



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

facing life with acceptance and compassion

An important aspect of preventing injury and illness is being alert, aware, and able to face anything that comes our way. If we are able to greet everything with acceptance and compassion we will be able to make wise decisions and act in an effective way. Accepting life as it is does not mean giving up or being a victim. Rather acceptance means facing reality, moving with it, and doing what needs to be done instead of wasting energy railing against it. We face health, economic, political, social, and environmental problems and we must use our energy wisely and well.

Living life with acceptance and compassion means facing our fears. We cannot help feeling fear but we do not need to feed it and become immobilized or jump to imprudent actions. Facing our fears with acceptance and compassion requires calling on our true nature, our spiritual beliefs, and our sense of connectedness in order to remain calm and centered, to see clearly and to act in the best interest of ourselves and our world.

A new field of scientific study is developing at the intersection of psychology, neurology, and contemplative practice (spirituality). Scientists are beginning to appreciate and understand the nature of humankind and the incredible interconnectedness of life.

Using MRI technology, scientists have begun to study what happens in the brain during mental states that are associated with happiness and well-being. They are beginning to understand the biological underpinnings of what the Buddha discovered more than 2,000 years ago and what mystics in all religions have always known:

“It’s a remarkable fact that the people who have gone the very deepest into the mind—the sages and saints of every religious tradition—all say essentially the same thing: your fundamental nature is pure, conscious, peaceful, radiant, loving, and wise and it is joined in mysterious ways with the ultimate underpinning of reality, by whatever name we give That. Although your true nature may be hidden momentarily by stress and worry, anger and unfulfilled longings, it still continues to exist. Knowing this can be a great comfort.” (Rick Hanson, Ph.D. with Richard Mendius, MD, *Buddha’s Brain, The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom*. New Harbinger Publications, 2009, p. 15)

Life holds unavoidable physical and emotional pain (illness, accidents, loss of loved ones, etc.). If we can respond to the pain from our true nature with acceptance and compassion we can reduce our suffering. Facing life effectively means:

Recognizing that we are all connected and establishing healthy compassionate loving relationships.

Accepting that the nature of life is change and embracing change in a way that encourages growth and development.

Appreciating the pleasurable joyful times and developing inner and outer resources that will help us face the difficult times with courage and grace.

Understanding and appreciating our true nature and the connection of all life has the power to reshape our world. Life is sacred and in the words of Albert Einstein: “The life of the individual has meaning only insofar as it aids in making the life of every living thing nobler and more beautiful. Life is sacred, that is to say, it is the supreme value to which all other values are subordinate.” ❧❧❧

Karen Stewart, MA, and David Stewart, PhD, are psychologists who work with individuals, couples, groups, and organizations in their Durham practice at Suite 220 at 811 Ninth Street in Durham. Reach them at (919) 286-5051. www.stewartpsychologists.com