



# mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

## acceptance, compassion, patience *and* action!

**A**t the beginning of the year, I decided to write three related columns: the first on *Acceptance* the second on *Compassion* and the third on *Patience*. I had undergone open heart surgery to repair a leaky valve and an aneurism and those were the fundamental truths I needed to try to embody. I wrote the first two columns and then in March the world changed. Now, nine months into 2020, *Patience* no longer seems like enough and I need to add *Action!*

Certainly, now is a time for both patience and action. We are growing tired of restricting our movements, wearing masks, socially distancing from friends and family, and the myriad of shifts in behavior we have had to make. Working at home brings social isolation but working outside of home brings the fear of contagion and extra measures to prevent the spread of disease. Many have lost their jobs entirely and are in danger of eviction, suffer from food insecurity, and lack of health insurance. Many have had to find child care, exposing them to risk. On-line schooling brings some social contact for children but additional stress in families. What is especially hard is that we cannot gather with our friends and families—give and receive hugs, celebrate and mourn together.

We must find ways to continue to be patient, to take care of ourselves and our families so that our homes are a shelter in this COVID storm. We need to take action to make our situations the best they can be. How do we do this?

The first step takes us back to acceptance, really acknowledging the changes and the stresses—writing them down, spelling them out. What are you dealing with? Then comes the compassion—validating how hard it is, how much we are doing, acknowledging that sometimes we may lose it a bit, but we can apologize and get past it. Compassion for ourselves comes first, taking care of ourselves so we can take care of those depending on us. Deep breathing—making the exhale longer than the inhale—triggers the relaxation response and can be done throughout the day whenever we think of it. Meditation, yoga, exercise, listening to music, going for a walk, going outside, escaping into a book or a TV show, talking to a friend—we need to make time for whatever soothes and comforts us in a healthy way. Then we can take on compassion for others—our family and friends as well as the rude person in the grocery store. Try to imagine their story, what might they be coping with and send a little kind energy their way—you will feel better than if you spent the time focusing on what they did that was offensive.

Patience is essential for the practice of compassion in these times. This is no sprint that will be over in a few weeks. We are in the midst of

a marathon and different energy and tactics are needed. Our patience is sorely tested and sometimes we will lose it. Then we remember compassion for ourselves, forgiveness, self-love. I remember the Sylvia Boorstein phrase I wrote about in a previous column: “Sweetheart you are in pain.” Sit with that and hold yourself in love as you would a small child. Think of a time when you felt deeply loved and really allow those feelings to wash over you. If you cannot think of a time like that with a person then think of a moment when you felt that kind of love from a beloved pet. If you cannot think of a time like that under any circumstance then imagine it, imagine what it would feel like to feel deeply loved and send that love to yourself.

Finally, in these days we must take action—not just the actions needed to soothe and comfort and care for ourselves, but actions to change things. Besides the pandemic we have the reality of institutional racism coming to light. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are treated unfairly under the best of circumstances, but the killing of unarmed black men and women by the very people charged with their safety has brought the injustice into stark relief. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are taking the brunt of the suffering from the pandemic, in terms of health, economics and safety. Our country was built by refugees. Immigrants are vital members of our communities but live in fear of deportation. Many take the least desirable jobs, are poorly paid and live in unconscionable conditions.

We also have an economic system that isn't working for most people in the United States. Our system works really well for some, but most people are falling behind economically. We need a politics of care—care for all the people. All people need to earn a living wage, have health insurance, adequate housing, get vacations and sick leave. No one should be going hungry in this country.

Mahatma Gandhi said “A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members.” We have been given so much in this country, it is time to make sure everyone has enough. Research shows that beyond money enough to meet needs and have and a little extra, money is not responsible for happiness. Research also shows that we are happiest when we are doing for others. Isn't it wonderful that ensuring that everyone has enough and caring for others could increase the happiness is our world? What would that look like? How would it feel? Elections are on the horizon. Each of us has an opportunity to make a real difference by voting. Please vote for politicians who care and will do something to make this a better place for all people. *l&l*

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