

# THE SEEDS OF A HOPEFUL FUTURE

*A Presentation on Hope and Optimism*



*“Star Catcher”* Mihail Minkov, IDA, Black Sea Coast, Bulgaria, March 2020

**Whoso lives pursuing pleasures, his senses unrestrained, immoderate in eating, indolent, devitalised – him verily doth Mara uproot as a gale a weak tree.**

**Whoso lives disciplining themselves, unmindful of pleasures, his senses restrained, moderate in eating, *full of faith and dauntless energy (Virya)* – him verily Mara doth not overturn as a gale doth not overturn a rocky mountain.**

*The Dhammapada*, Ch. 1, The Twin Verses, Buddha

**So now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but *love* is the greatest of these.**

*Corinthians* 13:13, St Paul

For our personal advancement in virtue and truth one quality is sufficient, namely, love; to advance humanity there must be two, love and intelligence; to accomplish the Great Work there must be three love, intelligence, and activity. And yet love is ever the root and the source.

Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, 18<sup>th</sup> c. French philosopher and initiate

All the impressions which are made on us by Nature are designed to exercise our soul during its terms of penitence, to prompt us towards the eternal truths shown beneath a veil, and to lead us to recover what we have lost.

Louis Claude de Saint-Martin

Do you suppose we have not passed through many times worse trials than that you now think you are in?  
a Theosophical Mahatma in *Letters That Have Helped Me* by WQ Judge

While there's life there's hope. Marcus Tullius Cicero, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC Roman senator & initiate

Every hour of life is fraught with danger or with help... How can it be possible that a few hours devoted to theosophical thought and action can counteract a whole week spent in indifference, frivolity or selfishness?

*Daily Readings from William Q Judge*

By working for other people we put in practice the inner beliefs which rest upon unity, we develop certain faculties in our nature, we increase our spirituality; for the first and most important step in the cultivation of spiritual faculties is the practice of good thought, good act, and constant endeavour for other people. By following this you will find yourself growing from within more and more, which is what you want, for all light that comes from without is deceptive and when it is gone leaves just what you have yourself. ibid

*It is your own mind you should watch and not the circumstances in which you are placed. Others have been in worse circumstances than what you think surround you, and have not been disturbed as you seem to be. It must be, therefore, that it is the way you yourself look at these things; stop looking at them in that way and look at everything in a contented spirit, feeling sure that they are all more or less illusionary, and you will do better.* ibid

Give up doubt, and arise in your place with patience and fortitude. Let the warrior fight, the gentle yet fierce Krishna, who, when he finds thee as his disciple and friend, will tell thee the truth and lighten up the darkness with the lamp of spiritual knowledge.

Having once turned thy mind to the light of that True Sun, thou hast cast thyself upon that great stream of divine energy which flows to and from that Sun; and nevermore canst thou claim back for thyself that life; live, then, so that the duty may be well performed.

We are tried in subtle ways that surpass sight but are strong for the undoing of him who is not prepared by right thought and sacrifice to the higher nature for the fight.

The circumstances we are in are the best for us, if we will only so regard them. Try to do this, and thus get the best out of them, and escape them in another life.

The practice of Benevolence, Tenderness, and Complacency brings about cheerfulness of the mind, which tends to strength and steadiness.

Anxiety is an obscurant and deterrent. So try to acquire patient resignation. Ibid

## HOPE AND OPTIMISM

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**H**OPE is a simple word with many meanings. It means different things to different people. Hope means to hold on rather than to give up, because hope shows that something can be done, things can improve and tides may turn. According to Dr. Judith Rich, "Hope is a match in a dark tunnel, a moment of light, just enough to reveal the path ahead and ultimately the way out." To be hopeful about something is to look on the future positively, to anticipate the desired thing or outcome. Hope is misinterpreted to mean wishful thinking, Pollyanna optimism, utopian dreams and passive expectations. False hopes lead to disappointment, frustration and passivity. We cannot hope to pass an examination after submitting a blank paper. But interestingly, even false hope is considered better than doubt. Writing to a student-aspirant Mr. Judge says: "Better a false hope with no doubt, than much knowledge with doubts of your own chances." One has to be hopeful and not doubt one's capacity even in the face of all adversities and bodily or mental handicaps, especially, in living the spiritual life. In a sense, it is not false hope, because the impossibility and the consequent "hopelessness" at a given point in time is only apparent, because we judge things from our limited viewpoint. A Master of Wisdom advises an aspirant to not fight misfortune in advance if things do not happen as one's worldly wisdom expects them to happen. He is asked to cultivate cheerful confidence and hope, because doubt unnerves and pushes back one's progress. True hope is never a fool's blind optimism, but as Christopher Lasch expresses it, "Hope implies a deep-seated trust in life...[which] would not be worth much if it had not survived disappointments in the past, while knowledge that the future holds

further disappointments demonstrates the continuing need for hope.”

Hope is an integral part of human life. It keeps us going. Science has repeatedly proven that hope has positive impact on our wellbeing. We live with the hope for a better tomorrow. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl writes that his experiences in the concentration camp showed that there is a close relation between the state of mind of a man—in terms of courage and hope, or lack of them—and the state of immunity of his body. Sudden loss of hope and courage can have deadly effect. He observes that majority of prisoners had lived in the naïve hope that they would be home again by Christmas, and so, when that did not seem to happen, many of them died. Also, prisoners who had lost any hope for the future, and had no future goal were also doomed. But those who had something to look forward to, who hoped to come out of the concentration camp and tell about their experiences to the world, survived the tortures.

Hope is a universal stimulant shared by all beings. It is the basis of all our endeavours and efforts. We set our minds and hearts on achieving many goals. It is hope which stimulates us to strive towards achieving them. Constancy of hope determines the persistency of effort in any direction. This is especially true when effort is being made to achieve a spiritual goal. Since a hopeful or optimistic person is ready to try one more time and find different ways of approaching the problem, researchers have found a close link between hope and divergent thinking, because divergent thinking is marked by richness of ideas and originality of thinking.

The term Optimism is derived from the Latin *optimum*, meaning “best,” and hence being optimistic means expecting the best possible outcome from any given situation. Thus, optimism is a mental attitude reflecting a belief or hope that the outcome of some specific endeavour, or outcomes in general, will be positive, favourable and desirable. The opposite view is termed pessimism. A common idiom used to illustrate optimism versus pessimism is a glass filled with water to the halfway point: an optimist is said to see the glass as half full, while a pessimist sees the glass as half empty. Optimism may be described as the attitude of seeing brighter side of life or seeing opportunities in challenges. Just like hope, the attitude or attribute of optimism seems to be connected with the higher and nobler aspect of human mind. Explaining the dual nature of human mind, higher and lower, H.P.B. says that the higher part of the mind is connected with the spiritual soul or *Buddhi*, and the lower is connected with *Kama* or animal soul. There are only very few people who think with the higher faculties of the mind, which concerns exercise of intuition and imagination. She differentiates such people from the materialists, who believe only in the material reality, and reject Spirit, Soul, God, etc., and hence would find it very difficult to raise themselves to spiritual level. Optimism and pessimism depend on it—the tendency to think with the higher faculties of the mind—in a large measure, writes H.P.B. (*Raja-Yoga or Occultism*, p. 205)

In Christianity there are three “Theological” virtues, Faith, Hope and Love, which are considered to be spiritual gifts of God. Thus, from a religious context, Hope being a theological virtue, is not to be looked upon as a mere human emotion. It is a virtue with divine origin. “At the very base of your nature you will find faith, hope, and love,” says *Light on the Path*. In a deeper sense it is the hope of becoming a better human being. True hope has its foundation in knowledge—*knowledge* of an ultimate objective possible of attainment by every human being. It is a hope of reaching unconditional happiness. It is also hope for spiritual progress of humanity. Therefore, it is said that hope springs eternal in the human breast. It is the well-spring of life, which brings hidden energies and powers to the surface. It is the kind of hope which cannot be dashed or extinguished completely. It rises, phoenix-like, from its ashes. Life on earth is full of fruitless strivings and disappointments, and yet what is it that keeps us striving and aspiring to achieve? Hope is unique to man, and so is aspiration, which in a way is proof that life has a noble purpose, that intellect and reason are not man’s highest powers, and that there is the immortal soul in man which is superior to all obstacles. That is why even when, seemingly, there is nothing to live for, human beings continue, intuitively, as expressed in *Prometheus Bound*, “To love, and bear; to hope, till hope creates from its own wreck the thing it contemplates.”

Hope is related to Greek mythology of Prometheus and Pandora. The myth of Prometheus relates to evolution of man. Prometheus’ two great gifts to humanity are fire and hope. There was a time in evolution of man, when man was really no better than a beast, though in human form. According to this myth, Prometheus stole “fire” from heaven and brought it to earth. Zeus punished him for this act by tying him to a rock and sending a vulture every day to peck at his liver. Every time that the bird tore out the organ, new organ would grow and once again the torture would be repeated. This agony lasted for thousands of years, until he was freed by Hercules. This myth refers to the “light of the mind” given to man by solar deities, endowing him with the power to choose, think and to reason. At incarnation this mind becomes dual. The

aspect of mind, which is entangled in Kama (passions), represents the eternal vulture of unsatisfied desires, despair and regret. Thus, man gifted with the mind, has misused the powers of the mind, breaking the harmony between the divine and earthly natures. Man is no longer Prometheus, one who could see ahead, but has become Epi-metheus, “he who sees only after the event.” The mythology says that a beautiful woman, Pandora, was created by the gods under the orders of Zeus to be sent to Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus; she had charge of a casket in which all the evils, passions and plagues which torment humanity were locked up, which she opened, and thus set free all the ills which prey on mankind. However, hope remained at the bottom of the casket, and she closed it before it could fly away. In the words of Hesiod, “Epimetheus, befooled by the charms of Pandora, accepted her destructive gifts—gifts of the immortals— and thereby brought misery and destruction to human race.” In a sense, the aspirations of Mankind for higher things are represented as the actual cause of human misery. Hope aids our struggle for better future, using the “fire” of mind, through self-induced and self-devised ways and means, checked by Karma.

The Doctrine of Karma is the Doctrine of Responsibility, and the Doctrine of Rebirth is that of Hope. Those who believe in the strict justice of the law of Karma will never entertain false hope of future mercy or salvation by proxy. We are a long way off from becoming a Buddha. It is no easy task to improve our nature. To overcome a single defect in our character or develop a single virtue takes enormous effort and time. The Buddha said: “Far hath he gone whose foot treads down one fond offence.” Rebirth provides an opportunity for progress. In the face of such stupendous task of overcoming evil within oneself and without, in terms of great wickedness of the individual and collective heart of man, one is bound to experience despair. “Hope deferred makes the heart grow weary” is the old saying, but which should never be uttered by the genuine aspirant to Higher Life. He must know that he is himself responsible for his lack of progress or slow progress. These encouraging words from a Master of Wisdom, written to a disciple, “Why feel ‘unhappy’ and ‘disappointed’? My good, my *faithful* friend, remember that hope deferred is no hope lost,” bring comfort to all aspirants to chelaship. There is also the fountain of joy and hope in the consideration that there are Masters, the perfected beings, who fought this very fight and have triumphed.

These Elder Brothers of Humanity despair not of humanity and are there to guide us on the right path. We must emulate them. To be able to say that with all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams it is still a beautiful world, or with all its pride, cruelty, wickedness and dissembling, there is still hope for humanity, is the mark of true optimism, rooted in the belief expressed by Carlyle: “From the lowest depth, there is a path to the loftiest height.” What may appear to us as a thoroughly selfish, wicked, brutal and indifferent person, may not be a “hopeless” case, in the eyes of the merciful law of Karma, which is ready to give one more chance to him as long as there is some goodness, or even potentiality of the same. That potentiality of good thought or action is not lost so long as one’s connection with the divine nature is not completely severed. “It is not so easy to go to hell as preachers declare it to be,” says *Through the Gates of Gold*. A Master of Wisdom explains that even a person, who may be a monster of wickedness, sensuality, ambition, avarice, pride, deceit, etc., has still in him the spark of divinity “smouldering under a heap of dirt,” and has therefore not yet become a *soulless brute*. He is punished in *Avitchi*, “uninterrupted hell,” which could well be a state or place on our earth, “where the culprits, *die and are reborn without interruption—yet not without hope of final redemption.*” (*The Theosophical Glossary*)

But when the lower mind repeatedly ignores the guidance of the Higher Self, one gradually stops hearing the voice of conscience. Then, after several life times, after being given chance after chance by nature, to turn the corner, if a person deliberately chooses evil and continues to do so, finally, there comes a point when there is not a single good or noble thought, feeling or action, that is worthy of being part of the Higher Ego. Then the path of communication between the lower mind which is the child is broken from the divine parent, resulting in a *lost soul*. When the lower mind breaks its connection with the divine Self, it is like a stem of a tree asking to be separated from the roots which nourish it. When it is disconnected, it perishes. Only such people are “beyond hope of redemption.” But such “hopeless” cases are rare, and that is why H.P.B. says that no student of Theosophy should despair of humanity, but aid in the development of the nobler qualities. “Even if the man of most evil ways worship me with exclusive devotion, he is to be considered as righteous, for he hath judged aright. Such a man soon becometh of a righteous soul and obtaineth perpetual happiness.” (*Gita*, IX)

