

## A SHOT OF HOPE SEEKING SOLACE THE SPEAKING TREE

# In Pursuit Of Elusive Hope

**One of the most inspiring, non-religious testaments to a quest for hope is the doctrine of logotherapy, writes JUG SURAIYA**

Abandon hope, all ye who enter here'. These words, which represent the most profound desolation of the human spirit, are inscribed on the entrance of the Seventh Circle of Dante's *Inferno*.

Today, in the face of the second, and more devastating attack of the coronavirus, Dante's fateful pronouncement seems only too apt for India.

It is indeed as though the virus has established a veritable Inferno, a virtual hell, on Earth. And perhaps the single most grievous victim of its relentless onslaught is hope.

Even as much as our body needs oxygen to survive, the human spirit needs the oxygen of hope to live. And that intangible oxygen of hope is possibly even scarcer and more difficult to find than medical O<sub>2</sub>.

Why is hope so essential to our being? Hope is the horizon of the future. When we are in danger of losing hope, we are in jeopardy of losing the beckoning horizon of the future, with its promise of endless possibility.

Things so bad at work that you fear being pink-slipped? Maybe it'll all be better in time; let's hope so. Domestic problems and tensions at home? In a while it'll get sorted out, hopefully.

Without the hope of a better future to help pull us through a bad patch, like a tow truck pulls a stalled car, we'd be left stranded in an inescapable and present imperfect.

The pandemic has hijacked our future and left us stranded in the prison of a present from which there seems to be no exit, or hope of exit. So what can we do about trying to reclaim our future, our hope? The first step would be to recognise the evil sibling of hope called despair.

Like a Bollywood movie in which twins get separated at birth and one becomes a cop and the other a villain, hope and despair are the deadliest of

foes, all the more so as they are the two sides of the same coin.

While hope urges you forward, encouraging like a trainer to an exhausted long-distance runner to go on, despair whispers in the inner ear of your heart: You know there's no point, so why don't you just give up, and let it all go?

Can the cop triumph over the villain? Yes, but not without our help.

Hope is not a massage session in a spa, where you can lie back and relax and let others do the job of working on you. Hope is a hard workout, a rigorous training programme that you have to stick to, despite the seductive inducements of despair to spare yourself the effort, because no good will come of it anyway.

All these metaphors, cop, villain, training programmes are all very well. But, dash it all, how about some practical advice, something I can *do* in the hope of acquiring hope.

Well, that's the first step. That you *want* to discover — or, rather, uncover — hope within yourself.

One of the most inspiring, non-religious testaments to a successful quest for hope is the psychological doctrine of logotherapy, *logo* being the Greek for 'reason, or meaning'.

Logotherapy is bedrocked on the premise that the basis of all human life lies in the search for meaning: We live because we want to know why we live.

Logotherapy was developed by psychologist Viktor Frankl in response to the unspeakable horrors of a Nazi death camp in which he was held captive during the Holocaust. He survived unimaginable horrors, and in the crucible of suffering he came to the realisation that the human spirit is such that it can endure anything if given a reason, any reason, to do so: Find a reason 'why' to live and the 'how' will follow.

The 'why' to live can be love of an individual, or of an idea, or of a project you want to accomplish.

Find within yourself the 'why', and the 'how' will find itself. The 'why' you find is called hope. And the 'how' which finds itself is the defeat of despair.



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