

Psyche & Soul 26

MOVING INTO THE NEW YEAR WITH HOPE!

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As 2020 comes to a close, we look forward to 2021 with Hope.

2020 changed our world. 2020 has been very distressing and disruptive and in some sense a disastrous year. A year which has affected the global society in so many negative and painful ways. Covid-19 blighted our hopes and dreams, disrupted our lives in drastic ways. It undermined our sense of security and predictability. Uncontrollable spread of the deadly virus led to over a million being infected and to the death of hundreds of thousands, leaving families in grief, sometimes in despair. The lockdown caused immense suffering, especially to the vulnerable. Travel was curtailed, social contact was restricted, and we were forced to be homebound. Economy collapsed, leading to loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs. Haunting pictures of deprivation and death on the road have seared into our collective memory. There is a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, increase in mental illness and suicide.

In this context, hope is our greatest ally. Every New Year brings a fresh outlook; we look forward to better times. We dream.

And we really hope that 2021 will usher in that freshness and newness in a very special way. We need this newness very badly in every sphere of our lives. A newness that will help us wipe away the bad memories, the nightmares, of 2020. Hope that the New Year will dissipate the virus, restore health and wellbeing to all of us, usher in a safer, more peaceful, and a more equitable and compassionate society.

WHAT IS HOPE?

Hope is the conviction of having a meaningful future despite obstacles and difficulties, and also choosing the pathways and means 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 includes practical pathways to realize the bright future we envisage. We work hard at realizing that dreamed of future. 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 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 thus involves faith, belief in one's capacity to achieve desired results.

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 refers to our determination to achieve our goals despite possible obstacles, When we are high on hope, we embrace such self-talk phrases as “I can do this” and “I am not going to be stopped.”

Pathways thinking refers to the ways in which we strive to achieve these personal goals. It involves generating an effective route to a desired goal. When that route does not bear the desired fruit, we create alternate routes and persist until desired outcomes are realized.

HOPE IS 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, commitment and persistence. Hope is aptly expressed in Barack Obama’s famous election slogan. “Yes, We Can!” It was not just a slogan, a belief. He set in motion a powerful election machine, and organized an army of committed volunteers working hard to make the dream come true.

BENEFITS OF HOPE

A large body of research shows that hope promotes health and happiness. Hope buffers individuals against a number of physical and mental problems and helps them heal faster and easier. Individuals who maintain high levels of hope when battling illness significantly enhance their chances of recovery. They remain appropriately energized and focused on what they need to do in order to recuperate.

Hope is 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.

Because of these benefits, hope would be our best companion to journey through 2021. We need to believe that 2021 will be a better year, and strive with confidence and persistence to make it a better year for us and our world.

Introspection

- *How do we really feel as we come to the end of 2020 and move toward 2021?*
- *What is it that we hope for us and our world as we move into 2021?*
- *What is the newness that we would like to experience in the New Year? What is it we need to do to bring about that newness?*

Prayer

Sacred scripture provides frequent assurance from God that he will bring about better times. Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah especially speak of the better times that God will usher in particularly after times of suffering and deprivation. For example, Isaiah says, something which is very relevant in the context of

the suffering and hopelessness brought by Covid-19.: *“And (God) will destroy...the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces...”* (25, 6-8)

In the Book of Revelation, we hear the One sitting on the throne in heaven saying: *“See, I make all things new!”* (21, 5)

Christmas, the Incarnation of God, that we just celebrated, is not only about the embodiment of God, divinization of nature, as we heard in last week’s podcast, but also about God’s comforting presence with us. Through the prophet Isaiah God assures us: *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.... Fear not, for I am with you”* (43, 2-5). And Jesus’ final words in the gospel of Mathew is: *“I am with you always, to the close of the age.”* (28, 20)

This protective and caring God, our Emmanuel, is very much with us here and now, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves at year end. We could consciously attune ourselves to God’s presence to us and spend some time talking to God about our travails and tribulations, as well as joys, of 2020, and about our hopes and dreams for 2021, the newness that we would like to experience. And listen to what God has to tell us, discern what God’s New Year gift/message is to us.

I wish you a very happy, safe, healthy and blessed New Year.

Thank you for listening/ reading.

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