

Making plans and taking steps to self-improvement

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We humans tend to make a lot of noise, whether standing or sitting.

I wonder how the world would sound if you eliminated all of the chatter, voices, and human utterances. Eerie, or soothing?

Fireworks accompanied most new year's celebrations and they date back thousands of years as ancient Asian cultures used firecrackers, fireworks and guns ? loud noises of any kind ? to frighten away dark spirits.

Church bells, drums and even sirens sound to welcome the new year.

Of course, no celebration would be complete without a beverage and many cultures offer spiced, hot drinks and offer them to neighbours.

New Year's Day was once a time to exchange gifts, as our ancestors wanted to bestow prosperity upon one another. One of my favourites, shortbread, was given in Scotland for good luck. Gifts included coins, eggs and even silverware.

The dawn of a new year and new decade is, of course, a time for reflection and introspection.

The practice of making resolutions apparently dates back to the Babylonians in 2,600 BC. Rosh Hashanah is a time for personal introspection and prayer, as well as visiting the graves of loved ones.

Whether you wear white, toss water out of the window, jump from a chair or carry an empty suitcase around the block, we all want the same thing ? hope for good things to come.

Hope, good wishes and blessings are fine, but we have to act. We have to make choices, decisions, and take action to ensure our own personal evolution.

We have to work hard to make ourselves better humans, better spouses, better parents and better siblings. There's no question we all have the desire, but we have to make it a priority every day.

My wife and I watched the award-winning ?Marriage Story,? a movie on Netflix over the holidays. While sombre, it provided a lot of food for thought.

One of the key take-aways from the movie was one simple retrospective task. Both spouses wrote a letter, noting all of the qualities that attract(ed) them to each other. My wife and I plan to do the same.

I think it's a really neat exercise that will help us revisit and perhaps keep those embers glowing brightly.

Marriages, and relationships, take constant effort, adjustment, improvement and tweaking. We often get very comfortable in our long-term living arrangements and perhaps things fall by the wayside. Our romantic sides get a bit frayed at the edges and we neglect to open doors, send flowers and make each day special.

It's not for a lack of good intentions or want. I think our lives in the past decade have become much more hectic than we were prepared for. We now often work or shop 7 days a week. We give our kids all that they want and we forgot some sound advice from our parents along the way regarding frugality.

Everything, especially our modern lifestyles, comes with a price.

The problem with we westerners is that we let our hectic pace get the better of us. We stress over finances and the cost of living. We worry about the future and we constantly worry about our kids. We spend more time thinking about home repairs than fixing ourselves.

There are times I really hate living in the society we've created. During long drives through Ontario, I stare at the countryside, thinking I could just duck into a remote forest and build a cabin. No one would ever find me!

When I look at other people around the globe, even those less fortunate, I envy them. I think they've found something we haven't ? how to live life and how to love within very simple means. They cherish family, health, and being able to share a meal with one another. They also value their religious beliefs, something that's waning in North America today.

They don't need to watch Netflix to figure things out. They don't have an Amazon account. And they've never shouted at a person in a drive-through.

They don't have to make lists regarding their spouses.

In retrospect, our parents knew very little about the psychology of relationships and the ins and outs of child-rearing. Few of them read Dr. Spock, let alone Dr. Seuss. They didn't discuss one another's shortcomings or stress over putting food on the table.

That's not to say they didn't worry about their kids, but we always had clothes and an allowance if needed. I lost my dad in 1998 and my mom in 2010 and while I don't dwell on them much, there are times I wish they were still around.

My wife and I also plan to create a to-do list for 2020. That list will not only contain some self-improvement measures, but also some fun things we hope to accomplish. It's a wish-list of sorts.

I'd love to try zip lining in the Caribbean, but that may just be a pipe dream.

Of course, 2020 marks our 25th anniversary, so I'm reminded to start planning now! And I'd better be up to the task or the dogs will have some company.

Like exercise equipment, our intentions and plans tend to fizzle out a few weeks into the new year. My wife often says I can lead the charge for two weeks, and then I slip into my old ways. I wish there was a concoction on late-night infomercials to keep the desire going strong.

As I said, it's constant effort. Our brains may need a bit re-wiring or constant reminders, but we're more than capable of becoming better, of being nicer, more compassionate, more loving, more considerate.

If we all did, the world, and our personal lives, would be much better indeed.

