



Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears

Pema Chödrön

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Best-seller Pema Chödrön draws on the Buddhist concept of shenpa to help us see how certain habits of mind tend to “hook” us and get us stuck in states of anger, blame, self-hatred, and addiction. The good news is that once we start to recognize these patterns, they instantly begin to lose their hold on us and we can begin to change our lives for the better.

“This path entails uncovering three basic human qualities,” explains Pema. “They are natural intelligence, natural warmth, and natural openness. Everyone, everywhere, all over the globe, has these qualities and can call on them to help themselves and others.”

This book gives us the insights and practices we can immediately put to use in our lives to awaken these essential qualities. In her friendly and encouraging style, Pema Chödrön helps us take a bold leap toward a new way of living—one that will bring about positive transformation for ourselves and for our troubled world.

Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears Details

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From Reader Review Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears for online ebook

Mark Valentine says

One image that connected with me that Chodron writes of involves viewing each of us as a continuous, flowing river. Named, the river appears to be the same, but every day, every moment, it is in a constant state of flux where banks change, levels rise and ebb, and flotsam has passage or dams may appear. I like this analogy because it shows how temporal, fluid and full of movement living life is.

She introduces a Tibetan word, "shenpa," in chapter 3 meaning "attachment" or those habits, feelings, compulsions, and cravings that control our lives, even becoming addictions. She never really says that we need to rid ourselves of all the detritus (although it is certainly implied) as she counsels that we need to embrace them; this is counterintuitive advice, but valuable because the experience of hardship shapes us into our present selves--and living in the moment is the essence.

I also appreciate her advice on abiding compassionately, of breathing in the struggle and oppression of others in order to exhale relief and healing. In this regard, it resembles the Prayer of St. Francis. Finding homeostasis in my life means striving to be a spiritual warrior; my discipline need be for this journey. Loving and having compassion for my traumas will allow me to have compassion and love for those around me. I can live with this.

Olivia says

It felt like every time I picked up this book I read something extremely relevant to something I was dealing with in the moment. Shenpa and not getting hooked into a storyline in our heads is all very helpful to my certain brand of anxiety. I need a constant stream of Pema Chödrön teachings in my life.

Tommy says

I would say my only complaint about Pema's book is that it's too short, but at 100 pages, it's not. There are pearls of wisdom on every page, and this slim volume of Buddhist thought - focused on staying with your emotions, leaning into pain, sitting with the hard stuff - is just right. It begs to be reread, to be handed off to a friend in need.

Pema writes with clarity, wit, and sensibility. She speaks to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, focusing on working through our habitual patterns, difficult emotions, and the 'shenpa', or attachments, that continue to lure us into a spiraling pattern of inefficiency with the time we've been given. Fears, addictions, insecurities, and other paralyzing feelings are addressed here honestly and thoughtfully, but never with a heavy handedness. Pema is a gentle voice, and a welcome one in my life.

Meghan A. says

Pema Chodron could write a car manual and I'd eagerly read it. This was as lovely and helpful as every other.

Michele Harrod says

Now this little book took me a while to get into, I started it, got busy, tried again, got distracted - until finally I did take the leap, and put all else aside and read it last week. Why the delay, I wonder? I suspect I was a little reluctant to actually let go of a few old habits.

It's funny how you do make the time for books, right when you are ready to receive their message.

I loved this one for the introduction to the concept of 'Shenpa'. The emotions that rise up in us (rage, frustration, greed, boredom) and which we usually act on with mindless repetition, and usually with extremely unproductive results. And all it takes is a breath. A moment of recognition, and that split second of turning reaction, into thoughtful recognition, acknowledgement, understanding and finally, choice, instead. I'm spotting Shenpa before it overwhelms me now, and giving it my attention. To find out the story that underlies it, to see if I can't manage it in a different way - and change the stories going forward. Wonderful insights.

Ditto, her story about having to sort out her mother's belongings after she passed away. For someone desperate to achieve some minimalism in my life, this story was also helpful in allowing me to understand the 'stories' we attach to inanimate objects, and how we can allow those to dictate our lives in unhelpful ways.

I definitely want to read more by this author!! But for now, I need to breathe a bit deeper, sit a bit more often, and recognise 'Shenpa' as it arises in my life. And most importantly, remember the one underlying theme that grabbed me the most that every other living being on this planet feels emotions pretty much exactly the same way I do. Maybe not at the same time, or for the same reasons, but pain, disappointment and anger - they all feel the same in all of us. There is something about that, that makes me want to give every other person on the planet a hug today.

TJ Shelby says

I absolutely loved this book. Maybe it was a combination of timing: me ready to move on from certain things in my past and my current fascination with eastern philosophy. Here are a few of my favorite gems:

* "A Native American grandfather was speaking to his grandson about violence and cruelty in the world and how it comes about. He said it was as if two wolves were fighting in his heart. One wolf was vengeful and angry, and the other wolf was understanding and kind. The young man asked his grandfather which wolf would win the fight in his heart. And the grandfather answered, 'The one that wins will be the one I choose to feed.'"

* "As we change our own dysfunctional habits, we are simultaneously changing society. Our own awakening

is intertwined with the awakening of enlightened society."

Charlotte says

What's so lovely about this slim book is that it's light as a feather—Buddhist concepts are relieved of their cumbersome weight for the average Western idiot—but it doesn't feel silly or condescending. Chodron personalizes every discussion with earthy vignettes from her own life, and her simplicity and directness keep us interested. The large print doesn't hurt, either. I'd recommend this to people interested in Buddhism, but also to those who might be just a little squeamish.

"Taking the Leap" is basically a meditation on *shenpa*, which can be translated as obsession or addiction—that feeling of being hooked or triggered or spinning out of control. (Apply this to compulsive eating or drinking, or to destructive thought patterns.)

Psychology would look at this from a different angle, but the Buddhist approach is to simply be present, stop avoiding difficult emotions or crashing into them with your same habitual responses and faulty interpretations. Stay with the discomfort, become curious about it, recognize the ephemeral quality of even the stickiest emotions, and reap the reward of becoming "unstuck."

Chodron suggests many exercises/meditations for opening up and working with *shenpa* and ties it all in to the goal of taking what we learn about ourselves and turning outward, to help others, society, the planet.

Diane says

I seriously considered buying this book so I could read it again and again during difficult times! I have considered reading this author before, when I saw this on the NFNR table and it was only 100 pages I jumped on it. I am so glad I did!

It seems to be a culmination of many things I have learned in the past 18 months! It is about being present in the moment and allowing yourself to feel your feelings as a way to get to know yourself and move forward in life. One of the biggest things I learned is that when you experience an emotion it only lasts for about 90 seconds. After the 90 seconds, it is just us perpetuating it! Can you say wallowing?

I have recommended this to at least 4 people already! It is not overly wordy and gets to the point quickly. Read it!

Julie says

I love Pema Chödrön's books (and audio works). Like her others, I find it is best to read it in pieces so that you can process what you've read as you go. Then, when you get to the end, start over, because you will pick up new insights each time and think of new ways in which they apply to your life. Parts of this book cover

the same material as her audio called "Don't Bite The Hook." It's helpful for me to hear the information again and again, so I don't mind the repetition. Taking the Leap offers practical advice, delivered in Pema's gentle, loving, compassionate way. I think everyone should own this book and read it periodically.

Jane says

First I read "The Untethered Soul" and I was very inspired. I kept feeling like I understood what why I needed to "let go" but I was still fuzzy on the "how to" portion. Somehow this book got on my list and it was just what I needed. It filled in the gaps for me. I already do Transcendental Meditation but this book added an element of addressing thoughts feelings when I'm not meditating. I may need to reread this one though because it is not the kind of learning that happens from just one read! Highly recommend this one for major life improvement!

Alison Kulik says

A very uplifting and useful book. The major points can seem lost in the content, but one could say the content itself is the most important. This is a book I will always have on my coffee table, a reference so to speak, for when I'm feeling out of sorts or like I'm a fish on a hook. It gives great insight into many Buddhist beliefs, the main focus of which is that we must first learn to be compassionate and accepting of ourselves without deception, before we can be compassionate towards others. Pema gives us tools on how to work towards this everyday. An excellent book and reference.

April says

Another one I'll have to buy. Shenpa was the big idea in this one for me, the attachment to being stuck in a pattern/reaction. Trying to be more open.

Talia says

I enjoyed "Taking the Leap." It is a quick read, and one that I thought might be helpful in this time in my life.

A few excerpts I found powerful:

"The source of our unease is the unfulfillable longing for a lasting certainty and security, for something solid to hold on to. Unconsciously we expect that if we could just get the right job, the right partner, the right something, our lives would run smoothly...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 the universal dilemma."

"...So that's what I learned: take an interest in your pain and your fear. Move closer, lean in, get curious; even

for a moment experience the feelings beyond labels, beyond being good or bad. Welcome them. Invite them. Do anything that helps melt the resistance...Then 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."

"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...Taking a moment to look at the sky...can give us a bigger perspective--that the universe is vast, that we are a tiny dot in space, that endlessless, beginningless space is always available to us. Then we might understand that our predicament is just a moment in time, and that we have a choice to strengthen old habitual responses or to be free."

Lisa says

I didn't really find much difference between chapters, they seem to re-iterate the teaching of not getting hooked, which is good, but personally, I found I would like to have read a bit *more* life-experience examples, as that helps me to better take in and understand what I'm reading. That said, Pema Chödrön is good at teaching, and I like her humility and her frankness, about her own pitfalls and experiences (as I said, though, I just wish there were more examples, or something, as I find I learn better that way).

(NB: I didn't really know what to expect with this book; it was a random pull at the library. The subtitle -- *Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears* -- seems to me a bit misleading, in that, in my mind, I thought there might be a more step-by-step thing, or more emphasis on examples of habits and fears. I suppose I feel as if there could have been a better title for this book, to better advertise what it's about. Maybe: *A Brief but Concise Introduction to the Concept of Shenpa*?)

Experience Life says

Faced with the scope of the planet's present challenges, not to mention our own day-to-day difficulties, it's not surprising that we sometimes feel the need to numb ourselves to the world around us. The obvious drawback to this survival tactic, notes Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön, is that we can wind up missing the whole show. The here and now is where life happens, after all. That's why Chödrön's latest book teaches the simple art of remaining present with what is and overcoming the attraction to distractions by becoming mindful of ways we become "hooked" by destructive mind-states.

Chödrön uses the Tibetan word *shenpa* to describe the condition of being triggered — those unconscious moments when our best intentions get steamrolled by angry outbursts or channeled into trips to the refrigerator. Instead of submitting thoughtlessly to *shenpa*, Chödrön suggests a series of simple interventions (pausing, breathing, reflecting with humor) that interrupt the cycle of reactivity and lead naturally to a more gentle, receptive state of being. When we interrupt aggression at the source, she argues, we are helping to interrupt it in the wider world, as well. This is Pema Chödrön at her best, offering uncomplicated wisdom for complex times.

