

The Phenomenology of Hope

Tanim Laila

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 humans 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 illustrates how hope gives a sense of profound meaning to life and existence and displays its contrasting exceptionality with other beings.

Key words: Islam, motivation, faith.

1. The Omnipresence of Hope

Hope is a characteristic that is intrinsic to 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 humankind differentiates them from other species, and therefore, hope is a natural discourse of emotions that humans most conscientiously evaluate as a means of optimism and success.

If we adopt the notion of survival as the main strife for human beings, then it is Hope that is at the essence of that need to survive. Whether it be a success in overcoming distress and obstacles or hope for 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 owner of our fate, the source of hope is often found 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.

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 humans. 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 us to be rational beings given the power to exercise free will through conscience.

The profound prevalence of hope in humans allows us 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 on the behaviour of war victims, we often find that those are the people that hope and work most 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 psychiatry as an outlet for discontent and is viewed by many as a more concrete and scientific approach to building a sense of hope. Regardless of the many channels, whether 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. Humans can never be really fulfilled if they believe that after this almost-too-small-a-period called life everything will end. We need, almost demand, another life, an after-life where we will reap what we sow. 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.

4. Hope and Islam

Islam emerged and was bestowed to humanity 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 the 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. It thus gave these oppressed groups a sense of hope, optimism and a rightful place in society.

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 recognizes the differences among people and enjoins respect for the beliefs and values of different races and religions. Belief in the Prophets of other religions is an article of faith in Islam. The unity of the Creator and of humankind, 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.

Allah, the Almighty, has said: O Sons of Adam, who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: verily, Allah forgives all sins. Truly He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (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 messages 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 banks 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 equitable distribution of wealth, generating hopes for the economically disadvantaged.

C. Political Hope. The principles of universal brotherhood and doctrine of equality of humankind represents one of the very great contributions of Islam to the social uplift of humanity. Miss Sarojini Naidu, an 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, colour 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 men. 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 the right of owning property. Prophet Mohammad (SAW) in His last sermon proclaimed that “Women 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 oneself a Muslim is not sufficient without doing something for it. Islam is not the sum-total of worshipers and worship services attended. 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:

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 endeavour. “*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 instil 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 Gifts from the 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, humans have been given this opportunity on earth. The omnipresence of hopefulness in all human beings is proof that hope is not only an important means of survival, but also gives meaning and substance to life itself. Hope has the power to heal and it guides humans through trials and tribulations and gives them 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 instil 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 about, talk about and discuss. 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 saviour because it is the last thing to die.

Author's Note

The author is the Chief Coordinator of the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW), a non-profit, non-political religious organization committed to human development at individual and community level through research on human security, Islamic finance, interfaith dialogues and rule of law. Further details on the Institute are available at www.ihmsaw.org.