

The next time you lose heart and you can't bear to experience what you're feeling, you might recall this instruction: change the way you see it and lean in. Instead of blaming our discomfort on outer circumstances or on our own weakness, we can choose to stay present and awake to our experience, not rejecting it, not grasping it, not buying the stories that we relentlessly tell ourselves. This is priceless advice that addresses the true cause of suffering – yours, mine, and that of all living beings.

Difficult things provoke all your irritations and bring your habitual patterns to the surface. And that becomes the moment of truth. You have the choice to launch into your lousy habitual patterns, or to stay with the rawness and discomfort of the situation and let it transform you.

For one day, or for one day for 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.

One of the deepest habitual patterns that we have is to feel that now is not enough.

Although it is embarrassing and painful, it is very healing to stop hiding from yourself. It is healing to know all the ways that you're sneaky, all the ways that you hide out, all the ways that you shut down, deny, close off, criticize people, all your weird little ways. You can know all of that with some sense of humor and kindness. By knowing yourself, you're coming to know humanness altogether. We are all up against these things. We are all in this together.

Sticking with that uncertainty, getting the knack of relaxing in the midst of chaos, learning not to panic – this is the spiritual path.

When we are willing to stay even a moment with uncomfortable energy, we gradually learn not to fear it.

The best spiritual instruction is when you wake up in the morning and say, 'I wonder what's going to happen today.' And then carry that kind of curiosity through your life.

Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over to annihilation can that which is indestructible in us be found.

When things fall apart in your life, you feel as if your whole world is crumbling. But actually, it's your fixed identity that's crumbling. And as Chögyam Trungpa used to tell us, that's cause for celebration.

When we resist change, it's called suffering. But when we can completely let go and not struggle against it, when we can embrace the groundlessness of our situation and relax into its dynamic quality, that's called enlightenment.

This moving away from comfort and security, this stepping out into what is unknown, uncharted and shaky – that's called liberation.

When things are shaky and nothing is working, we might realize that we are on the verge of something. We might realize that this is a very vulnerable and tender place, and that tenderness can go either way. We can shut down and feel resentful, or we can touch in on that throbbing quality.

The trick is to keep exploring and not bail out, even when we find out that something is not what we thought. That's what we're going to discover again and again and again. Nothing is what we thought. I can say that with great confidence. Emptiness is not what we thought. Neither is mindfulness or fear. Compassion – not what we thought. Love. Buddha nature. Courage. These are code words for things we don't know in our minds, but any of us could experience them. These are words that point to what life really is when we let things fall apart and let ourselves be nailed to the present moment.

Sticking with uncertainty is how we learn to relax in the midst of chaos, how we learn to be cool when the ground beneath us suddenly disappears. We can bring ourselves back to the spiritual path countless times every day simply by exercising our willingness to rest in the uncertainty of the present moment – over and over again.

Lean into the sharp points and fully experience them. The essence of bravery is being without self-deception. Wisdom is inherent in (understanding) emotions.

– excerpted from Pema Chödrön's *Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion*