



# mindset

BY KAREN STEWART, MA

## to integrative medicine and beyond!

**T**hose who have seen the movie *Toy Story* will recognize this take off on Buzz Lightyear's motto "To Infinity and Beyond!" Integrative medicine is simply the best thing that has happened to health care in a very long time. Recognizing the inseparability of the mind, the body, and the spirit has restored medicine to treating the whole person. Now I think it is time to begin to recognize that we must go far beyond this limited perspective if we are to anticipate healing in its fullest sense.

Just as we cannot separate our mind, body, and spirit we cannot separate our individual selves from our families, our communities, our environment and our world. If there is sickness in any of these areas, it adds to our level of stress and therefore affects our health. The effects of poverty, poor health, inadequate parenting, limited education, prejudice, and injustice can be debilitating for generations. The emotional wounds of violence, coercion, and war are impossible to measure.

We need to do what we can to heal these wounds because they ultimately affect us all. The solutions lie not in more fear, isolation, incarceration, and coercion, but in creating a new paradigm based on compassion, understanding, and cooperation at the individual, community, societal, and global levels. A friend of mine calls this "enlightened self-interest."

Beginning at the level of individuals and families, we need to ensure that we all have adequate health care and an earned income that allows us to live above the poverty level. Each of us needs access to an excellent education that encourages problem solving, independent and critical thinking, self-reliance, physical and emotional self-care, development of healthy self-esteem and respect for others, as well as experiential and integrated understanding of the world around us. We need to live in a society that respects all points of view and where everyone has access to equal rights and justice because it is the will of the people, not simply the law. Finally we need to live in a world free of violence and coercion.

The ugly specter of hatred that was raised in the last election is appalling. Hatred is always based on fear and as long as we exist in a climate where fear is promoted and violence is viewed as the solution the spiral will go on and on. Fear is based on ignorance. Understanding and cooperation provide the answers that will enable us to work with each other and with other nations to bring about peace and healing in ourselves, in our country and finally in the world.

The old saying "peace begins with me" is more true now than ever before. Each of us must start with ourselves and begin to let go of our fears, cultivate a strong, self-confident,

compassionate and peaceful self. Stress is the way of life. Isolated stress reduction techniques are simply not enough. We need to bring stress reduction into each moment of our lives. We need to find the stress reduction technique that helps us find our way to our center, where we feel "the peace that passes all understanding." Then we must try to bring that peace into each moment of our lives and act out of that place. The path is simple, the practice is most difficult, but it is in trying and practicing and failing and then beginning again that we make progress.

The steps in the path are simply: Be mindful and aware in the moment, look inside and try to understand what is going on, take deep breaths and let go of fear, and find your "center"—that place where you feel the love of the divine, the support of the universe, you know what is real and true, and you know that no matter what happens you have the strength to face it. Finally, act from that place to take whatever small step you can towards healing—at the individual, family, community, societal, or global level.

In the movie *Star Wars* they said: "May the force be with you." May the force be with us all and help us to begin to accomplish healing on a grand scale. **h&h**