

**Looking Outward:
The Wellspring of Hope**

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(This talk is dedicated to Dr. Ronna Jevne who deepened my understanding of hope.)

I learned about hope in Hiroshima. That may seem incongruous, given the devastation and immense human suffering caused by the atomic bomb attack in 1945. About twenty years ago, when I visited Hiroshima for the first time, I spent a day in the museum in the city's Peace Memorial Park, with its vivid, even electrifying, depictions of atomic horror. I interviewed some of the survivors and heard tales of unimaginable personal suffering. The day was one of unremitting gloom.

With my friends, I went back to the hotel. We sank into chairs in the lobby, with celebration the farthest thing from our minds. The concierge came by and told us a baseball game would start in an hour – Hiroshima against Tokyo. On an impulse, we took a taxi to the stadium, bought baseball caps and got caught up in the frenzy of the hometown crowd cheering for Hiroshima. By the end of the game (it ended in a tie!) we'd learned the rhythms of the Japanese chants and performed them exuberantly.

Afterwards, we reflected on the good time we'd had. The evening had not been frivolous but it had offered us a release from the horror of the

day and allowed our minds to focus on the future. Hiroshima had re-built itself; life went on. Hope for a better future was in the air.

If the people of Hiroshima can have hope, I've often told myself, so can I. Hope has overcome fear in my own life. Hope has overcome even the death of those close to me: my father, my daughter, my wife.

Everyone has a story of hope. Hope, it appears is ubiquitous. I entered the word hope in the Google search engine and in 0.21 seconds, 102 million responses popped up on the screen, from Bob Hope's golf classic to the Cancer Hope Network, from Hope International University in Southern California to New Hope Natural Media Online (whatever that is). There are many Operation Hope organizations and the music, travel and education industries are dotted with themes of hope.

Google even offers a daily summation of news items dealing with hope. I clicked on that site and in 0.87 seconds, 102,000 items came into view, starting with "Israel's New Holocaust Museum Offers Hope for the Future," moving on to "Stem Cell Technology Sparkles with Hope," and "Teachers Hope Book Swap Empties Shelves, Opens Minds," the last item apparently referring to a project in Pennsylvania in which library books are shared among students (a worthy expression of hope indeed).

Infused with all this hope, I went downstairs for breakfast and was greeted by a front-page headline in the daily newspaper, “When All That’s Left Is Hope,” a story about a mother still searching for her son who was presumed drowned ten years ago. So hope, it seems, is not all sweetness and light.

I turned to my Webster’s dictionary to see if it could produce a meaning of hope in a few words, and I found: Hope – “to cherish a desire with expectation of fulfillment,” e.g. we hope for great things from our children. But then the dictionary raised a much deeper meaning in explaining “hope against hope,” which is to hope without any basis for expecting fulfillment. This brings us closer to the mystery of hope.

What is it that gives us hope? Can you measure it? Can you see it in a store window and buy it? Can you put it in your suitcase and extract it when you’ve arrived some place? We know that hope is the opposite of despair or despondency, but how exactly can we get hold of it when we need it?

I think that hope must be much more than a bridging word signifying a wish for something we cannot control, e.g. “I hope the weather will be warm tomorrow.” Hope must be more than a passive shrug: “Let’s hope for the best.” Hope is more than a blind assumption that things will turn out

all right. Hope is best understood as a verb, connoting an active desire with the expectation of fulfillment: we long for something, and will it to happen. Hope, of course, cannot guarantee that we get what we long for, but it activates us in the search and provides a pathway from vision to reality. Hope is a motivator. The bigger the dream, the stronger must be the hope. Through hope, we overcome.

I hope for the abolition of nuclear weapons. But I must energize this hope in order to make it meaningful. I must be part of the movement for change in this paramount human security issue of our time. To hope for abolition means learning to think in a more human-centered way. To hope for abolition means participating in a range of activities. To hope for abolition means committing myself every day to the further ascent of humanity.

I have found that hope is not something to take but to give, not found by searching inside ourselves but by projecting ourselves outward. This is the mystery of hope. We cannot claim hope or expect to own it or define it as a right. Hope is outward bound. So how to find the elusive element within to project outward? Ah, the mystery.

We can approach this eternal question by at least looking outward. Do you see the sunrise, that first glow of pink on the horizon, giving way to

a burst of light as the sun, in its splendor, rises? Do you see the sunset, the gentle lowering of that great ball of fire settling beneath a cloud, gradually dropping from view, its traces leaving the promise of a tomorrow? Do you see the mountains enduring through the ages in their snow-capped majesty? Do you see the ocean, the vast expanse of water that provides both life and furious power? Do you see the photo of the earth as a whole taken by the astronauts that shows the beauty, the unity, the fragility of the planet? Do you see the work of creation, the art, the sciences, the music, the movement forward of society that infuses us with the qualities of life in its full splendor?

Yes, we see these things. And then we look again at the photos of the devastation of Hiroshima, the bloated corpses of the Tsunami, the dead of warfare, the children with AIDS, the victims of poverty and destitution. These are real scenes of life too and too often they appear to overwhelm us or lead to compassion fatigue.

So the two sets of images must be balanced: the beautiful and the ugly. Which will prevail as history moves forward? How can we exercise hope for the human condition? I cannot look into the hearts of everyone to determine this. I can only look into my own heart and there begin the push outward. I must be outward bound to find the hope I seek.

