

The Many Faces of Hope in Difficult Times

By Heather-Jane Ozanne



“Stay hopeful – no conflict lasts forever.” - Ibrahim Issa, Director of Hope Flowers School, Bethlehem

I am writing in January 2026, and the above words were spoken by Ibrahim in late 2025 in a Zoom call updating UK supporters on the dire and traumatic situation facing Gaza and the Occupied Territories. These words were spoken amidst turmoil, grief and danger and demonstrated the resilience of a man of peace devoted to a school educating its students for ‘the wellbeing of humanity’. They are a testament to the ability of an attuned human heart to find empowering hope even in dire situations.

In our world today, everywhere we turn we are confronted with growing polarisation amongst people and in politics as well as the enormous destructive effects of climate change and economic instability. How can we remain hopeful and take positive actions in the light of the many catastrophes and conflicts? Each time I connect with the enormity of what is going on I have a sense of grief, but from this grief arises a new sense of urgency to make whatever small contribution I can towards a world where all can flourish. The circumstances of our world can seem overwhelming, and this overwhelm can cause people to deny or close their minds to what is happening in and around them, or feel dis-empowered, fearful, hopeless. So here I would like to share some reflections about hope and hopeful action.

Much has been written about the power of hope, and opinion seems to be divided on its usefulness and value. Some see hope as something negative – leading to apathy and inertia. Some people point to having ‘false hopes’ as a means of making life bearable. However, this can also be extremely negative when false hopes are revealed as precisely that – false. I believe that there are many faces and levels of hope which are positive, effectively strengthening our resolve when times are tough or uncertainty is rife. Hope can be a motivating and revivifying force.

Here are some thoughts about hope.

Hope and Nurture

Last year as part of my work, I was involved in a series of events bringing diverse interfaith and intercultural communities together to build hope and create positive actions through our Tree of Life Tour. The Tree of Life image served as a very good symbol for us, with its world-wide recognition, in religions and indigenous traditions, as representing a universal force which connects and nurtures us all. In the words of my Sufi colleague and friend Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, who was the main speaker on the tour, we must recognise that which connects us all, and nurture that within us that enables us to feel connected to others. Recognising our connection with others and what is good in life even in the face of the most difficult and dreadful conflict and circumstances brings stability, hope and steadfastness. Here is a photo of one of the Tree of Life images, with people's leaves of hope, from one of our events.



Leaves include: LOVE, WE ARE ONE, I am Peace, I am Love, I love my Mum

The most frequently heard comments at our events were that people had felt nurtured and inspired to hope by them. Feeling nurtured helps people to overcome despair and re-engage with the critical issues of our time, and allows for changes in perception. The events highlighted the important link that when people feel nurtured, their sense of hope can be renewed, even in the most troublesome and wearying times.

Hope and the Arts

I believe that the arts can bring great gifts into the arena of building a better future and peace-building. Not only can they nurture us, but they can reach parts of ourselves that have shut down in the face of the onslaughts of life, and encourage new growth, in the same way that feeding plants helps them to bloom and flourish.

Hope is not 'woolly'!

The following poem, 'bare bones' by Ullie Kaye Poetry demonstrates that hope is not always (or ever!) soft and fluffy but that hope can be experienced as a quiet energy even in the most difficult of times.

hope is not always soft and lovely.
she is not always cascading rivers
and sunlit skies, dancing. hope knows
there is work to be done. there are
roads to be travelled. turns to be made. *Continued...*

she is bare bones and deep waters.
she is weary and weak. she is barely
a glimmer. she shakes when she speaks.
this is where hope lives. smothered in
sweat. full of war. and on the verge
of crumbling into the sea.
yet there she is, quietly breathing.

Hope as Action

To be hopeful do hopeful things. - Fr John Dear

Hope is the faith that, together we can make things better. - Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Hope can be both a call to and the fuel for action. One aspect is described in the following quotation: *Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out* - Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* (1986)

We can sense what is 'ours to do' at an inner level. This sense brings with it the conviction of what we feel we must do, regardless of outcome, because the action has intrinsic value. It is part of our quality of being, even part of our way of life, going beyond positive thinking into positive living.

Here, I would like to share two inspiring stories of people have made the world a better place. Even when circumstances were full of constraints, they were able to do hopeful things. A lady who was housebound wanted to contribute to her community but was not sure how. What eventually transpired was that she offered to take in parcels for her local community - receiving parcels is of course problematic for people who are out all day. This helped her community and also herself as she made friendships with the people who came to collect their parcels. Her selfless act in wanting to work for the good of others resulted in mutual good.

The second inspiration is a good friend of mine who has a real heart for the world, for nature and for good of all. Due to severe physical difficulties, she is unable to take actions that others may take for granted. Yet for short periods when she is able to use the internet, she posts wise and thoughtful information about world situations, often garnering support for causes which may not be well known.

Participatory Hope

Participating in life beyond ourselves can bring hope and provide a counter to despair. Havel provides a counter to this despair: 'even a purely moral act that has no hope of any immediate and visible political effect can gradually and indirectly, over time, gain in political significance.' Understanding that our participation in life can contribute to change, even

when we cannot anticipate the outcome, and especially when we are not attached to a particular outcome, can enable us to act freely. Doing what is worthwhile is worthwhile in itself without unduly forcing our idea of what the impact or outcome might be. Participation in itself tends to increase our sense of hope. Participation can be a 'stance' which we embody rather than a specific action.

Another aspect of participatory hope is understanding that if we can participate in change with others, even just a very few others, this can lead to large shifts. *When a complex system is far from equilibrium, small islands of coherence in a sea of chaos have the capacity to shift the entire system to a higher order.* - Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Laureate

Hope and Heart

Hope springs eternal in the human breast - Alexander Pope

There is a level of hope which is a quality of the heart - the deep knowing, spiritual heart which sees all things, connects all things, holds all things together in compassionate love.

Difficult circumstances and despair can disconnect us from our deepest heart which contains the wellsprings of courage, love, and hope. If we can find ways to connect with our deepest heart - and this can be a difficult journey - we can find hope, hope which can lead us into positive actions, however large or small, which further re-inforce our sense of agency and hope.

Hope's home is at the innermost point in us, and in all things. It is a quality of aliveness. It does not come at the end, as the feeling that results from a happy outcome. Rather, it lies at the beginning, as an impulse of truth that shines forth. When our innermost being is attuned to this impulse it will send us forth in hope, regardless of the physical circumstances of our lives. - Cynthia Bourgeault

Living Spirituality Connections: A Clue to Hope is in our Name

The last few years have repeatedly shown me the value of nurturing hope in each other and in myself. This can happen through connecting with like-minded people with similar concerns, sharing ideas, and through our spiritual longings, impulses and spiritual practices both individual and communal.

Our work in LSC is taking a new turn, where much of our reflecting and connecting will happen through our website. I/we will explore many themes and practices which can help us to live in positive and hopeful ways, informed by spirituality. We envisage that through the website we will be able to connect with sources of hope, and with others, in ways that can encourage and nurture hope and hopeful actions towards a flourishing humanity on a flourishing planet.

Heather-Jane Ozanne is CEO of Spirit of Peace <https://spiritofpeace.co.uk/> Within this charity, she is continuing to develop and deliver a training course – Pathways for Human

Flourishing, centred around the wisdom of the heart and based on her work and experience in community and social work and her partnership with International peacebuilders.

Heather-Jane is also a retreat leader and facilitator; a member of the Core Living Spirituality Connections team, and a member of the Core Group of CANA (Christians Awakening to a New Awareness). She co-authored with Janice Dolley, ***Voices of Contemporary Christians: Towards the Universal***. In 2025 she was awarded The Paul Harris Fellowship, Rotary International's highest recognition, honouring individuals (Rotarians or not) who significantly support Rotary's ideals, particularly "Service Above Self." The award signifies exceptional community service.