

The importance of giving up hope: Helping clients have the courage to despair

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Four essays on hope

**1. Everything that is done in
the world is done by hope.**

- Martin Luther, 16th century
Catholic priest and religious
reformer

hope (hōp)

noun

- a confident desire
- a likelihood of success
- a feeling of trust

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2. Hope is in reality the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, 19th century nihilist philosopher

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Some illusions help

“Depression often emanates from the loss of core illusions . . . [or] the loss of an exalted, idealized, and illusory view of oneself, one’s specialness, or the painful awareness of the true nature of our vulnerability in the world. . . . Thus, depression is characterized by the absence or lack of sustaining illusions.”

- Stanley H. Teitelbaum, *Illusion and Disillusionment: Core Issues in Psychotherapy* (1999), 169

Disillusionment may lead us to:

1. deny or distort reality
2. replace one set of illusions with a new set of illusions
3. become hypervigilant to avoid being fooled by illusions again
4. become resigned to hopelessness and despair
5. accept reality and adapt

Consider:

- What is a hope they hold onto and long for but that they do not control?
- What false or unhelpful hopes keep them from taking action toward positive change?
- What is a hope you hold onto and long for, but that you do not control?

In response to disillusionment we may:

- 1. Deny or distort reality**

Diseases of Hope

“Hope can be diseased not just in its object but in itself, in its very process and mechanism, when it:

- (a) it leads to a disparaging attitude toward the present,
- (b) it is mindless of sacrifices, and
- (c) it hampers flexibility.”
 - Omer, H. & Rosenbaum, R., Diseases of Hope and the Work of Despair (1997), in *Psychotherapy*, 34, 3, 226

In response to disillusionment we may:

1. Deny or distort reality
2. **Replace one set of illusions with another**

In response to disillusionment we may:

1. Deny or distort reality
2. Replace one set of illusions with another
3. **Become hypervigilant**

In response to disillusionment we may:

1. Deny or distort reality
2. Replace one set of illusions with another
3. Become hypervigilant
4. **Resign and give up hope**

Ambiguous Loss

Physically present
Emotionally absent

Emotionally present
Physically absent

In response to disillusionment we may:

1. Deny or distort reality
2. Replace one set of illusions with another
3. Become hypervigilant
4. Resign and give up hope
5. **Accept reality and adapt**

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- 4. Hope is not prognostication. it is an orientation . . . that things can make sense, no matter how they turn out.**
- Vaclav Havel

Consider:

1. What's the most moving experience you've had?
2. What did someone else do that inspired you as part of that experience?
3. What did you do to contribute to that experience or help make that experience possible?

Consider:

4. In your own eyes, what has been your most significant accomplishment?
5. What impact did it have, or what did it change?
6. What was hard for you about pursuing this achievement?

Consider:

7. What patterns or routines in your life are most meaningful to you?
8. What sacrifices do you make to keep those patterns or routines going?

Consider:

9. How long ago did each of these experiences occur?
10. When did you last have an experience somewhat like each of these?
11. What stops you from having more experiences like these?

Consider:

12. What are some bold, creative, mold-breaking risks you would take if you weren't afraid?
13. What could you do this week to pursue one of these?
14. Will you?

Four essays on hope

1. Everything that is done in the world is done by hope.

- establish hope with calm, curious, compassionate trust building

2. Hope is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man

- explore unrealistic objects of hope that are tormenting
- explore process hopes that disparage the present, are mindless of sacrifices, or hamper flexibility

3. Perhaps hopelessness is the very soil that nourishes human hope

- explore responses to disillusionment: distorting reality, the “golden fantasy,” hypervigilance, resignation to loss or ambiguous loss

4. Hope is not prognostication. it is an orientation . . . that things can make sense, no matter how they turn out.

- identify and pursue values and goals that are worth standing for

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