



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

a time to heal

“A time to heal.” I have been thinking about these words from Ecclesiastes a great deal of late. There is so much healing to be done: at the level of the environment, between and within countries, within communities, and of course within us.

We are confronted daily with ecological problems that need to be addressed. We hear news of natural disasters—the earthquake in China, the cyclone in Myanmar. We are aware of starvation, unrest, fighting, and even genocide in the world. We are concerned about casualties and injuries among our troops serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, and among the civilians there as well.

Food and gas prices are rising, and people are losing their homes, jobs, and sense of security here in the United States. We may experience conflict and tension within our communities and families. Finally, we may suffer individually from anxiety and depression or other psychological distress. Just reading these few paragraphs is enough to bring you down!

How do we find respite in the midst of such heaviness? What can help us keep our hope alive? Everyone must find their own way, but there are some essentials that can help us maintain our equanimity.

Community—friends and family—are of vital importance. Feeling loved is great, but loving others actually brings us the most happiness. Being in relationship with others requires patience, the ability to overlook things, and the capacity to forgive. Empathy for the other’s point of view and the capacity to place the other’s needs ahead of one’s own at times is a must. Conflict resolution skills are also critical in order to work things out when necessary. Recognizing that “we are all in this together” helps allay undue anxiety and fears when times are tough.

Finding a sense of meaning and purpose is also vital. We all need to feel that what we do serves a purpose larger than ourselves. For many a spiritual connection fills this need. Contributing to a cause, whether it is environmental, social, or political is important. Taking

care of others feels good! Most people find that when they selflessly give to another, they actually get back more than they give. We are hard-wired to need that feeling of care and connection that giving brings.

Doing something is important. When asked how she could continue to work with the poor of Calcutta knowing that her efforts were just a drop in the bucket of poverty Mother Teresa said, “Our job is not to be successful, but to be faithful.” We must all be faithful in our efforts to bring about healing wherever we can.

At the personal level, doing our own work to heal whatever “wounded-ness” we carry is very important. If we do not heal our wounds we can inflict them on others or pass them on to our children. We must openly deal with old pains and hurts.

I often compare dealing with psychological injuries to dealing with physical injuries. When we cut ourselves we automatically cover the wound with our hand. We may be afraid to remove our hand and see the injury, but we must do so in order to be able to clean out the wound and apply antiseptic. Cleaning out the wound may be quite painful, but unless it is done, the wound can fester and become infected. Some wounds are so dangerous that they can make our entire bodies ill.

Sometimes we can handle the injury by ourselves or with the help of a friend, but sometimes we need professional help—X-rays, a cast, stitches, or other interventions. Just so with psychological wounds, sometimes we can handle them by speaking with a friend. Sometimes we need the help of a support group (Alanon, Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.). Sometimes we need professional help. We must seek the help we need to be whole.

Finally, we must remember to take good care of ourselves: exercise, eat well, and take time for whatever brings us joy, whatever comforts us, whatever brings us peace of mind, and of course whatever makes us laugh! Times are tough, and we must maintain our strength, courage, and peace of mind and heart. **h&h**

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