



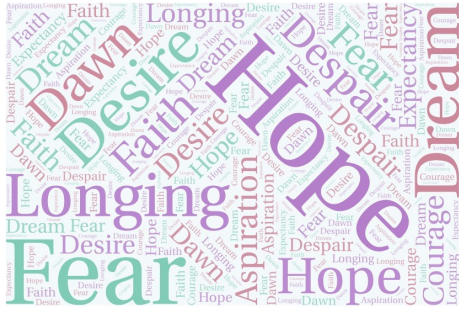
Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

February 2024

Hope

Wisdom Story



This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths." This truth is nuanced since the difficulty is not experienced equally by all. On its continuum, some live a life of ease while the burdens of others are unimaginable. The rest dwell somewhere between facing obstacles and challenges that can be daunting.

The Raspberry

Touchstones

Gerda was born in 1924 in Bielsko in southern Poland. It was a small town on the west bank of the Biala River, surrounded by mountains known for skiing and hiking.

She lived with her father, Julius, a manager in a manufacturing company, her mother, Helena, and her brother, Arthur, who was five years older. Life was good. In the summer of 1939, Gerda and her mother were on a vacation at a resort when they had to return home because her father suffered a mild heart attack. In September 1939, the Germans invaded Poland. Gerda and her family were concerned because they were Jewish, and the German army was oppressing Jews. In October, her brother had to go register with the Nazis, and he never returned. Gerda received letters from him postmarked in Russia, but they eventually stopped.

German soldiers forced them to sell all of their possessions to non-Jews and live in their basement, which was flooded. In April 1942, Gerda and her parents had to move into a small ghetto with the remaining Jews in the town. Their living quarters were quite cramped. Then, they were forced into work camps. Gerda and her mother had to sew military uniforms.

In June, soldiers put her father on a transit train. Then Gerda and her mother were told they would go to a new work camp. When they gathered to depart, soldiers put Gerda in one group and her mother in a different one. Her mother yelled to Gerda, "Be strong." This was how her family was swept up in the Holocaust, a terrible Nazi program designed to persecute the Jewish people.

Gerda, separated from her family, was fortunate to be taken to a transit camp with

(Continued on page 2)

Introduction to the Theme

Hope, from the Old English *hopa*, goes back to the 12th century. It meant "confidence in the future" and "expectation of something desired." Of course, before our species had language, it had hope. We could not have survived with it.

To understand the significance of hope, consider its opposite, despair, which means "a total loss of hope." Tragically, in the U.S., there has been a notable increase in deaths of despair (suicide and poisoning by alcohol and drugs). The opioid crisis has played a tragic role in this. Additionally, CDC data for 2021 found that 57% of U.S. teen girls felt persistently sad or hopeless. In Canada, the rate is 20%.

M. Scott Peck wrote, "Life is difficult.



We need hope. While some classify hope as an emotion, it is more an expectation, a belief in a positive outcome, in possibility, the triumph of goodness, difficulty faced, fear overcome, or despair vanquished.

We need hope, but hope is not a certainty. Some people have no hope. The poignancy of the phrase "to hope against hope" is the possibility that a positive outcome may be unlikely. Still, we hope. It is to play the cards dealt to

(Continued on page 2)

Hope & the Common Good

To paraphrase Thomas Paine, these are times that try people's souls. Yet this has always been more true than not for many, if not most, people throughout history. How has the soul responded to trying times? It hopes as Emily Dickinson knew: "'Hope' is the thing with feathers— / That perches in the soul— / And sings the tune without the words— / And never stops—at all— ..." Hope usually follows fear and despair, transforming them into courage. Hope imagines the Common Good and then encourages us to respond. We need the wild boldness of hope, the persistence of love, and the work of our hands and hearts to make a better world.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

This project is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Reimagining the Common Good

Extraordinary Gift

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

her best friend, Ilse. In July 1942, they were transported to the work camp at Bolkenhain, where Gerda and Ilse operated looms in the textile factory making cloth for military uniforms.

In August 1943, Gerda, Ilse, and some others were sent to another work camp, the one at Merzdorf, where the conditions were much worse. Gerda was filled with despair because her supervisor forced her to work 18 hours a day. She then remembered her promise to her father to never to give up. This gave her the strength to continue.

Mercifully, a while later, a kind supervisor, Frau Küger from the Bolkenhain camp, had Gerda and Ilse transferred to the work camp at Landeshut to make the cloth used for parachutes.

In May 1944, Gerda, Ilse, and some others were sent to the work camp at Grünberg. It was an awful place with terrible conditions. Gerda had to work in the spinning room to make the thread used to make cloth. It was a difficult job. In September, Gerda was lucky because she got a new job counting fabric bundles. Now, working during the day, she was able to get more food to share with Ilse.

One morning, Ilse was walking along a path when she saw something red on the ground. It was a raspberry! Ilse picked it up and put it in the pocket of her dress. She was careful all day so she wouldn't squash it. That evening, she found a leaf as she was walking into the building where they slept. Ilse approached

Gerda and gave her the red raspberry on a green leaf. It was the most



beautiful thing that Gerda had ever seen. She was so grateful to Ilse for her incredible generosity.

In January 1945, all the girls and women in the camp were forced to march almost 500 miles to Czechoslo-

(Continued on page 8)

Life Inside Hope

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

us while refusing to fold. But there is something more beyond the outcome; as Václav Havel explained, "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out." Hope makes sense. This is not blind hope, but hope with heart wide open. Remember that courage comes from an Old French root *corage*, meaning heart. Hope empowers us to face difficulties with courage, resilience, and determination and to persevere through hardships. Facing difficulties illustrates how hope is different than a wish. Like blowing out the candles on a birthday cake, we fling a wish into the universe while not doing anything to make it come true.

Hope is a state of mind, a disposition of the heart, an inclination of the soul, and an inspiration to action. Charles Snyder wrote, "A rainbow is a prism that sends shards of multicolored light in various directions. It lifts our spirits and makes us think of what is possible. Hope is the same—a personal rainbow of the mind."

As summarized by Elaine Houston, researchers have identified four kinds of hope.

- ◆ **Realistic Hope** is hope for a reasonable outcome, like reducing chronic pain when doctors can't eliminate it.
- ◆ **Utopian Hope** is a collective hope growing out of collaborative action that seeks to create a better future for all. In our tradition, we have examples like Raków from 1569 to 1638 in Poland and, in mid-19th century New England, Hopedale, Brook Farm, and Fruitlands. They all embodied utopian hope.
- ◆ **Chosen Hope** is the hope that helps people live very challenging things so they can navigate a difficult present and an uncertain future.
- ◆ **Transcendent Hope**, also known as existential hope, has three components: 1. It is patient, expecting everything to turn out well; 2. It is a generalized hope not tied to a particular outcome; and 3. It is

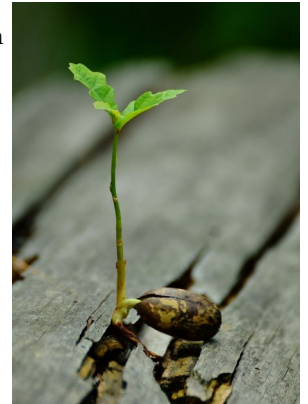
universal, combining an optimistic view of the future with a defense against despair in facing challenges.

Cultivation of hope involves focusing on positive outcomes rather than dwelling on problems, being resilient in the face of setbacks and adaptable when engaging change, using coping mechanisms to deal with stress, connecting with others for support, taking time for introspection during struggle, and, since hope is not passive, taking action as able.

Some disparage hope. Friedrich Nietzsche saw hope as evil because it allows us to go on in the face of adversity and thus prolong our torment. He was a pessimist in the challenges of existence.

Others suggest that hope is false. Barack Obama wrote, "We've been warned against offering the people [...] false hope. But [...] there has never been anything false about hope."

Hope, an incredible shapeshifter, can adapt to the possibilities of each day. A person diagnosed with a potentially terminal illness hopes that the treatment will not be too debilitating and that a cure will occur. And if a cure is not possible, the person hopes for time: more time, good time, life time, time spent with loved ones and friends. They hope the pain can be controlled and reconciliations can occur. Each day, hope rises to lift a person's spirit as high and as far as it can go. None of this is false hope, for life is precious. As Thoreau noted, it is driven by our infinite expectation of the dawn. Barbara Kingsolver wrote, "The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is to live inside that hope."



Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "We bang and bang on the door of hope, and don't anyone dare suggest there's nobody home." Barbara Kingsolver

Day 2: "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out." Václav Havel

Day 3: "Hope is one of our duties ...part of our obligation to our own being and to our descendants." Wendell Berry

Day 4: "If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all." Martin Luther King, Jr.

Day 5: "Hope is believing in spite of the evidence, then watching the evidence change." Jim Wallis

Day 6: "Hope ...which whispered from Pandora's box only after all the other Plagues and sorrows had escaped, is the best and last of all things." Ian Caldwell & Dustin Thomason

Day 7: "Hope, unlike optimism, is rooted in unalloyed reality.... Hope is the elevating feeling we experience when we see—in the individual's eye—a path to a better future. Hope acknowledges the significant obstacles and deep pitfalls along that path. True hope has no room for elusion." Jerome Groopman

Day 8: "They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for." Tom Bodett

Day 9: "To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness." Howard Zinn

Day 10: "Hoping for the best, prepared for the worst, and unsurprised by anything in between." Maya Angelou

Day 11: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was

the winter of despair." Charles Dickens

Day 12: "She felt worthless and hollow. There was no hope of fixing this. And when hope is gone, time is punishment." Mitch Albom

Day 13: "Hope like that, as I thought before, doesn't make you a weak person. It's hopelessness that makes you weak. Hope makes you stronger, because it brings with it a sense of reason, ...a reason for you to live." Cecelia Ahern

Day 14: "Hope. It's like a drop of honey, a field of tulips blooming in the spring-time. It's a fresh rain, a whispered promise, a cloudless sky, the perfect punctuation mark at the end of a sentence. And it's the only thing in the world keeping me afloat." Tahereh Mafi

Day 15: "Hope ...is an active, determined conviction that is rooted in the spirit, chosen by the heart, and guided by the mind.... Hope is the foundation of action." Mark Hertsgaard

Day 16: "No. Don't give up hope just yet. It's the last thing to go. When you have lost hope, you have lost everything. And when you think all is lost, when all is dire and bleak, there is always hope." Pittacus Lore

Day 17: "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one." John Lennon

Day 18: "I suspect the most we can hope for, and it's no small hope, is that we never give up, that we never stop giving ourselves permission to try to love and receive love." Elizabeth Strout

Day 19: "Wishes are false. Hope is true. Hope makes its own magic." Laini Taylor

Day 20: "One lives in the hope of becoming a memory." Antonio Porchia

Day 21: "This new day is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the yesterdays." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Day 22: "Love recognizes no barriers. It

jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope." Maya Angelou

Day 23: "There is nothing so cruel in this world as the desolation of having nothing to hope for." Haruki Murakami

Day 24: "There was a moment in my life when I really wanted to kill myself. ...But even in my most jaded times, I had some hope." Gerard Way

Day 25: "...All hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life." John Lennon



Day 26: "...Love is stronger than fear, life stronger than death, hope stronger than despair." Henri Nouwen

Day 27: "Hope was a dangerous, disquieting thing, but he thought perhaps he liked it." Nora Sakavic

Day 28: "Hope is a powerful thing. Some say it's a different breed of magic altogether. Elusive, difficult to hold on to. But not much is needed." Stephanie Garber

Day 29: "I learned that the world didn't see the inside of you, that it didn't care a whit about the hopes and dreams, and sorrows, that lay masked by skin and bone. It was as simple, as absurd, and as cruel as that." Khaled Hosseini

Day 30: "At what point do you give up—decide enough is enough? There is only one answer really. Never." Tabitha Suzuma

Day 31: "Ask yourself these three questions ...and you will know who you are. Ask: What do believe in? What do you hope for? What do you love?" Paullina Simons



A Theology of Hope

In I Corinthians 13:13, Paul wrote, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." We could conclude that hope comes in second as if there was a competition. Yet, Paul Tillich wrote, "Hope is the most important theological virtue because it is the foundation of love and faith."

Paul's insight was not in making love the greatest but in affirming what abides: faith, hope, and love. These three have helped us survive and, at times, thrive. They give meaning to life. Braided in a single strand, they are stronger together. Each thread helps us understand the others. All are grounded in the Earth, the first of four elements. Love's metaphor is Fire because of passion. Faith is linked to Air, seeking what is intangible. Hope is like Water because it nourishes and never stops flowing despite the obstacles.

Hope has been a part of the theological DNA of our faith. Universalists were hopeful about what could be achieved on Earth and about the restoration of all souls to God. The Winchester Profession of faith they adopted in 1803 declared that "holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected, and that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works...." Universal Salvation restored all souls to God, conferring holiness. But holiness wasn't enough. What about happiness?

Universalist minister Hosea Ballou (1772-1852) believed that the object of good works was not just our happiness but the happiness of others. He said, "knowing that our happiness is connected with the happiness of all others ... induces us to do justly and to deal mercifully with one another." His words echo those of the prophet Micah, who encouraged people "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

For the Universalists, the promise of holiness through universal salvation made life worthwhile. It eliminated the dreadful expectation of eternal damnation, making the pursuit of happiness meaningful. Happiness in this life

and holiness in the next!

They would not know how to respond to the question by evangelical Christians, "Are you saved?" Believing that communal salvation is the only salvation of any value, they would have asked, "Are we saved?" This is not unlike the *Bodhisattva* in the Buddhist tradition who, having gained enlightenment, refuses the reward of nirvana, instead choosing to be reborn again and again to help all sentient beings achieve enlightenment.

As Universalists believed, we are saved by God in the next life and by our actions in this life. For this reason, they responded to the deep hunger of their time, including the abolition of slavery, temperance, prison reform, world peace, and women's rights. The object of their good works was not just their happiness but the happiness of others. Their fervent belief in universal salvation and their activism may have led Russell Miller to entitle his massive two-volume history of Universalism, *The Larger Hope*.



The Rev. Alfred S. Cole (1893-1977) wrote *Our Liberal Heritage* (1951). It was a very brief history of our faith, blending fiction and non-fiction. In a well-known passage, Cole wrote, "The Time-Spirit [likely the narrator] said to John Murray, 'Go out into the highways and by-ways of America, your new country.... You may possess only a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them, not hell, but hope and courage. Do not push them deeper into their theological despair, but preach the kindness and everlasting love of God.'" While Rev. John Murray (1741-1815), a founder of Universalism, did not say these words as asserted by Henry Cheetham in his 1968 history, they capture the spirit and power of the Universalist message. "Not hell, but hope." This affirmation was radical, the faith of heretics.

This "Larger Hope" has changed as

our theology has evolved, but it still beckons us. We may not use the word salvation, but a concept of it animates our faith. "Salvation" from 1200 CE meant "saving the soul," and this is how our forebears understood the word. Their belief that all souls would be saved contrasted with the Calvinist view that only the elect merited salvation. Another meaning of the word emerged about 1400 CE: the "protection or preservation from destruction, danger, calamity, etc." The good works of Universalists sought to create heaven on Earth by working on social issues and attempting to create utopian communities. Our social activism embodies their work to save humanity but we have expanded activism to include the Earth due to climate change and other challenges. The magnitude of this combined work requires hope.

Universalists desire for "holiness" connects to our desire for "wholeness." Both words share the root, *kailo*. They believed that holiness was the birthright of all. Achieving wholeness has its own challenges. UU minister Marilyn Sewell entitled her 2014 collection of sermons, *Wanting Wholeness, Being Broken*. We may be broken, but our pursuit of wholeness is a worthy endeavor infused with hope.

Yet some ask, "Is hope possible?" Theologian and Yale professor Miroslav Volf writes, "Fear, more than hope, is characteristic of our time." He recounts some of our fears: Financial disruptions, economic dislocation, ecosystem collapse, etc. He notes that identity politics and nationalism are driven by fear. Because of these and more, he writes, "Hope seems impossible; fear feels overwhelming."

A liberal theology of hope confronts fear. Fear can control us, and some use fear to manipulate us. The question we must ask ourselves in response to fear is this, "What would I do in this situation if I wasn't afraid?" This brings fear into the light so we can engage it. Sometimes the fear is real, sometimes it is a product of our anxiety. Regardless, we can seek internal and external resources to confront the fear. Hope is one of those resources. Hope invokes courage, resilience, creativity, and persistence. Fear can be individual, but it can also involve many. In times of fear, the collective hope of a

(Continued on page 5)

Wings of Hope

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**

group can provide a sense of solidarity, making it easier to face challenges together. We are a progressive, hope-based faith that engages and overcomes fear.

Volf draws on theologian Jürgen Moltmann's book *Theology of Hope*, which contrasts optimism and hope. Optimism extrapolates a positive future outcome based on tendencies in the present. But optimism's sunny disposition crumbles when situations turn dire. Then, optimism dies young, disintegrating into hopelessness. Hope is much tougher.

For Moltmann, hope did not depend on the present. As Volf writes, "The future good that is the object of hope is a new thing, *novum*, that comes in part from outside the situation. Correspondingly, hope is, in Emily Dickinson's felicitous phrase, like a bird that flies in from outside and 'perches in the soul.'"



Nadia Janice Brown offers a contrasting metaphor that is important. She writes, "Fear is a bird that refuses to fly, and each time she neglects to use her wings, she consents to the slow death of her destiny." Never neglect the wings of hope.

Czechoslovakian statesman Alexander Dubček experienced the German invasion in World War II, the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia known as the *Prague Spring* in 1968, years of exile, and then helping to liberate his country during the 1989 *Velvet Revolution*. Someone asked how he survived. He responded, "Hope dies last." He endured because he never lost hope. Our liberal theology of hope calls us to do everything in our power to ensure that hope never dies.

Source: Touchstones

Hope as New Life

Struggle and Hope

Joan Chittister

Every major spiritual revelation known to humankind ...is based on the bedrock of hope.

...Hope is rooted in the past but believes in the future. ...The greater the hope, the greater the appreciation of life now, the greater the confidence in the future, whatever it is.



But if struggle is the process of evolution from spiritual emptiness to spiritual wisdom, hope is the process as well. Hope, the response of the spiritual person to struggle, takes us from the risk of inner stagnation, of emotional despair, to a total transformation of life. ...It is an invitation to live at ...depth of soul, a higher level of meaning than the ordinary, the commonplace generally inspires. The spirituality of struggle gives birth to the spirituality of hope....

Despair is a spiritual disease into which is built its antidote: hope. It is a matter of refusing to die at exactly the moment when we are being offered new life.

Hope is not a denial of reality. But it is also not some kind of spiritual elixir. It is not a placebo infused out of nowhere. Hope is a series of small actions that transform darkness into light. It is putting one foot in front of the other when we can find no reason to do so at all.

...The spiritual task of life is to feed the hope that comes out of despair. Hope is not something to be found outside of us. It lies in the spiritual life we cultivate within.

Source: *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* by Joan Chittister

Ever-flowing Bounty

Leaping and Hope

Scott Russell Sanders

The words *hope* and *hop* come from the same root, one that means "to leap up with expectation." Isn't that how it feels to be hopeful—that buoyancy, that eagerness for what is to come? Since before our ancestors began planting crops, humans have been living in expectation, counting on the hunt and the harvest, on what the Earth and our labors will bring forth. We invented ways of speaking about what we plan for and long for, even when it is not yet visible: spring will come, we say, the drought will end, the fever will break.... All covenants, all vows, all prophecies are cast in the future tense.

When we leap up, what do we see? If we see nothing but shadows closing in, if we expect only disaster, we may well quit leaping altogether. We may hunker down in the present, sink into momentary sensation—not as a way of experiencing the fullness of being, as mystics would have us do, but as a way of avoiding tomorrow.



...The Latin word for hope, *sperare*, comes from an Indo-European root *spei*, which means to expand. You can hear that old root in prosper and you can hear its denial in despair. To be hopeful is not only to feel expansive, but to count on an ever-flowing bounty, while to feel despair is to feel constrained, to fear that the springs of life are drying up.

Source: *Hunting for Hope: A Father's Journeys* by Scott Russell Sanders

Developing Hope

Vicki Zakrzewski

...Researchers have found that students who are high in hope have greater academic success, stronger friendships, and demonstrate more creativity and better problem-solving. They also have lower levels of depression and anxiety and are less likely to drop out from school.

But does this mean hope causes these benefits—or couldn't success in school and in making friends just give students more hope? In fact, studies suggest that having hope may actually predict a student's future academic achievement *more* than having feelings of self-worth or a positive attitude towards life actually do.

...The good news is that hope can be cultivated, even among students who are at risk for losing it. But first we have to understand what scientists mean when they talk about hope.

Hope doesn't mean wishful thinking—as in “I hope I win the lottery.” Instead, a person who is high in hope knows how to do the following things.

- ◆ Set *clear and attainable* goals.
- ◆ Develop *multiple* strategies to reach those goals.
- ◆ Stay *motivated* to use the strategies to attain the goals, even when the going gets tough.

...To help ...build these skills of hope, here are five research-based guidelines.

1. [Help students] identify and prioritize their top goals, from macro to micro.
2. Breakdown the goals—especially long-term ones—into steps.
3. Teach students that there's more than one way to reach a goal.
4. Tell stories of success.
5. Keep it light and positive.

Source: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_help_students_develop_hope

Family Activity: *Wishing & Hoping*

It can be difficult for children to grasp the idea of hope, since it is more abstract than a wish. One way to help them with this is to suggest that a wish is something for ourselves, while a hope is

directed to others. When they blow out the candles on their birthday cake, they can make a wish for something. Ask them to make a list of the things that they would wish for if today was their birthday.

Then discuss with them the kind of things people hope for in relationship to others, including the entire world. Things that may make the “hope” list are things like peace and an end to hunger.



Family Activity:

What gives you hope?

The previous activity paves the way for this activity. Author Susan Gabriel created a list of 120 things that give her hope. These include

1. Being surrounded by trees
2. Acts of kindness
3. Sparkling mountain streams
4. Smiling children
5. National parks and national forests
6. Small towns
7. Greener cities
8. Slower rhythms
9. Deep breaths
10. Forests
11. Wilderness
12. Dreams

You can see her complete list at <https://www.susangabriel.com/to-inspire/things-that-give-me-hope/>

Ask your children what gives them hope. You might want to first share with them some of the things that give you hope. Consider creating a poster with all of the things suggested by your children and you, and putting it somewhere in your house in a visible location in order to be reminded of these things daily.

Cynicism Versus Hope

Jim Wallis

Prophetic faith does not see the primary battle as the struggle between belief and secularism. It understands that the real battle, the big struggle of our times, is the fundamental choice between cynicism and hope. The prophets always begin in judgment, in a social critique of the status quo, but they end in hope—that these realities can and will be changed. The choice between cynicism and hope is ultimately a spiritual choice, one that has enormous political consequences.

...Ultimately, cynicism protects you from commitment. If things are not really going to change, why try so hard to make a difference?

...Perhaps the only people who view the world realistically are the cynics and the saints. Everybody else may be living in some kind of denial about ...how things really are. And the only difference between the cynics and the saints is the presence, power, and possibility of hope. And that, indeed, is a spiritual and religious issue. More than just a moral issue, hope is a spiritual and even religious choice. Hope is not a feeling; it is a decision. And the decision for hope



is based on what you believe at the deepest levels—what your most basic convictions are about the world and what the future holds—all based on your faith. You choose hope, not as a naive wish, but as a choice, with your eyes wide open to the reality of the world—just like the cynics who have not made the decision for hope.

Source: *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* by Jim Wallis

A House for Hope

Four Dimensions of Hope

Carol Farran and her coauthors of *Hope and Hopelessness* write, "Hope constitutes an essential experience of the human condition.... A way of thinking, a way of behaving, and a way of relating to oneself and one's world.... [Hope] has the ability to be fluid in its expectations...." They suggest that hope has four dimensions: experiential, spiritual, rational, and relational. They refer to these as the struggle, soul, mind, and heart of hope. These are distinct, yet woven together.

Experiential: The struggle of hope

While our life stance can generally be hopeful, hope becomes vital when confronting a challenging, inescapable trial. There is no way around such trials; there is only the way through. They are similar to Dante's "dark wood" in the sense that we do not know the way forward. The path emerges with each step and may take many unexpected turns. We soon realize we are not in control but can choose how to respond in each moment.

As we know, life can be challenging. Our life may not be difficult in sum, but it can be hard in moments that are fleeting or persist. Often these events come crashing into our lives with no prior warning. They can leave us powerless and hopeless, and that is untenable. Despair and fear assault us, and these can be overwhelming. Hope acts like a balm, soothing suffering, lessening despair, and helping us meet our fears.

Hope empowers us to search for healing and wholeness.

Spiritual: The soul of hope

Hope has a transcendent dimension. As Emily Dickinson wrote, "Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul / And sings the tune without the words / And never stops at all."

Hope opens us up. It can free us from the bondage of fear. That is not an easy process, but it is powerful. It requires facing fear and staring it down to break its hold on us.

Hope is an integral part of faith; like faith, it is best understood as a verb. Hope can be characterized as a sort of confidence about something that is not yet

proven and a sense of assurance about living in and with uncertainty.

Hope is a spiritual practice that we return to again and again, especially when despair grows in us and we fear, as Wendell Berry wrote, "what our life and our children's lives may be." His spiritual practice was to go into nature with the wood drake and the great heron, seek the peace of wild things, find still water, and rest in the world's grace.

The soul, which is the essence of our being, is resilient but can be wounded. Unitarian Universalist minister Nancy Shaffer wrote, "How shall we mend you, sweet Soul / What shall we use, and how is it in the first place you've come to be torn? / Come sit. Come tell me. We will find a way to mend you."



She continues, "I would offer you my silence, my presence, all this love I have, / and my sorrow you've become torn." This process of mending connects the soul of hope to the heart of hope.

Rational: The mind of hope

C. Rick Snyder, author of *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There from Here*, wrote, "Hope is rather hopeless for those who assume it totally lacks a realistic basis. But suppose hope is tied to something realistic. ...Neither a goal you have no chance of obtaining nor one you are absolutely certain of meeting is part of hope."

Whatever the situation, hope has a certain realism. It is shaped by the desire to arrive at a goal or outcome. This goal is not static. As circumstances change, hope re-vision what is possible. The goal may change and be more modest, but it is still obtainable.

Hope is different than wishing. As Laini Taylor writes, "Wishes are false. Hope is true." Because hope evolves, it is

never false. While the goal or outcome may change, it remains desirable, possible, and authentic.

Relational: The heart of hope

The heart of hope is compassion, our ability to suffer with others and to be open to their suffering. This becomes a solidarity of caring, acknowledging that when the bell tolls, it tolls for everyone.

Veronica Roth writes, "Since I was young, I have always known this: Life damages us, everyone. We can't escape that damage. But now, I am also learning this: We can be mended. We mend each other." It is this sense of mending that gets at the heart of hope.

We can mend each other. It is such a precious realization. We can mend each other by "encouraging" each other, which is to say, based on the French root of the word, by "putting heart into each other."

Richard Gilbert offers a beautiful metaphor for the heart of hope. He writes, "Come into the circle of caring, / Come into the community of gentleness, of justice and love. / Come, and you shall be refreshed. / Let the healing power of this people penetrate you, Let loving kindness and joy pass through you, / Let hope interfuse you, / And peace be the law of your heart. / In this human circle, caring is a calling. / All of us are called. / So come into the circle of caring."

In *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-first Century*, the Revs. John Buehrens and Rebecca Ann Parker write, "Within any house of hope, of whatever tradition, there breathes a sense of the Holy, a response to the Sacred Spirit or Spirits present in life, inspiring creativity, compassion, and social action." They acknowledge that hope existed before they were born and that "Hope will go on after us, through those who will continue the struggles for justice, equity, and compassion, and will form and reform communities that embody love of life."

At their best, our congregations are houses for hope that minister to the struggle, soul, mind, and heart of hope of those they serve within their congregation and in the wider world.

Source: Touchstones

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion: Hope

Preparation: (Read *Touchstones* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words “We hope, we despair, and then we hope again — that is how we stay afloat in the cosmos of uncertainty that is any given life. Just as the universe exists because, by some accident of chance we are yet to fathom, there is more matter than antimatter in it, we exist — and go on existing — because there is more hope than despair in us. *Maria Popova*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake)

(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “The kind of hope I often think about ...I understand above all as a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us or we don’t; it is a dimension of the soul; it’s not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation. Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.” *Václav Havel*

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. What, for you, is the difference between hope and optimism?
2. How have you experienced hope in your life?
3. Describe a time when you felt hopeless. What was the impact? What helped in overcoming this?
4. How does being hopeful add to your sense of meaning and purpose in life?
5. Is hope a natural personal inclination, a spiritual practice, whistling in the dark, or something else?
6. How has your sense of hope changed over time?
7. As you look to the future, what do you hope for?
8. Where and from what do you draw hope?
9. François de La Rochefoucauld wrote, “We promise according to our hopes and perform according to our fears.” Do you agree? How does fear affect hope?
10. With Maria Popova, is there more hope than despair in us? If yes, why?
11. How is hope anchored beyond our horizons?
12. How can your congregation help cultivate hope in you, others, and the wider community?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones)
We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Thank you, Ilse

(Continued from page 2) **Wisdom Story**

vakia (now the Czech Republic or Czechia). It took five months. Gerda was separated from Ilse during the march, which pushed her into deeper despair. The memory of Ilse’s gift, that beautiful, luscious raspberry, helped her go on.



The first person she met when she reached Volary, Czechoslovakia was Kurt Klein, an American soldier. He was so kind. Gerda couldn’t believe that she had reached safety. She was hospitalized for several months, and Klein would visit whenever he could. They would eventually marry and move to the United States. They had three children, eight grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren. And Gerda told each one the story of the gift of a raspberry, a symbol of hope in a terrible time.

She was grateful to Ilse for the rest of her life. In 2010, President Obama gave Gerda Weissman Klein the Presidential Medal of Freedom. No one knows whether or not she gave President Obama a raspberry in return.

Source: <https://journeythroughtheholocaust.org/items/show/10?tour=2&index=0>

Attribution for Images

- Page 1:** Flower on water by happymom33 on Pixabay
Page 2: Raspberry, photo by ArtActiveArt on Pixabay
Page 2: Seedling by congerdesign on Pixabay
Page 3: Ceramic Bowl, photo by Photo by Roman Odintsov on Pexels
Page 3: Iris flower, photo by Aaron Burden on Pexels
Page 4: Votive candles, photo by Anna Shvets on Pexels
Page 5: Cardinal, photo by Ray Hennessy on Unsplash
Page 5: Rainbow, photo by Csanokovszki Tibor on Pexels
Page 5: Girl Leaping, photo by 1556045 on Pixabay
Page 6: Birthday Cake, photo by Pexels on Pixabay
Page 6: Protest, photo by StockSnap on Pixabay
Page 7: Dandelion, photo by Nikola Johnny Mirkovic on Unsplash
Page 8: Raspberry, Photo by Amanda Jones on Unsplash