



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

beyond body/mind

We are living on the edge of a new frontier of healing. Ages ago, western scientists artificially divided the human being into body, mind, and soul. Scientists studied the body and the mind (separately of course) and left the soul to theologians. While this artificial method of study made practical sense and has yielded tremendous results, it is ultimately simplistic and not real. We are just beginning to put the pieces together to learn how the whole works. This is an exciting time as Western medicine opens to the wisdom of the East—acupuncture, meditation, yoga, etc.—and begins to acknowledge the importance of energy pathways, balance, harmony, nutrition, and—most of all—spiritual well-being.

What do we know right now? We know that our minds, bodies, and spirits are not separate. Massage therapists have long known that they can touch a spot in a person's body and it can trigger profound memories and emotions that had been unavailable to conscious awareness. We experience emotions and memories in our bodies. We know that sensations in our bodies can spark intuitive knowledge—gut reactions, if you will. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we know we are much more than our emotions, our thoughts, and our bodily sensations.

Our emotions are transient and often unreliable. Pay attention to your emotions over the course of a day, or even just a few hours. You will find that your mood/emotions can shift from positive to neutral to negative even in relatively stable situations. Sometimes the shifts are subtle, but they may be fairly dramatic in some people. Emotions can last anywhere from a few seconds to hours if we keep them going by thinking of stories to support them.

We also know that what we think is not always true and accurate. We see the world through the lenses of our experience and our genetic make-up. People describe the same experience very differently. Our perceptions and thoughts become even less reliable when we are emotionally upset. In short, we are a bundle of shifting and often unreliable emotions and thoughts. Fortunately we are much more.

When we talk about ourselves we often place a hand on our heart. We touch our hearts because that is where we feel our center, that place where we can observe our emotions, watch our thoughts and hold it all in perspective. This is our self that exists beyond what we are feeling and thinking—our calm center. From this place we can chose our actions rather than just reacting to thoughts or emotions.


Beyond this calm center is an even deeper state that can be reached through meditative practice—prayer, yoga, or other deeply centering techniques. When we are able to still our mind, calm our breath, and let go we can find a place of stillness where we can be in touch with something beyond our individual self. This state defies words but people use words like oneness, peace, and unity to describe the experience. Some might call it being in touch with the Divine, the life force, universal awareness or universal consciousness. It is a state of love, compassion, and connection. Being in touch with this state can have a profound effect on our well-being. From this place the effects of physical or emotional illness recede in significance and our ability to cope with whatever life brings is assured. I believe that this is the place we know as Spirit or Soul.

In the words of Albert Einstein:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us "universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

So how do we live in the face of this knowledge? We try to remember always that we are whole and way more than the sum of our parts. This means;

- Listening to our bodies;
- Recognizing and allowing our emotions to simply wash over us, knowing this also will pass;
- Watching our thoughts, trying not to get caught up in "stories" about the past or worrying about the future;
- Being present in the moment;
- Remembering that we are more than our thoughts, emotions or bodily sensations;
- Finding a way to that ocean of love, compassion and connection.

This is no small task. It is life work, but the rewards are incomparable. 

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