

Ep #30: Lessons from Pema Chodron



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

Welcome to The Life Coach School Podcast where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hey everybody. What's going on? Episode 30, that's what's up. That is amazing. Thirty weeks some of y'all have been with me. Thirty lessons, that's a lot of listening. I really, really appreciate you guys hanging with me. I so appreciate this community of listeners that I've created and the content that you all are not just listening to, but applying to your life. So thank you, thank you, thank you.

Now, as you know every 10 episodes we talk about an author. And it's an author that's had a huge impact on my life and someone that has been one of my teachers and someone that I love deeply. And at this time we're talking about Pema Chodron. And she is such a huge influence on my life. And here's what you really need to know, is that she's a nun and she swears, so ... You know, I always picture nuns being like really, you know, nun-like. I don't picture them giggling and laughing and making jokes and using sarcasm, but Pema does all of it. And she's a Buddhist Monk too to top it all off. So, you know, she does all the meditating and contemplating and still is hilarious. If you've ever heard her speak or you've ever, you know, read her books or listened to her, she's just bad ass. That's the only way to describe her. And she was just on Oprah too, if you guys are as obsessed with the Oprah network as I am. You can go to her Super Soul Sunday. She was just recently on and was fantastic. Loved listening to her talk to Oprah and have them laugh.

So what I want to do is talk to you a little bit about some of her concepts that have had such a huge influence on me. Her main concept is based on shenpa. It's a Tibetan word for attachment. And basically she talks about the moment one is hooked into a habitual negative or self-destruction action and thought. Shenpa or getting hooked, according to Pema, occurs as a response to something, as a response to a C, a circumstance as we use with the model. Right? And then we get into what I call is the spin cycle.

She asserts that the past experiences sometimes lead to these self-destruction thought patterns, and then eventually lead to responding to that with excessive eating, drinking or maybe angry outbursts. So it's exactly the work.

And she heavily influenced my work when I was creating the model based on her concepts that she taught me and the idea of that suffering. She says somebody says a mean word to you, and then something in you tightens. That's shenpa. And then it starts to spiral into low self-esteem or blaming or anger at them or degrading yourself. And if you have strong addictions, you just go right to the addiction to overcome the bad feeling that arose when that circumstance triggered you.

So basically what her philosophy is is in that attachment and how that attachment leads to us creating this negative spin cycle for ourselves. And her work is all about embracing that, moving towards that understanding that with compassion and love and peace. And truly I ... When I was first doing all my work on my weight, I had created so much suffering for myself. And I was eating, I was constantly going to the food to try and overcome my own suffering, my own pain. And so she really spoke to that, that if you are willing to understand your pain and move towards it, that really is the secret to unattaching from it.

So what I'm going to do now is I want to go through some of her quotes and some of her teaching and just discuss them briefly. I can't obviously share everything she's taught. I'm not going to read her whole book, although I'd really like to. Her books are so good and I think you guys would love any of the books that she's written.

A couple of my favorites, "Start Where You Are" and "When Things Fall Apart". I really, really love that, "When Things Fall Apart". So check them out. Go to Amazon, check those books out. But I'm going to share some of the concepts with you and have a little bit of a discussion with you. And then hopefully if you have some comments or ideas, you can come over to TheLifeCoachSchool.com and share with me what are your favorite teachings from Pema.

Okay. Here we go. "If we learn to open our hearts, anyone, including the people who drive us crazy, can be our teachers." Wow. So think about that. That is so true for me. My relationships that drive me the most "crazy", the ones that trigger my brain in a way that causes me to think in a certain way really reveal to me the parts of my brain, the parts of my patterning in my brain that still need work. And so in that way any person that, quote/unquote, drives you crazy can be your teacher.

"The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently." Dang, that is so good. I'm reading it again because it's so dang good. Really listen to it.

"The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently." This is one of the biggest challenges most of my students have. They don't want to spend time looking at themselves. They don't want to know what they're eating. They don't want to know what they're feeling. They don't want to know what they're thinking about all the people in their life. They think it's tedious. They want to just disconnect from themselves. And I love the way that she calls that fundamental aggression. Beautiful, love it, love it, love it.

All right, next. "Feelings like disappointment, embarrassment, irritation, resentment, anger, jealousy and fear, instead of being bad news are actually very clear moments that teach us where it is that we're holding back. They teach us to perk up and lean in when we feel we'd rather collapse and back away. They are like messengers that show us with terrifying clarity exactly where we're stuck.

This very moment is the perfect teacher. And lucky for us, it's with us wherever we are. So if we could look at our negative emotions as signals, as indicators of where we still have healing to do and thinking to change. Right? It's where our patterning has not been looked at clearly.

Our awareness has been lapsing. Those emotions can remind us to pay attention to reconnect to ourselves. Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity." God, isn't that beautiful?

"Compassion is a relationship between equals. Only when we know our darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others." For those of you who are coaches, I know many of you are, I think that is one of the most important lessons. If you want to have the honor of working with a

client, if you want to have the honor of being present with a client, you must be willing to know your own darkness well. Only then can you be present for the darkness of others. Oh, so good.

Another one, "You are the sky. Everything else, it's just the weather." She's so good. That's so amazing. "People get into a heavy-duty sin and guilt trip feeling that if things are going wrong, that means they did something bad and they are being punished. That's not the idea at all. The idea of karma is that you continually get the teachings that you need 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. You're given this gift of teachings in the form of your life to give you everything you need to open further. Fear is a natural reaction to moving closer to the truth." Dang, I mean come on you guys. That is ridiculously amazing.

"Fear is a natural reaction to moving closer to the truth. The most difficult times for many of us are the ones we give ourselves." Holy cow, if that isn't true, I don't know what is. The most difficult times are the ones we give ourselves. "Life is glorious, but life is also wretched. It is both.

Appreciating the gloriousness inspires us, encourages us, cheers us up, gives us bigger perspective, energizes us, we feel connected. But if that's all that's happening, we get arrogant and start to look down on others. And there's a sense of making ourselves a big deal and being really serious about it, wanting it to be like that forever. The gloriousness becomes tinged by craving and addiction. On the other hand, wretchedness, life's painful aspect softens us up considerably. Knowing pain is a very important ingredient of being there for another person. When you are feeling a lot of grief you can look right into somebody's eyes because you feel you haven't got anything to lose. You're just there. The wretchedness humbles us and softens us. But if we're only wretched, we would all just go down the tubes. We'd be so depressed, discouraged and hopeless that we wouldn't have enough energy to eat an apple.

Gloriousness and wretchedness need each other. One inspires us, the other softens us. They go together. Rather than letting our negativity get the better of us, we could acknowledge that right now we feel like a piece of shit and not be squeamish about taking a good look." I love me some Pema. God, that's good, right? Rather than letting it get the better of us,

we could just acknowledge that right now we feel like a piece of shit and not be squeamish about taking a good look. Love it.

"To be fully alive, fully human and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest. We think that the point is to pass the test or overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. There is a story of a woman running away from tigers. She runs and runs and the tigers are getting closer and closer. When she comes to the edge of a cliff, she sees some vines there. So she climbs down and holds onto the vines. Looking down she sees that there are tigers below her as well. She then notices that a mouse is gnawing on the vine to which she is clinging. She also sees a beautiful little bunch of strawberries close to her growing out of a clump of grass. She looks up and she looks down, she looks at the mouse. Then she just picks a strawberry, puts it in her mouth and enjoys it thoroughly. Tigers above, tigers below.

This is actually the predicament that we are always in in terms of our birth and our death. Each moment is just what it is. It might be the only moment of our life. It might be the only strawberry we'll ever eat. We could get depressed about it, or we could finally appreciate it and delight in the preciousness of every single moment of our life. If someone comes along and shoots an arrow in your heart, it is fruitless to stand there and yell at the person. It would be much better to turn your attention to the fact that there's an arrow in your heart. Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over to alienation can that which is indestructible in us be found." Whew. "Most of us do not take these situations as teachings. We automatically hate them. We'd run like crazy. We use all kinds of ways to escape. All addictions stem from this moment when we meet our edge and we just can't stand it. We feel we have to soften it, pad it with something and we become addicted to whatever it is that seems to ease the pain. We don't set out to save the world. We set out to wonder how other people are doing and to reflect on how our actions affect others. We habitually erect a barrier called blame that keeps us from communicating genuinely with others and we fortify it with our concept of what is right or wrong. We do that with people who are closest to us and we do it with political systems, with all kinds of things that we don't like about our associates or our society. It's a very common ancient, well-perfected device for trying to feel better. Blame others. Blaming is a way to protect your heart, trying to

protect what is soft and open and tender in yourself. Rather than own that pain, we scramble to find some comfortable ground."

I really just want to keep reading all of these because they are so amazing, but I'm going to end here with one last quote, and then I'm going to just make a few comments about what it means to me.

"Nothing ever goes away until it has taught us what we need to know. 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. Maybe the only enemy is that we don't like the way reality is now and, therefore, wish it would go away fast.

But what we find as practitioners is that nothing ever goes away until it has taught us what we need to know. If we run a hundred miles an hour to the other end of the continent in order to get away from the obstacle, we find the very same problem waiting for us when we arrive. It just keeps returning with new names, forms, manifestations until we learn whatever it has to teach us about where we are separating ourselves from reality, how we are pulling back instead of opening up, closing down instead of allowing ourselves to fully experience whatever we encounter without hesitating or retreating into ourselves.

This teaching has truly shaped my life. This concept of not trying to argue with how reality is now, not feeling like I need to protect myself from how reality is now, but rather embracing it and moving towards it and going into it.

That is the way that I have found living my life is better. It's not having less negative emotion, but it's resisting it less. It's not having only great things happen to me in my life, but accepting everything that happens into my life and knowing that it's part of the human experience. And the more I'm willing to say yes to the things that happen to me, even when they're things that are unwanted, the more fully I experience my life.

And I teach this to my students. The worst thing is when we resist what is happening, when we tell ourselves ugly things about it and when we resist feeling our negative emotion. By opening up instead of closing down we get to experience fully whatever we encounter without hesitating or retreating into ourselves." It's so beautifully said and I wish that for each of

you, that you will not shut down when things happen to you, but you will use every reason in your life, the “good things”, and the “bad things”, to open up even more. Thank you so much, Pema Chodron, for everything you've taught me. I couldn't love you more. For those of you who don't know Pema, please enjoy. I'll talk to you all next week. Bye.

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