



LOOKING AT the benefits of community and reaching out can help individuals find support during tough times. (TNS)

How are you?

• BATYA L. LUDMAN

While so appreciative of the love and concern many readers bestowed upon me over the past month, I now turn to each of you and ask, “How are you doing?”

This is not the “how are you” that we toss out as we quickly pass by each other and are gone before hearing the answer. Rather, how are you doing right now, with all that has been going on in the country in recent months?

I have my own feelings to rely on for such an assessment, but each patient walking through my door gives me a glimpse into what we are dealing with and how we are coping – not just as individuals, but as a nation, at times fractious, and at others united in pain and sadness. Though we want to move forward, as we head into new elections and the accompanying divisions and debates, we recognize that the peace we want is not yet at hand, and we increasingly find ourselves coping with violence and terror.

When God said to Adam in the Garden of Eden, “*Ayeka*” – “Where are you?” – he did not mean “Where are you physically standing?” but “Where do you stand emotionally – what is going on inside of you?” Each of us must take up this challenge and ask ourselves the same question. Then we must move forward, appreciate why we are blessed to be living in Israel, and impart that as best we can to everyone we know.

If we don’t love, appreciate and take pride in what we have, neither will others. To be that light unto the nations, we must take a good, honest look at ourselves and all that we have, and show the world our strength and determination as we fight terrorism during these difficult times.

This is neither a political column, nor one on religion; it is a psychology column, and with this in mind, I suggest we look inward so we can recognize our blessings. If we can do this, we can move from a state of helplessness, hopelessness and collective depression into one of communal unity as the strong nation we are meant to be.

THIS JOURNEY started in June with the death of three innocent boys, and we must continue it in spite of ever-increasing challenges. Remember, the goal of terrorism is to terrorize, to take away our sense that we are okay. Here are some thoughts to help us all weather this storm and bring out our inner strength.

1. Recognize that you are not only okay, but are, in fact, even better than that. Start with a complete body scan. Take two slow, deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth. Just notice each part of your body, starting at your head and moving to your feet, and appreciate how each helps you function. At this moment, what works, and what is even working great? Notice it now, since we so often take things for granted until those things are taken from us.

2. Feel proud of your accomplishments. Look inward: What characteristics or values describe you the way you are and how you want to be thought of?

3. View your immediate environment with a sense of amazement. Look outside of yourself and into nature. Yesterday, while out walking, I saw a beautiful flower in the shape of a Star of David, passed by many trees laden with fruit, and ate a tangerine right from our own tree. What might you appreciate as you look around you? There is much to see if you are open to looking.

4. Examine your relationship with others. Our friendships in this country have so much depth. We can call or be called upon by our friends at any hour of the day or night. When one person is hurt, we know it is just a matter of time before we discover we know someone who knows him, and we feel that closeness and its incumbent pain. As a country, we rush to each other’s aid – through simple acts like giving blood, or by taking ourselves halfway around the world to set up field hospitals in times of crisis.

5. Appreciate the spirit that this country offers. Life here has tremendous meaning. People do incredible acts of *hessed*, kindness; our young men and women give selflessly to their country through army or national service. Our values are incredible; we sincerely want to help others. Even when we disagree, it is because we have different ideas about the proper path to a similar goal.

6. Living here enables you to lead a full Jewish life. Bible, history, geography and culture all come alive, with or without a law saying so. Where else do the bus driver, the supermarket cashier and the gym teacher all wish you “*Shabbat shalom*”?

7. Our land has great meaning. Nowhere else are fruits and vegetables treated with holiness during a sabbatical year and farmers encouraged to take time off to be with their families. We have constant reminders of how holy the land beneath us is, frequently finding archeological remnants dating back centuries and even millennia. Whether our view is of the Jerusalem hills, the desert, the Mediterranean or the Golan, we can experience it all within a short drive.

WE HAVE so much to be proud of. Yes, in these trying times, we must be even more resilient. When we don’t feel safe, it is not easy to be tolerant of others around us. Yet we must remind ourselves to search for the good in everyone as we go about our daily lives, looking out for our safety but not letting fear or baseless hatred weigh us down.

We must work harder to have patience with the driver who cuts us off or the clerk who is rude. We can’t imagine what went on in their day. These are all part of our extended family, and we must look out for one another, even when we don’t share the same views.

This is a time for self-reflection and self-appreciation. Today is a day to stand tall and be united – even in the face of great pain and despite political divisions. We can appreciate our “start-up nation” mentality, our Nobel Prize laureates, and our disaster relief to the rest of the world, and we can, and will, continue to build a great nation by standing up for who we are and the values in which we believe. So put up your flags on your car and your house, and feel proud to be Israeli today. ■

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