

## **Hope Keeps Us Moving Forward Towards a Better Future**

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Ever since being discharged from the hospital three days ago (Feb 20, 2023), my mind could not help but marvel at the wonderful capacity to hope and dream in times of great danger and suffering.

I am able to pen this article this morning (Feb 23, 2023) because I have a hope that holds fast even in turbulent waters. I want to share this message of hope with my readers, especially INPM members, so that we can move forward in this new year with renewed commitment and reignited passion.

Hope is like a bright shining star in the darkest night. This is indeed the darkest hour in recent history. When I see in the daily news the scale of devastation and the depth of human suffering of innocent people in Ukraine, my normal human response to this tragedy is: Who can stop this madman Putin? Why can't the UN stop him from firing missiles at their peaceful neighbor? Is there any hope to stop human beings from committing atrocities against one another?

I can raise similar questions of despair regarding a wide range of issues, such as: is there any hope of reducing substance use and opioid overdoses? Is there any hope of ending COVID-19 and other plagues? Is there any hope of teaching people how to treat each other with sincerity, kindness, and respect rather than manipulation, deception, and intimidation?

Personally and collectively, we often feel overwhelmed by insolvable problems or tormented by fear, anxiety, or frustration for not getting to where we want to go. I would have never expected that a simple procedure of extracting a molar tooth would result in me ending up

in Mount Sinai Hospital's emergency ward. As I have already mentioned in previous communications, I am grateful for going through this ordeal because this may be my last opportunity to learn the important lessons I need in order to complete my life mission.

During my days of hospitalization, what kept me alive was hope: hope for a successful surgery, hope for a speedy recovery, hope for completing my projects, hope for a mighty fortress against death's enemies, hope for making the necessary changes in my professional and personal life, and hope for world peace.

What kind of hope can meet all the above needs and desires? I can't think of anything in the psychology literature on hope that comes close to the kind of hopeless hope that is beyond human capabilities. The positive psychology literature is dominated by Snyder's hope theory (Snyder et al., 1991).

Basically, Snyder's theory is about two essential components of goal-directed thoughts—both the perceived ability to generate pathways to reach the desired goal, and the perceived ability to execute the behavior necessary to complete the right pathway. The emphasis is on agency and self-efficacy. Snyder's theory is part of the cognitive revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a major pillar of the first wave of positive psychology.

Unfortunately, his theory is not applicable to me by any stretch of imagination. I needed help even to use the washroom or have a drink of water. There are thousands upon thousands of bed-ridden patients who need extended assistance in order to survive. To tell them hope depends on their agency would be like rubbing salt on their wounds.

I also recall one of my earlier pilot studies on hope prior to my successful aging project (Wong, 1998). I simply asked a group of elderly individuals to complete a simple survey on hope, which includes the following questions:

- (1) What kind of good things are you expecting or hoping for at present? Tell me your most important hopes first.
- (2) In terms of percentage, how much control do you have over whether your hope will come true?
- (3) In terms of percentage, how confident are you that the things you hope for will come true?

Not surprisingly, the most common hopes are:

- (1) I hope my children will visit me soon.
- (2) I hope that my surgery next month will be successful.
- (3) I hope that my doctors will be able to reduce my pain.
- (4) I hope that that winter session will be over soon.

None of the hopes listed above involve agency. If one interviews people in palliative care (Wong & Yu, 2021), their hopes are more likely to be based on faith rather than on agency.

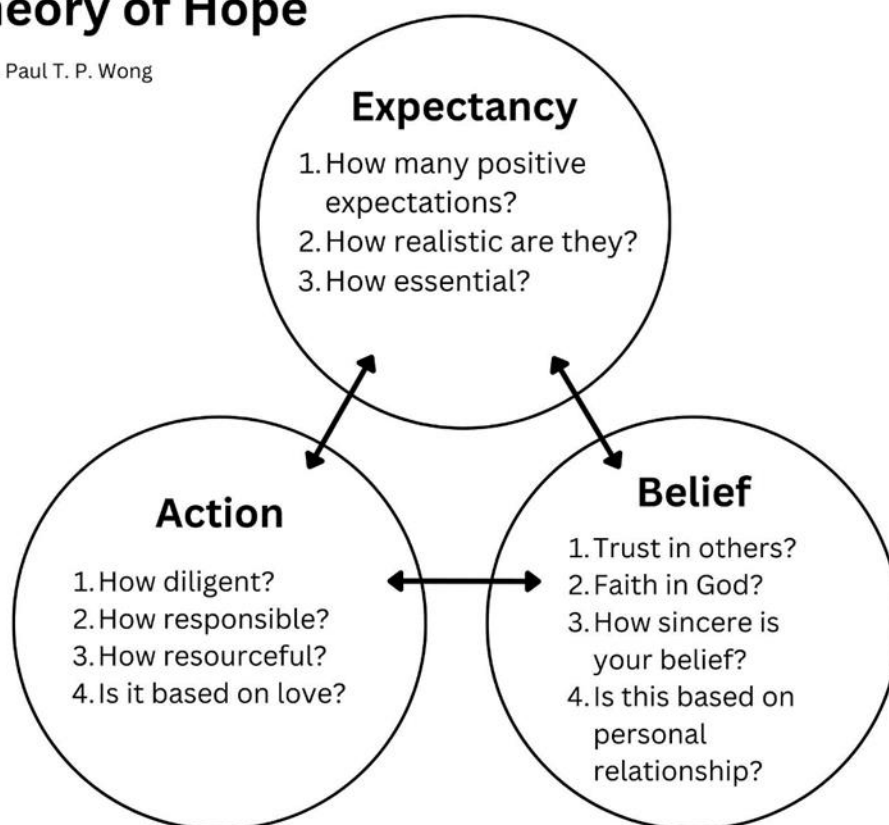
After a few days of wrestling with the mystery of hope, I'm finally able to put together a tentative "expectancy-action-belief" model of hope that is applicable to the entire spectrum of human challenges, based on my personal experience as a patient and as a researcher. Figure 1 captures the main components of my theory based on new paradigm of existential positive psychology (Wong et al., 2021).

Figure 1

*Wong's Expectancy-Action-Belief Theory of Hope*

# Wong's Expectancy-Action-Belief Theory of Hope

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong



This is a complete framework that is applicable to the whole spectrum of human experience.

One can see from the above figure that we will need all the help we can get in order to keep our hope alive, especially when we get sick or in old age. In addition to self-efficacy, we also need faith in God and trust in other people. Such faith and trust are based on personal relationships rather than blind faith. Good relationships take time to cultivate and demand sacrificial love. I hope that some of my friends will develop a scale to measure this new comprehensive hope.

Through the ups and downs in life, having a heart full of hope is not from confidence in one's agency or competence; rather, it is from the strongest power of love, flowing from God's

heart to all the people, and flowing from one heart to another. Love prevails over all things (Wong & Mayer, accepted) and love enables us to live together as brothers and sisters (Wong, in press).

When we love our true self, our souls will realize that we are all connected at the deepest level, and that we are all part of this infinite universe. Once we have this awakening, there is no more need for us to be number one or climb the dominance hierarchy. All we want is to make our honest and unique contributions to make the world a better place.

I still don't have the energy to fully explain my theory right now. It will take some time for me to regain my health. Meanwhile, let hope keep us all moving forward towards our dreams. Please enjoy this song [I wrote with Francine Honey](#) (Wong & Honey, 2021).

May this little essay inspire you to work joyfully and diligently to advance the INPM's mission of meaning, spirituality, and world peace.

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