

HOPE AND OPTIMISM ENHANCE HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

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Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha Centre for Psychospiritual Wellbeing at Jeolikote, Uttarakhand, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

This weekend we shall reflect on the contribution of hope and optimism to health and happiness...

Mr. Rajan had built up a thriving business through hard work and sacrifice. He had just invested a few lakhs of rupees to improve his facilities when an accidental fire destroyed all that he had built up. He was devastated.

The fire gutted his business, but not his spirit. Recovering from the shock he determined to rebuild his business. He was confident he could do it although difficult. Instead of brooding and lamenting over his loss he set about finding ways and means. He first approached his insurance company. He was told it would take some time before he would be reimbursed.

He then approached a bank for loans. It refused. He went to another ... and another, and kept going from bank to bank. They all refused. He realized he was not going to get the loans he needed. But he did not give up. He knew he would find a way.

And that way was selling his large house and surrounding land and moving into a small apartment with his family. With the money from the sale, he started his business again on a very small scale. Meanwhile he received remuneration from the insurance company. Slowly the business expanded and today ten years later, his business ventures are thriving.

Mr. Rajan lived with hope. He believed he would succeed and he worked hard to make his dream come true.

Hope is the conviction of having a meaningful future despite obstacles and also choosing the pathways to make that future real.

Persons high on hope have visions of who they want to be and what they want to accomplish in life and are able to motivate themselves, and feel resourceful to accomplish their objectives.

Hope and optimism go together. Optimism provides us with a faith that the future is going to be bright, that we can accomplish our goals, whatever they may be. When in a tight spot, we reassure ourselves that things will get better.

Hope includes practical pathways to realize the bright future we envisage. We persist in seeking goals despite setbacks and obstacles. We are also flexible enough to find different ways to get to our goals or to switch goals, if needed.

HOPE THEORY

This is the understanding of hope provided by C. R. Snyder, the leading psychologist exploring hope. Snyder and his colleagues have come up with what they call the "*Hope Theory*." The theory holds that hope involves two types of thinking: agency thinking and pathway thinking.

Agency Thinking

Agency thinking refers to an individual's determination to achieve his or her goals despite possible obstacles. It reflects the self-belief one will succeed in one's endeavor. High-hope persons embrace such self-talk phrases as "I can do this" and "I am not going to be stopped."

Pathway Thinking

Pathway thinking refers to an individual's belief he or she can achieve personal goals. It involves generating an effective route to a desired goal. When that route does not bear the desired fruit, high-hope persons are able to create alternate routes and persist until desired outcomes are realized.

NOT WISHFUL THINKING

Hope, thus, is not mere wishful thinking, an illusion. It is real. It involves having goals and working towards realization of those goals, despite obstacles. Hope calls for determination and commitment. Hope was aptly expressed in Barack Obama's famous election slogan, "Yes, We Can!" But it was not just a slogan. He and an army of committed volunteers worked hard to make the dream come true.

BENEFITS OF HOPE

A large body of research shows that hope promotes health and happiness. Hope buffers people against a number of physical and mental problems and helps people heal faster and easier. Individuals who maintain high levels of hope when battling illness significantly enhance their chances of recovery.

Hope and optimism have been found to be negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, and anger and positively correlated with life satisfaction, positive physical and mental health, self-esteem, ability to adapt and cope in various situations and longer life.

In general, people who possess hope and think optimistically have a greater sense of wellbeing in addition to the improved health outcomes outlined above. Hope evokes positive emotions and reduces negative ones. Hope has been found to release endorphins which create pleasurable mood and feeling of wellbeing.

Hope is a high motivator and facilitates success in one's endeavours. Hope has been found to relate to higher achievement test scores among students. Athletes with high as compared with low hope perform significantly better in their events.

Living hopefully, thus, leads to health and happiness as well as success in life. It would be worthwhile for us to cultivate hope which calls for fighting pessimistic outlook on life and developing optimistic attitudes and working persistently toward goal realization.

INTROSPECTION

Here are few questions for us to introspect:

Do I generally have an optimistic or pessimistic outlook on life?

Do I easily give up when I face obstacles, or do I persist in my efforts until I succeed?

Is there any lesson/message for me in Mr Rajan's story? If yes, what?

PRAYER

The twin dimensions of hope presented by Snyder and colleagues – agency thinking and pathway thinking - are illustrated in the beautiful Gospel story of healing of the woman with the hemorrhages (Mark, 5, 24-35). This woman who had been suffering from chronic hemorrhages over a period of years had spent her life savings approaching many doctors in hope of healing, but with little positive outcome. Yet, she did not give up. She persisted in her hope that she will be healed. And she took an alternate pathway to healing. She believed that if she could touch Jesus's garment she would be healed. In spite of the hurdles before her, she made her way to Jesus and touched the hem of his garment. And she was healed.....

You could visualize this beautiful story of hope and optimism for a while. May be you could place yourself as a participant in the story. You could allow a fantasy to develop, allow in your imagination the incident to unfold further. What happens next? What do you see, hear and do? What emotions arise in you as you observe? What sensations do you feel?.... You could then spend a few moments conversing with Jesus or the woman.

Have a pleasant weekend.

Be well Be safe. Be blessed.

Thank you for listening.

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