



Summer Journal

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Fork



Free minds, open hearts.

Hope and Despair: A Reflection

Hope seems like such an upbeat, happy topic. But I sense that to do it justice, you can't talk about hope without talking about despair. It is in those moments when all hope seems lost, and we feel overcome by a sense of futility, that we come to realize what a truly life-saving quality Hope is.

I use Hope with a capital H, because Hope is more than an attitude of having confidence and trust that the things we desire will come to pass. Hope is one of those archetypal qualities that is intrinsic to our experience of being human. It emerges in the most difficult of circumstances, as a shining beacon, saying "All is not lost. Don't give up. You will find a way." It is a force of evolution that moves us toward a more complex and comprehensive vision of wholeness. It is a fine-tuning of perception that enables us to see the long arc of history and know that progress often takes two steps forward and one step back. Progress and backlash against progress are intrinsic to the process of human evolution. As Reinhold Niebuhr so astutely observed: "Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; Therefore we are saved by hope."

Hope is often life-saving. It has been for me. Like many humans, I have had periods of darkness in my life when I have felt deep despair and self-doubt. Despair has emerged in those times when everything I knew to be true about my life is called into question, and I am turned upside down and emptied of all my former ways of knowing and being. As I sit in that place of emptiness, what brings me through to the other side is a whisper of Hope that says: "this is part of being human... this is how we grow... by letting everything that is too small for us die. It is painful. You can't avoid the pain. You will come out a larger person... trust this process."

In our collective lives, we are bombarded by realities that would bring any sane person to a state of despair. When we look at the world around us, with its suffering, misery and outrageous injustice;



New members: Tom Murphy and Jeanne Marie Merkel with Kimberly.

it would be only natural to feel hopeless. The problems we face as a human race are huge. Perhaps many of us have wondered if the Earth might just decide to sweep humans off the planet as a failed experiment. I know the thought has crossed my mind – though it hurts to admit it. What brings me back to my senses when I feel that level of despair? The sight of my grandchildren's beautiful faces. Then I realize what a cowardly thing it is to succumb to despair. I can't give up – for their sakes, I have to hold onto Hope like a life-jacket, and pull myself out of my downward spiral and get back to work.

I remember so vividly, the months preceding the 2008 election. I was at my daughter's home, and she was doing her part to keep us all informed on the issues in the election and the progress that was being made. We had gathered to watch Obama's campaign speech. My granddaughters were in their bedroom when the speech started. But soon the room was filled with the sound of the crowd chanting: "Yes, we can. Yes, we can." The chant drew the children out of their room like a piper – and they had this glow of wonder in

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From our Minister

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness. —Desmond Tutu

What gives you hope in the face of despair?

Today, as much as at any time, there seem to be so many reasons to despair. In our UU World, we are in the midst of a staggering disarray: with the resignations of three of our leaders, the death of another, and continuing revelations of the ways that our faith (even liberal UUs) are marked by deep patterns of patriarchy, white supremacy, and cronyism. In our national politics, we are faced with a callousness that would strip health insurance and other needed benefits from our most vulnerable. Over and over again, we witness the extra-judicial slaying of Black people, with no real justice for their lives, their families, and their communities. And in the wider world, as our planet cries out from the effects of climate change, we debate the legitimacy of science and divest resources from the experts charged with working with other global leaders toward solutions. In our own personal lives there is the loss and uncertainty that comes with death, illness, and aging—of ourselves and of our loved ones.

How do we find hope in the face of so much heartbreak? It is useful to remember that hope is a response to suffering and uncertainty. In a world without despair, there is no need for hope. But, how do we find hope in the face of despair? How do we cultivate the resilience necessary to push past tragedy? Lately, my hope springs from the twin propositions that *I am not in charge* and *I am not alone*.

Hope springs from the recognition that *I am not in charge*. So much of the universe is outside of our individual power and control. This recognition

relieves me of the pressure to ‘make everything right.’ It also gives me some perspective. Whether you believe in a greater power that is God, or gravity, or history, or the great human family—there is a force (or many forces), outside of the individual moving us forward in time. To some extent, this perspective allows me the grace to name life’s traumas and tragedies as part of a much larger unfolding narrative. We are but specks in the grandness of the universe.

Like a drop of water, I am inconsequential. At the same time, many drops of water together can erode mountains. *I am not alone*. We are not powerless to the forces of history. All around us, we see the evidence that the care and concern of others has created our world for us today—both its comforts and its hardships. In turn, where we place our care and concern is shaping the world for others. Hope springs from my own commitment to act in ways that create more love and justice in the world—knowing that there are others who are doing the same.

Hope is not some rosy optimism that predicts a positive future and positive outcomes. Instead, hope is our desire for the future based on our experience of the past. Hope accepts that life abounds with the bitter and the sweet. Hope reminds us that this has always been so, and still, we have persisted. Hope dares us to work toward an unknowable future—certain only that our efforts will join those of others.

The scientist Jonas Salk wrote, “Hope lies in dreams, in imagination, and in the courage of those who dare to make dreams into reality.” In the face of tragedy and despair, hope is the very thing that can turn the world around.

Reverend Kimberly Johnson Quinn



Dan Koontz and group in the last Song Writer’s Share concert of the season.



“Hope”

In *An Essay On Man*, Alexander Pope (1733-34) wrote, “Hope springs eternal in the human breast.” There is no if, when, or but to a hope that springs eternal; it is forever and everlasting, sort of like a beacon of light no matter how deep the despair. In *The Roots of English*, by Robert Claiborne (1989), “hope” and “despair” come from the same Latin root “*spe-*,” which means “to thrive, to prosper,” and “*speres*,” which means “hopes of future prosperity.” “De-“ before the word means “without.” In Spanish, “esperar” (Latin *sperare*) means “to hope” while “desperar” (Latin *desperare*) means “to be without hope.” This common root seems to indicate that hope and despair are “two sides of the same coin,” says a thoughtful Robert Hilliker from the Institute for Clinical Social Work, where he published his paper in 1989 that says, “Despair exists on a continuum with hope, and embracing this notion might lead to freedom, creativity, and healing where you least expect it.” Referencing a passage from Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Hilliker quotes, “It is out of the deepest depth that the highest must come to its height.”

“Hope cannot exist without despair,” write many philosophers, psychologists, songs, and poems as they struggle to embrace this dual existence. As a child of the 1960s and raised on classic Rock’nRoll, I carry hope around with me everywhere I go and have long grasped that despair, its edgy flipside, comes along too. I am well-versed in songs and stories of the greatest of loves that have slipped away. I am all too aware that the more I hold on to hope, the more I allow despair in equal measure. My personal history has a few unforgettable tales of crash landings or of pulling myself up

out of the holes where I have fallen.

As I’ve grown, both “hope” and “despair” have taught me more of their nature and true meaning. I would not have had the capacity to deepen this understanding without coming to our congregation most Sundays and listening to the wise words of our ministers and speakers.

Hope does not promise that everything will be as I want it to be; but with hope there is a way for that hard reality to be all right, and to come to better terms with it. It is no small feat in this day and age to have the faith that hope will still be there when despair happens. It is from the depths of despair that I have experienced hope springing up in unexpected ways.

Pamela Wittenberg

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their eyes, as they came and sat with us, and then we all joined in the chant together: “Yes, we can. Yes, we can.” They stayed with us through the speech, mesmerized by the message of Hope.

I think often of that night, and of all that we, as a nation, accomplished during eight years of leadership that inspired Hope. And I know that the backlash against that progress was bound to happen. And that backlash is fueled by psychological manipulation that is geared at destroying Hope. So how do we hang on? I’ve found it crucial to limit exposure to manipulative media, and to seek out community that affirms the core values that need to be protected. A community that is anchored in Hope and Justice.

So I brought myself into the fold of this Unitarian Universalist Congregation, and last Sunday became a member. Thank you for your welcome. I look forward to working with you to bring a message of Hope back into our world.

Jeanne Marie Merkel

The Blind Eye

I am reading *Galileo's Daughter* by Dava Sobel. She describes a period during the Protestant upheaval in the 1600s when the Catholic Church suppressed heretical ideas through its "Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition." When Galileo's newly refined telescope confirmed through visual evidence the absurd notion that the earth revolved around the sun, the inquisitors called him to Rome. After a lengthy trial they added his writings to their list of heretical works and placed the 70-year-old Galileo under house arrest for the remainder of his life.

Galileo had many powerful friends, counts and princes, political leaders in Pisa, Florence, Siena and Rome: some, former students; others, he had assisted in the practical aspects of statecraft, improving artillery fire, draining swamps, solving engineering and architectural problems. These men and women helped save him from execution or torture, but they dared not raise their voices to spare him humiliation.

To them it was more important to demonstrate their loyalty to Roman Catholic beliefs than to speak or even to see the truth. Acting on the fear that officers or spies of the Inquisition might pay a visit to them, some burned correspondence they had received from Galileo and hid the telescopes Galileo had manufactured for them.

Meanwhile an Austrian protestant translated Galileo's works into Latin for all the educated world to read.

This was a time when your political or religious affiliation directed your view of what is real. Reading this book, I tried to imagine myself a farmer tilling my vineyard in the hills above Florence. *If the earth is spinning, why can't I feel it? When I drop my hoe, wouldn't it fly off into the air if we were spinning?* Galileo may be a perfectly good mathematician and a useful artilleryman, but when it comes to his abstract theories, this farmer would likely stand by the Church.

Unfortunately, today we are too familiar with this phenomenon. An entire political party laughs at the scientific evidence of global warming. Our president thinks vaccines may cause autism. And on the other side, some who consider themselves progressive share the same suspicion of vaccines, while others only trust scientists who confirm beliefs they already hold dear.

We turn a blind eye to our opponents. Truth is less important to us than where we learned it, or who else believes it.

I am lucky to be married to a history teacher and know that this is not an unusual state of affairs. Most news sources in the 1800s had a political point of view; some were owned outright by political parties happy to publish scandal true and false about political opponents. Although fake news has taken on a new dimension with the advent of the internet, it has been part of American elections since Jefferson ran against Adams.

Perhaps this condition of intransigent beliefs is almost normal. Perhaps the relative unanimity we experienced in the 1950s was a legacy of the two World Wars when we were locked in a desperate crisis. That was a time when government censors controlled the press and even personal letters, a time when a British ship with 5,000 men was sunk without a word of it in the newspapers.

Was it a better time? Not something we would wish for.

Yet it was a time when political leaders with different viewpoints were able to accomplish things far beyond us now. Can you imagine an Eisenhower, a Republican West Point graduate, passing the interstate highway system through a Democrat controlled congress? Today he would not have been able to push it through a Republican congress.

If bitter partisan disagreement is the normal condition of governance, how do moral people on both sides prevail?

Here's a laundry list of advice I attempt to remember: Don't let anger befuddle you. Don't tilt against windmills. Keep your ego out of the fight. Accept your own complicity. Attempt to see the real human needs behind your opponents' words.

But when none of this calms me, I remind myself that the men who created our institutions of government had seen it all: mad kings, childish kings, populist uprisings, incompetent judges and corrupt legislators. Having no delusions regarding the perfectibility of human behavior they created a system of checks and balances that curbs the frequently imperfect men and women we have elected. For not always do we the people, in fair and open elections, make perfect decisions.

Mark Potter

We strive for peace in our hearts and in the world around us.

We open our doors to all faiths....

On April 15 the Meetinghouse celebrated a Seder.



From left our organizers: Martha Potter, Allie Holstein, Carol Holstein and David Holstein.



On June 14 our Muslim friends joined us in an Iftar to break their Ramadan fast.

Over 100 friends and religious leaders from throughout the community joined us in this festive potluck.



Prayer blankets for private prayer in the downstairs classroom.



Ken Dorph receives a birthday thank you from a friend. Ken's dream brought us all together.

Helping Hands Fund Spreads Hope

Every week at Sunday service, we are invited to make an offering to the “bowl at the back” that is then used to support our work in the greater community (with a portion going toward the Minister’s Discretionary Fund). The decisions made as to where these Helping Hands funds are sent aim to reflect our values and mission as a congregation and to share our hope for a kinder, more compassionate environment.

Our mission statement includes the following words: “We act against exclusion, oppression, and violence...When fear strikes, we stand on the side of love.” This year, the Helping Hands Fund has attempted to address these by distributing our monies, amounting to over \$3,000, to three local East End agencies. Children from immigrant families were assisted in differing ways by two agencies. The North Fork Spanish Apostolate received a donation to continue providing immigrant children with day

camp and sleep away camp opportunities, carrying on our past assistance to a very successful program. Centro Corazón de Maria in Hampton Bays was benefited by funds to pay passport application fees for children of immigrant families. These will allow immigrant parents to prove the citizenship of their children, removing one of the many concerns now present in their lives. Finally, The Shinnecock Health Center is now able to purchase medical equipment that will provide for better service to the patients of the Shinnecock Nation.

The hope that is spread from your donations into the “bowl at the back” is moving out into the community. The next hope is that you will continue to pass on additional ways to spread our mission of “Standing on the Side of Love” beyond our walls.

Carol Holstein

More spring events....



Susan Kane with friends at the Summer Solstice cookout.



Kimberly welcoming Maya and Zianya Kane.



Mark and helper constructing our new sign.

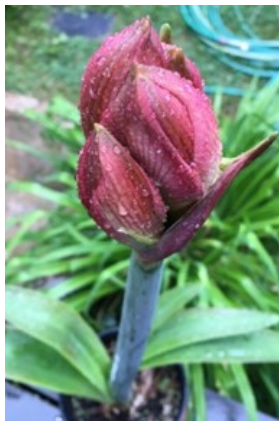
The Christmas gift

I told my Christmas-gift amaryllis that it's ok that it didn't bloom this year. I have a photo of last year's coming into being, unfolding slow and powerful and delicate. And yet, here's this year's. It's green; it's alive. The leaves shoot out thick and vital. It's different from - not less than - last year's. The next morning I woke with this phrase in my mind, *'the universe unfolds itself to us each moment. We are the unfolding.'*

Though these days when I wake up in the morning, my first feeling is as likely as not to be dread. Just a moment of 'oh no.' I have developed a routine for myself, and when my eyes open and I find that 'oh no' coming up, I breathe, and look at the blue or grey sky I'm lucky enough to be able to see with my head still on the pillow, and say that old line from *Hair*, "Good morning starshine, the earth says hello."

I think all of us have probably had the experience in our lives of no hope, and it's maybe only when you completely feel its absence that you know what it is. In one way or another, at one time or another, many of us have visited our own nadir. And it's from that bottom point, that abyss, that (when you've been there a while and the moment becomes right) you may feel the energy that wants to go back up. And to me that is hope. We might not understand hope, or welcome it so, if we hadn't actually felt despair. After a long cold winter, on a day that surprises us with a little bit of warmth, the sun shining, simply the change in the earth's relationship to the sun as we move through our phases – something in us begins to rise.

I think maybe I'm not flowering this year either. And though I told the bulb I loved it anyway, I am often not so kind to myself.



There's a classic meditation where we imagine in our belly a point of light and, with our breath, feel that point expand to form a sphere that encloses us, and, with our breath, to continue to expand to our surroundings, to our planet, our solar system, our galaxy, the entire universe and all the universes. And then, with our breath, we follow the cycle back. So we can talk about hope as a *rising*, not just within each of us but within our larger sphere – our community, our country, our world.

A few months ago I taught a qigong class after Sunday service in the main sanctuary/zendo/yoga studio/group meeting/ art gallery/performance and celebration space here at the UU Meetinghouse. As our group imagined we were bears and felt our vitality connecting us to the energy of the earth, I became aware of an otherworldly and haunting sound that wove in and out of our words and silences. This wasn't our own chi energy vibrating, exactly. What I heard was the Easter choir practicing downstairs.

I was struck by it, by how all of us come here to this Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse to work through being awake and human on this earth at this moment, as indeed we all are.

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I decided to carry up the gear for the outdoor shower from the basement last week, hoping the weather might soon turn warm enough for swimming. And there, in a dark corner, I noticed an old amaryllis plant, from a year or two ago: soil bone dry, with a six-inch very white shoot. I brought it up to the deck and, today, it's twice as high and deep green.

Soon, I *hope*, it will flower.

By Tina Curran



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Hope and Despair

“I hope I win Powerball this week!” (No, I still haven’t won; I say that every week!). “I hope it won’t rain the day of our party.” “I hope my pot roast isn’t too dry.” We use the word “hope” countless times a day, but what is hope? In our day-to-day lives it is simply a desire or expectation; wishful thinking. But in times of despair or darkness, it is what keeps us going and looking toward a brighter future. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We must accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope.”

It’s easy to think the future will be bright when our present is carefree and easy. But when we are going through difficult times, either personally or within our community, that is when we most need to draw on our hope for a better future. Hope is optimism; it is *knowing* that we will get through this dark time even though we don’t see any signs of things getting better at the moment.

I work with victims...and survivors of domestic violence. So many women and men are going through the darkest times of their lives and feel like there is no hope in sight. Experiencing emotional, psychological and physical abuse can destroy a person’s sense of self-worth, and trust in his or her own thoughts and decision making ability. Hearing constant insults and degrading words directed at oneself, a person can begin to believe he or she is worthless and may even deserve the abuse.

Our community, local, national and world-wide is going through some very stressful times lately. That’s not to say that it was perfect before; but with the daily news reports of bombings, shootings and

other tragedies, it’s easy to feel despair and hopelessness. With such large-scale tragedies, we might feel like we have no power to affect positive change.

But it is hope that keeps us going in our personal and community hardships. Sometimes it is difficult to muster up a positive outlook on our own and we may need support from friends or professionals to develop hope, but without it we would fall into depression and despair. Hope motivates us to try to find a way out of our adverse situation, or to work with others to create harmony in our community.

Hope is a powerful spiritual practice. Hope guides us to look for the best possible outcome in a grim situation. With hope, we can find some peace of mind even before a problem is completely resolved. Positive visualization, focusing on what *is* good in life, and living in the moment, are all ways to manifest hope.

Whether we are dealing with our third car breakdown in a month, or a severe illness in ourselves or a loved one, hope is what keeps us from falling into despair. When our community has been hurt by violence or racist incidents, hope is what brings us together with like-minded people to create positive change.

Anne Lamott, a novelist and political activist concisely stated, “Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don’t give up.”

Pamela Grienke



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