



Readings

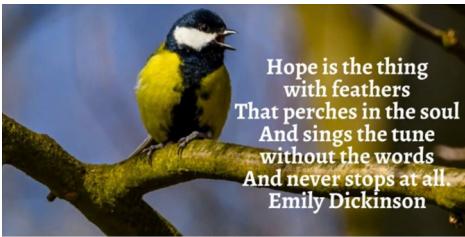


Photo by Petr Gašpar on Pixabay

1. *Passive Hope versus Active Hope* by Rev. David A. Morris

So where does our hope come from, the hope that keeps us engaged and committed even when things look bad, the hope strong enough to sustain even a broken heart, the hope that isn't just blindly believing that "everything's going to be all right?"

Joanna Macy says this: "The word *hope* has two different meanings. The first involves hopefulness, where our preferred outcome seems reasonably likely to happen. If we require this kind of hope before we commit ourselves to an action, our response gets blocked in areas where we don't rate our chances too high."

"The second meaning," she goes on to say, "is about desire... knowing what we hope for and what we'd like, or love, to take place. It is what we do with this hope that really makes the difference."

Macy proposes what she calls "Active Hope." "Passive hope," she says, "is about waiting for external agencies to bring about what we desire. Active Hope is about becoming active participants in bringing about what we hope for."

Macy's "active hope" is a practice, not a feeling. It starts with gratitude, with naming and giving thanks for what and who we love. Next we acknowledge the whole reality of whatever situation we're in, including its difficult aspects. And finally, we decide what it is we can

EXPLORATION

Hope

actually do to serve, to nurture, to heal, or to defend what we love. Action becomes our hope: Committed action for what we love and value most. What we love and what we choose to do for it becomes our source of strength and inspiration, rather than any expectation or wish for how things will turn out in the end.

Source: no longer online

2. *The Journey toward Hope*

by Rev. Linda Hansen

In a world of greater and greater mistrust, people are desperate for the hope found in community—the hope that it is possible not just to tolerate, but to benefit from, to live fuller lives because of, "the company of strangers."

...We live in a world as frightened of community as it is of death. The truth is, we human beings are understandably frightened of the vulnerable, finite creatures we truly are. We seek escape from vulnerability and death by redefining ourselves in our philosophies and religions, or by hiding behind material wealth and power at the expense of others.

Unitarian Universalists ...lay claim to a religious worldview that takes this world to be our true home, that takes this finite life to be our real life.... We could help to show the world that the joys of embracing our finite lives are worth the risks and losses, that being limited human beings is a much richer prospect than being angels or even gods. We could help to show the world that it's possible for human beings to live together justly and peacefully. ...What we have to offer is the possibility of genuine hope—hope in the world we have, hope in the finite interdependent creatures we are, hope in our relationships of love and friendship, hope in the communities we create not only with one another but with the strangers with

whom we are lucky enough to be in company.

Source: <http://archive.uuworld.org/2003/05/feature2.html>

3. *Sources of Hope*

by Rev. Nancy Bird Pellegrini

...Hope may actually rely on a kind of blind faith—faith in the awesomeness of nature, faith in the potential of the human spirit, and faith in connections with a higher power and the people you love. This means having faith in the continuity of things. It requires a belief that what we do in this life can make a difference in the world that will live on long after we are gone. To maintain hope, ...it is necessary to have this faith, not fully explained, not totally rational, but somehow there nevertheless.

...Ask ...what are your sources of hope? What brings you the strength and the inspiration to face another day? ... How can we draw from the wellspring of hope within ourselves to help create and sustain hope for others? What actions can we take that will spring forth from our own sources of hope? What choices can we make about taking responsibility in following the beckoning of the spirit toward the good? What role can we play as co-creators to help promote justice in the world?

...These words [are] from Unitarian Universalist theologian Rebecca Parker: "Hope rises. It rises from the heart of life, here and now, beating with joy and sorrow. Hope longs. It longs for good to be affirmed, for justice and love to prevail, for suffering to be alleviated, and for life to flourish in peace."

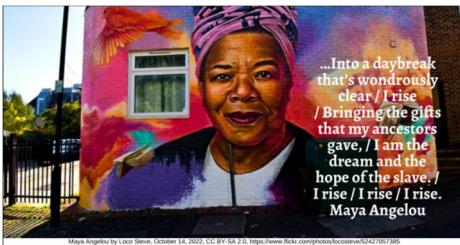
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4. *Definition of the Common Good*

The Common Good:

Is a concern for the welfare of the whole

1. Recognizes the human person is sacred and social



2. Is built upon the principle of human dignity and the equality of all people
3. Recognizes that human beings realize their dignity and achieve their destiny in particular communities, not isolation.
4. Requires a foundation of basic rights which are minimum standards for life in society
5. Is personal and communal
6. Must be active at every level of life
7. Is directed by a moral concern that each person must participate and share in the benefits of social advances
8. Is needed to avoid the harmful forces of coercion, domination or exploitation
9. Is needed for the overall just functioning of a society
10. Recognizes that governments and political institutions are necessary and have active responsibility for achieving the common good
11. Must be an increasingly transnational—or global—reality encompassing the entire human family
12. Is not utilitarian in nature: it's not “the greatest good for the greatest number,” because this can allow for the exclusion of individuals or even segments of society

Source: no longer online

5. **From Hopelessness to Hope**

by Rev. Dr. Stephen Furrer

Hope ...is not so much a feeling as something you do. A modus operandi. The old Universalists used to refer to their religion as “the Larger Hope.” They believed that, ultimately, all would be saved and everything in life—everything across the whole universe—would be redeemed... The old Universalists didn’t stop there...: just believing that their salvation was wrapped up in everyone else’s. No, those Universalists then organized their lives according-

ly—on the assumption that the whole of reality was connected and was destined for wonder and joy and happiness. ... Gathering regularly with others who share a creative and optimistic view of life is crucial to staying healthy and strong. But one doesn’t have to be an old-style theological universalist. Like Camus and Sartre, you may think the world is meaningless. Fine. But if that’s how it feels for you, please go a step further and, also like Camus and Sartre, embrace life in spite of its meaninglessness—you’ll find the absurdity funnier and the human touches sweeter, more poignant, and more beautiful too. Be part of the Larger Hope. Like the poet Kabir proposed... make love with all you find beautiful and important and special in the life before you. Music? Art? Nature? Your grandchildren? Working for Justice? A good book? Marx Brothers movies? Gardening? Talking to old friends? Whatever you love, hope is there. And it will sustain you, if you let it, even through the darkest night. So let it in, and let it be....

Source: no longer online

6. **The Crisis of the Common Good**

by Walter Brueggemann

The great crisis among us is the crisis of “the common good,” the sense of community solidarity that binds all in a common destiny—haves and have-nots, the rich and the poor. We face a crisis about the common good because there are powerful forces at work among us to resist the common good, to violate community solidarity, and to deny a common destiny. Mature people, at their best, are people who are committed to the common good that reaches beyond private interest, transcends sectarian commitments, and offers human solidarity. It is a trek that all serious human beings must make.

Source: no longer online.

7. **Embracing the Unknown**

by Rebecca Solnit

Hope locates itself in the premises that we don’t know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes — you

alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting. It’s the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand. We may not, in fact, know them afterward either, but they matter all the same, and history is full of people whose influence was most powerful after they were gone.

Source: *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* by Rebecca Solnit

Wisdom Story

Nasrudin’s Train Ticket, a story from the Sufi tradition

Nasrudin was about to board a train, and the conductor asked him for his ticket.

Nasrudin began looking through his pants pockets, but he couldn’t find it.

“One moment,” he said. “I know I brought it.” He searched his bag, and still couldn’t find it. He then searched the floor around him, and the missing ticket still eluded him. He even began looking in his socks, but alas, the ticket was not found.

As the conductor watched this, he asked, “Why don’t you check that pocket on your shirt? That’s usually where most people put their ticket.”

“Oh, I can’t look there,” Nasrudin replied.

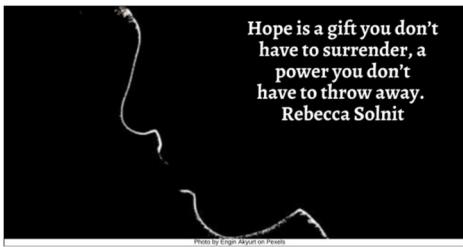
“Why not?” the conductor asked.

Nasrudin explained, “Because if I do and I find out it is not there, then I would have no hope at all of finding it!”

Source: <https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/train-ticket>

Snippets

“The kind of hope I often think about (especially in situations that are particularly hopeless, such as prison) I understand above all as a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope



Hope is a gift you don't have to surrender, a power you don't have to throw away.
Rebecca Solnit

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*

"Hope is the capacity to work for something, to continually 'go for it,' simply because it is good, desirable, or "worthy" — and not because we have a fairly good chance of succeeding, and not necessarily because there may be some juicy reward in it for us. The more desperate the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the more forbidding the circumstances, the greater the odds against things turning out well, the deeper the hope. The more hopeless the present may appear to be, the more ardent our hope for something better.... Hope is the serene conviction that something makes sense, that it's worth it, regardless of how it might turn out." *Michael Downey*

"There is a close connection between hope and hopes, but we must not confuse the two. We set our hopes on something we can imagine. But hope is open for the unimaginable. The opposite of hopes is hopelessness. The opposite of hope is despair. One can cling desperately to one's hopes. But even in a hopeless situation hope remains open for surprise. It is surprise that links hope with gratefulness. To the grateful heart every gift is surprising. Hope is openness for surprise." *David Steindl-Rast*

"Apart from hope, patience could degenerate into resignation, and resignation into despair. But to stay committed and to continue working, despite the fact that what we seek is going

to remain unrealized for a long time, requires more than determination and rugged wills. Hope, then, is the great virtue for those who take history to heart, those who continually feel and cherish our common humanity." *William Reiser*

"It's important to say what hope is not: it is not the belief that everything was, is, or will be fine. The evidence is all around us of tremendous suffering and tremendous destruction. The hope I'm interested in is about broad perspectives with specific possibilities, ones that invite or demand that we act. It's also not a sunny everything-is-getting-better narrative, though it may be a counter to the everything-is-getting-worse narrative. You could call it an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings." *Rebecca Solnit*

"The feeling of hope that I sometimes experience, though less often now than in my youth, is not true hope any more than infatuation is true love, though both are glimmers of the deeper reality whence they emerge. Hope is a virtue, not a feeling. It is a strength (*vitus*). Living a hopeful life, like living a loving life, is a matter of the will. It is a decision that must be made over and over again as we face situations that seem to be beyond our ability to endure. In fact, there is much that is beyond us, but there is nothing that we cannot find the strength to cope with...." *Tom Stella*

"What could be the meaning of hope if it were not patient? Its heart and soul are the readiness to endure the present in the expectation that tomorrow will offer more than today. Hope is greatly diminished if we are unwilling to persist and persevere, for then there would be no reason to hope for the fruits of self-reliance, the outcome of our own industry and discipline. ... Patience and despair may look upon identical landscapes and at first glimpse nothing that promises renewal or relief. Yet patience lives between memory and anticipation in such a way that it brings something to the situation that was not apparent until patience has done its careful work. ... Patience, even when its own vision is obscured, can try to clothe itself with

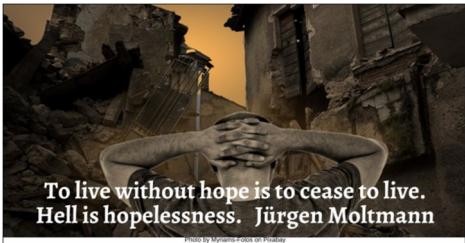
the imaginations of others and thus hope to find new images of hope."

David Baily Harned

"Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of hope — not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident gates of self-righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges; nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of 'Everything is gonna be all right,' but a very different, sometimes very lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about your own soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it might be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle, but joy in the struggle — and we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we are seeing, asking people what they see." *Rev. Victoria Safford*

"It is the nature of hope to rise. It lifts our spirits. It buoys us up when despair threatens to drag us down. It gives us a boost when we feel we can't go on. Hope is the fuel and the energy that keeps the world moving forward. Hope doesn't exist on its own. Hope is like the leaven that causes a loaf of bread to rise. In bread baking, flour and sugar create the culture in which the yeast can do its work. A spiritual community is the culture where hope grows, where we create the leaven that makes our spirits rise. We belong to a tradition of hope. We come from a lineage of people who saw the world not just as it was, but how it could be. We are rooted in an ancestry of possibility.... Hope is in our spiritual DNA...." *Rev. Diane Dongiert*

"...Hope motivates us to persevere, into the darkness, to journey onward, despite the obstacles blocking the trail of life, despite not knowing how, or when, or where, or why our life's story will conclude. ...Hope is not wishful thinking, nor is it magical thinking. Hope is an emotion, a mindset, a belief, a motivation, that despite setbacks and obstacles, despite hardship and misfortune, despite the unknown last chapter of your life's story, you believe that your



To live without hope is to cease to live.
Hell is hopelessness. Jürgen Moltmann

Printed by MyPrints.com on Friday

life will work out, that when you take your last breath, there is something else beyond this world.

You can do incredible things when you have enough hope. It was Christopher Reeves ... a quadriplegic, after being thrown from his horse ... who said, 'Once you choose hope, anything's possible.' *David Hood*

Questions

1. In reading #1, Rev. David Morris builds on Joanna Macy's distinction between passive hope and active hope. What are examples of passive hope? What circumstances might make passive hope the only option? What are examples of active hope? What supports people being able to pursue active hope? Morris writes, "We decide what it is we can actually do to serve, to nurture, to heal, or to defend what we love. Action becomes our hope: Committed action for what we love and value most." Have you seen active hope? Have you practiced active hope? If yes, please share an example. Is active hope more likely in a group of people rather than when alone? How can our congregations promote active hope?
2. In reading #2, Rev. Linda Hansen writes about genuine hope but seems to be referring to active hope. She writes, "In a world of greater and greater mistrust, people are desperate for the hope found in community—the hope that it is possible not just to tolerate, but to benefit from, to live fuller lives because of 'the company of strangers.'" Is there more mistrust? Why or why not? What hopes might community offer to people? How do you view her suggestion that we can benefit from a "company of strangers?" What

made things easier when you first visited your congregation? How did this compare with other groups where you have been a stranger? How does your congregation welcome strangers?

3. In reading #3, Rev. Nancy Bird Pellegrini links hope to faith. How does faith connect to your hopes? A third of what she writes are questions worthy of consideration, so please try to answer them. "What are your sources of hope? What brings you the strength and the inspiration to face another day? ... How can we draw from the well-spring of hope within ourselves to help create and sustain hope for others? What actions can we take that will spring forth from our own sources of hope? What choices can we make about taking responsibility in following the beckoning of the spirit toward the good? What role can we play as co-creators to help promote justice in the world?"
4. In reading #4, a definition of the Common Good is presented. What do you think are attributes of the Common Good? Based on #5, the common good must be built on "a foundation of basic rights which are minimum standards for life in society." What rights do you think should be included? Are any of these absent from society? If yes, how could active hope promote one of these missing rights? Based on #6, how is the Common Good personal and communal? #13 rejects the justification of "the greatest good for the greatest number." Do you agree? Why or why not? If yes, what happens if a good that includes everyone cannot be found? If no, what happens to those who continually do not benefit from the common good?
5. In reading #5, Rev. Dr. Stephen Furrer writes, "...Gathering regularly with others who share a creative and optimistic view of life is crucial to staying healthy and strong." For him, this is a key to being hopeful. How does your congregation contribute to your hopefulness? Even if you find much of
6. In reading #6, theologian Walter Brueggemann writes that the "Crisis of 'the common good'" is due to "...powerful forces at work among us to resist the common good, to violate community solidarity, and to deny a common destiny." Do you agree? Why or why not? He concludes, "Mature people, at their best, are people who are committed to the common good that reaches beyond private interest, transcends sectarian commitments, and offers human solidarity." Do you agree? Why or why not? What values promote the common good? What interests seek to undermine the common good? How can our congregations promote the common good?
7. In reading #7, Rebecca Solnit writes, "Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists." How would you compare hope with optimism and pessimism? She writes that optimists and pessimists "both excuse themselves from acting." Based on her commitment to action, do you believe your actions matter? Why or why not? She writes that we may not know beforehand or afterward the impact of what we do. Should this be a reason not to act? Why or why not? Since many struggles last generations, how can hope encourage us to act in such situations?
8. Václav Havel believed that hope was a "state of mind, not a state of the world," adding, "either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of the soul...." How might this be true? If true, how might this inner hope affect how we act? Havel concluded that hope "is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons." When you look at the

life meaningless, what in your life do you love, and how does this love encourage you to be hopeful? Furrer concludes that what you love will sustain you "even through the darkest night." Do you agree? Why or why not?



How could we tire of hope? so much is in bud. Denise Levertov

Photo by Nennineinszwedrei by Pixabay

world, what do you hope for that is beyond the visible horizon?

9. Michael Downey writes, "Hope is the capacity to work for something, to continually 'go for it,' simply because it is good, desirable, or 'worthy'" regardless of how things turn out. Do you agree? Why or why not? How might this attitude make hope stronger? Downey expresses it this way, "The more desperate the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the more forbidding the circumstances, the greater the odds against things turning out well, the deeper the hope." Can this conviction encourage us when things are difficult? Why? How?

10. David Steindl-Rast makes a distinction between hope and hopes. For him, "hopes" focus on what we can imagine, while "hope" touches the unimaginable. He then writes, "The opposite of hopes is hopelessness. The opposite of hope is despair." Do you agree with his distinctions? Why or why not? How is hope different than a wish? Steindl-Rast adds, "even in a hopeless situation, hope remains open for surprise." Do you agree? Why or why not?

11. William Reiser calls hope "the great virtue." How might this be true? He notes that without hope, "patience could degenerate into resignation, and resignation into despair." How could this happen? How can hope strengthen our resolve?

12. Rebecca Solnit writes that hope "is not the belief that everything was, is, or will be fine" because of the "tremendous suffering and tremen-

dous destruction" around us. Hope deals with reality, and it acts. As mentioned above, why is action an integral part of hope? Solnit suggests that hope must take "account of complexities and uncertainties," but it must also see openings to act. Do you agree? How does this approach make hope stronger?

13. Tom Stella writes, "Hope is a virtue, not a feeling." Why might this make sense? He adds, "Living a hopeful life, like living a loving life, is a matter of the will." In what ways is hope an act of will? In the struggle between hope and despair, what pushes you toward hope? In conclusion, Stella writes that hope "is a decision that must be made over and over again as we face situations that seem beyond our ability to endure." When and where have you chosen hope in your life? What helped move you toward hope?

14. David Baily Harned asks, "What could be the meaning of hope if it were not patient?" Why is patience an essential aspect of hope? He explains, "patience lives between memory and anticipation." What are your memories of hope succeeding? Of hope failing? How did you react in both situations? How does hope help us anticipate good outcomes?

15. Rev. Victoria Safford writes, "Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of hope...." Not at the gates of optimism, common sense, self-righteousness, or the gate of "Everything is gonna be all right." How do these gates fail us? As she

writes, hope involves truth-telling, resistance and defiance, seeing the world as it is and as it could be, and struggle and joy. Which of these are important to you? Why? How do they enrich hope?

16. Rev. Diane Dowgert writes, "It is the nature of hope to rise. It lifts our spirits." Does hope lift your spirit? How? She also writes that "Hope doesn't exist on its own." What things strengthen hope? She concludes, "Hope is in our spiritual DNA...." Do you think Unitarian Universalism is a tradition of hope? Why or why not? If hopeful, what contributes to that stance? Is your congregation a place of hope? If yes, in what ways?

17. David Hood writes about how hope is motivating. He concludes, "It was Christopher Reeves ... a quadriplegic, after being thrown from his horse ... who said, 'Once you choose hope, anything's possible.'" Do you agree? How can hope make things hopeful that otherwise would seem hopeless?