

Commentary...

Hope and strength for the day

By Bren Gates
Guest Columnist

Traditionally, the New Year has been about anticipation, new light and life, reset, beginnings — but not this year. Most people speak with trepidation about the future. Hope feels stunted. Unrest hovers, a feeling of flux, so we wait with bated breath to see what the New Year will bring — not in anticipation, but with unease.

The uncertainty is real, old systems and ways of doing things failing. We've lost trust in optimism because it hasn't relieved anything. We're told, on all sides, everything is rigged. All of it.

No, I decided this morning. No. Uncertainty will not take the one thing that gives strength to my day. I will hope.

I think back to the years when talk shows and networks tried to project positivity — programming about goodness and light, humor. Over time they flopped, went out of vogue. They didn't produce the kind of money that violence and conflict generate. The majority of family movies and dramas slowly took a back seat to gaming videos, horror, war, and violence, until very few non-violent movies remained. Intense anger and dismissive attitudes spilled into other areas of our media and political discourse.

This concerned me, so I did a little research. Apparently, the neocortex is made to solve problems and project possible solutions. Our minds are not happy unless working to fix something, anything. We are drawn in as an innate way to protect, and there is a thrill in overcoming. As a result, problems and conflict sell. "Give 'em something to ruminate about."

Directly or indirectly, we've been programmed to fight the big fight, but not

the little ones, so we bring the big fight into everything. Now we wonder if the world will become recognizable again, or if life as we've known it has come to an end.

OK, I have to get a little cheeky here: Yes. The world we perceive does end, every day. The sun comes up, it goes down. Yesterday is gone. Today is real. Happy New Year.

Change happens, but how we perceive it is up to us. Many of my friends refuse to watch the news anymore. Instead we read articles and newspapers to stay informed, purposely avoiding pundit indignation — hope destroyers.

At first it was almost like coming out of a trance. I now see how staged news talk is, how manipulative, more emotional abuse than informative content. I find it disheartening that so many partake in this abuse every day — the indignation, fear projection, anxiety, the anger-making. The result? Some fight their perceived reality with rocks through windows and harsh, demeaning words and attitudes. Others flee to states that make them feel safer, tribal alliances. Still others freeze, do nothing, feeling battered, losing hope and motivation. Fight, flight, or freeze. As a country, we struggle with instability.

Behavior modification happens *to us* when we give our personal objectivity away.

Let's face it, the individual can do very little when it comes to the large, societal issues the pundits addict us to every day. But that doesn't mean we give up. COVID has caused many to wrestle with self-imposed expectations, only to discover an inner maturity, the ability to work on real, everyday problems instead false indignation. There's an incredible amount of satisfaction in this, a chance to actively see

how one can affect personal change in community, here and now. This is opposite of ruminating over injustice.

When I let myself see past the programmed fear in others — talk to hearts instead of ego-projecting minds — a kind of community awareness grows. I have an acquaintance who uses racist slurs, but this person would help anyone in need, no matter race or religion. I've seen him do it, over and over again when others turn away. I will not turn from him, although I have hinted that slurs get in the way of seeing his heart. And this person is not the exception. Most people I know would rescue someone stuck in the snow, or show compassion if one is hurting. We must reach for the hope we see in people and not their programming.

The reality is that the majority of us are safe, so much safer than many in the world. We have hot running water, access to food and shelter. We are lucky. We have enough, and enough to share. It is easier to share when one has hope and is not obsessing over a bleak future.

My wish for all of us in the new year is strength for the day, and a positive outlook for the future. To look again at people we may distrust, look at what they do instead of their pontifications. There may be rough roads ahead, but most of us have enough, and no matter income level, everyone has something to offer. Although the mind wants to niggle at problems, I can imagine a community that chooses to engage less in indignation about the big stuff, and more in heart talk, objective problem-solving that affects change, those who stand together in authority, aware and responsible for their own projections, their own programming. Yesterday is gone. Today is real. So, I will hope.

Happy New Year, 2022.

Diving for a meal...



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