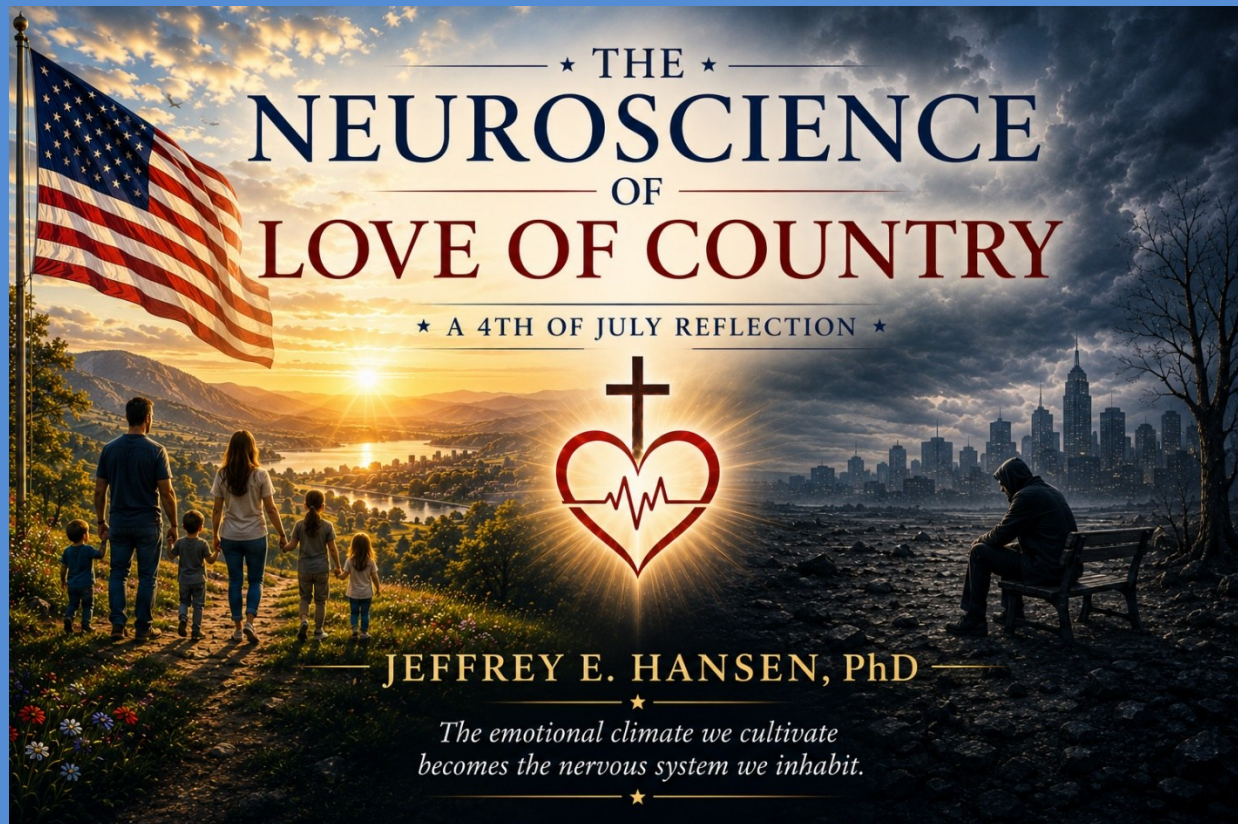




Two Speeches

Yesterday I experienced something that stayed with me long after the speeches had ended.

Within the span of a few hours, I listened to two very different visions of America. One speech was by Zohran Mamdani. The other was by President Donald Trump. I wasn't listening primarily as a Republican or as a Democrat. I was listening as a clinical psychologist.

One of the things psychologists are trained to observe is affect. Affect is not personality, nor is it a diagnosis. It is the observable expression of emotion through facial expression, tone of voice, posture, emotional range, and the overall emotional climate being communicated.

As I listened to Mr. Mamdani, I heard a speech dominated by criticism of America. The emphasis was on what is broken, what is unjust, what has failed, and what government must do to correct those failures. The emotional tone I observed was one of grievance, dissatisfaction, and frustration.

A few hours later I listened to President Trump speaking at Mount Rushmore. The contrast could not have been greater. His speech was dominated by gratitude for America, confidence in America's future, and appreciation for what this nation has accomplished. He celebrated our military, our inventors, our entrepreneurs, our scientists, our universities, our workers, our generosity, our faith, and our remarkable history of overcoming adversity. He acknowledged that America has flaws, but argued that

our history has always been one of confronting those flaws and striving to rise above them.

Later that day I attended a Fourth of July church service. The sanctuary was filled with American flags. Veterans were recognized. Patriotic hymns filled the room. As I looked around, I saw gratitude, joy, and appreciation. People were celebrating not a perfect nation, but a nation they genuinely loved.

Driving home, one question would not leave me: What kind of emotional climate are we creating?

The Psychology of Emotional Climate

That question is not primarily political. It is psychological.

Every leader creates an emotional climate long before public policy is ever enacted. One of the foundational principles of NeuroFaith® is that the autonomic nervous system is continually asking one fundamental question: Am I safe?

Drawing upon Dr. Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory, when our nervous system perceives safety, we move toward ventral vagal regulation. In that state we become more capable of connection, curiosity, creativity, compassion, thoughtful decision-making, healthy relationships, and hope. When the nervous system continually perceives threat, however, it increasingly shifts toward survival. Anxiety, hypervigilance, anger, defensiveness, and eventually discouragement or shutdown become more likely. These are adaptive survival responses, but they were never intended to become our permanent way of living.

The Heart, the Brain, and NeuroFaith®

NeuroFaith® also draws upon the growing science of neurocardiology and heart rate variability. The brain and the heart are in constant communication through the autonomic nervous system, particularly through the vagus nerve.

When we experience gratitude, appreciation, hope, love, and genuine safety, especially when combined with slow, regulated breathing, the heart begins to organize into a more coherent, sine-wave-like rhythm. That organized rhythm sends more coherent regulatory information back to the brain, supporting emotional regulation, clearer thinking, resilience, and healthier relationships.

Conversely, chronic fear, contempt, bitterness, resentment, and hopelessness keep the body leaning toward threat physiology. Over time, prolonged stress responses influence cardiovascular health, immune function, sleep, emotional regulation, attention, and overall well-being.

What Makes Nations Flourish?

That question led me into decades of research by Ronald Inglehart, Ed Diener, Richard Easterlin, Ruut Veenhoven, and the World Happiness Report. While no political or economic system is perfect, their work consistently suggests that societies characterized by greater freedom, personal agency, opportunity, social trust, and meaningful relationships report higher levels of subjective well-being than societies dominated by authoritarian control and chronic coercion.

I find that fascinating because it suggests that emotional climate matters not only for individuals but for entire cultures.

A Fourth of July Reflection

Let me be clear. This is not an argument for conservatism or progressivism. It is not an argument for capitalism, socialism, communism or any particular political philosophy. My question is different: What kind of emotional climate does a worldview cultivate?

As a clinical psychologist, I have spent decades watching what chronic resentment, bitterness, fear, contempt, and hopelessness do to the human spirit. Those emotional states become embodied. They shape the autonomic nervous system, influence our relationships, affect our capacity to think clearly, and alter how we engage the world.

Positive emotional states such as gratitude, appreciation, hope, love, and purpose help organize heart rate variability into a more coherent rhythm, while chronic negativity pulls the body toward dysregulation. Research by Elizabeth Blackburn and Elissa Epel further reminds us that chronic psychological stress is associated with changes in telomere integrity and cellular aging. Our emotional lives become biological experiences.

As I reflect on these things through the lens of NeuroFaith®, I find myself returning to a simple but profound truth. We become, in part, the emotional climate we repeatedly inhabit. Day after day, year after year, our thoughts, attitudes, relationships, and the stories we tell ourselves shape far more than our opinions. They help shape our physiology, our character, and ultimately the kind of people we become.

None of these systems functions in isolation. They are part of an exquisitely designed orchestra, continually communicating with one another. When we repeatedly cultivate gratitude, hope, appreciation, faith, love, and genuine human connection, the entire orchestra begins to play in greater harmony. When we repeatedly cultivate resentment, contempt, bitterness, chronic outrage, and hopelessness, that harmony begins to fracture.

Perhaps that is why Scripture so often calls us to gratitude. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *“Give thanks in all*

circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). He did not say to give thanks for every circumstance. He said to give thanks in every circumstance.

So today, on this Fourth of July, perhaps we could give ourselves a simple but profound gift. For just a few moments, set ideology aside. Take a slow, deep breath. Look around.

Remember the generations who sacrificed so that we could enjoy the freedoms we often take for granted. Give thanks for those who built, defended, taught, healed, served, invented, discovered, and quietly gave of themselves so that others might flourish. Celebrate what is good. Honestly acknowledge what still needs to be improved. Love your country enough to help make it better, and love your fellow citizens enough to extend grace, even when you disagree.

Your heart knows the difference.

Your brain knows the difference.

Your immune system knows the difference.

Your telomeres know the difference.

Together they speak with one magnificent voice. Gratitude is far more than a virtue. It is a way of living that cultivates healing, resilience, hope, and deeper human connection. It nourishes the heart, calms the nervous system, strengthens the body, and reminds us that truth is not merely something we believe—it is something we are called to live.

So today, let us give thanks to God for this remarkable nation and for the freedoms we have inherited.

Let us recommit ourselves to being people of character, courage, humility, compassion, and hope. May our love of God deepen our love for one another and may our love of country inspire us to leave this nation stronger, kinder, wiser, and more united than we found it.

From the perspective of **NeuroFaith®**, that may be one of God's greatest gifts to the human soul: a grateful heart that brings peace to the mind, strength to the body, hope to the spirit, and light to a world that desperately needs it.



Happy Independence Day. And may God continue to bless America.

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