

Hope and people living without Hope: An Old Testament and Contemporary Perspectives.

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Abstract

In the Old Testament, there are countless incidences and record of experiences and conditions that led many into depression. People with debilitating diseases like leprosy (Lev.13), loathsome sores (Job 2) and other 'strange' diseases suffered considerably. Their pains included not only the effect of the affliction but the attitude of the people among whom they lived which involved stigmatization and rejection. Just like those who became hopeless as a result of health complication and disease, many in the Old Testament Jewish society suffered quite remarkably. In juxtaposition with the contemporary Nigerian society, the condition of the aforementioned group seems to be very similar. Now and then, disasters, religious and ethnic riots, militant insurgence, youth unrest etc have left many Nigerians in utter hopelessness. Terminally ill patients and others with serious health problems have not fared any better in our society today. Many are in a very deplorable state with shattered hope of survival. It is based on the foregoing submissions that this work has among other salient things, dialectically examined the efficacy of hope in the lives of the hopeless. Suggestions on how the therapeutic cum 'placating' concept (hope) could be harnessed and utilized became one of the major thrusts of this paper.

Introduction

It is a fact that people who live with protracted/terminal disease experience stigmatization, abhorrence and hatred from others who once might have loved them. It is not uncommon also for terminally sick patients to feel insecure, hopeless and depressed. The aforesaid supposition is most likely 'considering the negative reaction of people in the other divide in relation to others living with protracted disease' (Ugwueye: 2004). In the Old Testament for example, people who contract diseases that seem never-ending; leprosy (Leviticus 13 and 14) and loathsome sore (Job 1-42) are stigmatized.(Okwueze, 1998) Some who became hopeless especially lepers might have died in isolation and banishment through complications and other related causes. However, it is probable that others who harnessed and activated the human phenomenon- hope recuperated and got healed. Evidences abound especially in the book of Job that seem to suggest that hope not only sustained Job but was also an imperative solution to his affliction; loathsome sores and great lack. Through dialectical assessment of some passages of the book of Job, one may not but agree that Job hoped on positive outcome that later helped him recuperate. Just like Job, some others that suffered different degrees of depression and despair in the Old Testament who had hung on hope might have lived positively with their condition. There is a glaring pain, anguish, and depression in the Old Testament as informed through the probable effects of the series of wars, famine, ecological mishaps and other related conditions. Even a casual reader of the Old Testament passages would easily observe the degree of

hopelessness and despair through the variant assertions; praises, supplications, incantations etc therein in the said scripture. Just like those that would have recovered and got healed in spite of their debilitating health conditions, many others might have the same fate as they battled destitution, penury and pains as occasioned mainly by displacements, wars, famine etc. For instance, it is likely that during Israelite' Exodus, the conquest of Palestine and numerous other wars and counter wars (sometimes guerrilla), drought and famine, case of destitute,(Kuntz,1974) and those wallowing in despair and hopelessness were emerged. This no doubt would have spurred 'hope issues' in the lives of the said suffering people.

There is no gainsaying the fact that misfortune and hopelessness are age-long human phenomena. There are countless people in the world today that are passing through the crucible and pangs of hopelessness. This condition may have been the grand effect of debilitating diseases, wars and natural disasters. In Nigeria, the many recorded crises/disturbances, economic hardship etc. have forced many into destitution and hopelessness.(Abimboye, 2009). It is in the light of the foregoing that this work aims at examining the efficacy of hope in the lives of those battling hopelessness. There is also the need to proffer possible ways of harnessing the healing and placating power of hope on the hopeless.

The Condition of Hopelessness.

Hopelessness connotes despair; despondency. In other words, it could simply mean loss of hope (Malcolm, 2010). Hope as depicted in Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (2010) stands for, knowing that a positive outcome awaits you. It is not only expecting a dream to come true but having a deep assurance that it is within reach. It is good to know that you can achieve your goals through persistence. It is looking to the future with joy and expectations of better things to come. Hope is one of God's greatest gifts to you because it is the magic that inspires you to keep trying, learning and living.

The salient points raised in the above explanation are that hope is: i. assurance that what one expects or 'dreams' would become a reality even when the outlook may or may not appear bleak; ii. Expectation of better things to come and; iii. God's greatest gifts that inspires one to never give up but keep trying, learning and living. However, hope is distinct from positive thinking which refers to a therapeutic or systematic process used in psychology for reversing pessimism also different from false hope which refers to a hope based entirely around a fantasy or an extremely unlikely outcome (Wikipedia: 2010)

Indeed, hope should be understood as a feeling that what is wanted/expected will happen despite odd(s). Put differently, it could be an anticipation of a positive outcome notwithstanding some current difficulties.

From this backdrop, hopelessness suggests absence of hope. One, who is hopeless, tends to give up easily and succumb to whatever that is troubling him/her. In some, it could lead to abnormal behaviour or suicide. One who nurses hopelessness may think that he is worthless; he only sees darkness and failure. As earlier indicated, hopelessness is not uncommon to people living with terminal or chronic health conditions, great misfortune or hardship and the likes. To this end, it will be exigent to examine the situations in these two societies-(Israeli and Nigerian societies)

i. The Hopeless in the Old Testament

The allusion to the concept of hope in the Old Testament could give a clue or reference to the nature of others with weird or depressed mental attitude. Granted, the classical Hebrew transliterated word *yahal* (qal perfect) can be translated to mean hope; expect; to cause to wait. Besides, the feminine noun *tiqewat* with suffix “i”, that is *tiqewati* can be rendered as expectation/hope. Cases where this concept is used in the Old Testament include Job 19:10, Psalm 119, 147, Job 13:15, Lamentation 3:21 etc.

Hope in other passages of the Old Testament is used in a more complex and patronymic way. The instance of this is found in Genesis 46:14. It alludes to hope when the expression ‘hoping in God; relying in God for positive outcome in the near future’ is depicted in the said chapter of the book of Genesis. Having said this, it seems imperative to observe that this concept (hope) became a very important issue especially when many were battling hopelessness in the Old Testament era. For instance, hope became an issue of deep concern for Job when he suffered a strange disease and abject poverty.(Agbo, 2007) Besides, it was hope that earlier kept the devastated people of Israel going, during ‘their harrowing exodus from Egypt (Mendenhall, 1970),(Noth, 1960).The Exodus experience, no doubt, ‘caused some great pains, destitutions, destructions, despairs and hopelessness to handful of Jews and other people they walked with (Bright,1958).The destruction caused by wars; deportations and exiles in the later part of the Jewish history most probably had led many into great depression. Even in the period of unprecedented Jewish prosperity (McKeating, 1979) (Kuntz, 1974), there were many others especially the commoners-*hamaress* , that were denied justice and access to good living (Okwueze, 1998). This in turn might have led many of these social misfits into hopelessness. Mentioning cases of hopelessness in the Old Testament is as good as writing an endless work, for a good number of the passages of the

scripture centre on war, poverty, destruction, drought, disease and the likes. These conditions as earlier stated fueled hopelessness in many people. It is important therefore, to explain few cases or condition of people battling hopelessness in the period under focus. To this, we turn;

I. Job and the Lepers

For many people, the word Job is synonymous with suffering. Job is depicted in the Bible as a man who suffered great misfortunes and diseases. Although scholars disagree to agree on the authenticity of the story of Job (whether or not it is a fiction), this position is not the major concern here, rather, our focus is on the hopelessness experienced by Job as he suffered devastation and great misfortune. At a point in Job's life, ...all of his possessions were destroyed and *ruach* (wind/spirit) caused the house of the first born to collapse killing all of Job's offspring who were gathered for a feast... (Wikipedia free online Encyclopedia, 2010) Subsequently, Job was afflicted with a strange, repugnant disease and deprivation. Probably because of his condition, most of his friends abandoned and stigmatized him with impunity. His wife suggested that he should curse God and die. (Mckeating, 1979), (Kuntz, 1974), (Gordis 1965). These assertions to a very large extent exposed the nature and severity of the disease Job suffered from and the hopelessness in the mind of Job's wife. Job himself had to regret his existence as he endured the excruciating pains and neglect. Nonetheless, in spite of the painful and humiliating experience of Job, he endured and later triumphed

Like Job, those that lived with leprosy in the Old Testament had great taste of pains, rejection, and hopelessness. Leprosy at that age had no known cure and hence it was dreaded. Among the viable cure for the disease at that period as depicted in the book of Leviticus is the destruction of the house and banishment or rather quarantining of a suspected leprous person (Jastrow, 1914). There was strong belief that Yahweh was punishing those that were living with leprosy. Ordinarily, this kind of position would easily spur people in the other divide to see others with the disease as never do well and bunch of evil doers, and therefore should be rejected. Although, the state of mind of those that suffered from leprosy may not be easily known as portrayed in the Old Testament especially in the book of Leviticus, through hermeneutics and dialectical interpretations of the passages that deal with the nature and the condition of lepers, it may not be far from mental torture of anguish, hopelessness and pains. Therefore, it is appropriate to add that lepers in the Old Testament period might have suffered and nursed hopelessness and despair at an unimaginable degree.

ii. The poor

Poverty is a great recipe that leads to hopelessness and depression. The Old Testament draws a distinction between the majority poor and the minority rich; though these two conditions aforementioned are relative to what makes people poor or rich in the true sense. Be that as it may, our focus here is on the condition of the abject poor in relation to their state of mind. Writing about this concept from the perspective of the Old Testament may be challenging for many passages would either speak about the poor or allude or be sentimental to this group of people. The nature and activities of the poor; serfdoms could easily be known as one reads through the history of Israel starting from the cradle to the end of the Old Testament. The history of Israel is intriguing. There were wars and counter wars (deportations; exiles), flood, famine, and diseases that engulfed the people at different times in Israel's history. No doubt, during these periods and time, many Jews became serfs; very poor and heart broken. One can imagine the state of mind of majority of the Jews in this category through the probable outcome of the conditions aforementioned.

Having noticed that possibly many Jews suffered the cramp of hopelessness as a result of the horrible and pitiable conditions they found themselves, it is pertinent to describe very few of the conditions mentioned earlier. In this regard, the state of the poor here is used in a generic sense to represent the condition of similar people in the Old Testament. It is glaring the way the poor are treated among the people they lived with. In spite of the very condition they found themselves which was that of penury and lack of basic necessities like food, shelter etc.; the rich were compounding their problems by exploiting them. Quarcoopome (1978) wrote while referring to the prophecy of Amos that the poor were marginalized, and treated like animals. No wonder this assertion, you cows of Bashan (Amos 4:1), who oppress the poor, who crush the needy (Amos, 8: 4 ff) was made in relation to the exploitation of the poor by the rich during the period of prophet Amos. (Okwueze, 1998). At this age, (8th century BC in Israel) there was an unprecedented economic growth. But instead of the wealth being a source of blessing to better the lots of the poor, the rich at that time did not only subject them to servitude but also made sure that they were denied justice and used the wealth against them. It is better imagined, the level of despair and hopelessness, that the poor described in the above passed through. Some might have possibly passed on due to frustration and pains. Also, likely is the fact that those who had hung on hope might have overcome the ordeal though there is nothing in the Old Testament especially on the passages that talk about the aforesaid story revealing how those exploited poor felt in

relationship to the positive outcome in the presumed hopelessness which they suffered.

Hopelessness: the Nigerian Contemporary Society's Experience

The contemporary society as used here is operationalized to mean the Nigerian society. This society has been bedeviled with crises, and other conditions that lead to hopelessness to a good number of the citizens. No matter how we disagree to agree on this subject, Nigeria is in a horrible state which produces condition that put people into great lack, fear and tension, hopelessness and waywardness. (Wikipedia, 2010) We are bombarded daily with stories of carnage, swindling; obtaining By Trick (O.B.T) embezzlement etc. Truly, there have been many crises and disturbances in Nigeria that the citizens are living in fear. They are confused particularly the poor on which or which not to fear. Notwithstanding the wealth and might, and intimidations from the rich and the politicians, the poor still faced pains and deaths through litanies of sicknesses that cause them great pains and that would have even cut their lives short as a result of poor medical services, corruption and negligence. They suffered pains of displacement as a result of religious and ethnic crises (Ailemen and Ekpunobi, 2010), militant insurgence, want and unrest, etc. It is highly outrageous how the rich and in most cases politicians cart away the tax payers' money and then watch the suffering masses; the poor die in the dungeon of poverty. More worrisome is the fact that some of these helpless persons who run to people they believe will help them will end up being milked of their last resort. For example, Amnesty International reports that there is an endemic corruption and rape by police in Nigeria. The law enforcement agencies that are meant to protect the rights of the citizens are indicted for violating those rights. There are countless cases where a woman would report a case to the police station and instead of the police attending to the presumably wounded woman, they will swindle and extort money from her and may even torment her more with rape. For kolawole (2010), an Amnesty International representative in Nigeria, the harsh reality is that if you are a woman or girl in Nigeria who has suffered the terrible experience of being raped, your suffering is likely to be met with intimidation by the police, indifference from the state and the knowledge that the perpetrator is unlikely to ever face justice

The poor in Nigeria and indeed other parts of the world especially in the third world countries Haiti, Pakistan etc. are compared to the poor in the Old Testament especially during the reign of Prophet Amos and other eight century prophets. There are numerous cases where these helpless members of the two societies gnash their teeth to the advantage of the rich. Justice is denied them with impunity. The rich are the sacred cows that will always

go unpunished even when they might have committed or flouted the law. For example, trillions of dollars are being continually embezzled in Nigeria by the rich and the politicians. (Ribadu, 2006) The most agonizing thing is that often the perpetrators are known influential citizens who in most cases would not be punished (law of immunity) But the poor that steals a little money, such as five hundred naira to feed himself (perhaps, because of the bastardization of the economy by the rich) may be kept in the prison custody for donkey years or shot dead by the police or even be lynched by his own 'people'- the poor. The affluent in Nigeria almost get whatever they desire. There are accusations that the remote cause of series of violence, and crises in Nigeria are the attitude of those sacred cows. They incite violence probably for political or other selfish reasons and the common man would raise arm against his fellow poor. This conclusion is partly informed by the fact that most of the victims of the violence in Nigeria especially religious/ethnic are the ordinary people in the street that are fending for themselves. The recent carnage in Jos is a case in point. Many people, who were massacred, maimed and their houses destroyed were the poor (Pam.2010). It is disheartening to state also that some of the victims of the recent Jos crises were children whose parents were brutally murdered; who were most likely grappling with hopelessness. Some of these children were picked by an American missionary named Reverend Joey Starling and kept where they were being properly taken care of in his orphanage home in Opi, a town located at the outskirts of Nsukka, Enugu state.

Left with nothing, the condition of the people in the foregoing description may have caused great psychological trauma, confusion, despondency and thought of evil of suicide. Therefore, not inappropriate is to say that hopelessness can have great adverse consequences on those suffering from it. Many people that passed through this agonizing situation might have acted differently; some may have harnessed the healing or placating power of hope as a means to an end to their problems. Others might have not survived the severity of their conditions as they battled the problem of hopelessness.

The Potency of Hope Therapy.

Hope is phenomenal to man. Nonetheless, it remains redundant until one harnesses it for proper usage. Granted, the process of harnessing the healing powers of hope starts from the mind. It is palpable that many factors can make a person's hope to be dampened or to be "strong or effective" as the case may be. In as much as we know that there are conditions that fuel hopelessness, it presupposes that there could be things

that can be done so that people think positively in the face of agonizing situations; this could be a tool for recovering from psychological disturbances, excruciating pains, great injustices, and devastating health conditions.

Hope has been instrumental to a very large extent in making terminal patients and other people suffering huge lack; injustice, poverty, etc to recover or live a positive; meaningful life. (Agbo, 2007). In this regard, it is pertinent to add that abnormal or miraculous healing of diseases that are hitherto known to be incurable is realizable through hope and other related conditions. It is a given that hope is not tangible. It cannot be felt like orthodox drugs like *paracetamol* or *Asprin*. In line with most physiotherapy, it is needless to take it (hope) at a specific interval or regimen. Even if there is such specification which actually may appear weird, there is no parameter or scale to measure the amount or the extent of hope that could cure a person with the pains of hopelessness. Hope is an abstract concept and by this, can not be felt yet it performs wonders when used or utilized well and correctly. One needs not to 'see or feel' hope before reaping from the potentials and tendencies it has in bringing meaning and healing to the lives of the despondent. Just like lay men in the field of science believe that the earth is spherical and revolves around the sun without seeing, feeling or even knowing the principle(s) which justify such conclusion, people living with hopelessness should believe and harness the *therapeutic* nature of hope to their own well being. To give credence to this assertion, Ebo (2007) observed that although he is a proponent of urine as an efficacious therapy to so many diseases, he cannot explain beyond doubt how this urine therapy works but he knows quite well that it is highly potent. Having known the nature of and what constitute hope, it is imperative to examine how this concept heals and soothes; placating effects.

The knowledge that a potential cure exists could make a difference for the living. In other words, that "a potential cure exists" could be a psychological therapy for people living with never-ending diseases and probably others living in any condition that 'threatens hope'. Such anticipation of possible curative drug or a possible way out of a particular condition can revert or make powerless and void the damage that could be associated with despair. For instance, Alina (2006) wrote "... still I have to know where he found those droplets of hope to move, the strength to change his life for the best and survive. I have been asked this question by doctors more than a hundred times", Joel explains. On the 22nd of April, 1986, I had ten Tcells, was given a life expectancy of six months. By then,

life expectancy was less than a year “...I recognize an internal optimism...this is the second decade and I’m still alive...” Joel was diagnosed with full blown AIDS on April 22, 1986 a time when little was known about this fatal disease. Joel Rothschild was faced with two choices- to close his eyes let go and die, or to fight AIDS.

Among the core and cardinal things that sustained Joel might have been the belief in the positive outcome which included a possible solution or curative drug of AIDS. Even though, after over two decades, AIDS has defied all possible curative drugs and still raises its ugly head, Joel has survived, probably because of his belief in a possible curative or *vaccinative* drug. There is no gain-saying the fact that internal optimism was what turned out to be a potent *antidote* that made Joel survive AIDS for that long period. Presumably, most people diagnosed with AIDS at the period little knowledge about the disease was known never survived it. They died not only because of the effect of the disease on them but for the hopelessness and related problems/complications. But Joel’s outstanding hope saved and kept him going till new and potent medical AIDS’ drugs (antiretroviral) was discovered.

In the same vein, numerous Nigerians have suffered the penury of lack, destruction and hopelessness as a result of crises and similar causes but interestingly, it is not out of place to contend that some of them have bounced back as a result of utilizing the invincible power of hope. Many that lost their properties and belongings; houses, businesses, shops etc were utterly destroyed in the series of crises and disasters in Nigeria, would ordinarily battle hopelessness. But only those that know the import of and *therapeutic* role of hope that would easily revert their condition against hopelessness.

Conclusion.

From the foregoing, it is not inappropriate to infer that hope is the life-wire that could make a person living in grave misfortune and/or diseased condition to hang on. This idea of struggling to live for more time in spite of an unbearable or painful condition has a tremendous effect in the life of the despondent. As observed earlier, it could make a person in the dungeon of despondency to fight the battle of survival and living a meaningful life from within his mind. This will in turn prolong the life of the said hopeless person

Indeed, worth noting is the fact that hope is not bought in the market with money. As a human phenomenon, it may seem not to be scarce. Yet, it may remain redundant except activated. The first thing a person suffering from hopelessness should know if at all he would transcend to observe by himself without a reminder, is to fight to improve his condition through his

mind. This does not cost much but to shun negative thinking and cling to the belief that there must be a way out and pursue this conclusion genuinely. He should know that the end of his problem may be nigh and fatal in the absence of the therapeutics of hope.

On the other hand, it is imperative that genuine efforts should be encouraged and imbibed so that preventable causes of conditions that lead to hopelessness be nipped in the bud. For instance, troubling life events; wars and other concomitant issues could be the remote causes of frustration and despondency and these no doubt could also be prevented. Even though the victims of hopelessness may be those who have suffered various degrees of misfortune, it still remains exigent that efforts should be made to ameliorate and address the original causes or what might have led people into despondency. If for example poverty is the major source of frustration and hopelessness, those who become hopeless because of such condition would easily turn to be hopeful when they overcome poverty. Therefore, there is the need to recommend that man, if possible should shun those things that could lead to hopelessness. Attention should be given to those who have suffered for no cause of theirs; those who have been stricken by disasters ought to be cared for. Among other things, they should be provided with relief materials and support by either the government or Non Governmental organizations/concerned individuals.

There is the supposition that a hopeless man is a dead man. Those in the spasm/pang of this condition-despondency should transcend to accept the truth that living without hope could be compared with a running vehicle without engine oil. The possibility of an engine knock is imminent. So, to live in hopelessness is like inviting a possible crack or end of life.

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