



mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

clearing space

Kathleen Hannan, a gifted local singer/songwriter and woman of many talents, offers a wonderful chorus for women “Bodies, Voices and Spirit.” In a recent chorus she read a poem about clearing space in our lives. The poem, *The Clearing* is by Morgan Farley.* The poet basically describes making space in her life for the unexpected, being open to the present moment and what will come—trusting that this is indeed the most important way to live.

What comes might be a “sudden wind” that “sweeps through me, changing everything.” “But,” she says, “ I think it will be something small, padding out from the shadows on delicate paws, or a word spoken so softly I hear it inside.” At the end, she invites the reader to

*Come stand with me here, it is
cold I know, and silent,
nothing is happening
The next breath, and the next,
is the new life.*

So often, when we think of rejuvenation we think about doing something: eating right, getting more exercise, getting enough sleep, making time for rest and recreation—the myriad of things that we know we should do to stay healthy.

We forget the importance of doing *nothing*, of making space for quiet contemplation, solitude, stillness, where our hearts can open, our minds can rest, and our bodies can relax.

In times of stillness, prayer, meditation or simple reverie, we can find our way to that place of peace within. In that place we can know things that are inaccessible to our normal state of consciousness. We are in touch with the core of our being, our real/best self, unencumbered by all of the necessary distractions of daily life.

Our culture so emphasizes *doing* that it is hard for us to recognize the importance of simply *being*. Daily practice of any kind that brings us to our still center becomes even more important the busier and more frenetic our lives. I am convinced that part of the cause of the epidemic of

insomnia is an attempt on our part to find that time of stillness. Unfortunately, when it comes in the middle of the night we can too easily open the door to needless worry and rumination. If we can make time during the early morning or late evening for a period of quiet reflection/meditation, we would likely all sleep much better.

We are often seeking answers—what to do about this problem or that, consciously trying to “figure things out” as if they were math problems that could be solved by logical deductions. For some problems this works, for others the solutions we come to just don’t seem quite right or enough. These are the problems that are best taken to a place of inner stillness and rest.

In that space we can let go of the seeking of answers and just rest with the problem or issue. Accepting it and allowing our mind to wander, our bodies to feel what they feel, our hearts to open. We can simply be.

When we become comfortable in that space sometimes grace happens. Without volition the path becomes clear, the block that we might have been experiencing gently falls away, we experience a deep knowing that feels right and good, even if we know it might bring frightening changes or mean doing something that seems too difficult. We can take that knowing and gently test it out—try it out, imagine it, talk to others, sit with the possibility until the need to act comes.

Practice makes us more receptive to that opening of inner wisdom, but we cannot will it. Willful seeking is antithetical to the process. Patience and letting go are the keys to the path to our still small voice, perhaps the most important aspect of optimum health. ❧

**The Clearing*, by Morgan Farley, copyright 1992, can be found in *If Not Now, When?: Reclaiming Ourselves at Midlife* by Stephanie Marston, Warner Books, 2001. And on-line: <http://thencomesthedawn.blogspot.com> Tuesday June 6th, 2006 posting Clearing Space.

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. Web address: www.stewartpsychologists.com