

Poise: A Warrior's Guide

Gary Stokes

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Monotheistic religions teach the practice of remembering God in each moment. The Sufi poet Rumi wrote about staying awake to life from moment to moment to realize enlightenment. The practices of tai chi and yoga use physical movement to integrate mind, body, and spirit for greater awareness.

Gary Stokes presents a psychological approach to this concept in *Poise: A Warrior's Guide*. Stokes believes that individuals who cultivate self-awareness can achieve greater balance in their lives and reach a level of equanimity he calls "poise." The book explains the qualities of poise, describes how individuals compromise their ability to stay poised, and describes Stokes's own efforts, and those of his friends and loved ones, to live more completely in poise.

Throughout the text, Stokes cites the words of influential writers such as Lao Tzu, Fritz Perls, Eckhart Tolle, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. His ideas about personal transformation have been influenced by the books of Carlos Castaneda, whose spiritual guide, Don Juan, designated people seeking enlightenment as "warriors." Stokes himself has published articles about transformational leadership and a book on organizational development. He teaches individuals and groups to effect personal, corporate, and institutional change in the United States and Eastern Europe.

According to Stokes, people often lose poise when they take offense at perceived inequities throughout government, business, and society as a whole without realizing their own involvement in the dynamic. "[I]t is not other people or life challenges that trigger our lost poise," Stokes says. "It is always our self-pity raging away in our minds that insists on poisoning the precious now with long-past victim stories." He explains that no one escapes feeling the emotions of self-pity that cause insecure behavior and impact almost all interpersonal encounters. This exaggerated emphasis on protecting "self" causes people to resist change and reject opportunities that might improve their lives.

Stokes writes with conviction about a psychological approach that he has found helps people learn to optimize their appreciation of life experiences. He urges readers to work with a trusted friend, loved one, or therapist as they search for greater self-awareness using this methodology.

The book begins slowly, with descriptive examples of what poise is. But those who persevere will find that the focus shifts in subsequent chapters to heartfelt personal stories, told by individuals who have agreed to share their experiences, in their own words, with the author. Their struggles to achieve self-awareness reveal the difficult task of identifying self-pity, often disguised as righteous indignation; their efforts to address and alter negative behavior patterns provide significant insight into the process. Concluding chapters contain helpful guidelines for sustaining a person's level of improved poise.

The book will offer significant value to individuals interested in reading about self-improvement. And professional life coaches and therapists will find *Poise* a practical reference for client treatment.

MARGARET CULLISON (June 1, 2012)

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