Modern Science, Ancient Wisdom, and A New Theory of Hope

Debra Orenstein

In these sometimes dystopian times, it is a hopeful sign that we are witnessing the proliferation of books on hope.[1] This bounty comes largely from the burgeoning field of positive psychology, often called "the science of happiness and human flourishing." For most of its history, the study of the human psyche focused primarily on healing or mitigating emotional suffering and mental illness. Positive psychology seeks to balance the important work of traditional psychology with its focus on spreading and increasing happiness, purpose, altruism, hope, and other positive states and traits.

Since the 1990s, positive psychology has added considerably to our understanding of how people "make hope happen."[2] Research and interventions can help Jews and Jewish leaders find hope for themselves, bring it to others, and instill it in our organizations and communities. At the same time, the Jewish tradition offers wisdom on hope that predates positive psychology by millennia.

The latest psychological models focus helpfully on agency, but they neglect to account for a second, vital kind of hope that is spiritually moreso than cognitively and behaviorally sourced. I find this second type of hope in Hebrew etymologies, Jewish texts, and Jewish culture. Based on feedback as well as theory, we need both kinds of hope—the first suggested primarily by positive psychology and the second by religion—to help people imagine and create a brighter future.[3]

[1] See sources in subsequent footnotes and the extensive bibliography in David Arnow, *Choosing Hope: The Heritage of Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2022). The attendant website, choosinghope.net, offers many valuable resources, including chapter study guides and quotations. I am grateful to Dr. Phoebe Atkinson of the Wholebeing Institute, Rabbi Eric Gurvis of the Musar Institute, and Rabbis Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer, David Bockman, and Gerald Friedman from our weekly *ḥavurah* for discussing sources with me. Thanks also go to Sylvia and Aviva Orenstein for reviewing my writing, as family members and editors extraordinaire. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

[2] See the influential Shane L. Lopez, *Making Hope Happen: Create the Future You Want for Yourself and Others* (New York: Atria, 2013).

[3] Feedback came from congregants and students at synagogues in Wisconsin and New Jersey; the Academy of Jewish Religion in Yonkers, New York; and the Positive Psychology Hour co-sponsored by the Marlene Meyerson JCC in Manhattan and the Wholebeing Institute. See

Positive Psychology and Religion

It is no accident that Judaism and positive psychology address many of the same topics.[4] With different perspectives and methods, both positive psychology and traditional Judaism seek to shape human attitudes and behavior in order to bring more meaning, joy, goodness, and connection into the lives of individuals and communities.

The Jewish journey begun by Abraham is, in Rashi's famous interpretation, "for your good/betterment/benefit and for your pleasure/enjoyment."[5] Halakhic, aggadic, and musar literatures have addressed the question of how to pursue "the good life" (in all the senses of that phrase) from antiquity until today. To take just one example, Geoffrey Claussen's recent book, *Modern Musar: Contested Virtues in Jewish Thought*, anthologizes the writings of seventy-eight Jewish thinkers on ten virtues.[6]

Along with commonalities, tensions also exist between positive psychology and religion and even between positive psychology and spirituality. Many positive psychologists reference religious, spiritual, and philosophical contributions to their chosen topics, and some study the well-being of religious people as compared to the general population.[7] However, as Sonja

Debra Orenstein, "Positive Religion: Hope and Gratitude Through a Jewish Lens," https://player.vimeo.com/video/6003133819.

[4] Guides for practitioners and coaches of positive psychology overlap almost entirely with religious topics; see, e.g., Jonah Paquette, *The Happiness Toolbox: 56 Practices to Find Happiness, Purpose and Productivity in Love, Work and Life* (Eau Claire, WI: PESI, 2018). Textbooks focus 60% or more on topics that have been central to religion, with 20–40% devoted to topics such as experiments, methods, history of the field.

[5] Rashi on *Lekh Lekha*, Genesis 12:1.

[6] Geoffrey Claussen, *Modern Musar: Contested Virtues in Jewish Thought*, JPS Anthologies of Jewish Thought (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2022).

[7] The research is summarized here: "Religion's Relationship to Happiness, Civic Engagement and Health around the World," Pew Research Center (January 31, 2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/01/31/religions-relationship-to-happiness-civic-engagement-and-health-around-the-world/. See also Sonja Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 227–39 and 343–48. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "Social Capital and Fallen Donkeys," Jonathan Sacks: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy (5778), https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-teitse/social-capital-fallen-donkeys/ wrote: "Regular attendance at a house of worship turns out to be the best predictor of altruism and empathy: better than education, age, income, gender or race." In 2015–16, I was privileged to study with Tal Ben-Shahar, Maria Sirois, and Megan McDonough for my certificate in positive psychology. Ben-Shahar, the primary instructor, occasionally and meaningfully drew on Jewish teachings and cultural references in his lectures. Together with his colleagues, he created the acronym SPIRE, designating **s**piritual, **p**hysical, **i**ntellectual, **r**elational, and **e**motional well-being as "five core elements that indirectly lead to happiness"; see Tal Ben-Shahar,

Lyubomirsky wrote about the history of the field in *The How of Happiness*, most researchers remain "hesitant to study spirituality and religion."[8] Positive psychologists rarely engage with or build on religious approaches to subjects like forgiveness, community, joy, intention, purpose, compassion, or hope.

Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman wrote *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* to incorporate and in some ways replace the wisdom of world religions on the subject of virtue. They wanted to create an inclusive and even universal schema of positive, admired traits by distilling philosophical and religious writings from across millennia and continents.[9] The authors of this ambitious endeavor devoted just eight paragraphs to summarizing Judaism and Christianity.[10] Peterson and Seligman reduced all religious contributions to the concept and practice of hope, one of the twenty-four character strengths they identified, to a single, syncretistic sentence: "The term hope has a long history, figuring

Happier, No Matter What: Cultivating Hope, Resilience, and Purpose in Hard Times (New York: Experiment, 2021), Kindle edition, 205 of 2410. *Happier No Matter What* includes a chapter on each element of SPIRE. The spirituality chapter acknowledges but does not focus on religion. Ben-Shahar describes religion as addressing grand but remote questions, in contrast to spirituality, which addresses people's everyday lives and sense of purpose. He mentions ancient religious contributions to mindfulness and cites Hillel on caring for both self and other (Kindle edition, 1521 of 2410). Ben-Shahar attributes to Eastern, but not Western, religions the notion that care and empathy for the self are inextricably connected to care and empathy for the other (Kindle edition 1447 out of 2410), notwithstanding the importance and interpretation in Judaism and Christianity of "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18; y. Nedarim 9:4; b. Shabbat 31a; *Sefer haḥinukh* #243; and Mark 12:31).

[8] Lyubomirsky, *How*, 228.

[9] The VIA (originally Values in Action) Institute supported the research and extolled the book: "From Aristotle and Plato *to the major world religions*, to other great thinkers and philosophers spanning the last 2,500 years, this work represents the most significant effort in history to review, assemble, research, and classify positive strengths/traits in human beings." See "Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification," VIA Institute on Character, https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths-and-virtues (emphasis mine). Their schema has been adopted and used by many researchers and practitioners, including Jews attempting to map it onto Jewish values; see, e.g., "Making Mensches: A Periodic Table," Foundation for Jewish Camp, https://jewishcamp.org/making-mensches/.

[10] Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48–49. The only sources for virtues they draw on from the Jewish tradition are the Ten Commandments and the book of Proverbs. In coding how different religious traditions relate to attachment, survival, or mastery in relation to hope, Anthony Scioli and Henry B. Biller, *Hope in the Age of Anxiety: A Guide to Understanding and Strengthening Our Most Important Virtue* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 83 use the Five Books of Moses as their only Jewish source.

prominently in Judeo-Christian discourse and naming it one of the chief theological virtues (along with faith and charity)."[11]

Several authors who have delved deeply into both positive psychology and Judaism have recently begun writing about the intersection between the two.[12] This article hopefully (pun intended) contributes to that trend. The fields of religion and positive psychology are just beginning to inform one another in important and powerful ways.

Antipathy to Hope

Like many people during the pandemic, I was discouraged in the spring of 2021. Daily deaths and disruptions continued long past the weeks or months many of us had first imagined—even after vaccines became available. High Holiday planning for 5782 turned out to be more fraught than the year before, when, at least, there was clarity that large groups would not be able to gather indoors.

For months I delved into the topic of hope, including the positive psychology literature. I planned to preach on and for hope during the Holidays and would periodically discuss my reading or writing over dinner with my family. Imagine my surprise when, the day before Rosh Hashanah, my husband said, "I've never mentioned this before, but I have an antipathy to the word 'hope.' If I hope something will happen, then I fear it won't." My response: "Craig, it's great that we still have some mysteries to discover about one another, but why in the world did you wait so long to tell me this?!"

I quoted this conversation in the opening of my sermon, which, thanks to Craig's insight, underwent a last-minute rewrite. It is important to begin any discussion of hope, including this article, with the acknowledgment that hope can feel risky, futile, or even false. After trauma or loss, or when the stakes are high or the odds of success slim, we are sometimes afraid to hope. We do not want to "tempt the evil eye" or feel disappointed. People even use the phrase, "I don't dare hope." In her famous poem, Emily Dickinson

[11] Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, 571.

[12] Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Schocken, 2009), 231–93; Michael J. Harris, David Rynhold, and Tamra Wright, eds., *Radical Responsibility: Celebrating the Thought of Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks* (Victoria, British Columbia: AbeBooks, 2013), esp. 245–58 ("Afterword: A New Musar?" by Tamara Wright); David Pelcovitz and Raphael Pelcovitz, *Life in the Balance: Torah Perspectives on Positive Psychology* (New York: Mesorah, 2014); Hanna Perlberger, *A Year of Sacred Moments: The Soul Seeker's Guide to Inspired Living* (Bloomington, IN: Balboa, 2017); Darren Levine, *For a Life of Happiness and Well-Being* (Millburn, NJ: Behrman House, 2019); and Arnow, *Choosing Hope*.

imagines hope as "the thing with feathers."[13] Yes, it perches in the soul and sings amidst the storms. But it can also fly away.

Hope is not only elusive; it becomes anathema, if lazy. The term "false hope" exists because people do not want to trust any version of hope that ignores reality or abdicates responsibility. At our best, we do not want to fool ourselves. Nor do we wish to be deceived by others about facts or challenges.[14] We know it will not work to just wish impediments away. True hope takes account of what is, even as it searches for more and better possibilities.[15]

Nevertheless, I would argue that the world suffers more from too little hope than from unbridled, careless, or even false hope. Rick Snyder, a leader in hope studies, went so far as to question the accuracy of the term "false hope." As summarized by psychologist David Arnow:

> People who scored high on Snyder's measures of hope were sometimes able to solve so-called impossible laboratory tasks that had not been puzzled out in fifteen years.... Snyder wrote: "Given that society as a whole tends to advance in leaps when 'impossible' goals are reached by individuals who dared to try, it seems counterproductive to adopt a policy of automatically dissuading everyone from pursuing seemingly impossible goals.... Care should be taken in concluding that an individual's goals are 'pipe dreams.'"[16]

The Benefits of Hope

It is important to cultivate hope and not just to limit hope hesitancy or mitigate despair. Being hopeful about any topic—including hope itself—

[13] Emily Dickinson, "'Hope' Is the Thing With Feathers," Poetry Foundation, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42889/hope-is-the-thing-with-feathers-314.

[14] The terrible costs of misleading or lying to patients about their prognoses are discussed in Jerome Groopman, *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness* (New York: Random House, 2004), 28–57 ("False Hope, True Hope").

[15] This comports with the definition of spirituality as "coming into relationship with reality" by Carol Ochs, *Women and Spirituality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 10. Spirituality can transcend this plane of existence, but only if we first come into a profound relationship with what is. Similarly, hope can help overcome current realities and limitations only if we first come into a profound and clear-eyed relationship with what is. See Scioli and Biller, *Hope*, 13–14 for inspirational language on the distinction between true and false hope.

[16] Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, xvi, summarizing and quoting C. R. Snyder et al., "'False Hope,'" *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58, no. 9 (2002): 1007–8.

motivates action. Both hope and hopelessness tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. Fortunately, the benefits of hope are enormous and enticing. In fact, "[t]he predictive power of hope in a person's life is greater than [that of] any other character strength."[17] The following are just some of the benefits verified by peer-reviewed social scientific studies. Knowing and citing these results can help boost hope and its positive effects.

- Hope increases the likelihood that adults will achieve their goals.[18]
- Hope helps people sustain a practice of physical exercise and improve their athletic performance. Higher hope people perform better in sports than their low-hope teammates with equal abilities and similar demographics.[19]
- Hopeful students perform significantly better in school, from elementary grades through graduate school, even accounting for various other factors.[20]
- Low-hope employees take sick days more than four times as often as their high-hope colleagues, signifying less well-being and productivity.[21]
- "Other conditions being equal, hope leads to a 12 percent gain in academic performance, a 14 percent bump in

[17] Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellmann, *Hope Rising: How the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life* (New York: Morgan James, 2022),19.

[18] Joseph Ciarrochi et al., "Hope and Emotional Well-Being: A Six-Year Study to Distinguish Antecedents, Correlates, and Consequences," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, no. 6 (2015): 1–15, including bibliographical references.

[19] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 19; Susana C. Marques and Shane J. Lopez, "Promoting Hope in Children," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, ed. Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez, Oxford Library of Psychology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 120; and Heather N. Rasmussen et al., "Hope and Physical Health," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, 161.

[20] Marques and Lopez, "Promoting," 119–20 and Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 19–21.

[21] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 52–53. For more on hope and work, see Angela R. Mouton and Monica N. Montijo, "Hope and Work," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, ed. Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez, Oxford Library of Psychology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 328 and Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 20–21, 211–12.

workplace outcomes, and a 10 percent happiness boost for hopeful people."[22]

- Citizens who are hopeful tend to vote.[23]

- Hopeful people have better coping skills and more tolerance and resilience to endure physical pain, illness, stress, loss, and natural disasters.[24] "In every published study of hope, every single one, hope is the single best predictor of well-being compared to any other measures of trauma recovery."[25]

- People measuring as "high-hope" have better well-being and outcomes, on average, for all forms of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, liver disease, and autoimmune disorders. "When hope is high, patients respond better to treatment, are more likely to engage in prevention strategies, and are more likely to comply with their health providers recommendations."[26]

- Hope reduces depression and anxiety.[27] It contributes significantly to recovery from mental illness across various approaches and techniques.[28]

- People with high scores on the adult hope scale also score higher on satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism, meaning

[22] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 50–51.

[23] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 210. See also "Setting up a Kids Voting Program to Increase Civic Participation: An Effective Practice," Hope Rising, Lake County, CA, https://www.hoperisinglc.org/promisepractice/index/view?pid=168.

[24] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 17, 36, 71 and Rasmussen et al, "Hope," 163.

[25] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 18 (emphasis original).

[26] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 15, 22.

[27] Groopman, *Anatomy*; Paul Kwon et al., "The Role of Hope in Preventive Interventions," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 9, no. 12 (2015): 696–704 and citations there; and Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 56.

[28] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 25 and Lorie A. Ritschel and Christopher S. Sheppard, "Hope and Depression," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, ed. Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez, Oxford Library of Psychology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 209–19.

of life, and happiness.[29] "Hope proved to be a strong, unique predictor of…positive emotions."[30]

- Hope assists with psychological adjustment and social-emotional problem solving. "Put simply, hopeful people have better outcomes connected to the way they think and behave."[31]

- People with high levels of hope live longer.[32]

In one longitudinal study conducted at University of Texas Health Center in San Antonio, researchers demonstrated that "hope is, in fact, a matter of life and death."[33] Among 795 people who were followed over the course of seven years, people who felt hopeless were more than twice as likely than their hopeful counterparts to die of natural causes during the time of the study. This remained true when researchers controlled for various other factors, including ethnicity, sexual identity, drinking, perceived health, medical conditions, age, and socioeconomic status.[34] "Twice as likely to die if hopeless" is a devastating statistic. But, in another longitudinal study of 2,428 men, subjects who scored as moderately or highly hopeless were more than *three* times as likely to die as their peers.[35] We say, "keep hope alive," but it is also true that *hope* keeps *us* alive.

To maximize hope's many benefits without succumbing to delusions or courting crushing disappointment, positive psychology has developed definitions and models for hope.

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[29] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 19. For the Adult Hope Scale, see C. R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There From Here* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 25, 50–51, 399.

[30] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen,* 56.

[31] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 18. This is what Tomasulo calls "recalibration" in the chart and discussion below.

[32] Amber M. Gum, "Promoting Hope in Older Adults," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hope*, ed. Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez, Oxford Library of Psychology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 145 and Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 59–62.

[33] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 59.

[34] Stephen L. Stern, Rahul Dhanda, and Helen P. Hazuda, "Hopelessness Predicts Mortality in Older Mexican and European Americans," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 63 (May 2001): 344–51.

[35] Susan A. Everson et al., "Hopelessness and Risk of Mortality and Incidence of Myocardial Infarction and Cancer," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 58, no. 2 (1996): 113–21.

What is Hope, and Why Do We Need It? Psychological Perspectives

In 1959, when Karl Menninger delivered an address on hope, he wondered whether the subject might be "taboo.... When it comes to hope, our shelves are bare. The journals are silent. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* devotes many columns to the topic of love, and many more to faith. But hope, poor little hope! She is not even listed."[36] A decade later, Ezra Stotland published *The Psychology of Hope*.[37] Stotland "understood hope as a joint function of the perceived probability and the perceived importance of attaining particular goals."[38] He considered hope "critical for goal attainment because it is a key component of motivation."[39] Subsequently, Snyder, who has been dubbed the "first 'hope scientist'" by other positive psychology researchers, likewise emphasized the importance of goals.[40] In his view, hope requires and is driven by goals; one must hope *for something*.

Snyder expressed his definition of hope with this formula: "Hope = Mental Willpower + Waypower for Goals."[41] In other words, hope involves marshaling one's inner resources, including intrinsic motivation, humor, and strengths (willpower) and employing multiple pathways and strategies for achieving one's goals (waypower).[42] In 1991, Snyder and colleagues introduced the hope scale to create a social science measurement of hope, based on a simple, eight-question survey.[43] Four of the eight questions on the hope scale relate to willpower, as Snyder defines it, and four relate to waypower. Willpower dies if one cannot imagine a path or paths to achieving one's goal. And the mere knowledge of possible paths forward is moot if one lacks the motivation to act. Hope depends on bringing will and way together, in service of a desired end. High-hope thinking is especially valuable when facing obstacles, because "when things get tough…high-hope people channel their energy to an effective alternative pathway."[44] For Snyder, hope has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements, with behavior as the main driver. Hope

[36] Karl Menninger, "Hope," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 116, no. 6 (1959): 481.
[37] Ezra Stotland, *The Psychology of Hope* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1959).
[38] Scioli and Biller, *Hope*, 22.
[39] Scioli and Biller, *Hope*, 22.
[40] Snyder, *Psychology*. For Snyder's epithet, see Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 9.
[41] Snyder, *Psychology*, 10.
[42] Snyder, *Psychology*, 176–77, 189–90, 204–5.
[43] You can take the test online here: The Hope Score, https://hopescore.com/hope-score/. Separate tests for children and for adult hope in specific subject areas are available in Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 48.
[44] Snyder, *Psychology*, 11, 323.

is no mere wish for a good future, nor even a good feeling about how the future can unfold; hope means working for the good future you wish to see. Each successful step creates a virtuous cycle, because seeing and generating options will stoke motivation, and taking consistent action tends to open up new paths of opportunity. Hope becomes the fuel that energizes people to shape a better future.

Snyder argues that the paradigm of willpower and waypower is not a construct he created, but the way in which people already unconsciously think and operate.[45] By bringing awareness to our thinking process, we can deliberately kindle hope. To strengthen willpower, Snyder suggests using affirmative language about goals (whether to oneself or in communicating with others), practicing self-care (including healthy eating, sleep, and exercise habits), and focusing on enjoying present-moment engagement with interim steps and objectives rather than fixating on an end goal.[46] To boost waypower, Snyder recommends sharpening and prioritizing goals, breaking large goals down into smaller ones, mentally rehearsing next steps, and seeking encouragement and help.

Perhaps surprisingly, Snyder also advocates anticipating obstacles. It may seem more hopeful to expect that everything will go well, but Snyder rejects that sort of optimism as "Pollyanna." If you can anticipate disruptions and barriers, you may be able to avoid them. In addition, if something unexpected arises that interferes with your goal, you will not tend to feel surprised or defeated. Rather, by imagining likely obstacles, you learn to consider derailments as part of the sometimes circuitous journey toward reaching your goal.[47] Positive psychologist Shane Lopez puts it this way: "Hopeful people believe: There are many paths to my goals. None of them is free of obstacles."[48]

The last chapter in Snyder's book is titled "Hope for Relationships and Vice Versa." Subsequent research has followed his example of examining the power of relationships to buoy hope, including specific connections such as teacher and student, physician and patient, or spouses. Maria Sirois

[45] Snyder, *Psychology*, 211.

[46] Snyder, *Psychology*, 224–27. In setting goals, he recommends: "I choose to…*something positive* [e.g., to get 8 hours of sleep], rather than "I will stop *something negative* [e.g., staying up late, watching screens]. In facing obstacles, he favors affirmative, empowering statements: "Now relax and take a few deep breaths" rather than "I can't believe this is happening!" or "I have a lot of good experience" rather than "I am too old."

[47] "Kindling Hope In Adults" in Snyder, *Psychology*, 211–56.

[48] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 18–19.

taught that "[h]ope can be seeded from without. How many of us have heard ourselves saying, 'You gave me hope'?"[49] Young people with a history of abuse and trauma do dramatically better in school and in life if they have even one person in their corner who is high in hope, as measured on the adult hope scale.[50] Hope and hopelessness are both contagious, including via social media.[51]

Snyder's theory and measurement of hope have been hugely influential. Peterson and Seligman include goals and pathways in their updated summary of hope as a value-in-action and character strength.[52] In their recent book, *Hope Rising,* Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman summarize research using Snyder's hope scale this way: "with over 2,000 published studies on hope…hope is no longer just a theory, hope is a science."[53]

Dan Tomasulo, like virtually all positive psychologists, credits and draws on Snyder's work.[54] He also relies on Barbara Frederickson's observation—mistaken, in my view—that hope alone among positive emotions "comes into play only when our circumstances are difficult or at least uncertain."[55] In figure 1, Tomasulo details steps necessary for hope that precede choosing a goal, applying willpower, or pursuing waypower. For Tomasulo, hope

[49] Maria Sirois, "The Paradoxes of Hope: How the Worst Moments Create the Possibility for the Best," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxoX2Y7LJ5I.

[50] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 162–63.

[51] Adam D. I. Kramer, Jamie E. Guillory, and Jeffrey T. Hancock, "Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion Through Social Networks," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 111, no. 24 (2014), 8788–90: and Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 146–48. Nicholas Christakis and Stephen Fowler, *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives—How Your Friends' Friends' Friends Affect Everything You Feel, Think, and Do* (New York: Little Brown, 2009). Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 4 begin the volume with an inspiring story of how hope spread in a hospital. One physician came to this conclusion: "Hope became the bridge between the impossible and the possible."

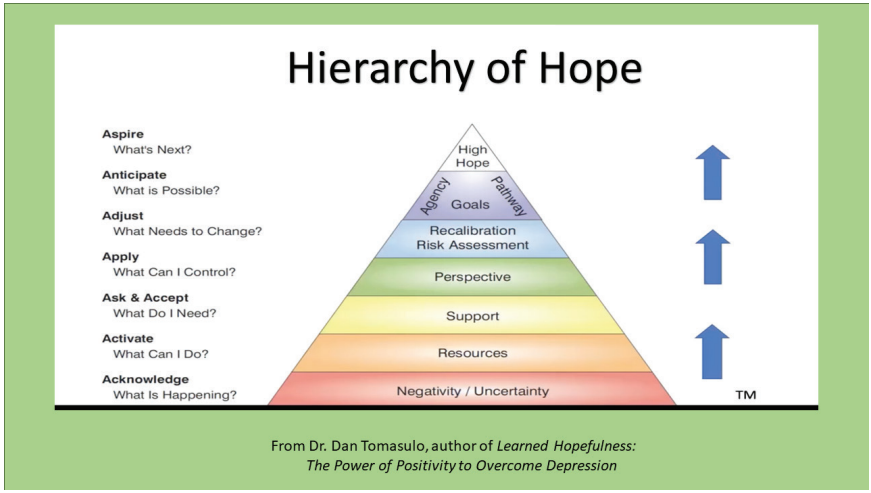
[52] "Hope," VIA Institute on Character, https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/hope.

[53] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, Kindle edition, 214 of 4830.

[54] Dan Tomasulo, *Learned Hopefulness: Harnessing the Power of Positivity to Overcome Depression, Increase Motivation, and Build Unshakable Resilience* (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2020), 10.

[55] Tomasulo, *Learned Hopefulness*, 10, citing Barbara L. Fredrickson, "Positive Emotions Broaden and Build," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. Patricia Divine and Ashby Plant (Burlington, MA: Academic Press, 2013), 47. Awe, gratitude, and compassion can be sparked by fear and/or disasters; see Jonah Paquette, *Awestruck: How Embracing Wonder Can Make You Happier, Healthier, and More Connected* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2020), esp. ch. 6 ("The Darker Side of Awe"). Gratitude often arises in the face of potential or realized losses and is stirred both for volunteers and for survivors after a natural or human-made disaster. Loss and disasters also trigger compassion and often strengthen communal ties. (Think of the aftermath of 9/11 or the early days of the pandemic.)

begins at the bottom of the pyramid with negativity and uncertainty. In a perfect world, there would be no need for hope! Hope is usually activated when something displeases or destabilizes us, whether in the moment or about our future. Awareness of what is uncertain or negative naturally sparks dissatisfaction, worry, or sadness—or even anger, fear, or despair. By climbing up the pyramid, we can choose to move from negative emotions to hope. (Although Tomasulo does not emphasize it, hope sometimes emanates from positive realizations and opportunities as well.[56]) He writes about the effects on hopefulness of how we relate to difficult circumstances: "When negativity and uncertainty are seen as [insurmountable] obstacles, they keep us stuck and lead to depression. …When [they] are seen as indications of a need to summon our strengths, we change our aspirations or methods."[57] Tal Ben-Shahar similarly defines depression as "sadness without hope."[58]



Once having identified doubt or negativity, we can marshal resources: first our own (Resources) and then those of others who may be able to

[56] Weddings, births, and scientific advances certainly give us hope! Tomasulo's own model seems to argue that hope (in its highest form, at the top of his pyramid scale) can stem from imagination and a sense of possibility, not just from negativity or uncertainty. Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016), xiv views uncertainty as a welcome resource for agency and hope: "In the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act."
[57] Tomasulo, *Learned Hopefulness*, 21.
[58] Ben-Shahar, *Happier*, 163.

help (Support)."[59] Tapping into internal and external encouragement is vital to sustaining motivation and to generating new ideas and options.[60] At the same time, examining one's situation and the resources to address it will also lead to realizations about one's limits. Tomasulo calls this stage "perspective." What can I control? What *can't* I control? This perspective helps people put effort into "controlling the controllables" and making progress, rather than expending energy fruitlessly. As Lopez writes, "re-goaling reclaims willpower from the pursuit of unattainable goals."[61]

Some decisions and actions, taken for good reason, end up failing, or at least not producing the expected results. Therefore, recalibration and risk assessment—continual course correction—is the next step up on Tomasulo's pyramid. Tomasulo, like Snyder, presents a structured process. The very existence of a model with sequenced stages contributes both to hope and to goal attainment. If one is discouraged, there are obvious questions and interventions to pursue: Is it my goal, willpower, or waypower that needs shoring up? Do I need to confront uncertainty? Solicit support? Discern what I can control? Revise my goal?[62] "One of the most important ideas consistently confirmed by research is that hope can be learned."[63] Providing a model helps in that learning.

At the top of Tomasulo's pyramid are goals, continually refined in response to feedback, changing circumstances, and personal growth. Goals are executed by both pathways and willpower, which Tomasulo calls "agency."

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[59] Kaye Herth, a hope researcher focused on nursing and palliative care, developed another hope instrument, the HHI, or Herth Hope Index, which measures for social connections and support, as well as goal-setting and the active pursuit of goals.

[60] "When you tap into the belief that you can do something to turn your dream into reality, you're tapping into energy and resilience, as well as creativity. These, along with the belief in your own power, will enable you to find ways to capitalize on opportunity and overcome obstacles as you reach for your goals"; see Annie McKee, *How to Be Happy at Work* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), 100–101.

[61] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 185.

[62] The stages of *teshuvah* ("repentance") work the same way. The laws of *teshuvah* are so powerful in part because they provide a sequenced model. This encourages people to let go of guilt when they "arrive at the top of the pyramid" and achieve *teshuvah gemurah* (complete repentance for a given sin). *Teshuvah gemurah* consists of facing the same or highly similar temptations, but responding differently than before (Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 2:1). Because of the structure, relapse does not mean that all is lost. One simply returns to the earlier stages: acknowledgment of a sin, oral confession for it, sincere expressions or regret, restitution to whatever degree possible, and a renewed resolution not to repeat the sin (Maimonides, *Hilkhot teshuvah* 2:2–5, 9–11). Similarly, on the hope pyramid, failure to reach one's goals leads back to uncertainty and negativity, and the climb to higher stages can begin again.

[63] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 196.

Implicit at the apex of the pyramid is that hope does not stem only from negative or doubtful conditions. Hope can build on itself, as other positive and negative emotions also tend to do.[64] Hope will open us up to new possibilities, engendering new, exciting goals we might not even have dreamed of before. In addition to responding to current conditions, we can envision opportunities and shape the future by asking "What's next?" That is the pinnacle of hope.

The Hope of Agency and The Hope of Acceptance

Snyder, Tomasulo, and other positive psychologists use the word "agency" to describe proactive choices. Lopez emphasizes the importance of "Agency Thinking," or believing that one's choices will make a difference.[65] Activists like Rebecca Solnit, Joanna Macy, Chris Johnstone, Elin Kelsey, and Cleo Wade hold that believing you can make a difference is crucial for motivation and staying power in social justice work.[66] Positive psychology directs hope toward specific goals where one's actions can influence the future and away from areas beyond one's control. Given that goal revision and course correction are essential elements of the process, even people in dire circumstances can set new goals to meet their "new normal" with hope.[67] Exercising agency to affect the future both reflects and promotes hope.

The hope of agency works beautifully in most situations. It also comports with religious notions of free will and repentance. Because human beings can and do make consequential choices, we are responsible and can justly be held to account for our agency. And, for as long as we live, we can choose anew where to direct and how to apply that agency.[68] In neurological,

[64] Tomasulo, *Learned Hopefulness*, 136–38.

[65] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 24.

[66] Solnit, *Hope*; Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're In With Unexpected Resilience and Creative Power*, rev. ed. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2022); Elin Kelsey, *Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis* (Berkeley, CA: Greystone, 2020); and Cleo Wade, *Where to Begin: A Small Book about Your Power to Create Big Change in Our Crazy World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019).

[67] Maria Sirois, *Every Day Counts: Lessons in Love, Faith, and Resilience From Children Facing Illness* (New York: Walker, 2006); Lucy Fettes, Stephen Ashford, and Matthew Maddock, *Setting and Implementing Patient-Set Goals in Palliative Care* (London: Cicely Saunders Institute of Palliative Care, Policy and Rehabilitation at King's College, 2018). Rabbi Maurice Lamm, *The Power of Hope: The One Essential of Life and Love* (New York: Rawson, 1995), 132–33 writes about hope in the face of a terminal diagnosis and includes a list of "Seven Hopes to Hold On To When There Is Nothing to Hope For." All seven include some measure of agency.

[68] Deuteronomy 30 affirms human free will and the ready opportunity to repent, culminating

psychological, and religious understandings, a major distinction between human beings and other animals is that we can imagine a more positive future and exercise agency to help create it. This is the theme of a book aptly titled by Seligman and his co-authors *Homo Prospectus*.[69]

While endorsed by both positive psychology and religion, the hope of agency nevertheless misses a vital form of hope that rabbis and other clergy often witness in action (and notice in its absence). I call it the "hope of acceptance." Sometimes people do not have control. Sometimes they do not see any path forward. Yet they can still have hope if they place their hope in something larger than themselves.

The hope of agency says, "there is power within me to change things." The hope of acceptance says, "there may be nothing I (or my circle of influence) can change, but there is a power greater than I, greater than all of us." Agency acts. Acceptance surrenders. Agency proactively addresses concerns. Acceptance consciously casts its cares.[70] Depending on the circumstances, each is wise. Over the course of a lifetime, both are needed.

It is valuable to differentiate, as Tomasulo suggests, between what is within our agency and what is outside it. We can then mindfully direct our activities and deploy our resources. But recognizing the limits to our exercise of free will and to the impact we can have does not necessarily mean limiting or extinguishing hope. Indeed, it has *not* meant that for billions of people across the globe and over millennia, because they have placed their hope in God. As we shall see, any power that one accepts as greater than oneself can become a source for the hope of acceptance.[71]

In the conclusion of an interesting and wide-ranging study of hope from a

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in verse 19 with the choice before us *today*: to choose life or death, blessing or curse.

[69] Martin E. P. Seligman et al., *Homo Prospectus* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2016) and Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 36. Psychologists and brain scientists coined the terms "chronesthesia" ("a capacity acquired by humans through evolution that allows them to be constantly aware of the past and the future") and "autonoetic consciousness" ("the capacity to mentally represent and become aware of subjective experiences in the past, present, and future"); see Bridget Murray, "What Makes Mental Time Travel Possible?," American Psychological Association (October 2003), https://www.apa.org/monitor/oct03/mental. In Genesis, the Creator made humans and not other animals in the image of the divine, endowing us with the ability to create as an act of will, consciousness, and vision. In the Jewish tradition, agency is also generally understood to be part of what distinguishes humans from angels, who do not have free will and must fulfill God's assignments; see, e.g., Sforno on Genesis 1:26–27.

[70] This refers to the New International Version translation of Psalm 55:23.

[71] Of course, it is possible to invest hope in a greater power that is neutral (e.g., nature) or even evil (e.g., the devil or a cult leader). But the vast majority of people choose a benign, sustaining, and sacred power that, in many cases, religious thinkers would identify with God.

Jewish perspective, Arnow writes that "[a] modern Jewish theology of hope, in my view, rests on two principal ideas: Human beings are created in the divine image. God has put the responsibility for fulfilling our hopes in our hands."[72] This summarizes and Judaizes the hope of agency, while missing the hope of acceptance. Echoing the notions and language of positive psychology, Arnow's definition of hope relates only to specific goals, as well as to motivations and actions that help achieve them: "Hope reflects our embrace of the possibility of a particular, deeply desired future, and hope fuels our actions to help bring it about."[73]

Toward the end of *Hope Rising*, Gwinn and Hellman write about their Christian faith and the secure "anchor" it provides them. They reference Hebrews 6:19–20 (NIV): "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."[74] Yet, earlier in the book, they discount the possibility of hope while there is no sense of agency, such as when a loved one dies. "When adversity slams into our lives there is a window of time when we must simply struggle to survive," they conclude.[75] Describing the trauma of house fires, they write:

> "It was not yet a time for hope. Hope would come later, after the terror, after the trauma. …They hoped for word that their house was spared. They hoped to find their pets. But *this was not really hope. They were wishes. Residents had no power over the outcomes.*[…] We call this the *survival window,* when your focus is not on hope. If someone tries to push toward rising hope in those moments, we will resent them and recoil, as we process the heartbreak, pain, or loss. …However, as we allow the negative emotions to run their course through the survival window, we need proven coping resources like hope to help us navigate back to well-being.

The Talmud invalidates prayers that one's own house be spared in the case of a fire that has already torn through a neighborhood, although the

[72] Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, 212.
[73] Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, 7.
[74] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 182–83. This is also a quote drawn on by Max Lucado, *Unshakeable Hope: Building Our Love on the Promises of God* (Memphis, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 153.
[75] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 31.

rabbis' reasoning is different.[76] The Talmud also advises: "Do not comfort [your fellow] while his dead still lies before him."[77] But you do not have to be a rabbi or a psychologist to know that urging people to buck up in the midst of a crisis is both foolish and unkind. For Gwinn and Hellman, hope must be paused during the "survival window." But, in my experience, this second kind of hope, the hope of acceptance, often operates even amidst trauma and especially when "nothing can be done." In fact, the hope of acceptance is a solid anchor in turbulent times.

When people have control, they choose hope by taking action. When they lack control, they choose hope by connecting with a power greater than themselves. The first kind of hope, agency, is more focused; the second kind, acceptance, has a wider perspective. It is attached not to specific goals for the future but to timeless, existential, and spiritual yearnings.[78] These yearnings may be especially potent in times of crisis. Often during such times, people discover a deeper kind of hope, closer to belief or trust than to goal-setting.

Of course, chaplains and clergy offer encouragement and practical help. But a big part of pastoral work is serving as a reservoir for the hope of acceptance, so that people undergoing the shock of an agency "drought" can be reminded of resources and powers that never run out.[79] In a question-and-answer session after one lecture I gave on "Hope in Difficult Times," a woman shared that she was incapable of setting goals after discovering a recent recurrence of cancer. Hearing about the hope of acceptance, she felt relief. It resonated with her and gave her permission to hope, even when she was overwhelmed by doubt and negativity and did not yet have the capacity to make a plan, take action, or ask for help.

Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said: "On the one hand we must accept the finite disappointment, but in spite of this we must maintain the infinite

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[76] Crying out for a house to be spared that has already burned (or not burned) is considered to be a prayer made in vain. The status of the house is a fait accompli. See m. Berakhot 9:3.

[77] m. Avot 4:18.

[78] After I developed this theory, I read about philosopher Joseph Godfrey's distinction between basic hope and directed hope, which bears some similarity to the hope of acceptance and the hope of agency, respectively; see Scioli and Biller, *Hope*, 28–29. Subsequently, I also discovered the concept of "object-oriented hope" which aligns with agency and "fundamental hope," which aligns with acceptance; see Alan Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion, and Political Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18.

[79] To continue the reservoir/rain/cloud metaphor, people can also "collect" hope when blessings "rain down" on them, and then, when facing difficulties, "draw on" those memories—and on any skills or traits that helped to "seed" hope in the past. See below for a discussion of how the word *tiqvah* is associated with living waters and containers.

hope."[80] The context of the quotation is significant. He discussed "the secret of the survival of our slave foreparents," whose hope continued while their oppressors did everything possible to strip them of agency. "With their bottomless vitality they continually transformed the darkness of frustration into the light of hope. They had the 'courage to be.'"[81] Agency calls on the courage to do; acceptance calls on the courage to be. Alan L. Mittleman commented on the virtue of hope as presented in the Bible: "Hope knows and affirms the value that inheres in being as such."[82] Effective action may be precluded in a given time or circumstance, but being operates eternally. For King, "disappointment" came when arriving at the end of one's agency, while "infinite hope" lay with God.

People can cling to a power greater than themselves that they do not necessarily identify with God. They might say that their ultimate hope lies in community, family, destiny, truth, goodness, justice, love, karma, the human spirit, or the universe. People both *discover* and *invest* their hope of acceptance in such powers.[83] The hope of acceptance can come from believing, with Albert Einstein, that "the Ancient One does not play dice [with the universe]"; or, with Rabbi Akiva and other teachers, that "[e]verything that the Compassionate One does, is done for the best" (b. Berakhot 60b); or, with Rev. Dr. King, that "[w]e, as a people, will get to the promised land."[84] A particular goal may or may not be attached. Many Jews consider Jewish peoplehood to be a hope-giving, transcendent power. With or without a professed belief in God, many Jews invest hope in the Torah and its eternal values, ascribing to it greater wisdom and goodness than to themselves, even when they do not understand the text or struggle against it.

The hope of acceptance does not operate only when agency is stalled (due to trauma) or nonexistent (due to circumstances beyond human control). It fosters a partnership. I do what I can by exercising my agency, and I rely

[80] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Shattered Dreams," Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/draft-chapter-x-shattered-dreams; see also King, "Unfulfilled Hopes," https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/unfulfilled-hopes-0.

[81] Here King evokes existential hope—the courage *to be*—and refers to Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).

[82] Mittleman, *Hope*, 6.

[83] As noted, many religious people would identify these greater powers as expressions of the divine.

[84] Andrew Robinson, "Did Einstein Really Say That?," *Nature* (April 30, 2018), https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05004-4 and Martin Luther King, Jr. "I've Been to the Mountaintop," AFSCME (April 3, 1968), https://www.afscme.org/about/history/mlk/mountaintop. This address was delivered the day before he was assassinated.

on a power greater than my own to do, or at least to own, what I cannot. At the end of *The Power of Hope*, Rabbi Maurice Lamm puts it this way: "After you have tried, trust. This is the final step, and it is, in many ways, the most important."[85] Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi advised: "Trust and let The Future pull you."[86]

The acceptance that my agency is humble and tiny compared to that of a greater power encourages an appropriate surrender to whatever cannot be changed and a healthy willingness to accept help. To achieve any vision worthy of that name, I must depend on others. Once I exhaust my individual ability to find a path forward, I may be more likely to "borrow hope" from peers and role models, if I have practiced accepting hope from a great power.[87] With more allies and support, agency tends to return more quickly.

For those who accept a power greater than themselves, the hope of acceptance operates constantly in the background and can be consciously tapped. The hope of acceptance does not depend on the fluctuations of circumstances or pathways because it relies on the steady presence, strength, and embrace of a great power. It can therefore sustain those who practice it, even when the hope of agency must sometimes pause.

The main Hebrew word for "hope," *tiqvah,* reflects the fact that limits on human capacity will sometimes force the hope of agency to stall. *Tiqvah* comes from the root *qoph*, *vav*, *he*, meaning both "to hope" and "to wait."[88] A second root, *yod*, *ḥet*, *lamed*, has the same double meaning of "hope" and "wait."[89] But this waiting is not a pause to allow "negative emotions to run their course," as Gwinn and Hellman wrote. The root *qoph*, *vav*, *he* means waiting with joy, courage, and the expectation of a good end despite fear and uncertainty. The term "expectant mother" hints at this kind of waiting and hoping. Things can go wrong during a pregnancy, but parents look forward to the birth, imagining and planning for a hopeful future in vivid detail. Like an expectant parent, the psalmist gains hope and strength from something new and wonderful, already in the making but not entirely by his own power: "Wait on/hope in God (*qavveh el YHWH*); be strong and of

[85] Lamm, *Power*, 171.

[86] Milgram Goldie et al., *Wisdom from Reb Zalman: Embracing the Jewish Spirit* (New Rochelle, NY: Reclaiming Judaism, 2018), 212.

[87] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 169–79 talks about "borrowing hope," "sharing hope," "building networks of hope," and "leading with hope."

[88] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, study edition, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2:1082.

[89] Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1:407.

good courage, and wait on/hope in God" (Psalm 27:14).[90] "Why so downcast, my soul, why disquieted within me? Have hope in/wait on God (*hoḥili le'lohim*); I will yet thank my ever-present salvation, my God" (Psalm 43:5).

In the Bible, hope depends not only on action and agency, but also on waiting and reliance on God. Birthing a better future requires surrender to God's timing and God's power. Indeed, one of the names of God is *miqveh yisra'el*, the Hope of Israel. Even when God punishes the people and they feel abandoned, Jeremiah calls God "Hope of Israel, its Savior in time of trouble" (*miqveh yisra'el moshi'o be'eit tsarah*, Jeremiah 14:8). It is Israel who abandons the Hope of Israel, not vice versa. (Jermiah 17:13).

The word *miqveh*, of course, also refers to a ritual bath. Scholars debate whether the etymology for the two meanings is the same.[91] Shachter-Shalomi believed that it is, and that the connection between "hope" and "ritual bath" is the notion of "container."[92] *Tiqvah*, like the living waters of a *miqveh*, must be collected and contained.[93] Before blessing a congregation, Reb Zalman often advised: "Now strengthen your container to receive."[94] Sometimes, hope seems to leak right out of us. Agency and acceptance can help us to stiffen our resolve and strengthen our hearts (*ḥazaq veya'ameits libbeikh*). Within ourselves and as we encourage others, each of us can be a vessel for hope. *Miqveh* and *tiqvah* also have in common the invitation to immerse fully—in the healing, purifying waters and in the healing, purifying practice of hope.

Another derivation of the noun *tiqvah* likewise reflects the higher powers that people connect with and hold onto. The word *qav* means "line," and *tiqvah* can mean "cord" as well as "hope." In the Book of Joshua, Rahab first lowers the spies who pledge to protect her and her family out her window with a *ḥevel*, a word meaning "rope" that also connotes destruction and birth pangs (Joshua 2:15). (The spies are in danger, as is Rahab; they are not sure if they can trust her or if they will succeed in their mission.) Then, to designate her home for protection, Rahab lowers a *tiqvat hasheni*,

[90] Psalm 27 is recited throughout the High Holiday season, when Jews especially need hope that they can change themselves and the coming year for the better.

[91] Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, xvii, 224.

[92] High Holiday sermon delivered at Makom Ohr Shalom synagogue in Los Angeles, date uncertain (1994–2010).

[93] Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, 221 cites British psychoanalyst Charles Rycroft, who "suggests that hope is an open system; like a river, it depends on inputs of rain, springs, and streams, but it feeds back nourishment to the surrounding environment."

[94] Especially before *dukhen*ing at Makom Ohr Shalom synagogue in Los Angeles, dates uncertain (1994–2010).

a blood-red line/cord/hope (Joshua 2:18, 21). *Tiqvah* is both literally (in the rope) and figuratively (in the hope) a lifeline. For both the spies and Rahab, the lifeline was lowered from on high at a time when agency was nil and destruction imminent.

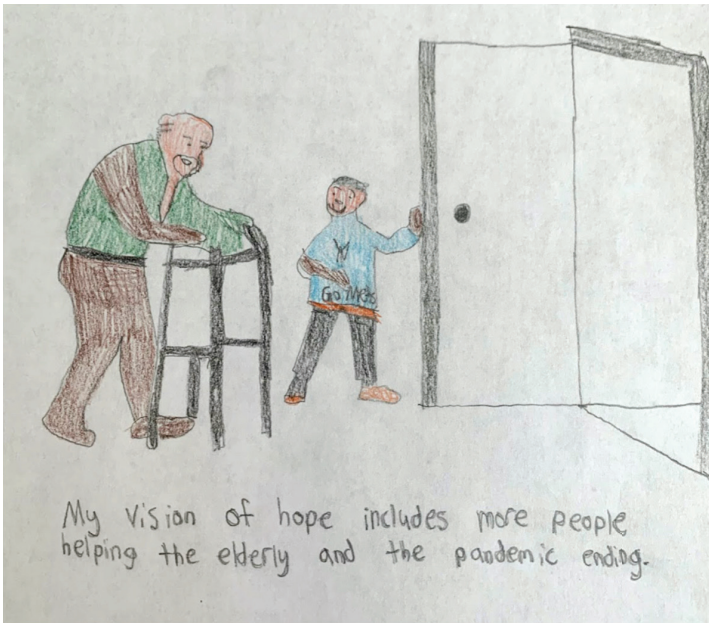
While the hope of agency works toward particular, cherished ends, the hope of acceptance expresses a more global faith that a good future will unfold. In that sense, the hope of acceptance could also be understood as *bitaḥon* ("trust").[95] In fact, a well-known phrase in Ecclesiastes 9:4 that uses the word *bitaḥon* is generally translated in context to mean "hope": *ki mi asher yeḥuvar et kol haḥayyim yeish bitaḥon*. The Jewish Publication Society translation is: "For he who is reckoned among the living has something to look forward to." The King James, Revised Standard, and American Standard Versions read: "For to him that is joined with all the living there is hope." The Message Bible declares: "Still, anyone selected out for life has hope."[96] Hope resides not in a particular goal, but in life itself.

The balance between agency and action on the one hand and acceptance and expectancy on the other crystallized for me on August 18, 2020, at 1:22 PM. I know the exact moment because of a time stamp on an email from Cooper Breslaw, a student in my synagogue's Hebrew school. I had asked the children to find or draw a picture representing what hope meant to them. Cooper sent the artwork shown below and added a caption as well.[97]

[95] Interestingly, *tiqvah* is not named as its own *middah* ("virtue") in most musar literature, but it is explored and elevated in relation to other virtues, particularly *bitaḥon*. Perhaps this is because *tiqvah* is so essential to all character improvement that it qualifies as a meta-*middah*. Hope that personal growth is possible is needed in order to engage in it vulnerably and faithfully. One modern mussarist goes so far as to say, "I have only one word to describe what *mussar* means to me: hope"; see Rabbi Yehuda Keilson, *Mind Over Man: The Climb to Greatness* (Lakewood, NJ: Israel Bookshop, 2017), 21. In discussing these matters, Rabbi Eric Gurvis shared with me a helpful essay on *bitaḥon* written by Rabbi David Jaffe and temporarily removed from the Musar Institute website. Jaffe wrote: "There is a classic debate in traditional Jewish sources….For Rabbi Yoseff Yuzel Horowitz, *Bitaḥon* meant a rock-solid belief that God would deliver what you needed, if you had enough trust. As difficult as this position sounds to the contemporary ear, it has strong support in classic Jewish sources…. For the Chazon Ish, *Bitaḥon* meant a belief that the events of our life and things that happen to us have ultimate meaning, even if we cannot discern that meaning or purpose from our limited perspective." The latter understanding of *bitaḥon* is similar in many ways to the hope of acceptance.

[96] Rashi explains the phrase in supremely hopeful and sobering language: *ki ve'odo yeish bitaḥon shemme yashuv lifnei moto* ("As long as [a person] is still alive…there is hope, for maybe [you] will repent/change before [you] die.")

[97] It is based on an illustration found at https://www.tasmeemme.com/store-items/vector-well-behaved-girl-opening-door-to-elderly-man-saying-please-come-in-good-manners-politeness-of-male-kid-decenity-and-urbanity-of-children-concept/?item=10120920381, which he customized and which I gained permission to use.



"More people helping the elderly" is a vision within our power to achieve. We have the agency to visit elders, honor them, assist them with tasks, and advocate on their behalf. Most of us can open a door and wait patiently. We can all look smilingly into an elder's face, as the young Mets fan does in Cooper's personalization of the drawing. Viewing this image stirs the hope of agency. The caption also evokes the hope of acceptance. If we were in denial, Covid-19 reminded us that no one has unfettered agency. Certainly, we can each do our part: follow medical advice, fund research, protect ourselves and our neighbors as best we can. But Cooper was wise enough to understand that no one can know or control when the pandemic will cease to be a threat. There is thus no superhero pictured here overcoming the virus. Instead, Cooper writes about an inner vision of the "pandemic ending." He has faith that there are benign and healing powers in this universe greater than the virus and greater than any of us. Creation was designed to help repair itself, and Cooper, like all of us, was designed for hope.

What is Hope, and Why Do We Need It? Jewish Perspectives

Hope is a good topic in any Jewish educational setting because it is integral to the Jewish heritage. We have already seen that the Hebrew language suggests ideas about how hope operates. Many scholars believe that Jews brought the concept of hope to the world. Certainly, Jews have needed and embraced hope down the generations. Menninger, along with Jonathan Sacks, Thomas Cahill, and others, distinguished between Greek and Jewish thought with regard to hope. Rabbi Lord Sacks wrote:

> At the heart of Judaism is a belief so fundamental to Western civilization that we take it for granted, yet it is anything but self-evident… . It is the belief in human freedom. We are what we choose to be. Society is what we choose to make it. The future is open. There is nothing inevitable in the affairs of humankind.[98]

By contrast, Sacks added, "[t]he ancients believed that human destiny lay in the stars, or blind fate."[99] In Greek mythology, the gods ruled human destiny, often cruelly and capriciously. In the Bible and the Talmud, God does step into history but for the sake of love and justice. Moreover, Adonai endowed human beings with the power to shape our future, with the *awareness* that we have that power, as the Torah and Prophets remind us.[100]

Time may be cyclical in Jewish thought, but it also has a direction and, with the advent of messianic days, a glorious culmination.[101] Not only is there reason to hope, the brightest possible future is ultimately a sure bet! Justice will prevail. Love will abide. Peace will reign. In the meantime, we are enjoined against fear, dismay, and despair. Through Moses, God gave that instruction to Joshua and, in turn, to priests, elders, and the entire

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[98] Jonathan Sacks, "Future Tense," Jonathan Sacks: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy (April 1, 2008), https://www.rabbisacks.org/archive/future-tense-how-the-jews-invented-hope/. See also Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York: Random House, 1998); Menninger, "Hope," 483; and Mittleman, *Hope*, 16, 83–84.

[99] Sacks, "Future Tense." Of course, the English word "fate" is applied to Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, the three Fates of Greek mythology.

[100] See, e.g., m. Avot 3:14; Deuteronomy 30:19; and Jonah 3:4.

[101] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New York: Schocken, 1982), 23–26 and Sacks, *Future Tense*, 243.

people (Deuteronomy 31:7–11).[102] Isaiah reiterated: "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God" (Isaiah 41:10). Rabbi Naḥman famously taught: "*Gevalt,* do not despair!"[103]

Rava names "did you expect salvation?" (*tzifita lishuʿah*) as one of just a few questions that each person will be asked in heaven (b. Shabbat 31a). Regarding this, Rabbi Eliezer Papo wrote in *Pele yoets*:

> It is not enough to say with one's mouth that one is anticipating redemption. Rather, it is necessary that a person expect redemption with a whole heart and total belief. Just as a person comes closer to death every day, so, too, does redemption come closer each and every day. If it tarries, then we will wait, for it will come, yes, come, surely, without any doubt.... It is incumbent on every human being to be expectant. The salvation of God can happen in the blink of an eye.[104]

The energy in this quotation gives one a sense of what a hopeful attitude can contribute. This perspective does not deny obstacles, threats, or difficulties. Death comes closer every day! But even with that stark view of the human condition, and in some ways because of it, *tiqvah*, *bitaḥon*, and *tsippui* ("expectation") must prevail. We do not have the luxury of despair. Given the limited time each of us has on this earth and the repair we need, both individually and collectively, the tradition offers two possibilities: work to bring redemption and/or wait with great expectation for it. Neither apathy nor resignation are on the menu.

Regarding any goodness that is still wanting in ourselves or in the world, the classic Jewish answer is not "no," but "not yet." Eliezer Berkovitz wrote: "Much more than the history of any other people, Jewish history is future-oriented. Its very essence is not the eternal 'now' of Rosenzweig, but the everlasting 'not-yet.'" [105] Repair is our work, and hope is needed to sus-

[102] There is debate over what "this Torah/Instruction" includes, but it at least includes the previous few verses.

[103] *Gevalt* is difficult to translate. It is an exclamation, meaning roughly "Heaven help us!" or "God protect us from such violence!"

[104] The Hebrew text is available at https://learntorah.com/PeleYoetz/Pdf/Hebrew326.pdf. Thanks to Rabbi Eric Gurvis for directing me to this source.

[105] Eliezer Berkovitz, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1974), ch.2; the text of this volume is available on Sefaria.org. He refers to a widely told story that Franz Rosenzweig, when challenged with the question "Do you lay tefillin?" answered, "Not

tain it. Improvement, if not perfection, is possible—and hope is therefore warranted.

Arnow's recent book, *Choosing Hope*, demonstrates how hope has been a grand theme and indispensable component in Jewish history, heroes, homeland, texts, prayer, holidays, theology, practices, humor, and survival.[106] Sacks wrote in his *Future Tense* that "[n]ot all, perhaps, but most of the commandments are either about creating hope, individually or through networks of support, or about behaviourally inculcating habits of hope.... To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope."[107]

Try talking about the Jewish holidays—even Tisha b'Av, Yom Hazikaron, or Yom Hashoah—and *not* touching on hope. Hope is vital in the formative narratives of the patriarchs, matriarchs, and exodus—and to the continuity of our people. Hope is a necessary ingredient for *teshuvah* and *tiqqun ʿolam*; improvement and repair would not be attempted without it. At joyous lifecycle events, Jewish families extend hope to the entire Jewish people, with the chant *siman tov umazal tov yehei lanu ulekhol yisraʾel*: "[let this joyous event] be a good sign, omen, and fortune for us and for all Israel." While traditional mourning practices certainly allow for grief, they also seek to uplift the soul of the departed, spread positive stories and contributions of the deceased, and convey the promise to mourners of better days ahead. It is common for visitors at a house of mourning or attendees at a funeral to say hopefully to one another *af simchas*, "may we meet at joyous occasions."

Through the prophet Zechariah, God calls the Israelites "prisoners of hope," saying, "Return to *bitsaron*/the fortress, you prisoners of hope, for this very day I announce that I will give back to you double" (*shuvu levitsaron asirei hatiqvah gam hayom maggid mishneh ashiv lakh*, Zechariah 9:12). The word *bitsaron* is difficult to translate, but the very clear phrase "prisoners of hope" may be even harder to grasp![108] It seems to be an oxymoron.

yet." The "eternal now" refers to Rosenzweig's theory of repetition in *The Star of Redemption*. For example, Sinai happened in the past and is also always happening now.

[106] "[K]ey narratives, concepts, texts, prayers, and practices in Judaism…have sustained hope for the Jewish people over the ages and, when viewed through an appropriate lens, can do so for us"; see Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, xxii.

[107] Sacks, *Future Tense*, 247–48, 250.

[108] The word *bitsaron* is a *hapax legomenon* with uncertain meaning. It has been identified as Jerusalem, a specific fortress in Samaria, or any fortress. "Fortress" can also be understood as a name for God. *Bitaḥon*, as seen above, is sometimes a synonym for "hope." I therefore wonder if the word *bitsaron* could be a scribal error for *bitaḥon*: "Return to faith in the future, you prisoners of hope." Whether the people are encouraged to return to a bedrock of faith, to Zion/Jerusalem, to a fortress at another location, or even to God, the overall message is that hope resides in a power greater and more stable than the people, their wishes, their sins, or their goals.

Prisoners, of all people, might be *least* likely to hope. When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, Moses's message of hope to them initially fell on deaf ears because their spirits and patience had been stunted by oppressive labor (Exodus 6:8).

For the people of Zechariah's generation, imprisonment was in the recent past. The destruction of the First Temple and the exile from Judah had been traumatic. After failing to heed Jeremiah's warnings (Jeremiah 34:1f), the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, was forced to watch his sons killed before he was blinded and led in chains to Babylonian prison for the rest of his life. People starved in the siege of Jerusalem, their houses were burned down, and only the very poor remained there (2 Kings 24–25, Jeremiah 52). The exiles famously "sat down and wept by the waters of Babylon" (Psalm 137:1).

Against this backdrop, Zechariah prophesied to the Jews in exile after the return to Jerusalem became possible, telling them, in effect, "you are *bound* to hope."[109] The Temple can and will be rebuilt. You may have thought our people were prisoners of the Babylonians, but all along (even before the Persians conquered Jerusalem from them), we were prisoners of hope—and so we remain.

Similarly, Jeremiah bought land in Anathoth, knowing that the conquest of Judah was imminent, to signify hope and confidence that his people would return. He also spoke directly to exiles from the Northern Kingdom, already in Babylon, letting them know that the exile would not be brief, as false prophets contended, yet giving them reason to hope:

> For thus says Adonai: when seventy years are fulfilled for Babylonia, I will take account of you out and uphold My good word to return you to this place. For I am know the plans that I made for you, says Adonai, plans for wellbeing and not for harm, to give you a future and hope (*'aḥarit vetiqvah*) (Jeremiah 29:10–11)

The hope and promise delivered by Jeremiah resonates powerfully today. Jeremiah 29:11 has been Googled more often than any other verse in the

[109] The paradox of being bound or imprisoned by hope recalls a more lighthearted but similar expression by Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Promised City," *City Journal* (Summer 1997), https://www.city-journal.org/html/isaac-singer%E2%80%99s-promised-city-11935.html: "We must believe in free will, we have no choice."

Hebrew Bible.[110] People literally search for hope on the internet and find it with the "weeping prophet."

The Hebrew prophets warned of destruction if people did not repent. (In this sense, agency is respected; people are free to choose sin and will reap what they sow.) But the prophets also promised that the nation would survive, and that God would ultimately forgive their betrayal. They preached the hope of acceptance: God and the covenant are powers greater than any sin or conquering empire. "The prophets, even the most pessimistic, were all agents of hope."[111]

The Book of Lamentations, attributed to Jeremiah, asserts hope during a crushing period of loss. In vivid, gruesome detail, chapter 3 describes the Jew as afflicted by God's own hand. His flesh was worn away, and his bones were crushed. He was made to dwell in darkness like those long dead. He was cut off, walled in; pleading, prey; numb; a laughingstock. He was ground into the dust. He thought that his strength and hope were lost (*'avad nitsḥi vetoḥalti*, Lamentations 3:18). Yet, he rallies:

> But this, I call to mind; therefore, I will hope (*al kein oḥil*). Adonai's kindness has not ceased, nor has God's compassion ended. They are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness. Adonai is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in/wait on God (*oḥil lo*). God is good to those who have hope in the Divine (*tov YHWH leqav*)… It is good to wait/hope patiently and quietly for the salvation of Adonai (*tov veyaḥil vedumam litshu'at YHWH*)… Maybe there is hope yet (*ulai yeish tiqvah*) …. Let us search and examine our ways, and return to Adonai (*venashuvah 'ad YHWH*) (Lamentations 3:21–40).

The penultimate verse of the entire book echoes the hopeful possibility of repentance, return, and renewal. "Return us to you Adonai, and we shall return. Renew our days as of old."[112] While hope can be found in an

[110] "The Top 10 Most-Searched Bible Verses: What's Missing?," Bible Gateway (January 24, 2011), https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2011/01/the-top-10-most-searched-bible-verses-whats-missing/.

[111] Sacks, *Future Tense*, 246.

[112] In liturgical readings, this verse is repeated after the conclusion of the book, ensuring that we end on a hopeful note. Referring specifically to hope as it is understood in the Bible, Mittleman, *Hope*, 14 writes: "Hope is not always about change. It is also about conserving the practices

imagined, better future, it can also be mined from memory and from the successes of the past. This is the deeper meaning behind of one my favorite Yiddish expressions: *oyb siz geshen, siz meglach*, "if it happened, it's possible." Chronesthesia can be employed to stoke hope.[113] Individually and collectively, Jews have survived what seemed at the time to be utterly hopeless situations.[114] Facing new challenges, we can draw strength from the acceptance that carried us through previously and find inspiration in the agency that proved effective.

Probably the best-known Hebrew text about hope comes from the prophet Ezekiel, who, like Jeremiah, prophesied during the exile. In his vision of a valley full of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:5–14), Ezekiel is instructed by God to speak to the bones. These bones seem to exercise agency and initiate action; they clatter and rattle, joining together. Yet their hope runs dry. The whole House of Israel is ready to despair: "Our bones are dried up. Our hope is gone (*'avdah tiqvateinu*). We are doomed." When they are depleted, the power of God raises them from their graves and carries them to Israel. It was not the winds (*ruḥot*) blowing from all four directions that resurrected life and hope when all seemed lost. Only the greater power of God's own breath and spirit (*ruḥi*) could do that.

Israel's national anthem, "Hatiqvah" ("the Hope"), was adapted from the poem "Tiqvateinu" ("Our Hope") written in the late 1870s by Naftali Herz Imber. Inspired by the establishment of the town Petach Tikvah, the anthem reverses the statement made by the House of Israel in Ezekiel, declaring: (*'od lo' 'avdah tiqvateinu*), "our hope is not yet [or still not] lost." We sometimes forget how remarkable it is that our ancestors prayed from 70 to 1948 CE for a return to Jewish governance in the Land of Israel, and no generation gave up hope.

In his book on Jewish humor, Joseph Telushkin tells this joke about Jews and hope.

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and institutions that support meaning, which have been inherited in the past and still endure in the present."

[113] See above, including footnote 72.

[114] Sacks, *Future Tense*, 253 writes movingly about the remarkable resilience and even hopefulness of Holocaust survivors. Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, 208 cites Steve Lipman, author of *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor during the Holocaust* and identifies humor as "the currency of hope" during the Shoah. He also summarizes the importance of hope among theologians and philosophers who write about the Holocaust, including Richard Rubenstein, Emil Fackenheim, and Irving Greenberg (95–102).

> A group of elderly, retired men gathers each morning at a café in Tel Aviv. They drink their coffee and sit for hours discussing the world situation. Given the state of the world, their talks usually are depressing. One day, one of the men startles the others by announcing, "You know what? I am an optimist." The others are shocked, but then one of them notices something fishy. "Wait a minute! If you're an optimist, why do you look so worried?" "You think it's easy to be an optimist?"[115]

This joke is set in Israel, a modern state whose very existence was based on an improbable dream and vision for the future. It is a nation famous for its grit in the face of opposition and its embrace of forward-thinking social structures and new technology.[116] But confidence about the future falters in Israel, too. Every human being wants to hope, and every human being loses the hope of agency at some point. Most of us waver, too, in the hope of acceptance, doubting our connection to or investment in a power greater than ourselves. This is normal; it would be toxic positivity rather than positive psychology to suggest otherwise.[117]

The old saying, "Jews are just like everybody else, but more so" applies here. Jews have a foundational attachment to hope—and, simultaneously, more reason than most others to lose hope. Hope is endemic to Jewish values and peoplehood, yet tragedy has marked Jewish history and experience. Salo Baron rightly decried the "lachrymose theory of Jewish history."[118] Our story is more than a series of expulsions, inquisitions, crusades, forced conversions, ghettos, blood libels, pogroms, terrorist attacks, and other catastrophes—most notably the Holocaust. Still, that history takes a toll. Gentler forms of oppression can also wear hope down; these include

[115] Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Humor: What the Best Jewish Jokes Say About the Jews* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 26. To Jonathan Sacks, "Rabbi Sacks on Optimism v. Hope," Jonathan Sacks: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy, https://www.rabbisacks.org/videos/rabbi-sacks-on-optimism-vs-hope-jinsider/ (originally published *JInsider*, March 2010), the word "optimism" signifies passivity, and the word "hope" signifies agency. Sacks's collection of radio essays confirms this use of terms and focus on agency: Jonathan Sacks, *From Optimism to Hope: BBC Thoughts for the Day* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

[116] Consider kibbutzim, women in political leadership, desalination, start-ups, and the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel.

[117] Faith includes doubt, otherwise, it would be called "certainty." The same can be said for hope.

[118] Salo W. Baron, "Newer Emphases in Jewish History," *Jewish Social Studies* 25, no. 4 (1963): 245–58.

poll taxes, restrictive covenants, school quotas, vandalism, vilification, and employment discrimination.

All this explains another joke in Telushkin's collection: "What's a Jewish telegram? It reads, 'Letter to follow. Start worrying.'"[119] One reason Jews have been champions of hope is that we have needed it so much ourselves.

What Hope Does Judaism Offer to Positive Psychology?

Since Jews unfortunately have experienced so much tragedy, we have something to teach the world about enduring difficulty with hope. Over and over, the Jewish people has overcome tragedy and trauma to build a hopeful future despite the odds. The Dalai Lama reached out to Jewish leaders, saying, "tell me your secret… the spiritual secret to Jewish survival in exile."[120] "Jews were and are still called on to be the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind."[121]

Along with bearing high levels of trauma and stress, Jews have also experienced extraordinary post-traumatic growth.[122] Perhaps the most dramatic example in Jewish history was the establishment of Yavneh and the rabbinic enterprise in response to the destruction of the Second Temple. In our own day, we have witnessed the flourishing of a generation that survived the horrors of the Holocaust. Jews have repeatedly faced existential threats without succumbing to fear, despair, or annihilation. Again, *oyb siz geshen, siz meglach*, "if it happened, it's possible."

Today, climate change, political divides, and mass migration have all reached crisis levels and in many ways are getting worse. Many of us consume fearmongering clickbait and conspiracy theories more than news. The world *needs* hope. "The capacity to hope has been shown to provide a therapeutic quality that helps refugees overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges… Being hopeful also matters to how we collectively influence what happens on the planet."[123] Jews have given the world the value-concept

[119] Telushkin, *Jewish Humor*, 25.

[120] Roger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 2.

[121] Sacks, *Future Tense*, 252.

[122] Tal Ben-Shahar, "Let's Suffer from Post-Traumatic Growth," *Psychology Today* (July 7, 2020), https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-art-whole-being/202007/let-s-suffer-post-traumatic-growth.

[123] Kelsey, *Hope*, 12.

of *tiqvah*, the hope of acceptance, and many examples and role models of agency, even during and after catastrophe.

Another important contribution that Judaism makes to the understanding of hope is its emphasis on the collective. The poem and national anthem were never called "Tikvati," "*My* Hope." *Our* Hope and *The* Hope are more inclusive, generous, and widely beneficial than any personal hope. Jews generally pray in the plural. The prophets speak to individual kings, but their main audience is the *People* of Israel. It is *our* hope that is either found or lost. "These bones are the whole House of Israel." Jon Levenson writes about Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones: "Israelite people die, like anyone else; the people Israel survive and revives because of God's promise, despite the most lethal defeats.[124]

Isaiah famously promises: "Youths may faint and tire. Young men will surely stumble. But those who hope in/wait on Adonai will renew (*yaḥalifu*) strength; they will grow new pinions like the eagles; they will run and not tire; they will walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:30–31). Here, the hopeful are discussed in the plural, with age and gender unspecified. Those who hope in Adonai will have more endurance than the strength of youth or manhood can provide. The Hebrew verb for renewing strength literally means "to change or exchange." Most translations add a definite article where there is none. The hopeful do not renew/exchange *their* strength; they renew/exchange strength. Therefore, the verse can be understood to mean that hopeful people rely on one another. The hopeful can even be imagined as running a relay race—each receiving hope, holding it, and passing it on for a collective win. Another interpretation is that believers can exchange their exhaustion for God's strength.[125]

There is a danger that positive psychology can devolve into solipsism. Do I engage in gratitude practices primarily because the research indicates that they will make me happier? In that case, people and God, in their goodness, can become mere instruments for me. The sense of obligation and appreciation is diminished, and the focus on what benefits *me* is strengthened.

[124] Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 163 quoted in Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, 131.

[125] Ibn Ezra interprets verse 31 to mean that hopeful people are regularly exchanging one iteration of godly strength for another, so that they never become depleted: "Even before one strength runs out, another comes to them from God." This highlights the power of the hope of acceptance, which, unlike the hope of agency, is not easily exhausted.

Hope, in Jewish thought, can be personal, but it is always connected to the collective—the hope for national redemption and universal salvation. Hope will help people achieve personal goals, but it will be wasted if those goals are merely self-serving. A sense of connection and obligation to something greater than oneself is essential to the Jewish relationship with hope but has not yet been integrated into positive psychology models.

What Hope Does Positive Psychology Offer to Judaism?

It would be an oversimplification to say that positive psychology gave us the hope of agency and religion gave us the hope of acceptance. Religions certainly advocate for setting goals, stirring motivation, and generating new paths and possibilities. Likewise, positive psychology encourages the development of a sense of meaning and purpose beyond oneself, even if that larger commitment has not been tied to hope or to a higher power.

The fact that social science can demonstrate the benefits of hope in and of itself provides a vital opportunity to Jewish leaders and communities. Proven benefits stoke the willpower and follow-through needed in order to nurture hope and reach goals.[126] Increasing hope will help Jews to sustain social justice work, *keiruv* ("outreach"), and other challenging, important efforts.

Positive psychologists can help religious leaders better understand and foster connections between hope and other strengths and mindsets. Hope can often lead to awe, and vice versa. Hope is also connected to a sense of purpose. As Lopez writes, "When we choose hope, we define what matters to us most."[127]

Positive psychologists have developed an array of tools and interventions to increase hope.[128] One of my favorites is an exercise called the "best imagined future or the best possible self." It requires just fifteen minutes a day of journal writing for three or four days in a row. Sometimes a visualization or gratitude practice is added. In Jewish settings, I have added "spiritual aspirations" to the "relevant areas of life" named in the exercise below, and

[126] This is important because willpower has proven to be a consumable resource. Roy F. Baumeister et al., "Ego Depletion: Is the Active Self a Limited Resource?," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 5 (1998): 1252–65.

[127] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 24.

[128] Paquette, *Happiness Toolbox*, ch. 7. Gina Delucca and Jamie Goldstein, *Positive Psychology in Practice: Simple Tools to Pursue Happiness and Live Authentically* (Emeryville, CA: Rockridge, 2020), 116ff.

also asked people to reflect afterward on themes and character strengths that appear in their writing. The effectiveness of this exercise has been studied since 2001. Participants who invest about an hour are generally happier and more hopeful, both during the week of their participation and for months afterward. The simple prompt follows:

> Think about your life in the future. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals. Consider all of the relevant areas of your life, such as your career, relationships, hobbies, spiritual aspirations, and health. Think of this as the realization of all your life dreams. Now write continuously for 15 minutes about what you imagine this best possible future to be.[129]

Imagine if every rabbi did this exercise and then shared it with students and congregants. Think of the hope and well-being we could spread! Then imagine applying this exercise to institutions and envisioning the best possible future for our synagogues, federations, camps, or schools. This approach would dovetail beautifully with appreciative inquiry methods for strategic planning. Participants would be less likely to succumb to complaining and negativity bias and more likely to draw on strengths in order to meet goals.[130]

While this and many other positive psychology interventions have proven effective, I recommend beginning a communal conversation about hope with an icebreaker called "head-heart-holy," invented by Lopez. He would ask people to point to where their hope dominantly comes from—their heads, their hearts, or heavenward, indicating a holy source. Lopez observed:

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[129] The wording is deliberately ambiguous regarding when in the future to direct one's imagination. Laura King of the University of Missouri invented the exercise. Preparatory instructions are provided at "Best Possible Self," Greater Good in Action, https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/best_possible_self.

[130] Negativity bias refers to the human tendency to notice and dwell on what is missing or wrong more than on what goes well. According to Rick Hanson, *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence* (New York: Harmony, 2013), 31, "The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences but Teflon for positive ones." Evolutionary biologists point out that ancient people were harmed far more by failing to notice one menacing saber-toothed tiger than by failing to notice one succulent berry bush. Miss a bush, and you forage another day. Miss a tiger, and you will be foraged. We are the descendants of ancestors whose negativity bias helped them survive.

> People don't hesitate—they each have a working theory of hope based on their experiences. And …they inevitably look around for the people who share their brand of hope…. The truth is, wherever your hands land, you can probably expand your sense of hope…. Feelings of hope may be ephemeral, but they strongly influence our actions. Hope also requires complex cognitive operations that incorporate emotions, not dismiss them. And hope almost always involves a leap of faith, as we move toward a future that even our best efforts can't guarantee."[131]

Scientific assessments are another gift of positive psychology to Judaism. Gwinn and Hellman write: "The truth is that many institutions and organizations don't want to know whether they are producing rising hope… Churches and synagogues should be increasing hope and, if they are not, benchmarking hope levels can guide vision casting, planning, and programming."[132] People tend to improve in whatever they track. Psychologists have already developed several tools to measure whether hope is rising, and new tools, reflecting Jewish values around hope and targeted to Jewish organizations, can also be invented.[133] I can imagine a *tiqvah* index that incorporates willpower and waypower questions from the adult hope scale and social support questions from the Herth Hope Index, along with questions about the hope of acceptance and hopes for the future of the Jewish people.

Peterson and other psychologists have shown that "hope is especially important in organizations experiencing uncertainty" and is "a more significant predictor of performance in start-up businesses than in more established firms."[134] With historic changes in politics, health, climate, and institutional norms, people and organizations are certainly "experiencing uncertainty," if not anxiety and crisis. Unpredictability and rapidly changing conditions mean that established Jewish institutions must now, more than ever, cultivate the innovative *and hopeful* mindset of social entrepreneurship.

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[131] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 19–20.
[132] Gwinn and Hellman, *Hope*, 39–40.
[133] See footnotes 46 and 62, above.
[134] Lopez, *Making Hope Happen*, 54.

Raising Hope

Sacks has a beautiful take on *Lekh lekha* and uncertainty (Genesis 12:1):"To be a Jew is to be willing to hear the still, small voice of eternity urging us to travel, move, go on ahead, continuing Abraham's journey toward that unknown destination at the far horizon of hope."[135] Hope means "stepping out to find out." As we leave the familiar behind, we can lift up our eyes and look for opportunities to find favor and be blessed, as well as to give favor and be a blessing.[136] It is not easy to maintain authentic hope, but it is worth it. And it is the Jewish mission.

I recently came across a blog post from Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt, with a bon mot that made me laugh out loud. She observed in a 2021 Rosh Hashanah sermon, "I'm pretty sure no one comes to High Holiday services to hear their rabbi say she's given up."[137] Keep laughing.[138] Keep traveling toward that unknown destination. Keep exchanging strength with your neighbors. Keep setting goals, and keep casting your cares. Keep hope alive, because it will keep *you* alive, both in body and in spirit.

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[135] Jonathan Sacks, "The Heroism of Ordinary Life," Jonathan Sacks: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy (5768), https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/lech-lecha/the-heroism-of-ordinary-life/.

[136] Genesis 12:1–2. Abraham lifts up his eyes to find hope in Genesis 12:1; 13:14; 15:5; 22:4, 13.

[137] Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt, "The Strength to Help Each Other Hope," Velveteen Rabbi (September 7, 2021), https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2021/09/help-hope.html.

[138] Theologian Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 157 calls laughter "hope's last weapon" (quoted in Arnow, *Choosing Hope*, 216, 273).