



A REASONED HOPE

BY RON BALLARD

CINDEX: TOM DETRICH

TALK OF CONFLICT FILLS THE NEWS—cultures at war, alliances challenged, populations at odds. Even the psychological state of global financial markets seems resistant to the underlying economic indicators. Where does hope lie?

The term *hope* is commonly used in many ways: “Hope for the best”; “Don’t get your hopes up”; “There is no hope.” Those usages suggest something that is not quite substantial or reliable. And when things look particularly ominous, it’s easy to let one’s hope become tainted by these connotations.

But there’s another kind of hope—a hope that stems from conviction, confidence, and assurance. A hope that is founded on something far more reliable than fancy or dreams. Contrasting these two versions of hope, you might say that hope is a matter of perception—how you’re looking at something.

I remember when I was quite young, listening to a telephone conversation my mother was having with a doctor in a hospital, where my

mom’s mother had been taken after being in a terrible car crash. After examining my grandmother in the emergency room, the doctor called my mother to report on her condition. Apparently the news was not very good, because my mother looked pretty frightened. At the end of the conversation, however, I saw a smile creep across her face. She hung up the phone and told me that the doctor had said there was no hope. Now, you don’t usually smile when you’re told that. But it actually struck my mother as funny in my grandmother’s case—because in her work as a Christian Science practitioner, my grandmother had spent many years helping people deal with hopelessness. It seemed to my mother that if ever the term “no hope” did not apply to someone, it was to my grandmother.

Several weeks later, my grandmother walked out of that hospital, thanking all the nurses who had never given up hope for her survival. During her stay, the medical staff had agreed to let my grandmother practice the spiritual healing methods taught in Christian Science while she was at the hospital rather than giving her medical treatment. But they certainly gave her a lot of tender, loving care.

My grandmother helped our family shift its definition of *hope* from a tenuous feeling to a solid conviction. Her love of God and her experience in relying on His care had taught her there was another way of looking at things than through material perception. She had learned to use *spiritual* perception—looking at creation the way God had made it.

This way of thinking is expansive and leads to innovative solutions.

The key to developing this hopeful way of thinking, this spiritual perception, is to nurture humility in our intellect—that is, not beginning with the assumption that the way we see something is the only way of thinking, or, for that matter, necessarily right. It's helpful to accept the possibility that there may be another way things can work out than what you might assume is best. In this way, there's always hope—confidence that the intelligence that comes from God, who is the infinite, divine Mind, is always present, and can be recognized.

What keeps a person from realizing the presence of divine intelligence often comes from established paradigms. Education is seen to be a process of learning the things that are part of those paradigms, and then living within them. When we are forced to bring down the walls that confine our thoughts, we find better solutions.

As an example, certain illnesses are said to need certain treatment. One time on a ski trip in Montana with some of my college friends, I woke up one morning with a severe pain in my side. I could hardly move, let alone think. Having experienced spiritual healing most of my life, I was sure I could rely on God's power and love to care for me and heal me. When my friends left for the slopes, I made my way to a telephone and called a friend who was staying nearby. She had had quite a bit of experience with spiritual healing, so I asked her to pray for me.

She came over right away. When she got there, she told me how she had prayed on the way. Her first inclination was to feel overcome with doubt—that she wouldn't know what to do or wouldn't know enough to help me. She was running out of hope, and even began to doubt that prayer would work. Pretty soon, though, she realized that she needed to get beyond those desperate feelings and begin to recognize that the healing power was not her responsibility. She

knew that the healing effect of her prayer was going to come from her willingness to recognize *God's ability* to care for His children, including me.

Immediately upon her coming into the room, I felt the results of her prayer. She read this sentence to me: "If Spirit or the power of divine Love bear witness to the truth, this is the ultimatum, the scientific way, and the healing is instantaneous" (Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 411). At that point, all pain left me and I settled down. I fell asleep for just a little while and was completely fine when I woke up. We spent the rest of the day skiing. Years later, a physician was giving me a thorough physical exam, including X-rays. He commented on the fine work of "the surgeon who operated on me"—during what he said had been an appendicitis attack. Obviously, I had never had surgery performed. Healing *had* come about—but by spiritual means, not material.

That healing lifted my hope by showing me there is a better way to look at situations, whether they're on a personal or on a global scale. Conflict often arises when people refuse to outgrow old paradigms, because they get caught up in combative arguments over political philosophies, religious doctrines, sociological outlooks, gender orientations, economic strategies, on the assumption that one outlook is fundamentally better than another. Of course it's true that humanity can improve by holding higher ideals, aspirations, and ambitions. But I don't believe that this can be accomplished by subscribing to one human approach rather than another. The outlook needs to reach a lot higher—toward God. And that's the greatest adventure there is—exploring a spiritual dimension of thought that leads to a divinely designed view of ourselves and others, and to the solutions resulting from our taking this view.

An idea that has helped me when I've needed to move beyond

limited perceptions reads in part, "To calculate one's life-prospects from a material basis, would infringe upon spiritual law and misguide human hope. Having faith in the divine Principle of health and spiritually understanding God, sustains man under all circumstances" (*Science and Health*, p. 319).

The prayer that heals physically is also applicable to interpersonal and international conflict. The world is on edge with adamantly held opinions about what the course of action should be in the Middle East, with Israel, Palestine, Iraq. Some people want to use force; others want to explore diplomacy. What's needed is a resolution that respects and protects all of God's creation, all peoples. And we need a higher aspiration—one which acknowledges that each and every one of us can discover a relationship to God that makes us feel secure, loved, validated, and upheld.

The Bible speaks about a "living" hope that thrives in the presence of the Christ. If you accept the Christ as the divine manifestation of God in your life, correcting mistaken attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and actions, then it's easier to find a sound basis for continual hope and effective resolution of conflict. With more individual confidence in the ability of God, we can expect results that will bless everyone collectively. Then it won't be disappointing if hope for a particular solution isn't fulfilled.

Hope is a kind of prayer, and prayer is a dynamic paradigm. It taps the source of intelligence that goes beyond mere reason or human logic. I don't believe anything changes the way we think more rapidly than prayer does. And once our way of thinking changes, the human scene around us changes, too. ✧



Ron Ballard is a Christian Science practitioner and teacher. He divides his time between San Francisco, California, and Ashland, Oregon.