

# Meditation for Difficult Times

BY PEMA CHÖDRÖN | SEPTEMBER 1, 2009

Pema Chödrön on four ways that meditation helps us deal with difficulty.

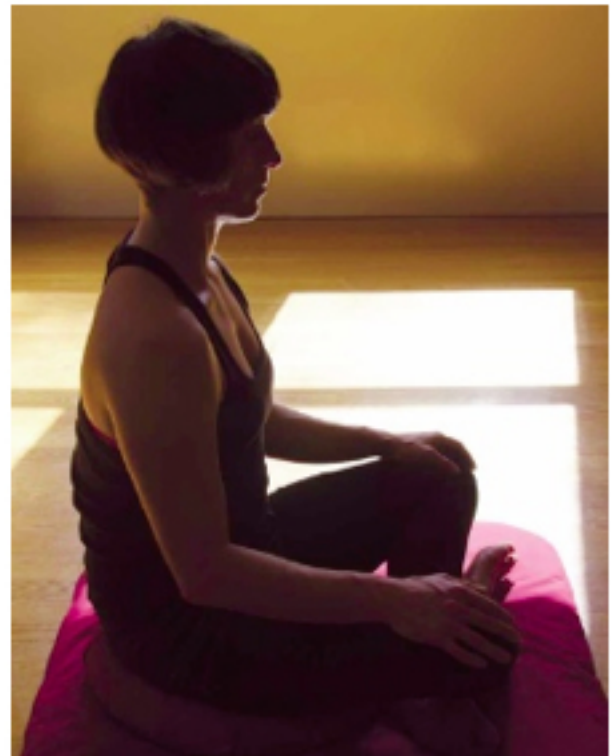
Meditation takes us just as we are, with our confusion and our sanity. This complete acceptance of ourselves as we are is a simple, direct relationship with our being. We call this *maitri*, loving-kindness toward ourselves and others. There are four qualities of *maitri* that are cultivated when we meditate:

1. *Steadfastness*. When we practice meditation we are strengthening our ability to be steadfast with ourselves, in body as well as mind.

2. *Clear seeing*. This is another way of saying that we have less self-deception. Through the process of practicing the technique day in and day out, year after year, we begin to be very honest with ourselves.

3. *Experiencing our emotional distress*. We practice dropping whatever story we are telling ourselves and leaning into the emotions and the fear. We stay with the emotion, experience it, and leave it as it is, without proliferating. Thus we train in opening the fearful heart to the restlessness of our own energy. We learn to abide with the experience of our emotions.

4. *Attention to the present moment*. We make the choice, moment by moment, to be fully here. Attending to our present-moment mind and body is a way of being tender toward self, toward others, and toward the world. This quality of attention is inherent in our ability to love. These four factors not only apply to sitting meditation, but are essential to all the *bodhichitta* (awakened heart) practices and for relating with difficult situations in our daily lives. By cultivating them we discover for ourselves that it is *bodhichitta*, not confusion, that is basic.



*From "Comfortable With Uncertainty: 108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion," by Pema Chödrön. Reprinted with the permission of Shambhala Publications.*