



Living Mussar Summer Learning

Tikvah, תִּקְוָה, Hope

Episode Three Study Guide

Key Concepts:

1. Hope is active; optimism is passive. Research and tradition (Sacks) distinguish hope's agency and pathways from optimism's passive expectation — hope better predicts life satisfaction and resilience.
 2. Tikvah is woven through Jewish text as communal, active hope. From Ramban's *kav/kaveh* wordplay to Ezekiel's dry bones to Hatikvah, hope in Jewish sources is something built together, not just felt.
 3. Hope is a practice, not just a feeling.
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Relevant Texts (courtesy of David Arnow)

1. A Simple Definition of Hope - David Arnow

Hope enables you to envision the future you desire and supplies you with the energy to help build it.

2. Measuring Hope and Optimism - Trait Hope Scale

- ❖ I can think of many ways to get out of a jam. (Pathways)
- ❖ There are lots of ways around any problem. (Pathways)
- ❖ I energetically pursue my goals. (Agency)
- ❖ My past experiences have prepared me well for my future. (Agency)

3. Revised Life Orientation Test (Optimism)

- In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
- Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

Sample Research Findings

4. "Hope Against the Cold: Individual Differences in Trait Hope and Acute Pain Tolerance on the Cold Pressor Task" C.R. Snyder et al 2005.

- Higher hope scores associated with longer time in freezing water.
 - Differences in optimism showed no such effect.
5. "Hope and Optimism as Related to Life Satisfaction," T. C. Bailey et al 2007.
- Agency was the strongest and most unique predictor of life satisfaction.
6. "Hope and Optimism as Predictors of Academic Performance and Subjective Well-Being in College Students" K. L. Rand et al, 2020.
- Our findings are consistent with previous research showing that hope is a unique predictor of academic performance.
 - Our results add confidence to the existing literature showing that hope and optimism differentially predict academic performance in higher education. These results suggest that it is the unique aspects of hope that are predictive. That is, trait expectancies anchored in beliefs about one's ability to achieve one's goals (i.e., hope) are stronger predictors of academic performance than generalized beliefs about the likelihood of good things happening.
 - Higher hope predicted increases in positive affect and life satisfaction, and greater optimism predicted decreases in negative affect.
7. "Two Faces of Hope: When Wishing Matter More Than Expecting in Climate Action," N. M. Elzafan, Oded Leshem Adomi, et al, 2026.
- Explores bi-dimensional model of hope, wish/desire vs expectation/feasibility in predicting engagement with efforts to address climate change. The wish dimension of hope correlates with climate change engagement while the expectation dimension does not.
8. "Why Optimism About Israel's Future Is An Act of Moral Resistance," Seth Cohen, founder of Applied Optimism, June 23, 2026, ejewishphilanthropy
- Back when I was working at Schusterman, we had a phrase. We said it constantly, to each other and to ourselves, half mantra and half marching order: *Make it happen*. Three words. Not a slogan stitched on a hoodie (although it was that too) but more of a theory of how the world actually moves. To me, it meant the gap between the way things are and the way things could be is not a wall; it is an assignment. It meant nobody is coming to do it for you. It meant that hope, if it is real, has a to-do list attached. The applied optimist, the gritty one, refuses to put the weight down. Instead, that kind of person holds the grief and the hope in the same two hands, keeps both eyes open and still gets up in the morning with gratitude for sight and a belief the next chapter can be better than this one. So no, being optimistic about the future of Israel is not naïve. Naïvete is cheap. What I am talking about is expensive. It costs you the clean narrative, the straightforward path and the satisfaction of certainty. You pay all of it, and you keep your eyes open anyway, and then you reach for the to-do list. For Israel.

For us. For the future. That is the act of moral resistance. Hope is not the absence of clear sight. It is what you build with your eyes open and your sleeves rolled up.

The Intertextual Rationale for Focusing on Hope in Judaism

9. Nachmanides, Ramban (1194-1270)

“When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being chaos [*tohu*] and emptiness [*vohu*]... (Gen. 1:1-2)... “He shall stretch over it with a line of chaos [*tohu*] and with weights of emptiness [*vohu*]” (Is. 34:11). For the line [*kav*] is what the craftsman uses to delineate the plan of the building he hopes to build. *Kav* is derived from “Hope [*kaveh*] to God” (Ps. 27:14).

10. Rashi on the Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 55a:

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Proverbs 13:12).

11. Exodus 32:11

But Moses implored the ETERNAL his God, saying, “Let not Your anger, O ETERNAL One, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.

12. Babylonian Talmud (Meg. 13a):

Moses’ mother named him Yekutiel, because Israel had hope in God in the days of Moses

13. Ezekiel 37:11

Then [God] said to me, son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.

14. Hatikvah, Naftali Imber, 1878:

Our hope is not yet lost, The hope that is two-thousand years old,

Kabbalah / practices

1. Start a hope journal writing down your hopes for the day and connecting with your efficacy to help bring about those experiences.
2. Practice “both-and” thinking instead of “yes -but” thinking. “Both-and” acknowledges challenges while also inviting alternatives.
3. When you awaken, say the “modeh/modah ani” prayer giving thanks for the act of waking up alive to the new day.

4. Create a “corner of light” in your home, a small table, book stand, or desk where you can set objects that inspire hope. Consider adding reminders of special events, personal milestones or other reminders of everyday joys. As you go about your day, take a few moments when you pass your corner of light to reflect on how it feels to connect with these inspiring objects.¹

Daily phrases - choose one to recite several times each day

- ☐ Hope is about being, not doing.
- ☐ I can create what I hope for.
- ☐ Hope gives me the opportunity to connect.
- ☐ What in my day inspires hope?
- ☐ Hope gives me pathways to action.

Questions for Reflection

1. What is your understanding of the relationship between hope and optimism?
2. There was quite a bit of discussion around the notion that hope is active. Two of our brilliant va’ad facilitators offered contrasting texts.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: *“Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope. The Hebrew Bible is not an optimistic book. It is, however, one of the great literatures of hope.”*

Rabbi Jeremy Rosen: *“I prefer trust and optimism to hope. Hope can be used in many different ways that express feelings but without necessary actions or consequences. Some are trivial like, “I hope to win the lottery.” Others more significant “I hope my child does well in school.” Or I hope my wife (or whoever) will forgive me.” Referring to specific events. Hope can be ephemeral. It can be desperate. Optimism on the other hand gives one confidence, a way to go forward that requires action or at least self-persuasion and conviction. Yes, optimism is a relatively modern word, but I think it expresses something deeper and more complex. One word is active, the other passive.*

→ What is the language and understanding that resonates with you?
Describe the practice that you intend to create in your own life?

¹ From Rachel Macy Stafford, by way of Gayle Zoffler. “Visualizing Better Days Can Help You Cope Today.” *Hands Free Mama*.
<https://www.handsfreemama.com/2025/02/11/visualizing-better-days-can-help-you-cope-today/> 2026.