



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

seeing stars

About six weeks ago I found myself wishing to be more of a Mary than a Martha. You may know the Bible story of Mary and Martha. Jesus was visiting their home and Martha was busy cleaning and preparing food for the many guests that would be arriving to hear Jesus. Mary on the other hand was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him.

Martha probably felt quite resentful for doing all the work and went to Jesus to ask him to tell Mary to help her, probably feeling sure that Jesus would see the unfairness of the situation. Much to Martha's surprise and probably dismay, Jesus said in fact that he would not be there long and that Mary had chosen wisely—to sit and listen rather than be concerned with other things.

For many years I was identified with Martha—unable to relax until all the work was done. I had a hard time understanding why Jesus would “take Mary's side” because after all *who* would get the meal together? Over the years I have heard more clearly what Jesus was saying: we need to make time and space for what is most important; work that has to be done will get done in due time. No one is going to starve, people could pitch in when everyone got hungry and figure something out. *That involves a lot of trust and the ability to discern what is most important.*

My desire to become more like Mary came from recognizing that, at the age of 63, the number of years that I have left feels quite finite. None of us is guaranteed even one more day, even one more breath, but the older we get the harder it is to ignore that our time on this beautiful blue marble is in fact quite limited. I want to *make time* for what is most important—family, friends, and spiritual growth and understanding and maybe some writing. I am convinced that the only way that happens is by being mindful and I know that for me that means slowing down, doing less.

Well there is an old phrase “Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it!” Sure enough, about three weeks ago I was caught in my Martha state, helping at a weekend retreat when in fact I was simply exhausted and just needed to go home and rest. I did not listen to the wisdom of my body and just kept on with the planned activities.

On Sunday morning I was cutting an avocado in a new way with a friend's very sharp knife and the knife slipped. I knew the kind of pressure I was applying and knew that my left hand had stopped the blade. In that split second I feared I had done terrible damage to my


hand. However when I looked down I saw that the cut on the base knuckle of my thumb was deep, but only half an inch long and felt enormous relief and gratitude.

I made light of it, staunched the bleeding and continued to work. About 30 minutes later I looked down and realized I couldn't move my thumb. A nurse advised a trip to the emergency room. Four hours later the hand surgeon on call said that I had severed a tendon in my thumb. I was scheduled for outpatient surgical repair three days later.

As the weeks have unfolded I have learned that, in fact, tendons heal slowly and my hand and wrist have been immobilized first in a cast and now a splint. I have learned how much we need our non-dominant hands—especially the thumb. I have developed enormous gratitude for all of the parts of my body that continue to work. This experience has renewed and deepened my respect for the courage and fortitude of people who deal with far worse conditions on a permanent basis. I am also grateful for the medical care I have received—for the doctors, nurses, and physical therapists who have helped. I have appreciated the kindness of friends, family, clients, and strangers.

It wasn't until about a week ago that I remembered my wish to be more of a Mary. Over the course of these weeks I have been forced to slow down. I have to pay attention to my body and I am more mindful because even the simplest of things are more complicated. I have realized in a new way my lifelong conflict between wanting to feel cared for and wanting to do everything by myself. This wound brought up past wounds—physical and psychological.

I don't wish for you an accident to force you into a more reflective, slowed-down state, but I do wish for all of us the wisdom to slow down and be more present. We need to listen to the wisdom of our bodies, to nurture our relationships, and to make time for whatever gives our lives meaning.

I recently read that someone has made a smart phone application that presents views of what the night sky would look like in various cities if there were no lights obscuring the view of the stars. The views are absolutely stunning. I have had the awe inspiring good fortune of camping under skies where the magnificence of the stars was fully visible. We would be a different people, a different country I believe if we all walked out at night and looked up and saw that kind of sky. I wish for all of us that we make the time and space to remember our place in this amazing universe. 

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