

CO-CREATING WITH THE INFINITE: Learning to Thrive in Relentless Change

Week #1 of a New 4-Week Series, "Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change"

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Don't you feel like everything is changing all the time? I mean, I know all along it has been, but it just feels like this velocity, which has picked up speed, like it's a snowball rolling down. Everything is changing so fast. You barely get settled and something else changes. But we also know the only constant thing in this world is change. So, we're cutting in the middle there, right?

So, I based this talk on a book by Pema Chödrön, and it's called "Living Beautifully." And she talks about ... It's going to be a four-week series, and I'm going to kick it off with the introduction and the first two chapters. And we'll have three more ones after that. And you've got to come back for each one if you want to hear the end of the story, okay? That or read the book. Show up for the rest of them. It'll be good. I think you'll learn a lot.

Sometimes life can be turbulent, the author says -- turbulent like a river, and all you can do is keep your head above water. I've felt like that. It feels like you're just picking up speed and you're just trying to stay above there, trying to float.

And sometimes it's so natural that we reach for what's familiar. So, when it's unstable, we look for stability, right? So, if something's not working, we run back to what it was. If it has to change -- the choice between change and staying comfortable where you are -- sometimes comfort actually feels a little better, even though it's not. Because we think that this is where we're supposed to be when actually we're supposed to be changing all along. So, we cling to routines, we cling to beliefs and our plans -- anything that gives us a sense of security and control.

In "Living Beautifully," she shares the Buddhist teachings that offer a practical way to meet the uncertainty and messiness of being human. It is messy. She asks us to consider: What if the very clinging is keeping you from fully experiencing your life? What if what you're hanging on to so tightly, afraid to let go of, is stopping you from where your life is really supposed to be? That struck me as very powerful from her.

And she writes really great; you don't have to be Buddhist in order to read her writings. I've read many of her books. And she says that, because when we become willing to loosen our grip on needing life to be a certain way, something shifts. When we let go, something shifts. We become more present, more compassionate, more available ... not only to the experience of our own lives more fully, but we reach out and help others around us.

She says ... On suffering and resistance, she explains that suffering stems from the impermanence itself. It doesn't stem from the impermanence itself, the change. Suffering exists because we're constantly trying to resist that change. So, it's not this piece here. It's us not wanting to let go of it.

I used to do this practice with people I worked with. I had this picture of a hand-drawn boat and a woman in the boat and all these baggages and stuff. And she's rowing, you know. She's rowing and rowing and rowing. And she's got all this baggage. She can't go anywhere because there's so much she's carrying with her. It's like, "*Oh, here it is.*"

So, in my story, she tosses it all out. She throws her anchor down so she can toss it all out and be safe. And then she tries paddling, and she still can't get anywhere. And she's like, "*What is going on?*"

And then I would ask them, "*What is holding her back?*"

And every one of them would say, "*It's the anchor.*"

I said, "*Think again.*"

"No; it's the anchor holding her back. Maybe it's the luggage next to the anchor."

No, it's the rope from the boat to the anchor. It's the attachment that we keep to whatever was that keeps us from going forward to where we want to be. She says that security is an illusion -- some dream we think will come true but we never quite get there.

And last week I shared it basically like this: *"Life on life's terms."* My husband hates it when I say that, but I do say it: *"Life on life's terms."*

He goes, *"Stop it!"* I'm woohoo for him. But it is!

Because it's scary! I've been scared before, and it can feel overwhelming. And all kinds of emotions can be created from it. But the reality is: if it's alive and living, It's changing. It's growing. So, we can learn to embrace that change with courage, flexibility, and presence -- even when it feels chaotic or difficult. Rather than searching for consistent security, we learn to stay present, open our hearts, and remain grounded in the truth of what we know.

And we teach truth here all the time, right, Unity? The truth is: we are all children of God. We have that grounding. My meditation was all about putting you in that space that says no matter what hits you, you take that breath; you go in; and you go, *"We've got this, God. We've got this, Spirit. We can move through this."* Is it easy? I'm not going to stand up here and BS you and say it is. But it's possible. And with practice, it becomes more possible and more possible.

So, staying present is about being here in this moment. And a lot of people think they're being present, but ... Like, for instance, I see sometimes people are staring at their phones. Are you present? Or are you at a distance? Are you thinking about tomorrow? Does that make you present? Are you thinking about what happened this morning while you're listening to me talk? That isn't presence.

Presence is being in that moment all the time. I read a book a long time ago by Thich Nhat Hanh that said that be present washing the dishes. So, when I wash the dishes, I stand there and I think about the dishes. And you know what? It seems to go by really fast. You'd think it takes a lot of time out. There's not really that many dishes in our house, but you'd think that I'd get sent off other places. But knowing and feeling them; and touching them and feeling myself; feeling that my feet are on the floor; feeling the warm, hot water on my hands. We don't use the dishwasher. So, you know, it's that whole sense of touch and feel and embracing that -- knowing that I'm in that moment.

Have you ever been in a conversation with a friend and you know they're distracted because they're either looking at their phone or they're looking behind you? Or, you know, hold on. You know what I mean? How does that feel? That doesn't feel comfortable, right? They want your presence. And you need your presence. You need to be available to yourself, not just other people.

And the other piece is about being grounded. Finding stability. She says to be rooted, but not rigid. So, plant your feet -- here's your Tai Chi move, right? -- but be able to move at the same time. And she says: be steady, but still be able to move in that steady: to flex, to move forward.

You know that a lot of times -- and you see it all the time in Florida -- the hurricanes will hit and the palm trees come right back up, most of them. You know, it's because they can bend. But the oak trees at my house in California uproot with that wind, because they have no flexibility. There's nothing in there that gives way. They actually have to fall to the pressure of the wind.

Finally in this, she suggests you to **keep your heart open.** Hard to do sometimes when you've been hurt a lot. I'll go right there. Hard to do sometimes in this world right now. Watching the news, it's hard to keep my heart open. But I keep trying. One foot in front of the other, right? Keep showing up. My heart is open. I'm here to love. I'm here to be the presence of God on earth.

And with these three things, it helps you by choosing compassion and acceptance and connection. You can stay in this moment and you can be grounded. It also releases tension.

Embracing life as it is makes room for both joy and sorrow. And as we know, if you get joy, you get sorrow. Everybody ever got really excited about something: *"Yay, it's going to happen!"* And then something else happens? They're like two sides of the same coin, I would think, almost. It's that joy -- there's always something that comes with that joy and always something that comes with that sorrow. They're part of the same thing.

In this book, she invites you -- throughout the whole book -- she invites you to leap into uncertainty. Embrace the unknown. Like the little bird in the nest. When they're in eggs, they're okay, right? They start growing. They get a little too big for the nest. Are they going to jump? Are they going to get pushed? Are they going to fall because of the wind? Sooner or later, that nest will not hold them. There will need to be some change in their lives to let them go forward.

So, she said **to truly, fully realize human life is like kicking the bird out of the nest; urging individuals to abandon the pursuit of absolute safety and security.** Nothing is absolute. Try as best we can, lock ourself in a vault. But how much life will you have stuck there?

And she says, **by embracing uncertainty and change, this also means fostering a mindset of curiosity and openness.** So, by doing this, you actually see more of the work. You're like, *"Wow; that's interesting. What if this happens? What if that happens?"*

I'll give you a practice. I went back into my memory banks, and I tried to think ... But actually, I think I learned this from Rev. Richard Rogers when he was here way back in the day when I was here, 20 years ago or something. And he had this example. He said that you're on a 12-foot platform, and there are no rails. Just 10' by 10', and it's just you standing there, 12 stories high. I'm very, you know ... Height just doesn't work for me. But imagine if you're standing there. Just what it would feel like to be, *"I don't have anything to hold me. I don't have any support. I don't know what's going to happen to me."* Here you are.

But what if you're on that same platform standing there, but you had a large set of wings? It's a whole different story, right? Because now, what if you fly? And in the uncertainty, being able to embrace that uncertainty, you can leap into that flying. You can take the chance and be there.

So, embracing groundlessness and relaxing into the dynamic change nature of life is defined as the path to enlightenment and the middle way between uncertainty and certainty. We want to be in the middle.

So, we're going to start with Chapter #1. That's kind of the overview of what it's about. And, like I said, you will have four weeks of it. Chapter #1 begins with "The Fundamental Ambiguity of Being Human." I love that!

The central idea is that **life is inherently uncertain, and our suffering comes from trying to make it certain.** I want to know the answer before I get there. I want to know that that person is going to be there. I want to know that, you know, all these things ... I want to know! I want to set myself up. Like I talked about last week, our trip was like -- we wanted to know where we were going to be in this trip. None of it worked. None of it! After the first two weeks, we were just in the wind. We were the little birds trying to flap, trying to keep going.

Pema calls this groundlessness. And we want something solid to stand on: an identity, an answer, a plan, a belief about how things should be. Should be. I don't know about you, but I come from a practice that says, *"You can should all over yourself."*

So anytime I hear somebody say should, I'm just like, *"Yeah, well, keep shoulding all over."*

But life continuously changes. Right? And the interesting part that she talks about is **being present in groundlessness.** She doesn't present it as something that's bad. She suggests that the very thing we experience as insecurity can actually become the freedom we're seeking.

I didn't know when this job came open that coming here, what would happen. I mean, I knew I lived here before. I could kind of predict. Now the kids are grown, so it's going to be a little different. But it's

like, I didn't know. I came here with that, knowing that the God in me -- the Christ in me -- would hold that for me. Because change is always happening. I can see it all the time. It's just like, everything we do is change.

It's like, if you clench your fist and you tighten up, what can you hold? What can you carry? What can you do? How much success will you have with everything tightened up and clenched? **We have to let go. We have to release, and we have to be open to that change happening around us.**

She suggested that ... Romans 12:2 said, *"Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* That's true Unity right there: the renewing of your mind. It's a mindset. This whole being open, being willing is our mindset.

And overall, **by learning to embrace the inevitability of change and uncertainty, we open ourselves to a more fluid and harmonious existence.** To be able to flex actually makes our lives easier ... and the lives of those around us to be able to do that flexing, moving in.

And you can see this -- I'm a master gardener -- you see this in the garden all the time, right? Your garden starts with a seed; grows to a stem or leaves; goes to bloom; goes to seed; goes back down again. It's constantly in change.

But if it's not growing, what's happening to the garden? It's dying. It has to stay in that growth. It has to be nurtured. It has to have the right ingredients. It has to have the right soil. I always say the soil is everything that builds a garden. You have to have the right nutrients in the soil, the right amount of watering. And these are the things we give ourselves to stay in this openness, to stay in this groundedness, to stay and to be able to flex and shift and move.

True freedom is found by releasing the struggle against the ambiguity of being human and learning to relax within the chaos of uncertainty.

And I don't know ... I stopped watching the news a long time ago, but you've got news all over social media, so I still see a lot of it. You know, you never know what is true. Half the time something comes up and I go, *"I have to go check that."* So, I go to snopes.com and see, and then it's all not true anyway. But it's because I want to be sure that I know what I'm talking about.

But it's scary when you look out there. You see all these things going on, and here I'm supposed to be flexible? I'm supposed to be open? But what are they doing? They're taking, taking, taking. Right? But it's not their transformation. It's mine. And I don't want to stay stuck. I want to keep moving. I want to keep growing.

And she invites us to take three vows or commitments she says that there are. Okay?

And here's the first one. Okay, if I don't pronounce it. **PRATIMOKSHA VOW.** It's focusing on refraining from the actions that cause harm to oneself or others; emphasizing personal conduct and discipline; guiding individuals to cultivate an ethical and mindful lifestyle.

Don't harm yourself. Take full responsibility. And do unto others. Right? That's what it is. She says, if you follow that as one of the vows, then you will live in that flexibility. You will live in that ability to change and to stay grounded at the same time.

1 Peter 2:1 says, *"So then stop doing anything to hurt others. Don't lie anymore. And stop trying to fool people."* I learned this a while back and I was really surprised when I heard it. Somebody said, *"When you lie to somebody, you're hurting yourself and them."*

I'm like, *"How can that hurt?"* But it really does. If you lie -- deliberately lie -- to somebody, you are causing this rip. You know that it's not real, and you're giving them false hope or false truth. And I know, for me, it affects me when I have to lie. I even hate to call and say the kids are home sick, so I'll say, "Oh, she woke up not feeling good." I won't say that she's sick, because she did wake up not feeling good.

Because I don't want to lie. I don't want that karma on me. I want to be able to live in my truth and my accountability.

[BODHISATTVA VOWS.] It's to be ethically and mindfully ... It will bring you to an ethical and mindful lifestyle. Daily, this looks like being mindful of one's actions, speech, and thoughts, and continuously striving to do no harm.

I know the Buddhist practice. And I'm not a Buddhist, but I know they don't even step on bugs when they walk. They make sure that they avoid the ants. They make sure anything on the ground -- anything that has a life -- they make sure to not harm.

That's a lot! I don't go that far. When there's bugs in my house, I get rid of them. Definitely. Or we're all screaming. [Laughs] We have one brave soul that gets rid of them for us. The rest of us are, "Aaaaah!"

So, the next one is: **SAMAYAS VOW**. And this is the secret. It says learning to tame the unruly mind through mindfulness, vigilance and consciousness. Recognizing the purity of all appearances and existence. Everyone is a child of God. Everyone has truth.

And that is the hardest thing to say when you look around the world. But I know that it's true, and I live in that truth. And keeping my mind on that, I can focus better on maybe not their behavior, but the fact that they are a child of God, and they deserve a life.

So essentially, these three are all bringing consciousness into play. Conscious awareness of all things, not just ourselves. Living in harmony with all.

And metaphysically, we know that consciousness is the sense of awareness, of knowing, right? And basically it says this: *"The sum total of all ideas accumulated in and affecting a man's present being -- that's consciousness."*

So, the sum total of everything that's going on in there is my consciousness ... And yours, and yours, and they're all different. Right? But that is our consciousness -- to be present in that.

So, by adopting and integrating these three commitments in everyday practices, individuals can find guidance and support in their quest for personal growth and spiritual fulfillment. You want to get there? This is one way to do it.

Practical steps to incorporate these in daily life include like setting aside time for **regular reflection meditation**. Where do we hear that? Here, right? That's our Principle #4: Through affirmative prayer and meditation, we connect with God and bring out the good in our lives.

The next one she suggests is **making conscious choices that align with ethical principles**. That's also from that same principle. But I also found it somewhere else that is very near and dear to my heart: Step 11. And it says this, if you don't know it: *"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand God, praying only for the knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out."*

When I learned that 28 years ago, that was the hardest thing to understand: that I wasn't in charge of everybody. I didn't have to heal everybody; that I could just heal myself. And by healing myself, the people around me would then start changing their lives ... or they change out of my life. And a lot of them did; they left my life. That's okay; it happens. Some of them I haven't seen again; some of them I still see because they found me on Facebook. Um ... you know ... that wonderful Facebook page.

But that's what it's about: seeking through prayer and meditation.

And she says **engaging community service or acts of compassion** is the last piece. And that's also one of our principles; it's the fifth one, which is: Knowing and understanding spiritual truths is not enough. A person must also live the truth they know through their thoughts, words, and actions.

Which, by the way, is also the 12th step: *"Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we try to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all of our affairs."*

We've got to live it. We've got to be it, and we've got to live it. And when we fall down and skin our knees or we get scared, it's okay. Get back up, dust ourselves off, and start again. And if you don't feel like you can, call your best friend. Always have somebody to call. I still am in contact with my sponsor. I love her to death. I still call her and go, *"Oh God, I'm beating my head against the wall here!"*

Because that's, that's like my spiritual director. She can help me really realize. She knows my BS, too, and she calls me on it. So that's kind of fun. She's like, *"Oh, you know what you're saying."* But so, it's like, you have that person to call. So, if you can't get back up yourself, call and ask somebody, *"Hey, support me in this for a minute."* Call the church and ask a chaplain to call you back. That's what they do, right? You can call the church and get a minister to call you back. Whatever you need. Because we're there for you to help you grow and be what you want to be in your life.

Furthermore, maintaining mindfulness and awareness in all actions helps reinforce these commitments and fosters a deep sense of purpose and direction.

Don't we all want that? Do we want to just linger on this earth and not have really anywhere, any goal in mind? Just *"Whatever; I'm just hanging out."* I don't know about you, that eats me up. I want to know. I want to head somewhere. I want to grow. I want to evolve. I want to become the best me, and be the best me for everybody else that needs me or wants me to be the best. And help them; pick them up.

Because I've been through a lot in my life, and I know that I have the experience to help share with other people and let them know that they can go through it and still make it. And I can guarantee all of you here have that same experience. You know how I know? One hundred percent of time! Because you're still here. I see you.

It just may have come out different. It may have sounded/it may have looked different. It's all the same. One hundred percent of the time, you can bet on yourself, because you're still here. So, keep trying, And it's okay to start over again.

So how willing are you to be anchored by the unshakable presence of God within? How willing are you to let go and let God?

Now, Chapter #2. It says, *"Life Without the Storyline."* This is a good one! Right? Let's take this further. We'll be a little bold and honest here. We don't just experience life. We tell ourselves stories about what happened. We do!

Anything that happened in my childhood happened in my childhood 60-something years ago. But I've told myself enough stories that I actually believe that it's still there. But I can tell you that the story that I tell now is probably not the story I would have told at three years old. Because I can't possibly reach back to that story. It's just a version of it.

For instance, I know somebody that took a picture and made an AI picture out of somebody's picture, right? And then they needed to make another one with another color or whatever it is. So they took the clone and made another AI picture. By the time you got here, the first picture didn't even look alike. That's what we're doing! We're telling ourselves stories as we go.

We say things like, *"This always happens to me. Why is it always me?" "This means I'm failing." "They don't respect me." "I know where this is going."* Right? *"I have to fix this again." "This isn't supposed to be happening."* This is storytelling at its best.

So, let's do a real quick exercise that I do with some people that I work with. And just if you imagine in your mind: you go home; you go to bed. You go, *"Oh, Beci's [indiscernible] went out of my head."* You go home and you go to sleep. And you've had such a good night's sleep. You've rested so well. You wake up in the morning, you put your feet on the floor, and in front of you is one of those big oval mirrors. And

when you catch yourself in the mirror, you don't know who you are ... because you have no stories that got you there. You know your name; you know you're married or what; you know you have children. But you don't know the stories that brought you there. Who would you be if you didn't have those to fall back on? What would you say about -- what age would you think you were? You wouldn't know what happened to your life, so we've got to stop leaning on the stories and lean into our lives. Let the stories go.

And I can tell you a story like that happened for me. Her invitation is to notice the difference between what actually happens and the story we've constructed about what happens. I used to commute back and forth in San Diego an hour each way. And as we went up the mountain, there were two ways in. And at some points, each one of those ways went down to one lane each way. So, we were always bottlenecking the whole way home. And you can imagine the traffic, right?

One day, this guy just nearly takes the front end of my car off. I got so mad! And I started saying all those little things: *"Why does he try to do that?"* All these little things. And I'm steaming up, and I'm steaming up. And I'm telling me the story: *"He nearly did this; he nearly did that. He would have caused that."* And I'm justifying all this in my brain. And I'm keeping it going, because I'm going to tell my husband I get home. You know, I saved my car.

And then I was still about 45 minutes from home. But about 30 minutes in, I went, *"What am I doing? Why am I holding on to this? What am I going to get from this on the other end when I tell him? Am I looking to be the victim? Am I looking for him to feel sorry for me or say, 'Oh yeah, that traffic's like that all the time!'"*

There was really nothing good going to come out of that. In fact, I lost 30 minutes of my life in the anger. And I don't like that.

So, we need to let go of our stories. The author invites us to **live without the storyline**. It doesn't mean becoming passive or pretending, or being mowed over, or that things don't matter. It means **allowing ourselves to experience the moment before we decide what it means**. Just experience it first. before you label it and see what happens then. In that pause and thinking, maybe the story really doesn't mean what we think it means.

So wrap it up. Chapter #1: Life is uncertain, so stop expecting solid ground. Just lean into it. Life is change.

Chapter #2: Stop immediately creating a story to make what's uncertain feel manageable. It's okay for it to feel uncomfortable. Learn to be uncomfortable in your discomfort. I mean, learn to be comfortable in your discomfort. Learning to live in the present moment and do no harm to ourselves or others in this world. Lean into change and let go of the stories. Step into living a beautiful life with courage, curiosity, and an open heart.

And this book is just getting started! Namaste.