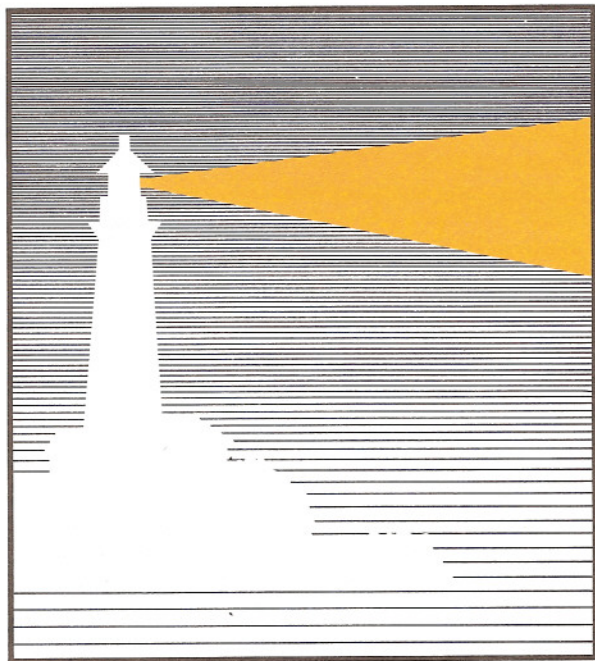


POCKET POWER

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HOPE



Hazelden

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The logo for Hazelden, featuring the word "Hazelden" in a serif font. The letter "H" is significantly larger and more stylized than the other letters, with a vertical line through its center.

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HOPE

There is an old Mexican story that illustrates the importance of hope for a full and healthy life. The story says one day the devil decided to go out of business. He held an auction to dispose of all the instruments of temptation he had used. Many people attended this auction hoping to find a means to achieve their wants through one of these instruments. The auction began early in the day, but there was not as much interest as one would expect. In fact, people were surprised to see most of the tools shiny and new, as though they had never been used.

The bidding was slow and most of the instruments were sold at a low price. Toward evening, there was only one left. It differed from the others in that it was well worn, so the bidding began high and continued even higher. Some people asked the devil's assistants what this instrument was that commanded such a high price. The assistants said it was a tool of the devil used most frequently and found most useful. It was the temptation to despair. They explained that the devil found, once he could get people to give up hope, the rest was easy.

Many of us who are recovering can recall times when we lived without hope. It was lack of hope that produced the familiar sense of impending doom. Even when we hid our despair

and fear of the future behind a mask of bravery, it seemed as though we were caught in a situation that could only get worse. We may have contemplated suicide as a way out of the situation. Being without hope, we had no real sense that the future could be anything different from the present.

Experience + Strength = Hope

The preamble of Alcoholics Anonymous tells us that A.A. is a fellowship in which people share their experience, strength, and hope. In fact, experience, strength, and hope are interrelated. The open sharing of our experience of recovery is the source of our strength. The willingness to share what has worked for us, the mistakes we've made and survived, the difficulties we have overcome, our willingness to accept care from others in recovery, all contribute to a strength that no one of us has on our own. It would seem that this willingness to share is not an option for us. And sharing experience is not limited to swapping "war stories" of our drinking and using days. We need to share the experience of today if we are to find strength to live it.

It is shared experience plus strength that flows from sharing and that becomes the foundation for hope. Hope is personal, but never individualistic. Hope is a shared reality or it is

not real at all. This may seem to be an extreme statement, but upon examination it appears to be true. It is most obvious in the case of sobriety. Many of us have tried to go it alone, to do it our way, and then discovered we could not. The attempt to live for ourselves, by ourselves, inevitably ends in frustration and despair. It was only when we began to share our experience that we gained strength and could begin to hope.

This simple lesson we first learned in terms of sobriety is sometimes difficult to apply in other areas of our lives. Even after years of sobriety we may sense a lack of fullness in our lives that we see in others around us. We may discover we have a lack of hope for the future. Routine, a lack of zest in living, even a sense of cynicism, may creep back into our daily lives.

The future may hold no promise for us other than a confused sense of "getting through." This lack of hope for the future and our lives may be related to our willingness to share experience and strength. We not only need to be willing to give, but also to be open to receiving from others. One of the things that can happen is we may have become givers and not receivers. Hope can be revitalized by a willingness to accept help from others; to allow our lives to be touched and influenced by others' experience

and strength.

Hope versus Fantasy

We may have spent a lot of time in magical or wishful thinking when we were drinking or using. We may have fantasized about winning the lottery, getting a big promotion, or finding just the right person who would make life worthwhile. Our addiction encouraged us to live in fantasy rather than reality.

The difference between fantasizing and hoping is in their relationship to the present. Fantasy bears no relationship to the present in any real way. It is simply a new world created by our wishes and desires, without any steps to get from here to there. True, some of us do win lotteries, or we get an unexpected promotion, or we meet someone special that makes a real difference in our lives. But we have to at least make the effort of buying the ticket, or doing the work, or getting out and meeting people.

Hope and Simplicity

One of the major blocks to hope is our tendency to complicate a situation. Give most of us five minutes alone with a simple problem and we can create a maze that defies imagination. This tendency was prevalent before recovery began, but our capacity for complication con-

tinues well into recovery.

Albert Einstein developed great mathematical theories long before the days of computers. However, he was given a special room comprised almost entirely of blackboards on which to do his complicated math. Every day when he left, he would leave a note on each blackboard that said either "erase" or "do not erase." One day the blackboard cleaner came into the room and saw that on each blackboard Einstein had written "erase" except in one small corner. Here he marked off a square in which he wrote a famous formula, and under that he wrote "do not erase." The formula was $2 + 2 = 4$. Einstein, with his great mathematical mind could range into the complicated far beyond the capacity of most people. He not only had a sense of humor, but a grasp of the importance of basics.

Simplicity of life is not being simpleminded. Some of us may have a natural predisposition toward a more ordered and simple lifestyle than others. All of us tend, however, to let our lives become unnecessarily cluttered. The clutter becomes a real block to active hope because we find ourselves, unaware at times, in the midst of contradictions.

An example of contradiction might be when we wanted to drink or use and yet still stay sober

and not cause trouble. Contradictions lead us to create conflicts in ourselves because we are charging into reality and attempting to mold it to our desires. When we keep hope simple and direct, we can conform to reality and our hope has a much greater chance of surviving.

Sometimes we need to share our hopes to see if they are contradictory. If they are, we need to let go of one desire in favor of another, or place it on hold for a while. For example, someone may wish to complete training for a new career, develop some hobbies, and pursue a relationship. These need not be in conflict, but they may be. It might be necessary to give priority to one over the other. In each instance, however, we need to keep in line with the basic hope of sober living. If taking steps to fulfill some of our hopes would conflict with our basic program, then we could cause problems. Keeping it simple in this case means sharing hopes with others so that we keep them from being in conflict and keep our sobriety in proper perspective.

Hope and Patience

For most of us, patience has not been one of our strong suits. If anything, we have tended to be people who want it all, now. To hope is not to demand. Some of us know ourselves well

enough to realize we often overreact in response to our thoughts or desires. To learn hope is to learn patience. Again, shared experience and strength of many recovering people have taught us that even our wildest hopes can be fulfilled, but not necessarily on our time schedule. Impatience can be an enemy of hope. We may know from experience that impatience has sometimes ruined a relationship or a job. We may have acted too quickly, without consultation or prayer, and ruined a friendship. We can learn from our mistakes of impatience the value of taking time. In fact, patience is not simply waiting and watching the grass grow. Patience is waiting with hope.

Again, it is helpful to share with another the difficulty of waiting and to acknowledge our tendency toward impatience. By sharing, we develop hope and avoid some of the dangers that occur when we become too demanding. There is no neat formula for all of this. The art of living with hope is acquired through practice and that means we all make mistakes. But there is hope even in that, for we can learn to develop a sense of personal timing, regarding when to act and when to wait.

Hope and the Pain of Loss and Failure

At first, recovery may seem to promise that

all trials are behind us. The gift of sobriety appears to bring with it all the things we wanted. Not everyone has this pink cloud experience early in recovery. But during the first few years, there are not many of us who don't, at some time, have the feeling that we may have "turned the corner." We begin to suspect that life is going to unfold smoothly for us. However, after some time in recovery, all of us come to the realization that although sobriety is our greatest gift and the promises of the program are true, we continue to face the reality of the pain of loss and failure in our lives.

These times are very important for us. We learn that hope is not simply an optimism that denies the pain of living. We learn, too, that our sobriety is not fragile. Sobriety does not depend on things going our way. It does not rest on a foundation of continued success. We discover that hope is not grounded in ourselves, but rather in a Power greater than ourselves that we allow to work in our lives. It is in times of distress that we come to a deeper realization of our need for others to support our hope for life. Hope does not blithely turn away from pain. Rather it enables us to face the pain of loss or failure.

Among the more severe pains we may face is the loss of a loved one through death or the loss

of a relationship through divorce or separation. It is important for us to be aware that the pain of such losses is not incompatible with hope. The pain is real and we need to grieve the loss. A great deal has been written about the phenomenon of grief. Grieving over real losses in our lives is a complex process accompanied by many intense feelings. Sometimes we may experience a very real sense of guilt. We may have sudden rushes of anger toward the other person, or God, or ourselves. We may wonder why such a loss should happen to us. We may at times wonder if having worked hard at being sober was worth it.

Hope plays two important functions in such times of loss. If we understand hope to be *the confident expectation of good*, it enables us to go through the grieving process sober and come to a full acceptance of our loss. Hope reminds us that although the loss of a loved one through death or separation will indeed affect our lives, the intensity of the emotion will pass. Hope encourages us to reach out to others for help. Hope gives us the strength to accept our feelings realizing that no matter how powerful they may be, they do not have the power to destroy us.

Hope also enables us to see the importance of mourning and coming to a full acceptance of the loss in order that hope may flourish again.

If we attempt to bypass this grieving process by pretending nothing has happened, or if we allow ourselves to become caught in the anger which may accompany grief, we short-circuit our capacity for genuine hope for the future.

To grieve the loss of a friend or loved one is not at all contrary to hope. If a person has truly been a gift in our lives and we experience the loss of that person, a certain sadness is bound to follow. But mourning loss need not go on forever. As we grieve the loss and come to the full acceptance of it, another future begins to emerge. It is hope that allows us to look forward in life with a calm and confident expectation of good.

The pains of loss and of failure are frequently interrelated and difficult to distinguish. However, we can separate them. Frequently, a loss is not our responsibility. Failure seems to imply a sense of, "It could have been different if only I had...." In ongoing recovery, we continue to learn to deal with failure in a healthy and hopeful way. Perhaps what hope teaches us in regard to failure is that no failure is final until we resolve it. The pain of not achieving a cherished goal may be real. Hope, however, allows us to acknowledge we have failed and helps us realize that it does not mean we are failures. In this instance hope enables us to look for the good in

the experience and in ourselves. Hope encourages us to acknowledge, but not dwell on the past.

Many of us have gone through very significant losses and failures in our drinking and using careers. In sobriety we have learned to look back on those and see that they need not inflict permanent damage on our lives. In sobriety, as we face the reality of the pain of loss and failure, we realize we have resources to draw upon through the program and the people in it that we never had before. Hope does not do away with pain, but allows us to accept it and live with a certain grace.

Hope as a Way of Life

Hope is a way of envisioning the future. It implies not only the wish that things will be different, but a willingness to change and the courage to act. Hopes tell us a great deal about ourselves. They reveal what is deep in our hearts and minds. In recovery we discover we have hope not only for ourselves but for other recovering people, our families, even our careers. Hope leads us out of ourselves, helps us become less self-centered, and be more concerned for the welfare of others.

Hope can see us through difficult and painful situations, and provide meaning and purpose.

When things go well and hope has been fulfilled, we have an opportunity for gratitude, and we can look forward to an even happier future.

Developing Hope

There are several small things we can do to help develop our capacity for hope. We might, for example, write down our hopes and specific goals on a regular basis and share them with others. We could call this taking an inventory of the future, rather than of the past. It will reveal the difference between what we truly hope for and what we fantasize about.

Another means of developing our capacity for hope involves Step Eleven, which asks us to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understand Him*, praying for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. As we learn to take time for prayer and meditation, we discover new possibilities we never considered. If we are willing to take our hope to our Higher Power in prayer and meditation, our hope will be expanded, and we will come to a deeper realization that fulfillment of hope does not depend on us alone.

If we are willing to share experience and strength, hope can become a way of life. We no longer have to regret the past, because we are

learning how to look with confidence to the future. The openness with which we are willing to accept our past may be the only barrier to hope. As we grow in honesty, openness, and willingness, we realize our hope will not be in vain. Willingness to examine and share our hopes, to be patient and keep it simple, to take time for prayer and meditation, become the foundation for a life today which looks forward to the future with the *confident expectation of good*.

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