



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

“let us try . . . what love will do”

As I sit here and think about the nature of healing, I find my mind wandering back to the events surrounding the recent presidential election. Once again tears come to my eyes as I think of the people in Grant Park in Chicago that clear night when the president-elect and his beautiful family accepted the nomination. One of the fruits of healing is gratitude, and I feel enormous gratitude to have lived through these recent events. Another byproduct of healing is joy and the expressions of joy of people around the world have been overwhelming.

Many of us believe that in electing Barack Obama our nation has taken a bold step toward healing racial and economic divides in our country as well as repairing the relationships of our country with other countries of the world. If we examine how these recent events came to pass we discover the essential elements of healing: clear and unflinching recognition of problems; desire to make needed changes; setting clear goals; acquiring the needed tools; and finally building relationships to help you achieve the goals. Underpinning those elements I believe are hope, faith that change is possible and agape—spontaneous altruistic love.

Truth must be faced. I remember one of my graduate school professors saying, “The therapist always stands for reality.” None of us wants to look at hard facts, but running away from the truth always does more damage than stopping to face it. While the truth and the consequences of that truth may be frightening and unpleasant, only by facing our problems can we begin to overcome them. This is true on a personal level as well as the national and international level. Denial or misrepresentation of facts only harms us in the long run.

Along with the recognition of problems must come the determination to make needed change. There are several stages in deciding to change. At first we may casually think about it, gradually we begin to get more serious and finally we make the commitment to

change. All of us have been through these stages in dieting, exercising, stopping smoking, etc.

Next we set goals. The clearer and more specific the goals the easier it is to identify the things we need to do to reach them and the easier it will be to recognize when we have accomplished them.

Then we need to acquire the tools we need to reach the goals. We may need to gather information, read books, and attend classes. Finally and perhaps most importantly, we need to reach out to others to help us reach our goals. The support and input of parents, friends, religious or spiritual advisors, coaches, dieticians and others increases our likelihood of being successful. And of course therapists can often be very useful. Outcome research on the effectiveness of psychotherapy consistently reveals that most of the effectiveness of therapy is due to the relationship with the therapist. In the context of a safe relationship we can relieve ourselves of deep and sometimes long carried burdens, accept the pain and move through it, and develop insight and new ways of thinking and problem solving.

During the campaign process, President-elect Obama followed these steps: he faced the problems, decided that change was necessary, acquired the tools he needed and surrounded himself with the people who could help him reach his goals. However, I believe that the reason he was so successful was that so many of us felt his hope, his faith, and his love and it resonated with our own hope, faith, and love. More than half of us were ready for a change from the politics of fear, mistrust, and unilateralism. Barack Obama inspired us, ignited our hope, and I would say raised love and compassion as a foundation for looking at the problems we face. As I look toward the coming years, I cannot help but end with a favorite quote of mine from William Penn, a Quaker: “Let us then try what love will do.” h&h

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