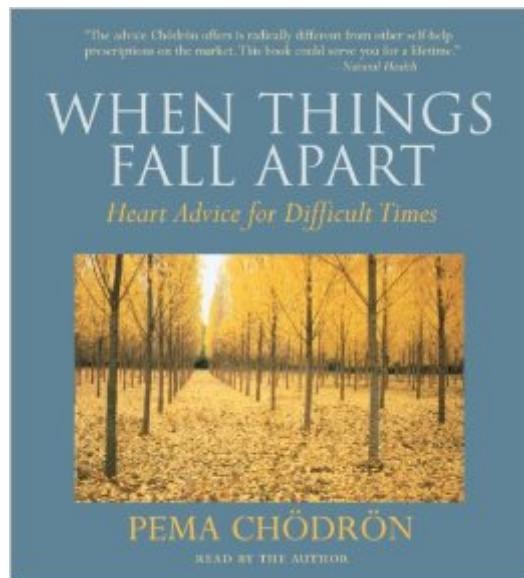


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When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice For Difficult Times



Synopsis

How can we go on living when things fall apartâ "when we are overcome by pain, fear, and anxiety? Pema ChÃ¶drÃ¶nâ™s answer to that question contains some spectacularly good news: there is a fundamental happiness readily available to each one of us, no matter how difficult things seem to be. To find it, according to traditional Buddhist teaching, we must learn to stop running from suffering and instead actually learn to approach itâ "fearlessly, compassionately, and with curiosity. This radical practice enables us to use all situations, even very painful ones, as means for discovering the truth and love that are utterly indestructible. 2 CDs, 2 1/2 hours, abridged

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Customer Reviews

I was just finishing this book in September 2001 when the events of 9-11 turned the world upside down, and things truly fell apart. There suddenly were all the vulnerable feelings that Pema ChÃ¶drÃ¶n encourages us to embrace: fear, sorrow, loneliness, groundlessness. And in the days of shock and grief that followed, there was that brief and abundant display of "maitri," or loving kindness, which emerged in waves of generosity and compassion for one another. For a while, we were in the world that she points to as an alternative to the everyday routine of getting, spending, and constant activity. It is nearly impossible to summarize or characterize this fine book. In some 150 pages it covers more than a person could hope to absorb in many years, if not a lifetime. We may know the Buddha's famous insight that human pain and suffering result from desire and aversion. But few writers have been able to articulate as well as ChÃ¶drÃ¶n the implications of that insight in ways that make sense to the Western mind. As just one example from this book, her discussion of

the "six kinds of loneliness" (chap. 9) illustrates how our desires to achieve intimacy with others are an attempt to run away from a deep encounter with ourselves. Our continuing efforts to establish security for ourselves are a denial of fundamental truths, which prevents our deep experience of the joy of living. Our reluctance to love ourselves and others closes down our hearts. Chödrön invites us to be fascinated, as she is, by paradox. On hopelessness and death (chap. 7) she writes: "If we're willing to give up hope that insecurity and pain can be exterminated, then we can have the courage to relax with the groundlessness of our situation. This is the first step on the path.

This book does not promise short term, quick fixes but encourages a way of life that will make living more joyful and meaningful - pain, change and all. This is not a book of "thought" filled advice from the mind, but a book (as the subtitle states) of heart advice. Pema openly shares some of her own experience as things fall apart, when her old way of doing things was no longer working. I bought it to give to my (fully grown) son when he was going through some difficult times. It wasn't what he needed or related to, so I read it myself. I like the way she points out that when things fall apart, that usually means we are on the brink of a change of some kind. My usual practice is to try to hold on to the familiar ways, but as I am finding out, that just doesn't work. And if it does, I am usually even more miserable. Depending on the kind of change you are experiencing, allowing it to happen with less resistance, without fear, can ease the opening to a new way. This is a disturbing thought to many of us. Give in? No way. Why, what if your spouse is cheating and you lose your job and you have a fatal illness and the sky is falling and you don't resist? (Ah, well -- most probably your spouse will still have cheated, that job will be lost, you will still have the illness and the sky will continue to fall.) On page 10 she says, "To stay with that shakiness -- to stay with a broken heart, with a rumbling stomach, with the feeling of hopelessness and wanting to get revenge -- that is the path of true awakening. Sticking with that uncertainty, getting the knack of relaxing in the midst of chaos, learning not to panic -- that is the spiritual path.

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