

WHAT IS HOPE?

Most people need a vision of something better which sustains them especially when the going is tough. The "something better" relates to what would be an improvement in the adverse or mundane circumstances and outcomes of their experiences. Being "sustained" means that by believing or knowing that there is "something better" they are helped to persevere and to achieve their goal, despite the adversity or mediocrity. **DEFINING RELIGIOUS HOPE.**

Since pre-historic times it is clear that religious hope has had to do with the after "life". For the purpose of this exercise I suggest therefore that we begin by clarifying what we mean by the word. Its popular usage is as a collective noun for that train of specific random events and that variety of circumstances involved in one's human existence. This generally includes the self imposed or self generated ones, but more particularly, it is about the unscheduled, temporary, passing away things that happen naturally and beyond our control and without any moral judgement, and regardless of humanitarian consequences. C'est la vie! "Living" is used as a verb and adjective for existing under those conditions and coping with them. Let's call this LIFE MARK 1. There is another meaning in which "life" is used more generically as an antonym for "death" (i.e. that which animates) to describe the potentialities of all "living" beings, and the consequences of being animated. This "life" is possessed by every organism which has the capacity at its optimal level of existence to be fully functioning within the boundaries of its particular species. Let's call this LIFE MARK 2.

There is also an extension of the use of this kind of "life" word. That is by inferring that it is a kind of animating spirit - that there is a superior or co-existent force or energy called "life" which is orchestrating the events and circumstances alluded to above. "Spirit of Life" MARK 3.

In defining religious hope we therefore need to be clear about what kind of life we are talking about.

TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS HOPE

The "something better" in traditional religious hope has to do with dissatisfaction with our earthly existence (Life MARK1). For most people it is too brief, too unpredictable too painful and too unfair. So the "sustaining vision of something better" is "eternal life" (Similar to MARK 1 with some of MARK 3). But unlike our earthly hopes this one is hard to test. It depends on a lot of assumptions which cannot be perceived or verified, let alone understood. What aspects of the traditional hope of eternal life do you find hard to accept? Its future orientation? Its location in a supernatural realm inhabited by spirits? Its conditionality that it is for believers only? Its resemblance to an earthly paradise? Its exclusion of suffering and wrong doing? Its guarantee of immortality? Its preservation of recognisable human personalities and physical identities? Etc? What aspects of traditional hope do you wish to retain?

THE PROGRESSIVE'S HOPE

Do you find it necessary to maintain a state of supreme hopefulness? If not, what sustains you in adversity? If so, in stating your personal hope, do you need it to be demonstrable and attainable in this present world? Will it be sensed and perceived with any or all of your human faculties, or require the use of additional faculties which as yet you do not utilise? Do you want it to be subject to progress and change as your knowledge and understanding increases? Do you wish to earn it, or depend on someone else or something else to make it happen to you, or take a degree of responsibility for achieving it?

Traditional religion places a high value upon immortality and spiritual luxury in an after life. Do you feel that you as a progressive can assess and value what is of ultimate worth about life and frame it as a primary religious aspiration? If so does it need to be:

- A dream of a domain which is friendly to humanity and nature – be ideal?
 - Found in this present world of space and time – be realistic?
 - Make sense to my reasoning mind – be rational?
 - In accord with projected scientific and technological development – be practical?
 - Experienced by at least some of my five senses – be ~~attainable~~ ^{PERCEIVABLE}?
 - Subject to change as knowledge increases – be flexible?
 - Fulfilled with the full co-operation of my strength, imagination and emotional reserves – be ~~achievable~~ ^{PERCEIVABLE}?
- Eric Stevenson