



FINDING HOPE AMIDST STRUGGLE



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The COVID-19 crisis is a time of unprecedented hardship such as we have never experienced. There is so much uncertainty, fear and suffering. There are shattered dreams, lost wages and uncertain futures for most of us. You are not alone.

You are not alone

How can we demonstrate strength and resilience in the face of such extraordinary difficulty? Is there light at the end of the tunnel? How can we press forward with determination and purpose?

You are at a crossroads

cross-roads

(krôs'röd', krös'-)

n.

A. The point at which an important choice has to be made

B. A crucial point

For most of you, your world has been rocked. Never did we imagine as we celebrated the dawn of a new year on 12/31/2019 that three short months into 2020, we would find ourselves:

1. Unemployed
2. Home with children without childcare and/or education
3. Unable to visit or care for older loved ones
4. Alone, isolated and insecure
5. Fearful and anxious for the future
6. Financially freaked out
7. *** Enter your personal feelings here ***

Let's face it, we have all experienced one, several or all of the above and to be frank, we have all, to some extent, been in survival mode.

Adrenaline, followed by fear, followed by licking our wounds, followed by... what's next? How do I get myself out of this place that feels so uncomfortable and catastrophic to a place of peace, confidence and hope?

Hang on dear friends...I've got ya!

It has been said that one positive thing about hard times is that they bring out, often in an extraordinary way, the very best within us — **if we allow it.** In any time of crisis, catastrophe, or threat, we respond in one of two ways:

1. We allow ourselves to be defined by the fears, limitations, and lack of discipline of our uncontrolled minds and untrained will; or
2. We use this COVID-19 challenging time as motivation to discover and express the beautiful divine qualities and fierce power that lie within each one of us.

Each of us can make this time of crisis a pivotal moment in our growth as individuals

Let us be those who look back on these difficult times and say, "Yes, that was when I seized the opportunity to bring out and manifest the results of my years of inner work and efforts at self-improvement."

Now is the time

As difficult circumstances test our patience and purpose, now is the time to dust off our grit and put it into action. In this process we will discover strength we may not know we had, and a practical, intuition-guided understanding of the right actions to take, and (most important) an expanding capacity to love and to serve.

In situations that challenge our stability in life, now is the time to learn to face our own fears and insecurities and give them to a Higher Source instead of allowing them to force us to settle and shrink into a fear-based mindset.

Now is the time to make the inner leap from thinking about the qualities of strength I hoped to achieve 'someday' to now living them. Now is the time to discipline our minds to identify the unhealthy scripts we tell ourselves based on fear and uncertainty. As we call out these negative scenarios, we have the beautiful opportunity to rewrite our stories and create scripts based on abundance and hope.

Now is the time to realize that our circumstances do not define who we are. Just because we are experiencing unusual hardship doesn't mean we are somehow diminished. Our spirits, our personalities, our faith and our determination will rise above these circumstances.

Redefine Suffering

In his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner dispels a common myth about suffering and helps us see our way through intense pain:

"The conventional explanation, that God sends us the burden because He knows that we are strong enough to handle it, has it all wrong. Fate, not God, sends us the problem. When we try to deal with it, we find out that we are not strong. We are weak; we get tired, we get angry, overwhelmed. . . . But when we reach the limits of our own strength and courage, something unexpected happens. We find reinforcement

coming from a source outside of ourselves. And in the knowledge that we are not alone, that our Higher Power is on our side, we manage to go on."

If we cannot find a way to make our wounds into sacred lessons, we invariably become cynical, negative, or bitter. **If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it**, usually to those closest to us: our family, our neighbors, our co-workers, and, invariably, the most vulnerable, our children.

Suffering is the only thing strong enough to destabilize the ego, our mind's sense of good and bad, right or wrong. Our natural instinct is to try to fix pain, to control it, or even, foolishly, to try to understand it. The ego insists on understanding and being in control and when there is a lack of control, fear is inevitable.

As much as we want to push the pain away often by numbing ourselves with destructive attitudes and/or behaviors as a means of escaping the pain, we must face it, we must embrace it and yes.... We must learn from it.

We need to avoid the temptation to distract ourselves from our own pain until we've learned what it has to teach us. When we can hold our pain consciously and trustfully, and not project it elsewhere, we find ourselves at our personal crossroads. It is at this crossroads that we are open to learning and breaking through to a much deeper level of faith and consciousness.

Michelangelo's Pietà

My favorite statue that embodies strength and resolve is found in Michelangelo's Pietà. As an

example of holding the pain, picture Mary cradling Jesus's body. One would expect her to take her role wailing or protesting, but she doesn't.

Instead Mary is in complete solidarity with the mystery of life and loss. It's as if she is saying, "There's something deeper happening here. How can I absorb it just as Jesus is absorbing it, instead of returning it in kind?" She is a stellar example of surrender and strength.

Time to be transformed

The word "change" normally refers to new beginnings; however, transformation more often happens not when something new begins but when something old falls apart. The pain of something old falling apart, disruption and chaos, invites the soul to listen at a deeper level. It invites and sometimes forces the soul to go to a new place because the old place was either no longer working or was taken from us.

There are many who describe this process as chaotic, dark, empty, abandonment, fear and depression. Whatever it is, it does not feel good and we want to flee from it. We will do anything to keep the old comfortable presence from falling apart.

This is when we need patience, and the will to let go instead of tightening our controls and certitudes. Transformation very often includes an unsettled feeling of recalibrating our course and surrendering our will to a higher purpose that lies waiting to teach us, if we but let it.

Change is change and is no respecter of persons. Life itself is in constant change. "It is what it is" –

a deepening transformation. It is a constant process of letting go, living in the confusing dark space for a while, and allowing yourself to enter into the unknowing...an uncomfortable space with very little, if any, control of the surroundings and the outcome. Letting go of expectations of desired outcome and clinging to the façade of control is true freedom indeed.

If we allow change to elicit transformation, we will find our second wind. If we resist against the reality of change, suffering is inevitable, plain and simple.

Find the beauty in everything

Our task is to find the good, the holy, and the beautiful in everything, even and most especially the problematic. The bad is never strong enough to counteract the good. We can most easily learn this through meditation, stillness and calling upon your Higher Spirit for clarity and peace.

When we spend time reflecting upon these principles, we trust our True North over all the passing jerks and snags of emotions and obsessive thinking. When we cultivate our strong and loving soul, we are no longer pulled to and fro with every passing feeling. We have achieved a peace that nothing else can give us, and that no one can take from us.

Grit is earned, not bestowed

As hard as this is to accept in the middle of hardship, please trust in the fact that you will become stronger because of it. Adversity develops character and the capacity for compassion, empathy, and courage. Focus on the value and

character strength you will develop from overcoming your obstacles. Think of the challenges from your past and how you were able to overcome them. You've made it through hard times before, you will not only make it through this challenge, you will learn, earn and become better because of it! I love reminding myself that I will succeed not in spite of challenges, but because of them. Grit is earned, not bestowed.

Gratitude turns what we have into enough.

Aesop

Find something to be grateful for and appreciate what you do have. Focusing on what's good in life through difficult times can be another source of resilience. Pulling positivity from gratitude and appreciation for what we still have offers a perspective shift that makes even the most difficult times more manageable. We may have experienced a job loss, but what can we find to be thankful for despite the pain? Keep a gratitude log each day as you begin the day. Write down the negative emotions you want to give up, what blessings we are grateful for and what we want to invite the universe to bring to us, such as peace, abundance, and love. Meditate in this space and allow the universe to deliver exactly what you need to pursue success and deliverance in these trying times.

Find your Bliss!

In the moments of insecurity and crisis, "shoulds" and "oughts" can be counterproductive; they just increase the shame, guilt, pressure, and likelihood of backsliding. It's the deep "yeses" that carry us through. The "yeses" to our purpose, the "yeses" to our vision and the "yeses" to our inner compass.

Do not ever lose sight of eagerness and enthusiasm. Be intentional in the next right choice and as we keep the faith, we will be clear-headed and lead with conviction.

We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give

Winston Churchill

Scientific research provides compelling data to support the fact that giving is a powerful pathway to emotional abundance and lasting happiness. Helping others takes us out of our paradigm and allows us to authentically and selflessly serve another. It might be assisting our friends and/or family while expecting nothing in return or extending help to a complete stranger on the other side of the world.

Because giving makes us happier and happiness makes us give more, it's a never-ending cycle of feel-good virtue. When someone around you performs a good deed, it's hard not to want to be involved. When we see the happiness it brings others, it's only natural that we will want to catch a dose of their feel-good-mojo!

Being kind and caring towards others is also infectious and can quickly inspire others to do the same. Be the domino that causes the ripple effect in others.

Today you are at your personal crossroad. What choices are you going to own? Your next right choice will determine your destiny. Take the high road because the low road is too crowded and never settle for less.

You've got this.