

Message of Hope from the Islamic Perspective-Never Give up Hope

We all acknowledge that we are overwhelmingly passing through challenging and difficult time leaving us to the point where one sees no way out. That's why Islam teaches us to keep moving forward with optimism because hope allows us to envisage a better future or a good outcome.

The Noble Qur'an teaches us many stories that we should believe in hope. The story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) (PBUH, peace be upon him) and how he was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused of fornication and imprisoned, his father Ya'qub (Jacob) PBUH was full of sorrow but never lost hope. Jacob never give up, and Allah united them after 40 years. Additionally, Prophet Ayyub (Jonah) PBUH was afflicted with adversity of losing his wealth and progeny but did not despair, he called out to Allah. Then Allah responded to him by granting him all that he lost; his health, wealth and family.

God willing, the world will not end even though the pandemic has been with us now almost a year now. Many similar incidents happened like plagues but the life didn't end. Similarly, the Spanish flu (1918 to 1920), infecting 500 million globally and killed approximately 50 million people. Examples of the First World War, which concluded with 41 million casualties. The calamity of the Second World War ended with the death of 85 million people, but humanity also survived and with the Grace of Allah we will survive. So, keep your hope up and believe that things will turn up for a better future.

Gratitude Can Lead to Hope

At the addiction recovery homes, many saw themselves as worthless and the world was corrupt and against them. In our groups, we asked the men and women to think of one or two experiences that day for which they were thankful. It took time, but they mentioned a good meal, a kindness from another, someone's sharing that was helpful, a phone call from family or friend, a good walk, or nice weather. As weeks went by the residents increased their gratitude for experiences and helpful events. Their general attitude began to change significantly with more positive thinking about themselves and others.

Gratitude can lead to hope. There are still difficult experiences, but one creates balance. Hope for the future starts to become real.

I Corinthians 13 – The Love Poem

And these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Loving relationships are key to finding hope and maintaining faith in others, self and a higher power. Friendships can allow one to understand the self and one's circumstances. The friend – or family member – values one!

As one confides in another, the ruminations inside can dissolve or be brought into focus. Hope emerges, not from self alone, but by the wisdom and encouragement of a friend. Love and positive relationships are essential to Hope. With the isolation of COVID, it's important for all of us to maintain contact with those who are our friends and family.

How a Humanist Finds Hope

In times of great conflict and crisis, those with faith tend to further lean into their beliefs. That reassurance can help them push through difficult times.

What, then, can Humanists, who are secular and believe in science-based evidence, do to stay strong?

When feeling overwhelmed with the negativity occurring these days here are a few suggestions to overcome that and find hope:

1 - Take breaks: If you notice that the more you hear about something, the worse your mental state gets, take a mental break from the issue. Take a mental break all around. Disconnect for an evening or weekend and indulge in things that make you happy like nature or good food.

2 - Lean on your support network: Even if those around you react differently to difficult situations, the importance of human connection can not be forgotten. Speak about what is on your mind to those around you and allow them to lift your spirits. We may not be able to meet in person, but telephone and Zoom/Facetime calls can be a big help.

3 - Inform yourself: the more you know on a certain topic, the more potential solutions you will be able to find or think of. Make sure the sources you look at to find answers are reliable and fact-based, not emotional and hyperbolic. Do not let yourself fall too deep into a topic that is straining you, but do not discard the idea that knowledge is power. Examine how historically dark times have passed and recovery has happened.

Give yourself the space to experience your struggles, acknowledge them, and work to overcome them. Most important of all, to hang onto hope remember that things are constantly changing. The factors that make you feel overwhelmed in this moment are not permanent.

Hope from a Unitarian Perspective

“Hope is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn’t permanent.”

- *Jean Kerr, American playwright and humourist*

Generally, most humans would agree and accept that hope is a belief that situations can improve and that hope is often a part of relieving suffering and contributing to thriving. The question is how do we create, develop, reinforce and encourage hope in ourselves and others.

Many Unitarians are non-theists and / or Humanist in their religious orientation and, therefore, don’t have a belief that a god will bestow hope as a gift to selected people or that a deity is bending the moral arc of the universe towards goodness or that it is the love of a god within humans that motivates them to take action to alleviate suffering and contribute to the happiness of others. A non-theistic person must find alternate beliefs to create, develop, reinforce and encourage hope in themselves and in others.

One alternative source can be found in nature because these beliefs and aspirations can be based on the natural response of empathy. It is a natural regard for life and concern about suffering that is observed in most reasonably healthy humans, whether believers or non-believers. We are led through this empathy to create bonds among us that serve to alleviate suffering and contribute to thriving. The bonds of relationships in families, in friendships, in communities become the sources of hope, reassurance and comfort for many non-theistic Humanists. A belief in love among all humanity can become one of the non-believer’s highest aspirations and greatest source of hope.

Another source of hope for non-believers can be found in knowledge and reason. For instance, if we discover through science and rational pursuit of knowledge that we are inextricably linked to the web of all existence then our hope can lie in the belief that the continued, healthy existence of humanity, all life and the environment is possible. Our hope can lie in a belief in the future thriving of our descendants and the descendants of all our human family. The possibility of a better future for everyone can become one of a non-theistic Humanist’s highest aspirations and greatest sources of hope.