

Some Thoughts on the Topic of Hope

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I will be talking about hope in the context of the challenges of daily life. I am not interested in examining the idea of "hope" as a metaphysical or intellectual abstraction, but rather as an important and practical component of the psychological, social and spiritual struggles which we encounter in daily life.

As we consider the nature of hope, we will also consider some additional attitudes which are related to hope -- doubt, despair, and faith. In fact, it might be helpful to consider these four elements as parts of a spectrum. Our basic attitude toward life can be centered at any point on this spectrum, from despair at one end to living spiritual faith at the other end. Please keep the image of this spectrum in mind as we proceed with our discussion of hope. Fear moves us toward despair and our ideals draw us in the direction of hope and faith.

It is likely that we most often find ourselves somewhere in the middle here, moving between hope and doubt. Those of you with a strong experience of faith will likely be somewhere between a sure grasp of faith sometimes consisting only of hope. If you often find yourself dominated by feelings of despair, I urge you to spend more time in prayer and worship so that you might find the hope and faith you need in order to live more fully and more productively.

The book tells us that,

P.52 - §2 ". . . Mortal man earns even his status as an ascension candidate by his own faith and hope."

Hope may be thought of as a positive attitude toward future possibilities. In the attitude of hope we imagine that some ideal state will be a reality in the future. Thus our ideals also play an important role in sustaining hope.

P.1459 - §5 ". . . truth can never become man's possession without the exercise of faith. This is true because man's thoughts, wisdom, ethics, and ideals will never rise higher than his faith, his sublime hope. And all such true faith is predicated on profound reflection, sincere self-criticism, and uncompromising moral consciousness. Faith is the inspiration of the spiritized creative imagination."

P.911 - §5 "The ideals of the race are the chief support and assurance during the critical times when civilization is in transit from one level to another."

When we talk about hope there are many goals toward which our hope might be directed. Let's list some of these:

Hope for personal health.

Hope for the success of some personal undertaking.
Hope for the well-being of our families.
Hope for the future of our children.
Hope for the success of the Urantia revelation.
Hope for personal salvation.
Hope for life after death.
Hope for our world.

It should be noted that in each of these examples there is a time horizon -- a time in the future for which we hope that some particular outcome will have occurred. Some of these horizons are closer to the present day than others. Some exist beyond the end of our lives here in this world. The Urantia Book contains a comment which I believe directly relates to this.

P.1295 - §3 There is a direct relationship between maturity and the unit of time consciousness in any given intellect. The time unit may be a day, a year, or a longer period, but inevitably it is the criterion by which the conscious self evaluates the circumstances of life, and by which the conceiving intellect measures and evaluates the facts of temporal existence.

P.1295 - §5 In the maturity of the developing self, the past and future are brought together to illuminate the true meaning of the present. As the self matures, it reaches further and further back into the past for experience, while its wisdom forecasts seek to penetrate deeper and deeper into the unknown future. And as the conceiving self extends this reach ever further into both past and future, so does judgment become less and less dependent on the momentary present. In this way does decision-action begin to escape from the fetters of the moving present, while it begins to take on the aspects of past-future significance.

Here the authors are talking about the time horizon which we use to evaluate our lives. But they have more to say about this:

P.1295 - §6 Patience is exercised by those mortals whose time units are short; true maturity transcends patience by a forbearance born of real understanding.

P.1295 - §7 To become mature is to live more intensely in the present, at the same time escaping from the limitations of the present. The plans of maturity, founded on past experience, are coming into being in the present in such manner as to enhance the values of the future.

P.1295 - §8 The time unit of immaturity concentrates meaning-value into the present moment in such a way as to divorce the present of its true relationship to the not-present--the past-future. The time unit of maturity is proportioned so to reveal the coordinate relationship of past-present-future that the self begins to gain insight into the wholeness of events, begins to view the landscape of time from the panoramic perspective of broadened horizons.

I bring this passage to your attention because I think it relates directly to the time horizon of our hopes. If our time units are short and we cannot envision life beyond the turbulence of the present world situation, we are likely to become pessimistic or even fall into despair. It is important to think in longer time units and to focus our hopes out into the future beyond the present turbulence. In this way we can find strength to work in the present for a better future situation.

One of the great gifts which we receive by reading The Urantia Book is the radical expansion of our time horizon to encompass an understanding of the distant past as well as insights into the distant future. This should help us to work more effectively in the present moment, in the present situation.

The book tells us that,

P.215 - §3 "The true perspective of any reality problem--human or divine, terrestrial or cosmic--can be had only by the full and unprejudiced study and correlation of three phases of universe reality: origin, history, and destiny. The proper understanding of these three experiential realities affords the basis for a wise estimate of the current status."

The Urantia Book gives us many of the tools we need to evaluate our situation relative to cosmic reality and take actions which will be truly helpful within this expanded context.

When I look at the present world situation and feel overwhelmed by the difficulties and complexities of it, I am reminded of Adam and Eve and their experience. Please let me read a passage describing Adam and Eve's view of planetary problems.

P.839 - §4 Adam and Eve found themselves on a sphere wholly unprepared for the proclamation of the brotherhood of man, a world groping about in abject spiritual darkness and cursed with confusion worse confounded by the miscarriage of the mission of the preceding administration. Mind and morals were at a low level, and instead of beginning the task of effecting religious unity, they must begin all anew the work of converting the inhabitants to the most simple forms of religious belief. Instead of finding one language ready for adoption, they were confronted by the world-wide confusion of hundreds upon hundreds of local dialects. No Adam of the planetary service was ever set down on a more difficult world; the obstacles seemed insuperable and the problems beyond creature solution.

P.839 - §5 They were isolated, and the tremendous sense of loneliness which bore down upon them was all the more heightened by the early departure of the Melchizedek receivers. Only indirectly, by means of the angelic orders, could they communicate

P.840 - §0 with any being off the planet. Slowly their courage weakened, their spirits drooped, and sometimes their faith almost faltered.

P.840 - §1 And this is the true picture of the consternation of these two noble souls as they pondered the tasks which confronted them. They were both keenly aware of the enormous undertaking involved in the execution of their planetary assignment.

P.840 - §2 Probably no Material Sons of Nebadon were ever faced with such a difficult and seemingly hopeless task as confronted Adam and Eve in the sorry plight of Urantia.

But they would have sometime met with success had they been more farseeing and patient. Both of them, especially Eve, were altogether too impatient; they were not willing to settle down to the long, long endurance test.

Here we have a clear example of hope being lost when a time horizon is not appropriate to the magnitude of the undertaking. Adam and Eve wanted to see results in a much shorter time frame than was possible given the situation in which they found themselves.

If you look at the situation in the world and feel overwhelmed, or if you feel you are losing hope, think about this story of Adam and Eve. Here we have a story about superhuman beings with extensive education and background who became disoriented by the magnitude of the problems in this world. If this could happen to them, then I shouldn't feel so badly when I find myself struggling with the same issue.

But since the time of Adam and Eve we have also had Jesus experiencing life on this world and we have his life as an example of how to move forward creatively during times of extreme difficulty when all hope appears to be lost.

It is helpful to consider the time horizon which Jesus used during his mortal life. His focus was on working in the present for the future appearance of the "kingdom of Heaven." He held within his mind an understanding of the true destiny of humanity. I believe that this is our challenge today. We must cultivate an understanding of this destiny. We must develop ways of working in our daily lives which will enable us to work creatively for the realization of that destiny.

One of our challenges is to strengthen hope to the point where it becomes living faith. When I find myself moving from a position of hope to a position of doubt and despair, I remind myself of several comments which the revelators make.

P.2070 - §8 "But mistake not! these compromised ideals of the Master are still latent in his gospel, and they will eventually assert their full power upon the world."

P.1608 - §1 ". . . no matter what blunders your fellow men make in their world management of today, in an age to come the gospel which I declare to you will rule this very world. The ultimate goal of human progress is the reverent recognition of the fatherhood of God and the loving materialization of the brotherhood of man."

I find that reviewing these passages helps me to mobilize my hopes in the direction of faith and to overcome the tendency to slide into despair. I believe these statements are true and it is this belief which sometimes saves me.

If we have hope for the long-term outcome of humanity's evolutionary adventure on this planet, we become empowered to work toward the achievement of that distant goal.

One of the enemies of hope is the thought that our vision of the future, our vision of the kingdom of heaven, our values, and our hopes are simply images created by our creative

imaginings -- images which the mind creates in order to give us a sense of stability and purpose. The Urantia Book addresses this issue in an eloquent passage on page 1118:

"To the unbelieving materialist, man is simply an evolutionary accident. His hopes of survival are strung on a figment of mortal imagination; his fears, loves, longings, and beliefs are but the reaction of the incidental juxtaposition of certain lifeless atoms of matter. No display of energy nor expression of trust can carry him beyond the grave. The devotional labors and inspirational genius of the best of men are doomed to be extinguished by death, the long and lonely night of eternal oblivion and soul extinction. Nameless despair is man's only reward for living and toiling under the temporal sun of mortal existence. Each day of life slowly and surely tightens the grasp of a pitiless doom which a hostile and relentless universe of matter has decreed shall be the crowning insult to everything in human desire which is beautiful, noble, lofty, and good.

"But such is not man's end and eternal destiny; such a vision is but the cry of despair uttered by some wandering soul who has become lost in spiritual darkness, and who bravely struggles on in the face of the mechanistic sophistries of a material philosophy, blinded by the confusion and distortion of a complex learning. And all this doom of darkness and all this destiny of despair are forever dispelled by one brave stretch of faith on the part of the most humble and unlearned of God's children on earth."

Without hope, without ideals, without a vision of a better and more meaningful future, we become paralyzed in our ability to take positive creative action in the world. If we do not have a vision of an ideal state which we are trying to achieve, how can we expect to make wise decisions in daily life?

The past century has seen an increase in the world of philosophical positions which say that our hopes are simply psychological illusions. Religious beliefs have been portrayed as unjustifiable opinions. Some philosophers have gone so far as to deny the existence of knowledge and truth. Values are portrayed as simply arising from emotional and social pressures. The world is understood to exist without meaning or purpose. From this perspective, passionate commitment to anything -- relationships, religious perspectives, political ideologies -- is not only useless but indicative of serious mental illness. Indeed, during the times of the Soviet Union people with strong religious convictions were placed in mental hospitals for treatment. This is still happening today in China.

The book says,

P.2076 - §6 "Scientists have unintentionally precipitated mankind into a materialistic panic; they have started an unthinking run on the moral bank of the ages, but this bank of human experience has vast spiritual resources; it can stand the demands being made upon it. Only unthinking men become panicky about the spiritual assets of the human race. When the materialistic-secular panic is over, the religion of Jesus will not be found bankrupt. The spiritual bank of the kingdom of heaven will be paying out faith, hope, and moral security to all who draw upon it "in His name."

We are also told that,

P.1766 - §4 "There is but one struggle for those who enter the kingdom, and that is to fight the good fight of faith. The believer has only one battle, and that is against doubt--unbelief."

I believe that when the authors of the book refer to "doubt" in this context, they are referring to that doubt which leads us to believe that our ideals and values are self-created abstractions which have no real meaning or value outside of our own subjective lives.

What is missing in these nihilistic assessments of the inner life is a recognition of the presence of the Thought Adjuster and the role which this fragment of divinity plays in the organizing and directing of the mortal mind. Consider the following:

P.1209 - §5 "Circle by circle your intellectual decisions, moral choosings, and spiritual development add to the ability of the Adjuster to function in your mind; circle by circle you thereby ascend from the lower stages of Adjuster association and mind attunement, so that the Adjuster is increasingly enabled to register his picturizations of destiny with augmenting vividness and conviction upon the evolving consciousness of this God-seeking mind-soul."

Many elements of our ideals and hopes may indeed be traced to social and psychological sources. Many of our beliefs and values are relative to our economic and social situation. But it is essential that we appreciate the role of the Thought Adjuster in our inner lives.

This pre-personal fragment of divinity exists within the mortal mind and constantly attempts to orient the personality toward eternal realities. The result, in the mind of a person yielding to this influence, is a gradual emergence of a consciousness of universe reality. The mind begins to function relative to ideals and hopes which resonate with spiritual values. In this context the work of the Adjuster in the mortal mind may be understood as being analogous to the working of a gyroscope in a ship or an airplane. It is a mechanism providing orientation and a sense of direction -- physical in the case of the ship or airplane, spiritual in the case of the mortal mind. On page 1182 the Adjuster is described as, "the prisoner of spirit hope confined within the mortal mind."

I believe the authors of The Urantia Book have captured the essence of this situation with the quote on page 2096 which says,

P.2096 - §7 "In the realm of religious experience, spiritual possibility is potential reality. Man's forward spiritual urge is not a psychic illusion. All of man's universe romancing may not be fact, but much, very much, is truth."

The stories and beliefs propagated by various religions have great value because they provide believers with a meaningful context within which values may be discovered and wise decisions may be made. On page 1011 the authors comment that, "At one time the hope of the survival of Occidental civilization lay in the sublime Hebraic concepts of

goodness and the advanced Hellenic concepts of beauty." On page 1036 they note that, "At the time of this writing much of Asia rests its hope in Buddhism." -- Clearly the authors place great value on the importance of religious stories and beliefs.

And regarding our world as a whole they say,

P.2086 - §2 "The great hope of Urantia lies in the possibility of a new revelation of Jesus with a new and enlarged presentation of his saving message which would spiritually unite in loving service the numerous families of his present-day professed followers."

Jesus said of himself, "I am the hope of all who know the living truth."

During mortal life the quest for cosmic citizenship involves strengthening hope to the point where it becomes living faith. We may not be able to grasp many of the details about how the cosmos works, but through faith we can know it as good, creative, and loving.

The journey of the truth seeker often begins with asking questions about the nature of reality. But over time the focus invariably shifts from questions about knowing to questions about being. The primary question becomes, "How can I live effectively and creatively in this universe -- how can I contribute to its further development?"

On page 2076 we are reminded,

P.2076 - §3 "As you view the world, remember that the black patches of evil which you see are shown against a white background of ultimate good. You do not view merely white patches of good which show up miserably against a black background of evil."

A situation in Jesus' life, during the years when he was helping Mary raise the children, illustrates his sense of the power of hope:

P.1400 - §6 For four years their standard of living had steadily declined; year by year they felt the pinch of increasing poverty. By the close of this year they faced one of the most difficult experiences of all their uphill struggles. James had not yet begun to earn much, and the expenses of a funeral on top of everything else staggered them. But Jesus would only say to his anxious and grieving mother: "Mother-Mary, sorrow will not help us; we are all doing our best, and mother's smile, perchance, might even inspire us to do better. Day by day we are strengthened for these tasks by our hope of better days ahead." His sturdy and practical optimism was truly contagious; all the children lived in an atmosphere of anticipation of better times and better things. And this hopeful courage contributed mightily to the development of strong and noble characters, in spite of the depressiveness of their poverty.

The real spiritual challenge which we face is the strengthening of hope to the point where it becomes faith. Hope is somewhat tentative -- we hope for some particular reality but we are not completely sure of it. The attitude of faith declares that the object of our

hopes is indeed real. Living faith empowers us to live loyally to our highest ideals in the present moment.

P.1134 - §7 ". . . living faith in the superhuman origin of our ideals validates our belief that we are the sons of God and makes real our altruistic convictions, the feelings of the brotherhood of man."

P.1222 - §7 It is only natural that mortal man should be harassed by feelings of insecurity as he views himself inextricably bound to nature while he possesses spiritual powers wholly transcendent to all things temporal and finite. Only religious confidence--living faith--can sustain man amid such difficult and perplexing problems.

But let us not be so limited in our perspective that we view this cultivation of hope and faith as merely a strategy to avoid anxiety. If we are able to transmute our hope into living faith, we should thereby be empowered to serve others. There are many places in the story of Jesus where the authors comment that he often "spoke comforting words of hope and courage" to the people he encountered in the course of his daily life. We can do this as well. Anything you can do to relieve suffering and anxiety in the lives of people around you is a direct contribution to the healing of our world.

The book says that,

P.2063 - §0 "The religion of Jesus is a new gospel of faith to be proclaimed to struggling humanity. This new religion is founded on faith, hope, and love."

P.1727 - §7 ". . . when religion is wholly spiritual in motive, it makes all life more worth while, filling it with high purposes, dignifying it with transcendent values, inspiring it with superb motives, all the while comforting the human soul with a sublime and sustaining hope. True religion is designed to lessen the strain of existence; it releases faith and courage for daily living and unselfish serving. Faith promotes spiritual vitality and righteous fruitfulness."

Please note in this last quote the comment that "True religion . . . releases faith and courage for daily living and unselfish serving." Meaningful service is the frontier we find beyond the horizon of faith.

P.2086 - §2 "The great hope of Urantia lies in the possibility of a new revelation of Jesus with a new and enlarged presentation of his saving message which would spiritually unite in loving service the numerous families of his present-day professed followers."

The great hope of our world is that this revelation will so strengthen and motivate its recipients that they will mobilize themselves into a force for service to humanity. And this service should not be viewed as some large-scale, grandiose plan. It is a mode of service which must be directed locally -- within our families, communities, places of work, and places of worship. It is not an approach which seeks to create social order by

imposing ideological uniformity on society. It is an approach which seeks to transform the world by spiritually transforming the lives of individuals.

There is much to be done -- let's get to work. !