

EMBRACE THE WORLD JUST AS IT IS

Final Week of a 4-Week Series, "Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change"

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Embrace the world just as it is.

I have a quote for you all: *"Chaos should be regarded as extremely good news."* How many people would agree with that? I got no hands.

Tonight we're covering the third commitment in Pema Chödrön's book: the commitment to embrace the world just as it is. And it's really the second commitment -- which we talked about last week -- on steroids. It's what Pema Chödrön's mentor has said to her when teaching Pema about this third commitment to living beautifully with uncertainty and change. It was: *"Chaos should be regarded as extremely good news."*

When I read that, I was thinking, *"Well, okay; let me breathe into it for a moment."* And then I thought, *"Well, chaos means, then, that there's an opportunity to help calm the situation."* It can also mean looking at something differently, so it doesn't produce more chaos. A better way of doing it would be good news. Or, if we find ourselves in chaos a lot of the times, it could mean reflecting on why we find ourselves making or surrounding ourselves with chaos instead of tranquility and calm. What are we afraid to maybe feel or hear inside of ourselves, that we have to make so much chaos around ourselves?

So, with this third commitment, the author of our book in this four-part series writes this: *"We don't reject anything that turns up in our awakening. In fact, we feel quite sympathetic toward the unkept quality of life."* In other words, we allow chaos to be part of our awakening.

And maybe you're wondering, as I did as I was reading the book: So what does my awakening have to do with embracing the world? Well, it means that we have to be doing our own inner healing work, as we talked about last week, because your healing affects the healing of those around you ... and their healing collectively affects the world. It's that ripple effect: as soon as we drop the big stone into the pond, the ripples go out and it affects/touches upon every part of that pond.

And what's happening in the world is due to collective consciousness, or human consciousness collectively creating our reality because we're co-creators. We're all expressions of the Divine and we're co-creating together. It's our third unity principle. So just breathe. I have a note: make sure they breathe on that one. [Congregants laugh]

Because when you look at the world right now, we may not want to take responsibility for it. However, being co-creators means that the responsibility is ours to heal ourselves -- to really look at our thoughts, our habits, our personality traits that are causing us to suffer or to get out of whack in life, to cause more chaos -- so that we can heal and live peacefully in the outer world, which is that ripple effect.

Collectively, then, our collective consciousness -- or our collective energy, our collective frequency, our collective vibration; whatever way you want to put that -- comes together and creates the world we see.

So, to first review the first two commitments. So, In order to live life beautifully with uncertainty and change, the first step is to accept and relax into the fact that life brings uncertainty and change. How many people find that easy? The same amount who thought chaos was good. Okay. Yeah. Accepting and relaxing into the fact that life brings uncertainty and change.

And then the second step was that commitment to take care of one another, consciously choosing to help ease the pain of the world by actively caring for others. Being a presence of love. Being a presence of compassion. Being a presence of support in the world. Our world. Sometimes we get overwhelmed because we think, *"I've got to take care of the whole world."* Our world. And then all of our little pockets of light together merge together for one big light.

So, tonight we bring both of those together. We accept life and the world as it is, and then we vow to embrace it. And in the embracing of it, there's a commitment to heal yourself in order to help heal others. Again, it's that second commitment, but almost bigger and wider.

In this third vow or goal -- and I like how she writes this -- she says this third goal is really to, **"manifest basic goodness."** I love that. It's juicy, yeah? Manifest basic goodness. To manifest basic goodness within ourselves, with ourselves, and with others.

Just sit with that for just a moment. How can I manifest basic goodness?

And so, to return to this idea of chaos as good news. So chaos is ... I was thinking about when you're baking, and you're stirring the batter. And you're mixing everything up together. And then you're putting some heat on it. And then, poof! You've manifested a cake. Cakes are yummy, right? But it took the chaos of mixing all that together. Just ask the milk and the eggs. They got mixed all up in there. And they got cooked. But then you manifested -- after all that chaotic swirling and twirling and heat on it -- something delicious.

When it comes to transitions and change ... And I got this from -- I love the book "Finding Yourself in Transition" by Rev. Robert Brummett. And he says, *"We start with the ending."*

See, we always think of change and transitions as a beginning. But, really, we start with the ending. There's an ending. There's the void. And then there's the new beginning.

And the void is, you know, walking in the wilderness, like Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. It's dirty. It's bumpy. You're unsure. It feels like a 40-year journey. It can feel like chaos. That void -- that in-between -- feels like chaos. But then a plan unfolds. A new beginning happens.

So, you've manifested the newness -- the new beginning -- from the chaos. And so, the world looks chaotic right now. But what if we looked at it as reorganizing a new beginning? And as co-creators, with our collective consciousness, we can come together -- which is what we do here on Wednesdays, Wednesday night meditation, Sundays -- come together to raise consciousness to create more harmony and acceptance, peace, love in the world.

Oftentimes we think about our awakening or manifesting our dreams as this beautiful Instagram reel of well-lit photos. Or we think it means that we can meditate for an hour. And so now, oof! Now I'm enlightened. Now I'm awakened.

But really, a true spiritual awakening and spiritual growth is about being able to handle the small irritants in life. It goes back to that Eastern philosophical saying I've shared before, I know, which says, *"You may not be able to keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair."* Birds are going to fly over your head. Are you going to let them irritate you?

And, most of the time, the small irritants come from those storylines we create: *"Uh-oh, there's birds flying over my head. Well, great, now I can't meditate. That's so annoying."* Or we could create another story, which would be, *"Wow! Birds flying overhead. Let me allow that noise to take me even deeper into my meditation time. Or let the noise be my meditation."*

Or we see a small dent in our car, and we get really, really upset. Or ... We can calmly just call the shop and get our car in. I'm not saying that the initial reaction wouldn't be anger. You can ask my husband. [Congregants laugh] Have the feelings; have the reaction; acknowledge it. But, again, don't let it build a nest in your mind or on your heart, whatever that irritant is.

So, Pema shares another lesson from her mentor who says, *"It's like saying oatmeal. Some people like hot cereal. Some people hate it. Nevertheless, oatmeal remains oatmeal."* See, you don't have to hold tightly and tell anyone who will listen that you like or don't like oatmeal. You don't have to have an attachment to your oatmeal opinion.

So, bringing it back to embracing the world as it is ... What leads to the divisiveness is that we cling on to our opinions. We cling on to our opinions with an emotional attachment. We cling on to our opinions and they make up our identity.

But we can just let something be or not be. We can just like something or not like something. Pema writes, *"Regardless of how we feel about snow, it's still snow: awakened energy manifesting just as it is."*

So, it's not that we don't have opinions about things. We do. We can. It's just that we don't cling on to them and make them our personality. Because Pema Chödrön points out that war and hate come from us being invested in our opinions.

But when we don't cling, we're present. We're present. Our eyes and our hearts are open. Our arms are open. When we don't insist that things go our way, there's room for an actual flow to occur. The less self-absorbed we are, the more fully engaged we can be; the more open-hearted we can be. Being engaged means we can be fully alive. Being fully alive means we can embrace the world just as it is, taking care of our fellow humans.

Everything in our lives is a vehicle for our own awakening; an opportunity for our spiritual growth. So whatever experience is in front of you, however you want to interpret it -- It's up to you. A confused mind will experience a confused world. A detached mind -- something not fixed on how it should be or how it is -- experiences many possibilities of awakening and growth.

And she writes this. She says, *"Whether we're irritated because someone took our parking place or we're overwhelmed by illness, debt, or flashbacks, it's all an opportunity to wake up."*

I really held on to that flashback. Those are those conversations -- was thinking about it for me this week -- those conversations that you keep flashing back to, right? Ruminating over. The conversation that keeps going on and on and on, over and over in your head. You can't let it go.

And I had a conversation last week, and it was stuck there; it was flashbacking to it. And then just yesterday, I thought, *"You know what? That conversation actually was an awakening for you, Stacy. That conversation is actually leading you to more growth."*

So, we can keep getting angry and frustrated and put more anger and frustration out into the world, or we can keep the frequency of peace, of healing, and put that out into the world. Because Eric Butterworth -- Rev. Eric Butterworth -- says we live from within out.

So, the suggestion from the book is to work on your own mind. Take the action, and take the action with the understanding that everyone is basically good. That goes right in hand with our Unity Principle #2: that, because humans are expressions of the Divine, we are all inherently good. That includes everyone. That includes those you may look down to. Maybe it includes the homeless person that you looked down on, or a neighbor, or a group of people with a different viewpoint.

But all are expressions of God -- of this universal Life Energy. Because two truths can exist at the same time: good and not so good; sorrow and joy. Because we all have a choice whether or not we're going to express our divine nature.

And this is where we get back to working with the emotions, not against it. To use that word "and." Oh, I love the word and. Because it could be: *"This person is trouble and I send them love as another expression of God."* *"That person really frustrates me and I send love to them as an expression of the Divine."*

It helps us to embrace the goodness that is always present. If we're looking, the goodness is always present.

One of my first jobs as a registered dietitian -- I was a research dietitian at UCLA at the Centers for Human Nutrition. And we were one of the hubs for this big national study, the Women's Health Initiative

study. It was for women between the ages of 50 and 79. It went on for over 15 years. And so, I was teaching classes about a low-fat diet because that was the study -- was to eat a low-fat diet.

And one of the classes was on a Saturday morning. And I got to the parking lot early, and one of the participants -- one of the women in the class -- she happened to get there early. There was no traffic on the 405 that day. And so, we got out of our cars at the same time. We were walking into the building.

And as we were walking, we were chatting along, and as we were talking, there was this grassy lawn kind of on the side of the building. Here was the front door. And over here was all this kind of nice grass lawn and trees. And there was a homeless man there. And so, as we're walking, she suddenly stops and she sees the homeless man. And she says, *"Oh, that's so sad. It breaks my heart. That's someone's son."*

Now I was about 27 or 28 at the time, and I didn't have any sons yet, but I did have a heart. And my heart suddenly felt very different about a homeless person. It was just those words: *"He's someone's son."* And I thought, *"And someone's brother; I have a brother, Someone's friend; a nephew. I've got nephews."* It gave me a whole different view of the unhoused population. It allowed me to awaken to a more compassionate viewpoint.

Pema writes, *"When you can see even the worst of hells as a place where you can awaken, your world will change dramatically."*

So, I'm not asking you to put yourself in harm's way; you know that. But what I am asking you is to open your heart and embrace the person -- the other group, the world -- just as it is. I'm not saying it's easy, folks. I'm right here with you. But to do it together, and then take that second vow -- to take care of one another.

And if a circumstance bothers you -- if you're like, *"Why are they doing that or they're not doing this?"* Do something about it. Do something about it. Take the action. But remember, the chaos we see on the outside -- the chaos we experience in our own lives -- it doesn't have to be bad. It may feel terrible. It probably feels terrible. We don't like it. But it's an invitation to stay centered in courage and compassion and with gentleness through the chaos, to view the world and embrace it.

And that means a lot of feelings can come up. Some not-so-great feelings. But we can continue to be more angry and more fearful. We can blame others and sit in victimhood. Or we can feel the feelings, acknowledge the feelings and emotions, and not tell ourselves, a big story. *"Aw, I'm weak for crying"* or, *"I shouldn't feel this way."* But, instead, to just be with it: to feel the feelings deeply. Maybe at first, just for a short time and then we can work up.

And it's a balance, right? Feel the feelings; acknowledge them ... but don't let the nests take place. Don't build the nest and let it live there.

So, she's encouraging us really to let the power of our emotions to open us up. To be honest with ourselves about what we're feeling; to be in the moment; and to learn that you're strong enough to sit with your emotions. That you can find peace just from being in the moment and not having to make up stories or exaggerate the situation or escalate the situation. You can just be. You can let it be.

There's a Buddhist teacher by the name Dipa Ma who said, *"When you feel happy, don't get involved with the happiness. When you feel sad, don't get involved with the sadness. Just be aware of them."*

And on that note, Pema Chödrön adds this. It's going to be on your screen to follow along: *"From staying present with impermanence and change, we become more confident, more fearless, more accepting of the groundlessness of the human condition."*

Because as you stay present to your emotions and open yourself up, you have room to embrace others. And you have that ability to empathize and be more compassionate. So, you can rant and rave and get upset. Someone comes late for lunch. You can get upset about them being late for lunch. Or you can enjoy the sunshine and people watch. And maybe even, *"You know, sometimes I've been late, too."* I like

to use that: *"And when have I done that?"* If I start to get upset with someone – *"And when have I done that?"* To show compassion both to the other person, but ultimately also to myself.

Ultimately, this third commitment invites us to embrace the reality of life. To stay present, centered, grounded, even in the midst of constant change and impermanence. And she says we're always going to arrive to the thought: *"This is just how it is. My old shirt won't last forever, and neither will I."*

Which begs the question: What do you want to do with your one precious life? How do you want to spend the moments of your life?

There was a prophecy written by the Hopi elders 26 years ago. Here's what they wrote (on your screen): *"At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves. For the moment we do, our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt. The time of the lone wolf is over."*

And what that is telling us -- what I take that that's telling us -- is that we can't get torn apart by turbulent times. We have to stay in the flow of life. And we can't do life alone. We have to do life together.

So, this third commitment to embrace the world just as it is: it's about embracing the world with the uncertainty, with the insecurity, vulnerability, groundlessness. And that may seem negative, but to know that -- we probably want to elude them -- but they're not feelings to avoid. To really look at them. She reminds us we can live beautifully with whatever comes: heartache, joy, success, failure, instability, change.

So, at the end of the book -- at the end of our series -- she asks us this question. She says, *"I leave you with this question. Are you ready to make a commitment? Is the time right for you to commit to not causing harm? To benefiting others? To embracing the world just as it is? Are you willing to make any or all of these commitments for a lifetime or a year or a month or even a day?"*

If you feel that you're up for it, then start wherever you are and voice the commitment to yourself or to a friend, a mentor, a spiritual teacher. You make the commitment knowing that, if you break it, you simply acknowledge that you broke it and then you start again.

In her book, *"Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change,"* we have three commitments or vows that she has shared with us. And she describes these saying, *"These can launch us on an exhilarating journey -- a life-giving journey, a journey of appreciating one another and our unlimited potential for good news."*

So make the journey for yourself. Make the journey for your loved ones. Make the journey for those you dislike; for those you disagree with; and even for those you don't know. Because by leaning into your feelings; accepting life as it is; doing your inner healing work; reaching out to help others; embracing the world -- that's when you become more at peace. That's when life becomes more beautiful.

That's my wish for all of you. And that's what we've learned from our series with Pema Chödrön. And that concludes our series, as well. Blessings, everyone.