



## Reconsidering Hope

Hope is a quiet piece of the healing puzzle. Because it tends to live in the background and seldom moves to center stage, it's often overlooked as a key aspect of the healing process. Yet, it strikes me as one of the most essential ingredients in a healthy system.

One way to determine the importance of something is to consider what happens without it. How important is air? Well, how do we do without air? All of us can survive only a few minutes without it. Water? Food? On a strictly physiological level, it's pretty easy to determine the priorities.

However, once we enter emotional and psychological territories, it gets much more difficult to determine which attributes are most important. So, how important is hope? In my own life, I know that I fair very poorly without it. Clinically, I've seen that this is common to human beings; we all seem to do poorly when hope is absent and to do much better when it is present. Before I go farther, it might be helpful for me to clarify what I mean by hope.

### HOPE AS FUNDAMENTAL CHOICE

Hope starts with a belief that there are options for my future. Before genuine hope can emerge, it is crucial that I see that there exists for me a range of possible futures, some negative, some neutral, and some positive. *Hope is generated through an active choice, a decision to orient to the good, to positive future outcomes. Even though hope necessarily involves the future, the choice takes place again and again in the present moment.* For me, hope doesn't just happen. Hope requires action; I need to choose hope over other options. It is crucial to have a clear view of these other options before you can wield the power of your choice and generate hope.

### PSEUDO HOPE

The word 'hope' gets used in many situations and contexts. For example, hope can masquerade as denial in disguise, a cheery whipped cream covering for something unpleasant. This happens when someone says, "I hope my leg is OK" after the manual exam, the X-ray, and the MRI have all shown that there is indeed a break. We can hide behind this kind of "positive" hope to delay facing a hard truth or as an excuse for inaction. Another false hope is nothing more than a disguised fantasy. "I hope I win the lotto today." While this may be a normal fantasy of sudden wealth, it isn't genuine hope because there was no choice involved.

### INTERNAL ALCHEMY

As I reconsidered hope, clarity proved elusive; it was difficult to pin down exactly how hope helps me. After much reflection, these four points emerged as important aspects of hope.

1. Once a few drops of hope have been entered my system, my internal energy feels different, in a beneficial way. When hope emerges, I know it. The feeling tones and colors of my system shift somehow. I feel lighter and it is easier to access my energy.
2. Hope must be very concentrated because a little hope goes a long way. When things are at their darkest, if I can find a little shred of hope to orient to, I get a large shift out of the sticky muck. Hope may be an elusive, subtle thing, but it packs a whallop!
3. *Genuine hope requires effort from me.* In times of despair or crisis, the temptation is to only see the negative aspect of the situation. If I can find the perseverance and the courage to resist focusing exclusively on the negative and to look at all the options, I may discover one that is positive. Then comes the crucial moment: if I can find the strength to choose to orient toward the potential positive future, then hope is liberated and can emerge into my system.
4. Things arise in me in the presence of hope that don't seem to arise otherwise. There seems to be something alchemical about hope. It combines with various elements, energies, and emotions and acts as a catalyst to bring about some fundamental change. I've seen this time and time again clinically. *When a client suddenly finds that there may be an option that their condition will improve, "hope-less" gives way to the emerging "hope-full." When this happens, the body's energies are re-vitalized in a clear way. There is suddenly more and different energy available to support the healing process.*

It's a great challenge to try to articulate the potency inherent in hope. However, the fact that hope is mysterious in no way diminishes its effectiveness. While I don't fully understand it, I'm so grateful when hope emerges in myself or in others; things usually change for the better with hope's quiet presence.

Best wishes,

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