

# **The Phenomenology of Hope**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Hope is a characteristic that is intrinsic in the minds of all human beings; consequently, human beings are able to express and communicate hope in a manner that is unique to other beings. The profound prevalence of Hope in man allows them to strive for survival in dire circumstances. Hope implies a certain level of perseverance. Often in a crisis, communities who are of a certain Faith, religion or spiritual guidance apply their hope in the Divine to find peace and calmness. Human history has unfolded major success of leaders, communities and individuals: none of which would have been possible without the trace of Hope in those accomplishments. Hope has the power to heal and it guides man through trials and tribulations and gives a sense of optimism in the midst of darkness.

This paper attempts to define and elaborate the concept of hope and its many dimensions. It will discuss the sources of hope that human beings are inclined towards. Through examples, it will aim to illustrate how hope gives a sense of profound meaning to life and existence and displays its contrasting exceptionality with other beings.

Key Words: hope, creation, mankind, religion, Islam

### **1. The Omnipresence of Hope**

Hope is a characteristic that is intrinsic in the minds of human beings irrespective of race, religion, gender and ethnic origins; consequently, human beings are able to express and communicate hope in a manner that is unique to other beings. This attribute given to Mankind differentiates them from other species, and therefore, hope is a natural discourse of emotions that Mankind most conscientiously evaluates as a means of optimism and success.

If we adopt the notion of survival as the main strive of human beings, then it is Hope, which is at the essence of that need to survive. Whether it be a success in overcoming distress and obstacles or hope of achieving something, Hope prevails as the most tangible of sentiments. Hope is a form of positive anticipation that keeps the soul afloat amidst grief. When we as human beings, realize that we are not the bearer of our

fate, the source of hope is often in Faith and a higher Being. If we believe in the fall of Adam and Eve, then we must also interpret hope to be a means of salvation towards the reconciliation of Adam and Eve, and thus, the birth of human civilization.

Hope, in its widest acceptance, is described as the desire of something together with the expectation of obtaining it. The Scholastics say that it is a movement of the appetite towards a future good, which although hard to attain is possible of attainment. By the formal object of hope we understand the motive or motives, which lead us to entertain a confident expectation of a happy issue to our efforts in the matter of eternal salvation notwithstanding the difficulties, which beset our path.

## **2. Driving Achievements & Overcoming Distress**

*“Hope is the companion of power, and mother of success; for who hopes strongly has within him the gift of miracles.”*

---Samuel Smiles

Human history has unfolded countless successes of leaders, communities and individuals: none of which would have been possible without the element of Hope in those accomplishments. As mentioned earlier, this derives from the intrinsic attribute that is unique to Mankind. Hope spurs creativity, the desire to innovate and discover. Hope has the phenomenal power to give strength in weakness. It is this very quality amongst characteristics such as patience, compassion, and forgiveness that allows man to be a rational being, who is given the power to exercise free will through his conscience.

We are all so eager to find out what makes an ordinary man so extraordinary? What makes an apparently average man such an achiever? The Wright Brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright were just your average boys “afflicted with the belief that flight is possible.” The reality of that obsession was a lonely quest for the brothers in the workroom behind their bike shop, plotting to defy gravity and conquer the wind. It was a force of hope that led the Wright brothers to invent, single-handedly, each of the technologies they needed to pursue their dream. They were plagued by failures after failures. When the Wright brothers finally realized their vision of powered human flight in 1903, they made the world a forever smaller place. They are an inspiration. The absolute beauty of it is in the simplicity of their success. They hoped to bring together people, languages, ideas and values and they followed up on it. With perseverance, creativity came naturally to these two pioneers.

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The profound prevalence of Hope in man allows them to strive for survival in dire circumstances. It seems as though that the need to survive is so strong that Hopefulness is the sole remedy from the fear of being extinct. If we speculate the behavior of war victims, we can conclude that those are the people that hope for a better future. Thus it seems as though that the more calamitous a situation is, the more that hope thrives in those individuals to overcome these hardships. Therefore, Hope implies a certain level of perseverance. Often in a crisis, communities who are of a certain Faith, religion or spiritual guidance apply their hope in the Divine to find peace and calmness. In first world nations, there has been an inclination to turn towards psychology and psychiatric as an outlet for discontent and is viewed by many as a more concrete and scientific approach to building a sense of hope. Nonetheless, regardless of the many channels, where it is Divine Faith or Science that are exercised to achieve contentment, Hope plays a powerful role in establishing that goal.

### **3. Essence of Religions**

Hope is inherent in Religion. Man can never be really fulfilled if he believes that after this almost-too-small-a-period called life everything will end. He needs, almost demands another life, an after-life where he will reap what he sowed. All religions be it Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism or Islam, originated with a divine covenant that generated hope leading to building confidence in the minds of its followers from ancient to the modern eras. Hope inspires its followers to believe that even if the whole world embraces a lie, some higher force will nurture the truth in you. Thus it comes has no surprise all men of faith are hope personified.

### **4. Hope and Islam**

Islam emerged and was bestowed to Man in a time when there was a need to revive social, political and economic justice in societies that had been devoid of all three. So it is of no coincidence that when Prophet Mohammad (SAW) brought the message of Islam and its inherent practice of justice, non-discrimination and equality for women, slaves, the poor and the disadvantaged of society it was a revolutionary change that contradicted the ancient cultures and traditions of Arab tribes, thus, giving these oppressed groups a sense of hope, optimism and a rightful place in society.

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The religion of Islam takes a systematic and comprehensive approach towards the nurturing of hope. Islam looks at the root causes of hopelessness and comprehensively addresses these issues. It engenders and encourages values that kindle the torch of hope and keep it ablaze. Accountability, Forgiveness, Compassion, Moderation in words and practices are embedded in the fundamental teachings of Islam.

Islam also emphasizes on the issue of responsibility and accountability of human beings—each person is responsible for his or her own actions. Although Islam teaches that God has predetermined the span of our life and the time of our death, it does not mean that even our actions are predetermined by Him. We surely are free in our actions and are, therefore, accountable for them. God only provides guidance for us to know what is good and what is bad.

*We created man of a water-drop...Surely We guided him to the right way—now whether he (follows it and) be grateful or (goes astray and) be ungrateful is up to him. (Quran: Surah Al-Insun:Verse 2-3).*

Islam recognizes the differences among men and enjoins respect for the beliefs and values of difference races and religions. Belief in the Prophets of other religion is an article of faith in Islam. The unity of the Creator and of the mankind, call for love, patience, peace, justice and equality- these are the essence of all the religions which came through the Holy Prophets and Messengers of Allah starting from Prophet Adam (AH), Prophet Nooh (Noah) (AH), Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) (AH), Prophet Daud (David) (AH), Prophet Musa (Moses) (AH), Prophet Isa (Jesus) (AH), and the last Prophet Mohammad (SAW). Islam not only recognizes all the Messengers but makes no discrimination between them.

*The Holy Quran says “the Messenger Mohammad (SAW) believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord and so do the believers. Each one believes in; (a) Allah, (b) His Angels, (c) His Books and (d) His Messengers. They say We make no distinction Between one and another of His Messengers. We hear and obey, oh! Lord and seek your forgiveness” (Quran: Surah Al-Baqarah:Verse 285).*

Islam attaches great importance to the concept of pardoning of sins by Allah thereby offering hope for the repentant sinner.

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*Allah, the Almighty, has said: O Son of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins as great as the earth, and were you then to face Me ascribing no partners to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as it. (Quran: Surah Az Zumar: Verse 53).*

Islam engenders a system of life that encompasses the social, economic, political, judicial, and military aspects of a community. The concepts and practices of Islam are designed to systematically institutionalize hope in communities.

#### A. Social Hope

Justice is the pre-condition of peace among people, irrespective of creed, faith and colour. The Quran ordains: "Let not hatred of a people incite you to act unjustly". Forceful conversion from other faiths is strictly prohibited in the Quran: "There is no compulsion in religion": "For you, there is your religion and for me, mine." These sublime ideals and injunctions of the holy Quran were realized by Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and his faithful companions in addition to message of fraternity, justice and peace to all regions of the world, thereby making this world a unique abode of human civilization attaining the pinnacle of glory.

Security, especially for the Muslim women, is guaranteed in Islam as per the code of the Holy Quran and the Prophet's last sermon. The Islamic dress code, particularly that of modesty in appearance, is yet another aspect of security for the Muslim women as it protects their selfhood, generating a hope that they are safe anywhere they remain.

#### B. Economic Hope

Zakat and waqf, two major sectors of Islamic endowments, as implemented by Prophet Mohammad (SAW) and his virtuous companions, form the basis of an economic system which ensures economic hope through financial security and human dignity. Such funds are not only used to provide charitable assistance to the poor, but also as capital to start a business spurring gainful employment and economic progress.

Islamic banking enables all parties in a financial transaction to share the risk, profit or loss of the venture. Depositors in Islamic banking can be compared to investors or shareholders, who earn dividends when the bank makes a profit or lose part of their savings if the bank posts a loss. The rationale is to link the return in an Islamic contract to productivity and the quality of the project, thereby ensuring a more

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equitable distribution of wealth, generating hopes for the economically disadvantaged.

#### C. Political Hope

The principles of universal brotherhood and doctrine of equality of Mankind represents one of the very great contributions of Islam to the social uplift of humanity. Miss. Sarojini Naidu (Indian Poet) speaking about this aspect of Islam says, "It was the first religion that preached and practiced democracy; for in the mosque, when the minaret is sounded and the worshipers are gathered together, the democracy of Islam is embodied five times a day when the peasant and the king kneel side by side and proclaim, God alone is great." Another example on men's equality is witnessed in Hajj where men of all of all races, color and ranks meet together in Makkah, as members of one divine family, clad in two simple pieces of white seamless cloth without pomp or ceremony, repeating "Here am I Oh Almighty at thy command; thou art one and alone; Here am I." Thus there remains nothing to differentiate the high from the low and every pilgrim carries home the impression of the international significance of Islam.

It is this same democratic spirit of Islam that emancipated women from the bondage of man. Sir Charles Edward Archibald Hamilton says "Islam teaches the inherent sinlessness of man. It teaches that man and woman have come from the same essence, possess the same soul and have been equipped with equal capabilities for intellectual, spiritual and moral attainments." Islam came as the defender of the weaker one, women, to share the inheritance of their parents. It gave women centuries ago right of owning property. Prophet Mohammad (SAW) in His last sermon proclaimed that "Woman are twin halves of men. The rights of women are sacred. See that women maintained the rights granted to them."

#### D. The Quran as an Embodiment of Hope

To claim himself or herself as a Muslim is not sufficient without doing something for it. Islam is not the sum-total of few-worships. It has its own philosophy, socio-economic and political structure for the economic emancipation of the people and spiritual salvation in the Hereafter. The Quran has about 300 verses on economics, 300 on law, ethics and morality, 800 on science and technology and above 1000 on history making it a comprehensive guide for humanity.

#### E. Scientific Hope

Pursuit of science and reason is of paramount importance in Islam. The Quran says:

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*There are signs in the heavens and earth for those who believe: in the creation of you, in the creatures God scattered on earth, there are signs for the believers; there are signs for people of sure faith, in the alternation of night and day, in the rain God provides, sending it down from the sky and reviving the dead earth with it, and in the shifting of winds, there are signs for those who use their reason. (Quran: Surah Al Jathiyah: Verse 3-5).*

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) reinforced these teachings, emphasizing that understanding comes through scientific endeavor. “*An hour’s study of nature is better than a year’s prayer*”, the Prophet declared. He directed his followers to listen to the words of the scientist and instill unto others the lessons of science’. In his time, China was considered a far off but scientifically advanced civilization. So he urged his followers to go in quest of knowledge even to China’. And the Prophet made the essential distinction: the revealed Book, as well as his own teachings, were exhortations, an invitation to reason and study what exists and can be discovered not scientific pronouncements in and of themselves.

#### **5. The Greatest Gift from Creator**

The presence of hope and the right to choose are perhaps the two greatest gifts that our Creator has bestowed on us. Whereas all other beings on Earth follow a cycle of life and death without individual hope or choice, Mankind has been given this opportunity as the Supreme Being on earth. The omnipresence of hopefulness in all human beings is proof that hope is not only an important means of survival, but also it gives meaning and substance to life itself. Hope has the power to heal and it guides man through trials and tribulations and gives a sense of optimism in the midst of darkness.

#### **6. Writer’s Recommendations**

##### **A. Recognize Hope**

Concerted effort should be made towards recognition of the all important role of hope. Its power to move individuals and communities to overcome distress and achieve the impossible should be acknowledged with appropriate importance and emphasis.

##### **B. Education on Hope**

Due importance ought to be given to the thorough study of hope. Its sources and origins should be meticulously examined in addition to ways and means to keep the torch of hope burning. This also calls for analyzing, upholding and propagating the teachings of leaders and personalities who gave hope to millions over the period of human history.

#### C. Internationalization of Hope

There is no denial of the fact that the World Today needs hope. This leads us to the important corollary that Hope needs to be told to the World. Collective effort should be made towards internationalization of hope. The United Nations may play the unique and pioneering role of declaring World Hope Day and thereby instill a sense of importance and urgency on the conceptualization of hope in countries round the globe.

Why write about hope? There are a million things to write, talk and discuss about. There is fuel to be discovered, there are genes to be duplicated, there are crimes to be solved, why spend time talking about something that is apparently so innate, so basic? Because we need to be reminded of hope. Hope needs to be remembered. We have hope. No matter how many wars have been fought, no matter how many lives have been mistaken for non-existence we have to remember that we have hope-to change it all. Hope can be our savior because it is the last thing to die.

#### **Notes & References & Bibliography**

*Under construction*

The author is the Chief Coordinator of the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW), a non-profit, non-political religious organization committed to researches on human security, Islamic finance, interfaith dialogues and rule of law.