



As Is

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by Kathie Hightower

My favorite piece of jewelry is a pewter pin with two simple words inscribed on it: “As Is.” The artist who created it, Lena Guyot, includes an explanation with the pin. “On the journey of the self, there comes a time when we make peace with who we are, respecting our strengths and accepting our weaknesses. We cease to sit in judgment on ourselves or others and get on with life.”

I love that thought and have worked hard to get to that space in my own life. (And yes, I have to work to “hold that thought.”)

I wear my pin often. It’s interesting to see the comments it provokes. Most women take one look and say, “I love your pin.”

Many men take one look, frown confusedly, and say hesitantly, “What’s Asis (rhyming with basis)?” My response: “She’s the Egyptian goddess of reality and I’m one of her disciples.”

Why is it that men don’t get it? I think it comes from the fact that men don’t shop as often in a Loehmans or a Mervyns or other discount store. They don’t immediately recognize the term “as is.” As is: flaws and all. As is: Accept me despite my weaknesses.

I might be working toward my goals to make changes in things I’m not thrilled with. But I don’t beat myself up over those things. I accept them lovingly as I work to make changes. And some of my “weaknesses” I choose to let go. I think the “As Is” idea covers a number of other important concepts.

- First, be grateful for our lives as they already are. That means counting our blessings. We have a lot to be grateful for in our lives, but many of us take them for granted. Our health is one example. Most of us don’t think about it — until we get sick. The problem with taking things for granted, is that when you do that — when you don’t acknowledge them and take steps to keep them in your life — they sometimes go away.

The other aspect of this is that by focusing on the good, you aren’t focusing on the negative. Trust me, I learned this the hard way in my own life. This is how it works. If you focus on the negative, you become more negative. If you focus instead on the positive, you become more positive. And I can tell you from experience, the second way is a much more pleasant way to live your life.

I think I really first learned to count my blessings when my husband was in Bosnia during the war, working for the UN Protection Forces — the “blue helmets.” I stayed glued to CNN News to find out what was happening there since we had no way of communicating (other than erratic mail). As I watched deaths from snipings, people standing in line trying to get water, bombed-out homes, I found perspective in my own life.

That lesson stayed with me. Now, very often, when I’m facing a challenge in my life, I think as I take a shower in the morning, “Kathie, you don’t have any real problems — you have hot running water, a roof over your head, plenty of food — and no one is shooting at you.”

The hot shower has become a trigger for that memory of putting things in perspective. My life “as is” is far better than many people in this world will ever experience. I want to be grateful for what I already have rather than focusing on what is missing.

- Secondly, we often focus on the lack in ourselves — the things we need to improve or “fix.” Very often we don’t stop to recognize or acknowledge what is already a strength. A number of years ago, I took a personal growth course at Ft. Lee, Virginia. One of the exercises was to check off positive characteristics we had from a long list provided. We were to give the same list to family members and friends to have them check off the positives they saw in us. And they were to mark our top 10 strengths with stars.

That exercise was eye-opening to me as they marked things and starred things that I didn’t even think of as strengths. Some were traits I just took for granted. Try your own list with your family and friends. It’s affirming.

As Lena Guyot goes on to say: “‘As Is’ is a proud declaration to the world and a reminder to ourselves that we’re already quite wonderful, just the way we are.”