



Hope

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune--without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

Emily Dickinson

Refusing to be disheartened by the overwhelming, sometimes suffocating influence of addiction in his family, and the repeated failure of 12-step programs to offer them any sustainable solution whatsoever, one man watched his loved ones ravage themselves, from their insides out, as he helplessly observed, his arms by his side, powerless to save them, alone, and forlorn. After years of scarring pain that tried to extinguish the tiny bit of hope that always remained in his heart, which wouldn't die, he turned to that small glowing ember and began to blow on it, fan it into flames, and build an equivalent counterforce of behavioral positivity that would become powerful enough to bring relief to members of his family as well as thousands who had previously known only the torture of addiction.

He walked the west side of Chicago on the potholed streets through the devastated neighborhoods, and he noticed the humanity that continued to generate sparks of hope even in the suffocating fog of despair. He had accepted long ago that nobody's life had any more value than his, but he had met some remarkable people who had achieved sobriety even in the midst

Hope

See me untethered
See me now
And see us together

And hope is what you came for
A drop in time we share
Hope and don't give up
Don't give up

If hope is a thing with feathers
Lost in the storm
Then see us fly together

And hope is what you came for
A drop in time we share
Hope and don't give up
Don't give up

See me, see me better
See me now
And see us together

Cyndi Lauper

of the worst of environments, equipped only with their hope. While news channels and others aimed their cameras at the violence, addiction, hopelessness, and despair, he focused on the experiential evidence of hope he witnessed, with his own eyes, and he began to collect it.

In the midst of such a desolate scene, these tiny glimmers of hope became "signs of life" and he began to gather these hopeful signs in desperate people together, having noticed that "hope in *community*" seemed to translate into motivation, action, and recovery. These small, consistent acts of his grew into a gathering place, a center, where those who had been failed by their previous encounters with addiction treatment could be served, whether they could pay for it or not.

And, over a short time, built on the law of attraction coupled with the magnetic, collective power of hope, an overwhelmingly positive community has sprung up in the midst of a neighborhood plagued by violence, gangs, and numerous random acts of unkindness.

Bryan Cressey is this man's name and the name of the center that has grown from the abundant love in his heart and his clarity of vision is Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center.

Above and Beyond embraces the concept of hope by utilizing the positive, selfless, and altruistic forms of it which begins by loosely defining it *as the feeling or expectation that what one desires can be had, or that events will turn out better than they were.* It's a joyful aspiration that can be captured and enjoyed in its various forms of positive anticipation and, when understood and cultured, it becomes a sustainable form of nurturing ambience in which our dreams can abide, and grow, on their journey to realization.

Many of us have been using a downgraded version of the word hope when we casually refer to something that may or may not happen. We sure hope today would be a good day. Or we hope the dirty dishes will be washed before we arrive home. However, the word 'hope' originated to mean something totally different, something much more significant. In Hebrew, it actually means 'to expect' or have some sort of 'expectation'. This means we aren't merely hoping it to be completed, we're expecting it to be completed. In Greek, it means to 'stay in expectation' with 'confidence', to trust, to be in a 'state of security'. So, we have traveled back to the origins of the word hope as we use it here, and will not be referring to the modern day, diluted meaning, which has stripped it of its superpowers.

Hope is a form of Harm Reductive Reasoning in that our form of it has no hard lines or distinct boundaries like abstinence-thinking does. We also refer to it as 'possibility thinking'.

In Brene Brown's book, "[Rising Strong](#)" she writes:

"Hope is not an emotion: It's a cognitive process - a thought process made up of what researcher C.R. Snyder called the trilogy of "Goals, pathways, and agency." Hope happens when we can set goals, have the tenacity and perseverance to pursue those goals, and believe in our own abilities to act."

Snyder also points out (as conveyed through Brown) that *"hope is learned."*



Above and Beyond embraces this behavioral way of approaching hope - as an *active* process, not passive wishing or waiting.

Brown goes on to mention that the development of hope is a by-product of struggling in life. Adversity, failure - this is the stuff that hope is born from and the raw materials of it are in ample supply at Above and Beyond.

From a 2011 Times article, "[Optimism Bias: Human Brain May Be Hardwired for Hope](#)," is offered a perspective, with roots in evolutionary psychology, which shows us that hope can be wired in the human brain to enhance survival. If present during trying times, hope can be a factor that allows some of us to transcend adversity and gather positivity for the days ahead. It shows us that we can actually "bank" hope for future use against its dissipaters and detractors.

"Hope keeps our minds at ease, lowers stress and improves physical health," the article states. *"Researchers studying heart-disease patients found that optimists were more likely than non-optimistic patients to take vitamins, eat low-fat diets and exercise, thereby reducing their overall coronary risk. A study of cancer patients revealed that pessimistic patients under the age of 60 were more likely to die within eight months than non-pessimistic patients of the same initial health, status and age."*

Psychology Today's 2011 article, "[The Will and Ways of Hope](#)" notes that hope can incorporate learning goals and become a blueprint for the future.

"People with learning goals are actively engaged in their learning, constantly planning strategies to meet their goals, and monitoring their progress to stay on track," the article explains. *"A bulk of research shows that learning goals are positively related to success across a wide swatch of human life-from academic achievement to sports to arts to science to business."*

Not only those of us stricken with the blessing of awakening from the trance of addiction have learned that life is always going to bring us challenges. Life is always going to be comprised of setbacks that intentionally try to pull us down and when one set is overcome, there's another to take its place. It's one of life's consistencies, the presence of insurmountable problems. For this reason, is it still foolish to have hope?

No. It's not. Because without hope, what are we left with? The alternatives are countless, with variations and complications that go on forever, but they are, all of them, horrid and unacceptable substitutes. We deeply believe that hope, simple hope, is fundamentally significant as a requirement for realizing and holding onto the best version of ourselves that we can construct. We have found innumerable indisputable proofs and countless experiential evidences which qualify us to say it's the most beautiful part of what it means to be human.

But hope is more than mere wishful thinking; it is the bedrock upon which we build successful, sustainable recovery. Without hope, or a desire to recover, there would be no motivation to get better. With no motivation, there would be very little meaningful action. Finally, with proper action comes improvement through a series of steps leading to a plan for recovery and working

the plan for years to come. We cannot stress more stringently the significance of hope in recovery. It's really where recovery begins.

Finding Hope

When preoccupied in an addictive substance or behavior, it not always easy to see a life beyond the addiction; beyond the chaos, pain and suffering. But hope can be found. There is no right or wrong way to find hope. Sometimes it comes easy, and sometimes we need to work to find hope.

Following are a few ways that have helped us to find hope which start with the principle of “Unconditional Self-Acceptance” (USA) in the journey of learning to love yourself.

Listen to Stories of Hope

Listening to stories of hope, success and triumphs of others can help us find hope. These stories not only inspire us, but also shed light on strategies of finding and sustaining hope even during the darkest times. Turn to someone near you and ask them their story. Then listen. Terry London call this Unconditional Other Acceptance (UOA).

Think of the Future

Look into the future and identify who and what's important to you. It could be a loved one such as a child, spouse or parents. It can also be an event or something you always wanted to do. Looking into the future helps cultivate a purpose and direction in life (i.e. hope).

Positive Affirmations

Though a simple process, positive affirmations do work. The repetition of positive affirmations leads to belief, and belief is at the heart of hope. Affirmations such as 'I am strong, I can overcome my challenges, I am a new person, I feel new hope and I can recover' rebuild a sense of self-worth and your belief that you are capable of achieving your goals. Not only do affirmations build belief, but also a confidence and a drive for change and action.

Leaning on a Higher Power

Many find hope by reaching for a higher power. This could be through spirituality, religion or philosophy. Reaching to a higher power is actually Step 2 in the 12-Step Process, "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity". Simplified this reads as 'There is help for my problem and I believe I can address it'.

Accept Your Current Situation

For someone it may be hard to accept that they are currently in a bad place. But the courage of acceptance is the first step in desiring a better future (i.e hope). Acceptance helps us realize that our current situation is not where we want to be, and helps us develop a vision of where we want to be. Without acceptance, we cannot take control of our destiny to reach a better tomorrow. Terry London calls this Unconditional Life Acceptance (ULA).

Have Realistic and Meaningful Plan

It is action that makes hopes come true. By the mere fact of developing a plan for a better future you will build hope. The more your plan, with firm action steps and dates, you will come to realize that your vision is truly attainable.

The journey and recovery from addiction is never an easy one. No one can last long and keep fighting for recovery without hope. Hope is a central ingredient in our recovery. Finding hope and meaning, together with a solid plan, helps us move forward on our journey of recovery.

What is the Alternative?

Without hope, we are left hopeless. This concept is not a stretch, it's obvious, and it carries with it despair, depression, worry, anxiety, loneliness, and suicide (or longing for death). It's awful, but those mired in it cannot see their way out.

Viktor Frankl describes a person living without hope as experiencing an *existential vacuum*, with no reason or purpose to answer for the reason for their existence. These unfortunates choose to live in a world in which there exists no guidance on what to do, and a world in which the person may not even know what she wishes to do. A person in this situation may then simply do what others do (conformism) or do what others tell him or her to do (totalitarianism). Symptoms of this existential vacuum include boredom, apathy, and psychological symptoms caused by moral and spiritual conflicts. The existential vacuum can also affect attitudes. It may be characterized by: (1) a "who cares" attitude toward life, living as if there is no tomorrow; (2) a fatalistic attitude toward life-acting as if one has no control over one's destiny, which is not true; (3) collectivist thinking-a denial of one's own personhood; and (4) fanaticism-a denial of the personhood of those who think differently. Frankl argues that these attitudes lead to the nihilism that is the breeding grounds for suicidal ideation, all of which can be dispelled by the simplest forms of hope . . . a learned behavior that can easily be passed on to others.

Who would want what's been described here?

In psychology professors Anthony Scioli and Henry Biller's book entitled, "[Hope in the Age of Anxiety](#)," chapter thirteen speaks directly to the alternatives to hope and meaning. It's entitled "Overcoming Hopelessness: Escape from Darkness" and these two professors tell us that there are nine forms of hopelessness, each related to the disruption of one or more of the basic needs that comprise hope; attachment, mastery, or survival. The authors present three "pure forms" of hopelessness resulting from breakdowns in one of these three needs or "motive systems" (alienation, powerlessness, doom). There are also six "blended" forms of hopelessness which results when two needs are challenged. This may seem complicated, but if we can overcome hopelessness by first recognizing which of these nine types we are confronting, then we have a chance at overcoming it (them). For each form of hopelessness, they present a mind-body-spirit treatment cocktail, involving a restructuring of thoughts, accessing the right kind of

hope-sustaining relationship, and specific spiritual practices. Armed with these forewarnings and prescriptions we can summon the light back into our lives.

Here are the nine types of hopelessness and just some of the strategies recommended by Scioli and Biller.

1. **Alienation** (Attachment)

Alienated individuals believe that they are somehow different. Moreover, they feel as if they have been cut loose, no longer deemed worthy of love, care, or support. In turn, the alienated tend to close themselves off, fearing further pain and rejection.

2. **Forsakenness** (Attachment and Survival)

The word "forsaken" refers to an experience of total abandonment that leaves individuals feeling alone in their time of greatest need. Recall Job in the Old Testament, crumpled over and covered with sores, pleading with a seemingly indifferent God.

3. **Uninspired** (Attachment and Mastery)

Feeling uninspired can be especially difficult for members of underprivileged minorities, for whom opportunities for growth and positive role models within the group may be either lacking or undervalued.

4. **Powerlessness** (Mastery)

Individuals of every age need to believe that they can author the story of their life. When that need is thwarted, when one feels incapable of navigating one's way toward desired goals, a feeling of powerlessness can set in.

5. **Oppression** (Mastery and Attachment)

Oppression involves the subjugation of a person or group.... The word "oppressed" comes from Latin, to "press down," and its synonym, "down-trodden," suggests a sense of being "crushed under" or "flattened."

6. **Limitedness** (Mastery and Survival)

When the struggle for survival is combined with a sense of failed mastery, individuals feel limited. They experience themselves as deficient, lacking in the right stuff to make it in the world. This form of hopelessness is all too common among the poor as well as those struggling with severe physical handicaps or crippling learning disabilities.

7. **Doom** (Survival)

Individuals weighed down by this form of despair presume that their life is over, that their death is imminent. The ones most vulnerable to sinking into this particular circle of hell are those diagnosed with a serious, life-threatening illness as well as those who see themselves

worn out by age or infirmity. Such individuals feel doomed, trapped in a fog of irreversible decline.

8. Captivity (Survival and Attachment)

Two forms of hopelessness can result from captivity. The first consists of physical or emotional captivity enforced by an individual or a group. Prisoners fall into this category as well as those help captive in a controlling, abusive relationship. We refer to this as "other-imprisonment."...An equally insidious form of entrapment is "self-imprisonment. This occurs when individuals cannot leave a bad relationship because their sense of self will not allow it.

9. Helplessness (Survival and Mastery)

Helpless individuals no longer believe that they can live safely in the world. They feel exposed and vulnerable, like a cat after being declawed or a bird grounded by a broken wing. Trauma or repeated exposure to uncontrolled stressors can produce an ingrained sense of helplessness. In the words of one trauma survivor, *"I was terrified to go anywhere on my own ... I felt so defenseless and afraid that I just stopped doing anything."*

Overcoming Alienation and its offshoots (Alienation, Forsakenness, Uninspired)

[Pure Alienation] This form of hopelessness may be fueled by cognitive distortions such as mind reading, overgeneralization, or all-or-nothing thinking. ... Many who feel alienated assume (wrongly) that absolutely no one is, or ever will be, in their corner. The antidote for mind reading is to examine the emotional evidence. This requires courage in the form of trust and openness to survey how others actually experience you.

If you feel forsaken, it is important to get outside of your head to see if your inner reality is an accurate reflection of the outside world. Most people who feel forsaken are overgeneralizing from a relatively small sample of experiences. With more extensive sampling, it is highly likely that they will encounter more hope-promoting responses from others. The antidote to all-or-nothing thinking is thinking in shades of gray-opening oneself up to the continuum of possibilities for one's life.

Overcoming Doom and its offshoots (Doom, Helplessness, Captivity)

Those who feel doomed as a result of a medical or psychiatric diagnosis may "jump to conclusions." The best antidote for jumping to conclusions is "examining the evidence." If you are diagnosed with a serious illness, do your homework and get the facts. For example, Harvard anthropologist Stephen Jay Gould was diagnosed with a rare abdominal cancer at the age of 40. When told that the median survival time for someone with this disease was only 8 months, he did some research. In his essay, "The Median Isn't the Message," Gould shared how his knowledge of statistics helped him to "examine the evidence." He was able to tell himself, "Fine, half the people will live longer. Now what are my chances of being in that half?" After factoring in his age, his relatively healthy lifestyle, the early stage of diagnosis, and the quality

of healthcare available, Gould arrived at a far more hopeful prognosis. In fact, he lived another 20 years before succumbing to an unrelated illness.

Overcoming Powerlessness and its Offshoots (Powerlessness, Oppression, Limitedness)

Three cognitive distortions frequently underlie feelings of powerlessness: discounting the positive, personalization, and labeling. When individuals cannot appreciate their talents and gifts, they are prone to discount any evidence of personal success or effectiveness. Examining the evidence is a good strategy for dealing with discounting the positive. One way to do this is to make a list of successes, particularly in the general domain you are discounting. For example, if you are prone to discounting a good grade on an exam, write down any past successes of an intellectual nature. If you tend to discount a work or social achievement, reflect on past occupational or group-related achievements.

It is common for those who are oppressed to engage in personalization and self-blame. A strategy for counteracting self-blame is reattribution (A therapeutic technique in which the patient is encouraged to consider possible alternate causes rather than dwelling on what's presented). This involves considering all the likely causes of negative emotions.

When individuals feel limited because of a perceived physical or intellectual disability, they may fall prey to labeling. To attack harmful labels, "define your terms." For example, if you feel or are labeled "stupid," reflect on the actual definition of the term. Are you always "making bad decisions"? Are you always "careless" and "unable to learn"? Unless this description, taken directly from the "American Heritage Dictionary," applies to you, then you are not "stupid."

HOPE - The Forgotten Virtue of our Time

Hope has been called the forgotten virtue of our time. Although we live in an era of considerable technological and scientific achievements, it has become an age of diminished hope or, perhaps more accurately, misdirected hope, because it is tempting to replace the virtue of hope with flimsy substitutes that cannot possibly give us what our souls ultimately need. We also live in an era marked by violence, which leads to a barrage of images sent worldwide that show citizens fighting police, children in Syria bloodied by war, refugee children washed up on a beach in Greece. These can threaten hope. But perhaps what threatens hope even more today are not these tragedies and calamities but the soft and subtle despair we settle into when we slip into ways of living that rob us of the exalted good we deserve by giving to others. The problem is not that we hope for too much, but that we have learned to settle for so little. We have caused our concept of hope to shrink and our recognition of its importance to diminish. We have lost sight of hope's transcendent dimension because we have forgotten the incomparable promise of sobriety to which hope always beckons.

To live in hope is to want nothing less for ourselves than what we capable of achieving. If achieving our true potential, each one of us, were the fundamental desire of our lives, what would change? How would we resurrect ourselves? At the very least, it would free us from the

energizing habit of substance abuse, worrying excessively about ourselves and unbind us from the joyless pastime of always comparing our status and achievements with another's. Because Above and Beyond is on our side and wants our good, we do not have to be anxious and fearful, calculating and cautious. We have time to love our neighbors and to treat them like we love them. We have time to be merciful and compassionate, patient and generous. We have time to listen and to be present, time to encourage and support, because we know that what we envision for our best selves can be and will be fulfilled. Hope frees us from the intolerable burden of thinking that so much depends on us that we become oblivious to the blessings around us, and especially to how each day our participation in activities at Above and Beyond call us out of ourselves so that we can see others around us, and show them our kindness and goodness. For those that participate in the programs at Above and Beyond, hope is a new and abundantly promising way of life characterized by joy and thanksgiving, service and generosity, hospitality and celebration and even the wonderful freedom to fail.



. . . and it all starts with the seemingly weakest, most meager of thoughts, *“maybe, just maybe, things could be better”* . . .