It is the combination of these two aspirations that characterizes Bodhicitta. The key to generating Bodhicitta is our cultivation of compassion.”

The Dalai Lama, *A Profound Mind*, 135-6

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“The word *bodhi* has a lot of different translations, but it basically means ‘wide awake.’ Sometimes it’s translated as ‘enlightened.’ It means a completely open heart, a completely open mind; it means a heart that never closes down, even in the most difficult and horrendous situations. There is no limit to bodhi, no limit to its fluid and all-embracing openness. The word *chitta* means ‘heart’ and ‘mind’; it means both things simultaneously, so we define it as ‘heart-mind.’ Bodhichitta communicates a mind that never limits itself with prejudices or biases or dogmatic views. So you could say that bodhichitta is awakened heart-mind, or enlightened heart-mind, or completely open heart-mind.”

How to Meditate, 171

“Bodhichitta exists on two levels. First there is unconditional bodhichitta, an immediate experience that is refreshingly free of concept, opinion, and our usual all-caught-upness. It’s something hugely good that we are not able to pin down even slightly, like knowing at a gut level that there’s absolutely nothing to lose. Second, there is relative bodhichitta, our ability to keep our hearts and minds open to suffering without shutting down.”

The Places That Scare You, 5

“Absolute *bodhichitta*, also known as *shunyata*, is the open dimension of our being, the completely wide-open heart and mind. Without labels of ‘you’ and ‘me,’ ‘enemy’ and friend,’ absolute *bodhichitta* is always here. Cultivating absolute *bodhichitta* means having a relationship with the world that is nonconceptual, that is unprejudiced, having a direct, unedited relationship with reality.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 76

“The Buddha said that we are never separated from enlightenment. Even at the times we feel the most stuck, we are never alienated from the awakened state. This is a revolutionary assertion. Even ordinary people like us with hang-ups and confusion have this mind of enlightenment called bodhichitta. The openness and warmth of bodhichitta is in fact our true nature and condition.”

The Places That Scare You, 4

“It takes bravery to train in unconditional friendliness, it takes bravery to train in ‘suffering with,’ it takes bravery to stay with pain when it arises, and not run or erect barriers. It takes bravery to not bite the hook and get swept away. But as we do, the absolute *bodhichitta* realization, the experience of how open and unfettered our minds really are begins to dawn

on us. As a result of becoming more comfortable with the ups and downs of our ordinary human life, this realization grows stronger.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 77

“We can lead our lives so as to become more awake to who we are and what we’re doing rather than trying to improve or change or get rid of who we are or what we’re doing. The key is to wake up, to become more alert, more inquisitive and curious about ourselves. While we are sitting in meditation, we are simply exploring humanity and all of creation in the form our ourselves.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 7

“Basic wakefulness, natural openness, is always available. This openness is not something that needs to be manufactured. When we pause, when we touch the energy of the moment, when we slow down and allow a gap, self-existing openness comes to us. It does not require a particular effort. It is available anytime. As Chogyam Trungpa once remarked, ‘Openness is like the wind. If you open your doors and windows it is bound to come in.’”

Taking the Leap, 70-71

“We can use everything that occurs – whether it’s our conflicting emotions and thoughts or our seemingly outer situation – to show us where we are asleep and how we can wake up completely, utterly, without reservations.”

When Things Fall Apart, 123

Related subjects for study:

The Absolute Slogans of Lojong – *Start Where You Are*, preface and chapters 1 through 4

“Three Methods for Working with Chaos” – *When Things Fall Apart*, chapter 19

IMPERMANENCE – RELAXING WITH UNCERTAINTY

“The three worlds are impermanent like the clouds of autumn.

The births and deaths of beings are like watching a dance.

The life span of people is like a flash of lightning in the sky,

And like a waterfall, it is quickly gone.”

Lalitavistara

Eric Pema Kunsang, “All Things Pass”, in *Jewels of Enlightenment*

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“The Buddhist teachings encourage us to relax gradually and wholeheartedly into the ordinary and obvious truth of change. Acknowledging this truth doesn’t mean that we’re looking on the dark side. What it means is that we begin to understand that we’re not the only one who can’t keep it all together. We no longer believe that there are people who have managed to avoid uncertainty.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 28

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“You can think of insecurity as a moment in time that we experience over and over in our lives. When you feel insecurity, whether you’re feeling it in the middle of the night out of nowhere or whether it’s constant, there is a groundless and unformed quality to it. The Buddhist teachings suggest that this kind of insecurity can serve as a direct path to freedom – if you can stop yourself from setting off the chain reaction of aggression and misery.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 89

“Life is very brief. If you realize you don’t have that many more years to live and if you live your life as if you actually had only a day left, then the sense of impermanence heightens that feeling of preciousness and gratitude. The teachings say, ‘ Well, that’s why we sit. That’s what mindfulness is about. Look carefully. Pay attention to details.’ Remembering impermanence motivates you to go back and look at the teachings, to see what they tell you about how to work with your life, how to rouse yourself, how to cheer up, how to work with emotions. If you really have these questions, you’ll find answers everywhere.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 101-102

“Our energy and the energy of the universe are always in flux, but we have little tolerance for this unpredictability, and we have little ability to see ourselves and the world as an exciting, fluid situation that is always fresh and new. How we relate to this dynamic flow of energy is important. We can learn to relax with it, recognizing it as our basic ground, as a natural part of life; or the feeling of uncertainty, of nothing to hold on to, can cause us to panic, and instantly a chain reaction begins. We panic, we get hooked, and then our habits take over and we think and speak and act in a very predictable way.

Taking the Leap, 32

“The source of our unease is the unfulfillable longing for a lasting certainty and security, for something solid to hold on to. When something unexpected or not to our liking happens, we think something has gone wrong. We are never encouraged to experience the ebb and flow of our moods, of our health, of the weather, of outer events – pleasant and unpleasant – in their fullness. Instead we stay caught in a fearful, narrow holding pattern of avoiding any pain and continually seeking comfort. This is a universal dilemma.”

Taking the Leap, 32-33

“Maybe the most important teaching is to lighten up and relax. It’s such a huge help in working with our crazy mixed-up minds to remember that what we’re doing is unlocking a softness that is in us and letting it spread. Every act counts. Every thought and emotion counts too. This is all the path we have. The path that we’re talking about is the moment-by-moment evolution of our experience, the moment-by-moment evolution of the world of phenomena, the moment-by-moment evolution of our thoughts and our emotions.”

When Things Fall Apart, 140-141, 143

“The instruction is to relate compassionately with where we find ourselves and to begin to see our predicament as workable. We are stuck in patterns of grasping and fixating which cause the same thoughts and reactions to occur again and again and again. When we see

that, even if it is only for one second every three weeks, then we will naturally discover the knack of reversing this process of making things solid. If you ask how in the world we can do this, the answer is simple. Make the dharma personal, explore it wholeheartedly, and relax.”

When Things Fall Apart, 142

Related subjects for study:

“The Facts of Life” - *The Places That Scare You*, chapter 3

EMPTINESS – EGOLESSNESS

“Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness are emptiness. Thus, Shariputra, all dharmas are emptiness.”

The Heart Sutra

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“At one time the Buddha gathered his students together at a spot called Vulture Peak Mountain. Here he presented some revolutionary teachings – teachings on the wide-open, groundless dimension of our being – known traditionally as shunyata, as unconditional bodhichitta, as prajnaparamita. The Buddha had already been teaching on groundlessness for some time, but he knew that our tendency to seek solid ground is deeply rooted. Ego can use anything to maintain the illusion of security, including the belief in insubstantiality and change. So the Buddha did something shocking. He pulled the rug out completely. He told the audience that whatever they believed had to be let go, that dwelling upon any description of reality was a trap.”

The Places That Scare You, 99-100

“By committing to *embrace the world just as it is*, we step fully into groundlessness, relaxing into the continually changing nature of our situation and experiencing it as awakened energy, as the manifestation of basic goodness. In some sense this is nothing new. It’s what we’ve been training in all along. But experientially, it is a big leap forward, and it points us toward a major shift in consciousness. This is a commitment to not reject anything. There is no way to get away from our experience, nowhere to go other than right where we are. We surrender to life. We give in and settle down with all the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, thoughts, and people we encounter.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 101-102

“When we reach our limit, if we aspire to know that place fully – which is to say that we aspire to neither indulge nor repress – a hardness in us will dissolve. We will be softened by the sheer force of whatever energy arises – the energy of anger, the energy of disappointment, the energy of fear. When it’s not solidified in one direction or another, that very energy pierces us to the heart, and it opens us. This is the discovery of egolessness. It’s when all our usual schemes fall apart.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 51

THE ESSENTIAL PEMA

“In the most ordinary terms, egolessness is a flexible identity. It manifests as inquisitiveness, as adaptability, as humor, as playfulness. It is our capacity to relax with not knowing, not figuring everything out, with not being at all sure about who we are, or who anyone else is, either. Every moment is unique, unknown, completely fresh. For a warrior-in-training, egolessness is the cause of joy rather than a cause of fear.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 45-46

“What does it mean to experience feelings selflessly? It means to experience them without solidifying them, without concretizing them, without clinging to them as *my* feelings, without projecting our interpretations onto them. It means to experience them without our personal trip. ‘Directly’ is something we can train in, but ‘selflessly’ dawns on us slowly over time.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 125

“It takes some training to equate complete letting go with comfort. But, in fact, ‘nothing to hold on to’ is the root of happiness. There’s a sense of freedom when we accept that we’re not in control. This may lead to a don’t-know-what-to-do kind of feeling, a sense of being caught in-between. This in-between state is where the warrior spends a lot of time growing up.”

The Places That Scare You, 119

“Emptiness is not a void, a blank space where nothing is happening. The whole point is that discovering basic goodness – discovering the awakensess, the is-ness, the nowness of things – doesn’t happen by transcending ordinary reality. It comes from appreciating simple experiences free of story line. When we see a red car with a dented door; when we feel heat or cold, softness or hardness; when we taste a plum or smell rotting leaves, these simple, direct experiences are our contact with basic wakefulness, with basic goodness, with sacred world. It is only by fully touching our relative experience that we discover the fresh, timeless, ultimate nature of our world. There is nothing we can see or hear that isn’t a manifestation of enlightened energy, that isn’t a doorway to sacred world.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 104-105

“So if you think that everything is solid, that’s one trap, and if you change that for a different belief system, that’s another trap. We have to pull the rug out from under our belief systems altogether. We can do that by letting go of our beliefs, and also our sense of what is right and wrong, by just going back to the simplicity and the immediacy of our present experience, resting in the nature of alaya.”

Start Where You Are, 21

Related subjects for study:

“Nowhere to Hide” – *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change*, chapter 9

“Groundlessness” – *The Places That Scare You*, chapter 18

“Pulling Out the Rug” – *Start Where You Are*, chapter 3

INTERDEPENDENCE

“The hand and other limbs are many and distinct,
But all are one – one body to be kept and guarded.
Likewise, different beings in their joys and sorrows,
Are, like me, all one in wanting happiness.”

Shantideva, *Bodhicharyavatara*, v. 8.91
in *No Time to Lose*, Pema Chödrön, 304

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“Shantideva uses the analogy of the wholeness of the body in several contexts. Here it refers to the interdependence of human beings: all of us unique but not separate, and, just like me, all of us wanting to feel good and not bad.”

No Time to Lose, 304-305

“The cause of our suffering is our concept of ourselves as a separate, continuous self. The *intensity* of our pain, according to the Buddha and Shantideva, is dependent on the intensity of our clinging to an impermanent, ungraspable ‘I.’ If this is true, how can we go beyond this central reference point of self? We do it simply and directly by recognizing that other people are just like me. This practice reveals that we all have the same fear of suffering and the same desire for happiness. This realization frees up the kindness of our heart.”

No Time to Lose, 305

“When someone is hurting, we see them as ‘other.’ So how do we come to know we’re not isolated beings? One way is to reflect that by not helping them, we are harming ourselves. Working with this notion again and again, what starts as a practice becomes real understanding. Whatever happens to any one of us affects the whole. If you think about it seriously, this type of interdependent thinking makes perfect sense. When we don’t take care of one another, I suffer, you suffer, the whole world suffers.”

No Time to Lose, 308

“This tenderness for life, bodhichitta, awakens when we no longer shield ourselves from the vulnerability of our condition, from the basic fragility of existence. It awakens through kinship with the suffering of others. We train in the bodhichitta practices in order to become so open that we can take the pain of the world in, let it touch our hearts, and turn it into compassion.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 4

“We cultivate compassion to soften our hearts and also to become more honest and forgiving about when and how we shut down. Without justifying or condemning ourselves, we do the courageous work of opening to suffering. This can be the pain that comes when we put up barriers or the pain of opening our heart to our own sorrow or that of another being. We learn as much about doing this from our failures as we do from our successes. In cultivating compassion we draw from the wholeness of our experience – our suffering, our

empathy, as well as our cruelty and terror. It has to be this way. Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity."

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 73

"Exchanging self for other, or tonglen, begins when we can see where someone is because we've been there. It doesn't happen because we're better than they are but because human beings share the same stuff. The more we know our own, the more we're going to understand others'."

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 98

"When things fall apart and we can't get the pieces back together, when we lose something dear to us, when the whole thing is just not working and we don't know what to do, this is the time when the natural warmth of tenderness, the warmth of empathy and kindness, are just waiting to be uncovered, just waiting to be embraced. This is our chance to come out of our self-protecting bubble and to realize that we are never alone. This is our chance to finally understand that wherever we go, everyone we meet is essentially just like us. Our own suffering, if we turn toward it, can open us to a loving relationship with the world."

Taking the Leap, 83

"When we look into our own hearts and begin to discover what is confused and what is brilliant, what is bitter and what is sweet, it isn't just ourselves that we're discovering. We're discovering the universe. When we discover the buddha that we are, we realize that everything and everyone is buddha. We discover that everything is awake, and everyone is awake. Everything and everyone is precious and whole and good."

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 125

Related subjects for study:

The aspiration practices of the Four Limitless Qualities

– *Comfortable with Uncertainty, 66-80*

"Dissolving the Barriers" – *No Time to Lose, 303-340*

EQUANIMITY – MIDDLE WAY

“If we rest the mind in great equanimity, undisturbed by thoughts that naturally arise, there appears from within a clarity and peace. It is spontaneously joyful and peaceful.”

Kenchen Palden Sherab and Kenpo Tsewang Dongyal, *Lion's Gaze*, 29

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“Training in equanimity is learning to open the door to all, welcoming all beings, inviting life to come visit. Of course, as certain guests arrive, we'll feel fear and aversion. Cultivating equanimity is a work in progress. We aspire to spend our lives training in the loving-kindness and courage that it takes to receive whatever appears – sickness, health, poverty, wealth, sorrow, and joy. We welcome and get to know them all. We could call it being completely alive.”

The Places That Scare You, 70, 72

“In the middle way there is no reference point. The mind with no reference point does not resolve itself, does not fixate or grasp. How could we possibly have no reference point? To have no reference point would be to change a deep-seated habitual response to the world: wanting to make it work out one way or the other. We are undoing a pattern that is not just our pattern. It's the human pattern. The process of becoming unstuck requires tremendous bravery, because basically we are completely changing our way of perceiving reality, like changing our DNA.”

When Things Fall Apart, 53-54

“We deserve our birthright, which is the middle way, an open state of mind that can relax with paradox and ambiguity. The middle way is wide open, but it's tough going. When we feel lonely, when we feel hopeless, what we want to do is move to the right or the left. We don't want to sit and feel what we feel.”

When Things Fall Apart, 54

“The transformative process begins at a deeper level when we contact the rawness we're left with whenever we refrain. We allow ourselves to wait, to sit patiently with the urge to act or speak in our usual ways and feel the full force of that urge without turning away or giving in. Neither repressing nor rejecting, we stay in the middle between the two extremes, in the middle between yes and no, right and wrong, true and false. This is the journey of developing a kindhearted and courageous tolerance for our pain. It helps us develop trust that we can experience the edginess, the groundlessness, the fundamental uncertainty of life and work with our mind, without acting in ways that are harmful to ourselves or others.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 51-52

“Only with equanimity can we realize that no matter what comes along, we're always standing in the middle of a sacred place. Only with equanimity can we see that everything that comes into our circle has come to teach us what we need to know.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 62

THE ESSENTIAL PEMA

“There isn’t any hell or heaven except for how we relate to our world. Hell is just resistance to life. In the way we practice, we don’t say, ‘Hell is bad and heaven is good’ or ‘Get rid of hell and just seek heaven,’ but we encourage ourselves to develop an open heart and an open mind to heaven, to hell, to everything. Why? Because only then can we realize that no matter what comes along, we’re always standing at the center of the world in the middle of sacred space.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 31-32

“The peace that we are looking for is not peace that crumbles as soon as there is difficulty or chaos. Whether we’re seeking inner peace or global peace or a combination of the two, the way to experience it is to build on the foundation of unconditional openness to all that arises. Peace isn’t an experience free of challenges, free of rough and smooth, it’s an experience that’s expansive enough to include all that arises without feeling threatened.”

Taking the Leap, 87

“There is a teaching that says that behind all hardening and tightening and rigidity of the heart, there’s always fear. But if you touch fear, behind fear there is a soft spot. And if you touch that soft spot, you find the vast blue sky.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 33

Related subjects for study:

“Finding the Ability to Rejoice” – *The Places That Scare You*, chapter 10

KARMA

“The teachings on karma not only show us how to create the right conditions for pursuing a spiritual path, but also provide a certain perspective for working with hardship and suffering in this life. Tibetans believe that the form of suffering that we experience now indicates the kind of negative action that was performed in a former life. In addition, and more important, the present suffering is not to be seen as negative, but as an opportunity to clear one’s karmic debt for the past misdeed.”

Reginald Ray, *Indestructible Truth*, 257-258

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“The Buddhist teachings on karma, put simply, tell us that each moment in time – whether in our personal lives or in our life together on earth – is the result of our previous actions. According to these teachings, what we experience in the present is the result of the seeds we’ve sown for hundreds of years, over the course of many lifetimes. It’s also the case that the seeds you sowed yesterday have their result in your own life today.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 85-86

“This kind of teaching on karma can easily be misunderstood. People get into a heavy-duty sin-and-guilt trip. They feel that if things are going wrong, it means they did something bad and they’re being punished. The idea of karma is that you continually get the teachings you

need in order to open your heart. To the degree that you didn't understand in the past how to stop protecting your soft spot, how to stop armoring your heart, now you're given this gift of teachings in the form of your life. Your life gives you everything you need to learn how to open further."

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 124

"Every action has a result. One could give a whole seminar on the law of karma. But fundamentally, in our everyday life, it's a reminder that it's important how we live. Particularly it's important at the level of mind. Every time you're willing to acknowledge your thoughts, let them go, and come back to the freshness of the present moment, you're sowing seeds of wakefulness in your unconscious. After a while what comes up is a more wakeful, more open thought. You're conditioning yourself toward openness rather than sleepiness."

The Wisdom of No Escape, 103

"The teachings on multiple lifetimes are interesting in this regard. In this lifetime, perhaps a particular person has harmed us, and it can be helpful to know that. But on the other hand, possibly ours is a far more ancient wound; perhaps we've been carrying these same tendencies, these same ways of reacting, from lifetime to lifetime, and they keep giving birth to the same dramas, the same predicaments. No matter what happened to us in the past, right now we can take responsibility for working compassionately with our habits, our thoughts and emotions. In this very lifetime, I have what it takes to change the movie of my life so that the same things don't keep happening to me. Our attitude can be that we keep getting another chance, rather than that we're just getting another bad deal."

Taking the Leap, 47-48

"In order to change our habits and burn up the seeds of aggression, we have to develop an appetite for what I like to call positive groundlessness, or positive insecurity. If at any moment of feeling guilty, insecure, and troubled you were to pause and let go of the words and start breathing slowly and deeply, you could let the whole drama unwind and unravel."

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 94-95, 97

"You're the only one who knows when you're opening and when you're closing. You're the only one who knows when you're using things to protect yourself and keep your ego together and when you're opening and letting things fall apart, letting the world come as it is – working with it rather than struggling against it. You're the only one who knows."

Start Where You Are, 89

"The dharma can heal our wounds, our very ancient wounds that come not from original sin but from a misunderstanding so old that we can no longer see it. The instruction is to sit compassionately with where we find ourselves and to begin to see our predicament as workable. We are stuck in patterns of grasping and fixating which cause the same thoughts

and reactions to occur again and again and again. In this way we project our world. When we see that, then we'll naturally discover the knack of reversing this process of making things solid, putting down our centuries of baggage and stepping into new territory."

When Things Fall Apart, 141-142

Related subjects for study:

"This Very Moment is the Perfect Teacher" – *When Things Fall Apart*, chapter 3

HAPPINESS / JOY

"The basic concern shared by all beings – humans, animals, and insects alike – is the desire to be happy and to avoid suffering. The Buddha said that the desire to achieve lasting happiness and to avoid unhappiness is the one unmistakable sign of the presence of natural mind. Because the true nature of all living creatures is *already* completely free from suffering and endowed with perfect happiness: In seeking happiness and avoiding unhappiness, regardless of how we go about it, we're all just expressing the essence of who we are."

Yongey Mingyur, *The Joy of Living*, 54

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

"How do we work with a sense of burden? How do we learn to relate with what seems to stand between us and the happiness we deserve? How do we learn to relax and connect with fundamental joy?"

When Things Fall Apart, 120

"There are three traditional methods for relating directly with difficult circumstances as a path of awakening and joy. The first method we will call no more struggle; the second, using poison as medicine; and the third, seeing whatever arises as enlightened wisdom. These are the three techniques for working with chaos, difficulties, and unwanted events in our daily lives."

When Things Fall Apart, 121

"The underlying point of all our study and practice is that the happiness we seek is here to connect with at any time. The happiness we seek is our birthright. To discover it we need to be more gentle with ourselves, more compassionate toward ourselves and our universe. The happiness we seek cannot be found through grasping, trying to hold on to things. It cannot be found through getting serious and uptight about wanting things to go in the direction that we think will bring happiness. The point is that the happiness we seek is already here and it will be found through relaxation and letting go rather than through struggle."

Start Where You Are, 82

"As we train in the bodhichitta practices, we gradually feel more joy, the joy that comes from a growing appreciation of our basic goodness. We still experience strong conflicting emotions, we still experience the illusion of separateness, but there's a fundamental openness

that we begin to trust. This trust in our fresh, unbiased nature brings us unlimited joy – a happiness that’s completely devoid of clinging and craving. This is the joy of happiness without a hangover.”

The Places That Scare You, 61

“‘Always maintain only a joyful mind’ is one of the mind-training slogans. As we use the bodhichitta practices to train, we may come to the point where we see the magic of the present moment; we may gradually wake up to the truth that we have always been warriors living in a sacred world. This is the ongoing experience of limitless joy. We won’t always experience this, it’s true. But year by year it becomes more and more accessible.”

The Places That Scare You, 65

“In our most ordinary days we have moments of happiness, moments of comfort and enjoyment, moments of seeing something that pleased us, something that touched us, moments of contacting the tenderness of our hearts. We can take joy in that. Gradually we can begin to cherish the preciousness of our whole life just as it is, with its ups and downs, its failures and successes, its roughness and smoothness.”

Taking the Leap, 61

“There’s a lot of joy as your burden begins to lessen, and it comes from doing anything that begins to change the pattern of fearing and wanting to resist what’s unpleasant. Resistance is what really causes the pain. Anything that begins to lighten up that resistance helps us to relax and open and celebrate.”

Start Where You Are, 93

“When you begin the practice of rejoicing in others’ good fortune, you can expect to encounter your soft spot – as well as your competitiveness and envy. Until I began to practice rejoicing, I wasn’t aware of how much envy I had. Who would have thought that the practice of rejoicing would be a setup for seeing our neurosis? Because our intention is to wake up so we can help others do the same, we rejoice as much in seeing where we’re stuck as we rejoice in our loving-kindness.”

No Time to Lose, 54

“We also provide the conditions for joy to expand by training in the bodhichitta practices and in particular by training in rejoicing and appreciation. As with the other limitless qualities, we can do this as a three-step aspiration practice:

‘May I not be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering.

May you not be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering.

May we not be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering.’

We can practice the first step of the aspiration by learning to rejoice in our own good fortune. The key is to be here, fully connected with the details of our lives, paying attention.

We are expressing appreciation: friendship toward ourselves and toward the living quality that is found in everything. This combination of mindfulness and appreciation connects us

fully with reality and brings us joy. When we extend attention and appreciation toward our environment and other people, our experience of joy expands even further.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 75-76

Related subjects for study:

“Enhancing the Training in Joy” – *The Places That Scare You*, chapter 11

SAMSARA / NIRVANA

“The essence of thoughts is dharmakaya, as is taught.

Nothing whatever but everything arises from it

To this meditator who arises in unceasing play.

Grant your blessing so that I realize the inseparability of samsara and nirvana.”

Pengar Jampal Zangpo, *Mahamudra Lineage Chant*

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

Definitions of terms:

Samsara is the vicious cycle of existence.

Nirvana is the cessation of ignorance and of conflicting emotions, and therefore freedom from compulsive rebirth in samsara.

Mahamudra is the state in which all experiences are transformed into transcendental knowledge and skillful means.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, footnotes, 74

“I would like to talk about not preferring samsara or nirvana. Many of the *mahamudra* teachings on the nature of mind talk about stillness and occurrence. If you want to pare phenomena down, all there would be are stillness and occurrence: space, and that which is continually born out of space, and returns into space. Sometimes it is called the background and the foreground. Usually there is some kind of bias. In samsara we continually try to get away from the pain by seeking pleasure, and in doing so, we just keep going round and round. The other neurosis is to get caught up by peace and quiet, or liberation, or freedom. That is what a lot of addiction is about, wanting to feel good forever, but it usually ends up not working out.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 74-75

“The opposite of samsara is when all the walls fall down, when the cocoon completely disappears and we are totally open to whatever may happen, with no withdrawing, no centralizing into ourselves.”

Comfortable with Uncertainty, 65

The ego can use anything to re-create itself, whether it's occurrence or spaciousness, whether it's what we call samsara or what we call nirvana. You may have noticed that in our oryoki meal chant we say that the Buddha ‘does not abide in nirvana. He abides in the

ultimate perfection.’ The ultimate perfection must be some sense of completely realizing that samsara and nirvana are one, not preferring stillness or occurrence but being able to live fully with both.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 76

“In order for us to be fully present, to experience life fully, we need to acknowledge and accept all our emotions and all parts of ourselves – the embarrassing parts as well as our anger, our rage, our jealousy, our envy, our self-pity, and all these chaotic emotions that sweep us away. Looking for an exit from experiencing the full range of our humanity leads to all kinds of pain and suffering. Meditation gives us the opportunity to experience our emotions naked and fresh, free from the labels of ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ ‘should’ and ‘shouldn’t’.”

How to Meditate, 83

“What does aversion feel like? You want to find out. You want to have a non-verbal experience of dislike. Once you’ve contacted that, invite it in, but without believing in the judgments and opinions about it, just contacting the feeling free of your interpretation. We contact the aversion, experiencing it as fully as possible as we breathe in, then we relax as we breathe out. We let the feeling be a basis for compassion, and also – gradually over time – we realize that it’s like a phantom; when we stay with it in this way, the aversion dissolves; it is not an opponent that we are struggling against; it’s not anything except energy that gets solidified and that we justify and then, on the basis of that justification, we hurt people.”

Practicing Peace in Times of War, 81-83

“We discover selflessness gradually, but always the prerequisite is being present. When we can be present with an emotion without any distractions, we find out very quickly how insubstantial, how fleeting it is. When you’re no longer so entangled in your emotions, then you can experience their power directly. Their intensity, their dynamic energy, rather than scaring you, wakes you up. You don’t discover this by trying to transcend the bitterness of life. You discover it by taking your place in the charnel ground with the confidence that this is where you belong. This is where you wake up.”

Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change, 126-127

Related subjects for study:

Charnel ground practice – *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change*, chapter 10

ENLIGHTENMENT

“If we truly understood that from the very beginning we have been perfect, but that somehow confusion arose and covered our true nature, then there would be no question of feeling oneself unworthy. The potential for enlightenment is always here, for each one of us, if we could but recognize it.”

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, *Into the Heart of Life*, 173

Commentary by Pema Chödrön

“Enlightenment – full enlightenment – is perceiving reality with an open, unfixed mind, even in the most difficult circumstances. It’s nothing more than that, actually. You and I have had experiences of this open, unfixed mind. If we were completely awake, this would be our constant perception of reality. It’s helpful to realize that this open, unfettered mind has many names, but let’s use the term ‘buddha nature’.”

How to Meditate, 161

“Enlightenment isn’t about going someplace else or attaining something that we don’t have right now. Enlightenment is when the blinders start to come off. We are uncovering the true state, or uncovering buddha nature. This is important because each day when you sit down, you can recognize that it’s a process of gradually uncovering something that’s already here. You can’t uncover something by harshness or uptightness because those things cover our buddha nature. Stabilizing the mind, bringing out the sharp clarity of mind, needs to be accompanied by relaxation and openness.”

How to Meditate, 162-163

“Regarding what arises as awakened energy reverses our fundamental habitual pattern of trying to avoid conflict, trying to make ourselves better than we are, trying to smooth things out and pretty them up, trying to prove that pain is a mistake and would not exist in our lives if only we did all the right things. This view turns that particular pattern completely around, encouraging us to become interested in looking at the charnel ground of our lives as the working basis for attaining enlightenment.”

When Things Fall Apart, 124-125

“It is very helpful to realize that being here, sitting in meditation, doing simple everyday things like working, walking outside, talking with people, bathing, using the toilet, and eating, is actually all that we need to be fully awake, fully alive, fully human. It’s also helpful to realize that this body that we have, and this mind that we have at this very moment, are exactly what we need to be fully human, fully awake, and fully alive. Furthermore, the emotions we have right now, the negativity and the positivity, are what we exactly need. One of the major obstacles to what is traditionally called enlightenment is resentment, feeling cheated, holding a grudge about who you are, where you are, what you are.”

The Wisdom of No Escape, 6

THE ESSENTIAL PEMA

“When we awaken our hearts, we’re changing the whole pattern, but not by creating a new pattern. We are moving further and further away from concretizing and making things so solid and always trying to get some ground under our feet. This moving away from comfort and security, this stepping out into what is unknown, uncharted, and shaky – that’s called enlightenment, liberation.”

Start Where You Are, 18

“Rousing the bodhi heart means connecting with our longing for enlightenment, with the clear desire to alleviate the escalating suffering we see in the world today. Most people do not give much thought to enlightenment. But most of us do long for a better world situation, and we long to be free of neurotic habits and mental anguish. This is the ideal state of mind for awakening bodhichitta.”

No Time to Lose, 75

“In the last years of his life, Chogyam Trungpa taught unceasingly on the very real possibility of creating enlightened society – a society where individuals cultivated unconditional friendliness for themselves and unconditional caring for others. It is true, that when we try to do either of these things, we find that it’s not so easy. The resistance to accepting ourselves and to putting others’ welfare first is surprisingly strong. Nevertheless, he spoke with enthusiasm and confidence about our remarkable capacity for bravery, for open-mindedness, for tenderness – our remarkable capacity to be spiritual warriors, fearless men and women who can help to heal the sorrows of the world.”

Taking the Leap, 97

“Now is the time. If there’s any possibility for enlightenment, it’s right now, not at some future time. Now is the time. Now is the only time.”

When Things Fall Apart, 144

Related subjects for study:

Engaging in enlightened activity – *No Time to Lose*, chapter 10

CONCLUDING ASPIRATION

Throughout my life, until this very moment, whatever virtue I have accomplished, including any benefit that may come from this book, I dedicated to the welfare of all beings.

May the roots of suffering diminish. May warfare, violence, neglect, indifference, and addictions also decrease.

May the wisdom and compassion of all beings increase, now and in the future.

May we clearly see all the barriers we erect between ourselves and others to be as insubstantial as our dreams.

May we appreciate the great perfection of all phenomena.

May we continue to open our hearts and minds, in order to work ceaselessly for the benefit of all beings.

May we go to the places that scare us.

May we lead the life of a warrior.

The Places That Scare You, 123

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