

On Hope—Rosh Hashanah 5787

Texts compiled by Rabbi Liz Bolton, questions by Rabbi Josh

The last lines of Psalm 27, the psalm for Elul and the High Holy Days:

לֹא אֶמְנָתִי לִרְאוֹת בְּטוֹב־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ חַיִּים: קִוָּה אֶל־יְהוָה חֲזַק וַיֵּאֲמֵץ לִבִּי
וְקִוָּה אֶל־יְהוָה:

*Luley he-emanti lirot betuv Adonai b'erez hayim, kavey el Adonai hazak
veya'amez libecha v'kavey el Adonai.*

Were it not for my belief that I'll behold God's goodness in the Land of Life... Hope, then, for The Eternal One; strengthen your heart with courage, and have hope in The Eternal.

-Joel Rosenberg, *Kol Haneshamah mahzor*, p. 1219

I must have faith that I can see through all of this

I can see the good, the blessings, the ways of life...

Cultivate hope in the Infinite Presence.

Let your heart be strong and filled with courage. Cultivate hope.

-Rabbi Yael Levy

If I had not hoped that I would yet see

Yah's Goodness fully alive on Earth.

So, friend, you too, hope to Yah. Be sturdy!

And make strong your heart! And most of all – keep hoping to Yah.

-Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

1) "Hope" is the thing with feathers -

That perches in the soul -

And sings the tune without the words -

And never stops - at all -

Emily Dickinson, "'Hope' is the Thing with Feathers" from

The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson

2) Just like moons and like suns,

With the certainty of tides,

Just like hopes springing high,

Still I'll rise.

Maya Angelou, excerpt from "Still I Rise"

3) Excerpts from Barbara Breitman's Evolve essay Hope as an Ethical Imperative:

<https://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/hopeasethicalimperative/>

A. The Midrash asks: How did Noah manage to survive the flood and live to see his children exit the ark, thus begetting a new generation of humanity? How did Moses go from fleeing from Pharaoh to plunging into the sea? How did Joseph go from being shackled in prison to a governor in Pharaoh's court? How did Mordechai go from being ready for the gallows to executing his executioners? In other words, what made it possible for Noah and Moses, Joseph and Mordechai, to transform the life-threatening situations in which they were living into a radically transformed reality? Fortunately, the midrash doesn't just ask the question. It offers an answer. It says that for each of these biblical characters, the answer is the same. *Ela ra'ah olam hadash*. It was because they could see a new world. An

olam chadash (Genesis Rabbah 30:8). The midrash teaches that it is our moral imagination, our ability to envision the world we hope to live into that makes it possible to transform our current situation and bring a new world into being.

B. Hope is an ethical imperative. That means having faith in the power of an ethical/spiritual vision to guide our action and activism towards revitalization, justice and compassion. Hope is an ethical imperative because when we face extraordinary challenges, despair drains us of energy and commitment. Taking a stand for our hoped-for outcome empowers our work towards it.

C. Joanna Macy, a much-beloved Buddhist teacher and longtime environmental activist says: “Active hope doesn’t require our optimism. We can apply it even ... where we feel hopeless. The guiding impetus is intention, we choose what we aim to bring about, act for, or express. Rather than weighing our chances and proceeding only when we feel hopeful, we ...let our intention be our guide. “Active hope is a practice. ...It is something we do rather than have...First, we take a clear view of reality; second, we identify...the direction we’d like things to move in or the values we’d like to see expressed; and third, we take steps to move ourselves in that direction.” [from Active Hope, Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, 2012]

Discussion questions

-How do you find hope in difficult times? Which of these texts most resonates with you as a support/inspiration for finding or practicing hope? Which do you think our world or the people you know need most right now?

-After reading all of the texts, return to your favorite translation of the last verses of Psalm 27. How do those ancient verses read now, in the context of these teachings about hope?