

Having Hope

What is it? Is it a curse or blessing or both? The sense of having no hope deepens our despair. One of the worst things we say to another human being is that they are hopeless.

We speak of being hopeful...of feeling hopeless. We cannot give another person hope. Reality teaches us that what is hope to one may be a burden to another. In other words, my hope is not your hope. The challenge is to find a definition of hope that is truly our own.

The key to this illusive concept of hope is finding our own definition of what it means in the midst of life.

As we struggle with darkness, fear, despair and apathy we can feel that there is no hope. Perhaps that feeling comes from our understanding of what hope has been in the past. Perhaps what we experience in the extremity of struggle is a whole new definition of hope.

Victor Havel writes, “Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.”



Experience teaches us that our understanding of hope changes throughout our lifetime. When we are children hope is what makes us happy. As we age, hope is a goal, a vision, a dream. It is far less immediate. Something we might attain, rather than a state we can dwell in, right here and right now.

Hope, at the darkest moments in our life, is not a comprehensive commitment to faith and belief. At those times hope can be as simple and as profound as the voice of another human being who appears to hear our fear; hope can be the knowledge that the sun will rise tomorrow, hope can be the smell of fresh spring rain, or the first snow flake, or the photo of someone we love. When despair seems to overcome us we feel disconnected, isolated, lost. What we need most in those moments is a means of re-connection, relationship and belonging. This “means” can be surprisingly simple or deeply complex. What matters at the moment is that we find this path of meaning in this life, here and now.

As someone who studied the science of hope, Ronna Jevne writes, “Hope; we ridicule those who have too much of it. We hospitalize those who have too little. It is dependent on so many things yet indisputably necessary to most. Those who have it live longer. Words cannot destroy it. Science has overlooked it. A day without it is dreadful. A day with an abundance of it guarantees little.”



If you are reading these words; you have hope. Try not to compare it with anyone else's expression of hope. Try not to get caught in the dualism of good – bad, hopeful and hopeless, worthwhile and worthless...the only kind of hope that will succeed is one that melts all the need of competition and comparison. When we can come to this understanding we experience a sense of peace, both within and beyond ourselves. In this state we trust life to be a journey of adventure, meaning and worth.

Imagine hope as an energy that melts the difference between life and death. Life then is no longer either/or, it becomes more than we can even imagine. Ending life then is not the option for the end of struggle because life is not an endurance test of

endless struggle. It is rather a mixture of struggle and strength. This is radical hope because it is often born in a sense of hopelessness. It is a new definition of the meaning of hope, which is not about happiness – rather it is about fullness, meaning and connection. It is being constantly reshaped and redefined, and it is constantly inviting us to the never-ending story of life's meaning. This is how hope becomes energy for whatever we have to face in life. It is not optimism, rather it is strength of seeking and realism.

Hope irks many professionals. Professionals are trained to know. Yet the choice is ours to make in relation to hope. We can open ourselves to the mystery or stay with the illusion of certainty.



Books abound on the topic of hope, but before you begin reading take some time to read from the book of your own life. Here some questions that may help you define your meaning of hope:

- Who are the most hopeful people you have known in your life?
- Who would you call to help with your hope right now?
- What images do you have of hope: music, smells, objects, colors, etc.?
- How do you nurture and care for your hope? What do you do to increase and strengthen it?
- What most threatens your hope?
- What do you think false hope is?
- Where do you look for hope when you feel hopeless?

- Can you remember a story of hope from your own life?
- When you close your eyes and try to imagine a picture of hope, what do you see?
- What most threatens your hope?
- If a child asked you right now, “What is hope?” how would you respond?
- Do you have a practice of hope? What if you began each day asking, what do I hope for on this day? What if you ended each day with the reflective question, “Where did I find hope today?”



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