

## \* HOPE \*

"I KNOW HOW MEN IN EXILE FEED ON DREAMS  
OF HOPE." Agamemnon, (L. 1668). Aeschylus, 525-456 B.C.E.

Hope is a feeling that something we want or need can somehow be had or that events will turn out for the best. As a man of many hardships, loaded and fueled with drugs, crime, violence and sex, I have a significant amount of experience within the realm of hope. In fact, one might even call me a connoisseur of hope; a title I hold proudly. Proudly, I say, for as long as I have hope then I am not hopeless; I am optimistic. I am, an optimist!

In the 20th century the most well known figure of hope in America was (arguably) Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968). In his most notable "I have a dream" speech, King spoke of his hopes that, one day, "sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners" would sit together and that his "children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." (Speech at Civil Rights March on Washington [August 28, 1963]).

While I do not purport to fully grasp the depths of which such hopes have rooted themselves in -- for I am not an African-American -- I will say that 40 years after the death of Mr. King another African-American man declared his own such "[h]ope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope! In the end, that is God's greatest gift to us." (Barack Obama, 2004 [Keynote address at the Democratic National Convention]). After which, only four years later, he would personally observe Mr. King's dream begin to come to fruition when over half of the voting population of America judged him not by the color of his skin but by the content of his character when they elected this man to be the President of the United States of America; the most powerful nation on earth. What once seemed like an absurd notion and a hopeless dream had become a reality. Dreams such as King's are growing. They've become real. One does not have to be black to notice this. Hope, is alive.

Hope is an internal lighthouse which gives humanity direction in the darkest of times. Without it we would be completely lost;



our race reduced to insects and animals of the planet that exist only in the moment. It gives humankind something better to strive towards while we are alive. We hope to have love; we hope to marry; we hope to have children; we hope for a home, for clothing, for food; we hope there's a God, a heaven, an afterlife, and that we will go there. We hope for our survival, and for peace.

Marcus Tullius Cicero, a famous Roman statesman and their greatest orator, once famously said of hope: "[d]um anima est, spes est." ("While there's life, there's hope.") (Ad Atticum (To Atticus), book IX, L. 10), Cicero, 106-43 B.C.E. I find it inspiring that even in an age two-thousand years ago, man was intelligent enough to comprehend the fact that hope is a NEVER-ENDING thing which exists as long as humans do.

As stated earlier, hope is not a tangible thing but a feeling we have within us. And feelings are, very much so, subjective emotions contained within each of us. As such, they are within our control. We have power over them. And while this is true, many humans have been disposed (at some point or another) to give up hope in the hardest of times. As Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) once wrote: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here!" (The Divine Comedy; Inferno, III, L. 22) and wherever "here" is to each of us, (in those worst of times) many of us have let ourselves fall victim to those words. But by and large one thing faithfully does ring true, which is: we are all indeed, "prisoners of hope." (Zechariah, 9:12; The Holy Bible). I truly do believe that this is an inherent aspect of human beings which by design, is to aid in our survival and the advancement of our race. The human race. Which, by and far, is all inclusive.

As prisoners we must cling to hope. We have to find hope somewhere and for some thing which will give our lives a purpose -- even if we have to dig it up from the deepest bowels of our subconscious minds. For it is only through such hope that we may alleviate our suffering, forgive our wrongs, stand tall against great powers, find love and bear our cross. In the words of the [ever-hopeful] poet Percy B. Shelley:



"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;  
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This, like thy glory, ... is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, ... and Victory."

(Prometheus Unbound, IV, L. 570)  
Percy B. Shelley, 1792-1822

Hope is what keeps us strong. It gives us the motivation to awaken each day; to focus on something other than the negative aspects of the situations we find ourselves in. It gives us a purpose. I do suspect that we are not so much unlike one another in this regard; whether one is a prisoner or not. (And this, I hope!)

Upon first reading the line(s): "to hope till Hope creates from its own wreck the thing it contemplates" I was struck, like a bell, with the truth and depth of this statement. Countless times in my life I had persisted toward goals, through hope and hard work, while having been abandoned by those around me under the belief all was hopeless... that all the doors upon my journey would be closed and locked. But as I traversed my roads other doors would appear, leading me in new directions; eventually taking me to the place(s) I'd been seeking, or, somewhere which fulfilled my needs adequately enough. I had ridden the wreckage of hope till it created (or became) the needs I'd contemplated.

I am not unique in this regard. It has happened to all of us at some point. It will happen again -- if we do not give up hope. And so, with these parting words I quote:

"Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage;  
Minds innocent and quiet take