

VOICES OF HOPE

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As 2020 begins its cycles of life, death, growth and diminishment, we continue our daily practice of contemplation and intentional holding of our world, in a vibrational field of love, hope and peace. We trust that in doing this as a growing communion of trusting, hoping people, we actually alter the vibrational field around us, sending ripples of healing and hope into a thirsty world. In this same ripple movement the ‘hope-weakened’ and ‘hope-deprived’ can be drawn back into the communal, contemplative, hope-filled heart.

We all have the capacity to be ‘voices of hope’, often without saying a word, just by being there for those around us who have lost or who are losing hope. I imagine that we have all been so for others, often without realizing it. In fact if each of us was to share even a single ‘hope story’ from our lives in the year just ended, we would have so much good news available that CEN reflections for the year would be simply story-telling!

But as we stand on the threshold of this New Year, where can we find voices of hope to help galvanize our movement into the year ahead? Recently I was reading from the writings of

Etty Hillesum – that amazing young woman who was a Dutch Jew put to death in Auschwitz in 1943. She was such a strong voice of hope in a seemingly hopeless situation that one can hardly believe it possible to write as she did when everything around her was so bleak, dark and depressing. On the train delivering her and other Jewish people to Auschwitz



she wrote on a postcard which she threw from the train window – ‘we left the camp singing’.ⁱ This was her last known writing – her last legacy to the fear-ridden world of the time.

Etty was a young woman who believed in and lived from an underlying philosophy of hope, even when it cost her dearly to keep hoping. But as the poet Emily Dickenson described hope in one of her poems:

*Hope is
the thing
with Feathers,
That Perches in the Soul,
That Sings the Tune – without the words,
And Never Stops at all.ⁱⁱ*

What an appropriate statement as we look at the life of an Etty Hillesum! Her hope was born and grew to maturity in the heart of a darkness that had seeped into the world soul. It is in fact within darkness that hope best shines its pinpoint of light into its surrounds, a light that can slowly grow as more and more pinpoints join with it and light a way forward. For only in the darkness of night can we see the stars at their best, and only in the face of harshness, cruelty, injustice and oppression can we truly see courage and endurance flourish. Darkness then, has a strange capacity to bring together and unite. It could well be seen as even an ‘elicitor’ of hope.

In the months prior to leaving for Auschwitz Etty wrote equally hope-inspired entries in her journals. In these writings the spreading of love, peace and the befriending of sadness are shown to be not only personal projects but as means of shifting the energy in the world around them:

“Yet there is love bound up inside us, and if we could release it into the world, a little each day, we would be fighting war and everything else that comes with it.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves — more and more peace—and to reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us the more peace will also be in our troubled world.”^{iv}

“...ought we not sometimes to open ourselves up to cosmic sadness?...Give your sadness all the space and shelter that is its due, for if everyone bears [their] grief honestly and courageously, the sorrow that now fills the world will abate. But if you do not clear a decent shelter for your sorrow...then sorrow will never cease in this world and will multiply”.^v



As we look at our world at the beginning of this New Year perhaps sowing love and peace, and befriending our sadness – even cosmic sadness – are keys to being voices of hope for the world of **our** times. If we work individually to ‘release the love bound up within us’, if we ‘reclaim areas of peace’ within our own hearts, and if we ‘open ourselves to [our own and] cosmic sadness’, giving it all the ‘space and shelter’ it needs, perhaps we, as CEN members

are choosing to be pinpoints of light. We are shining the light of a hope that things **can** be different into the dark places of our own world. When we unite to do this and we can be powerful beyond measure to make that difference happen! Hope is a pin-point of light that when believed in and shared, strengthens and grows into an invincible flame. The darkness of Etty's time and of our own can be seen in essence as a 'begetter' of that invincible flame.

This invincible flame brings to mind our October reflection where we were invited to enter through contemplation, an 'ongoing darkening' which brings us into the 'inner wine cellar of the heart' and the 'endless oneness of a womb-like unitive night'. Perhaps we can now see this as the womb place where the invincible flame of love and hope is born – a flame that evokes further memories of John of the Cross' in his metaphor of the *Living Flame of Love*^{vi}. This Flame of Love can transform all darkness – even world darkness - into a love and hope that can fan into the 'beacon of hope' which November's reflection referred to as our 'call'.



Yes, as we end our January reflection, we take up again the final words of December's reflection, 'life is full of invitation' and we 'have to embrace its gifts'. The invitation for 2020 is that we increasingly become living beacons of hope emanating the 'released love' that is bound up inside, the 'reclaimed inner peace' and the gently held 'sheltered sadness' into a waiting world. In doing this we become Voices of Hope in our time!

ⁱ Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life and Letters From Westerbork* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), p.360

ⁱⁱ Emily Dickenson, from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University press, Copyright © 1951, 1955, 1979, 1983.

ⁱⁱⁱ Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life the Diaries, 1941-1943 and Letters from Westerbork*.

^{iv} *ibid*

^v *ibid*

^{vi} John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of John of the Cross*. Translated by Kieran Kananaugh O.C.D and Otilio Rodriguez O.C.D (Washington: ICS, 1991). p. 578-9