

THE H.O.P.E. MANUAL

(Summary)

©2012 Kenneth H. Hamilton, MD
Paris, Maine
www.hopehealing.org

FORETHOUGHT

Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?¹

FOREWORD

I write this “how to” manual for you who would like to work with a “small group” of your fellow human beings to help each other get past some of life’s challenges and get on with your lives... a H.O.P.E. Group. The chances are that you are seeking answers to four time-honored “success–questions” that turn out to have been a part of human consciousness for tens of thousands of years: *Who am I? Why am I here? Where did I come from? Where am I going?* It is likely that those questions have been with you since childhood. However, if you're anything like me, when I asked my mother where I came from, she said, “From my tummy, dear.” That was *not* the answer I was looking for; so I never asked her again! However, I kept on asking *myself* that question, and the answers have come to me in so many different ways in so many different times.

My experience has shown me that dreams can be recovered, and when they do return, the quality of life changes. Coming together in small H.O.P.E. Groups builds a container that makes the recovery of those dreams not only possible but highly likely. I recommend that you look at your group as a group whose common focus is hope... hope as defined by Václav Havel is the “certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out”. Hope creates that specific mindset in which to hold your dreams, your core passions, your worthy ideals²... in short, all those *gifts* that help you make sense out of your life. Yes, the H.O.P.E. Group work leads one to appreciate the gifts that Life has given each and every one in the group for her or his lifetime.

You are all there to share an interest in exploring the four rich life–questions, paying attention to the peregrinations³ of your path as you move through life without necessarily

¹ From *The Summer Day* by Mary Oliver in *New and Selected Poems*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992.

² Earl Nightingale, arguably the world’s greatest student of success, defined success as “the progressive realization of a worthy ideal” and went on to say that his lifelong study of success told him that each of us is born with such an ideal, and the remembering and serving of that ideal was quite possibly the most beneficial thing a person could do for his or her health. (Personal communication)

³ I love this word that means a journey—a wandering—for the following reason: In the late autumn of 1973 I had the incredible experience of rescuing a peregrine falcon from behind a steel fireplace cover in the home my family

moving toward a specific goal which exists in an unknown future. I encourage you to come together in these groups to focus on living in the present moment with every step guided by hope, the attitude of meaning.⁴ Your focus is finding meaning in life—hope—so you are encouraged to call your group a H.O.P.E. Group.

For the interests of safety, care, grace, beauty, and creativity, I encourage you to make this an invitational group of between five and eight members, growing ultimately to no more than twelve members, all of whom know you well, and who come for their own benefits as much as for yours. Come together, supporting and nurturing each other, for as long as you need. Close the group when those needs have been met, celebrate its life and say goodbye to it with a simple ceremony in which everyone who participated in its life celebrates the experience.

Keep in mind as you work together that H.O.P.E.'s mission is to help people find meaning, value and purpose in their lives through the first intention of a H.O.P.E. Group: "We come together to find wellness." This relieves you of responsibilities for how other human beings do the work. Be responsible for your own journey and remember at all times that the humans in your group are teachers and students to each other: No one needs fixing, judgment, advice or criticism, for we are all in this together... meant to help each other over life's "speed bumps". H.O.P.E.'s working practice for this shared way of helping has no hierarchical order to it. Rather, it is the way of compassion—the way of the "bodhisattva," a realized being who returns to earthly life for the salvation of all sentient beings. Compassion is common to all great spiritual practices, but none are as disciplined in this as the Tibetans; their leader, the Dalai Lama, is recognized as a bodhisattva of compassion. A powerful perception inheres in that function; namely, nothing is broken and nothing needs fixing, for suffering is common to the human condition and empowers self-correction—healing.

I intend for you to find your own safe place and to be safe there; for safety is a feature of all H.O.P.E. Group work. I will share with you the experiences of over forty years of working with people individually and for the last twenty-five plus years in groups seeking that which would give meaning, value, and purpose to the rest of their lives. I share with you the total experience of over 6000 H.O.P.E. Group meetings guided by me or a person I trained in the work.

You will learn how to listen... deeply and compassionately: a form of listening that the Quaker philosopher and ecumenist, Douglas Van Steere, calls "holy listening," a "process of discernment and discovery that listens a soul into life". You will learn how to be *active* and encourage *action* to draw people out. You will become a fellow traveler; for you, too, must be on a journey as are all of us humans, for whom every journey is a *once-told-tale in the annals of the Universe*. You will learn this important distinction between being a H.O.P.E. Group *convener* and being a psychotherapist.

I share with you a word of caution: this work is attractive, and some may come to your

had built two years earlier. The wild creature had somehow found its way down the chimney. I heard the noise of its frantically beating wings, and called my wife and our two children to stand by the fireplace with large towels to catch the wild creature as I removed the fireplace cover. It all went with extreme grace, and we carried the beautiful creature outside and watched it soar away on its beautiful, pointed wings!

⁴ Viktor Frankl, who survived Nazi concentration camps for three years, came out telling us, "I found the meaning of life in Auschwitz." The work for which he is best known is *Man's Search for Meaning*. It is still in print and readily available.

group seeking love, safety, forgiveness, and compassion to heal their childhood wounds, but those wounds may be so deep that such a struggling soul perpetuates his or her woundedness upon members of the group both within and outside the group meetings. That person needs to leave the group and seek professional help, even if the group you have convened must shut down for the benefit of the rest of the group. Remember, please, that H.O.P.E. stands in support of you and your group with the experience of thousands of H.O.P.E. Group meetings, and should such a challenging situation occur, we'll help you work through it; for such situations are powerful teachers to us all.

I have another word of caution that relates directly to group safety: if anyone in your group feels a need to be critical of another, be certain to speak of the other's *behavior* in the context of the H.O.P.E. Group meeting *with the person of concern present in the meeting*. Sharing your thoughts, feelings, beliefs, perceptions of the other's behavior in the meeting creates opportunity for dialogue about feelings. Sharing them outside of the group or in the absence of the other makes the group unsafe, because having a concern is *holding a perception...* and perceptions are personal, *colored by an attitude*. And we all know how it *feels* to know that someone is "talking behind your back". Because H.O.P.E. Groups focus on holding healing attitudes towards self and others, and knowing that attitudes are always chosen⁴, a harmful attitude calls for a compassionate response of a *shift in attitude* known as a "reframe" that makes forgiveness possible.

In this respect, I share with you a word of advice: the document called *The GoldBook* renders with clarity the intention of all H.O.P.E. Groups to do no harm; rather, to *benefit* all those who participate in the group by helping them to get on with their lives.⁵ A study of the contents—the H.O.P.E. Group Opening, the Principles of Attitudinal Healing, and the H.O.P.E. Group Guidelines—can reveal to even the most casual reader the means to draw to the attention of a participant who might harm others how his or her behavior is inconsistent with—incompatible with—the function of any and all H.O.P.E. Groups.

The convener's work is to bring the healthy healing power of a H.O.P.E. Group to those who want to get safely past the speed bumps of their lives and discover ways of being more hopeful and healthy. When you act solely as the convener, then everybody in your group is a guide to everyone else... sharing experience without attachment to its use... no hierarchies, please; your responsibilities are to you. It takes the whole group to be responsible to itself!

The H.O.P.E. experience will help you to learn more about the wonderful diversity of human life. You will learn—by personal and vicarious experience—the excitement of becoming committed to *life* and not to death or disease. You will learn how to examine the value of your own life commitments and direct them to be nurturing, creative forces in that life. You will learn to focus on the whole of life as it unfolds for you in the present moment—now—the only time there is. Your H.O.P.E. Group is your teacher; for here you are both students and teachers to each other.

INTRODUCTION: THE GIFT

The gift of being human is a gift of the Universe promised you since before time began.

Let us choose to look at our lives differently... not as shameful mistakes, but rather as gifted with our lives by the Creation Itself, complete with all of their challenges. The gift is a blessing...

a blessing that may contain such challenges as to appear to be a curse. However, lest you give life that curse, see it as a blessing, and your life will bless all those whom you touch. Let your H.O.P.E. Group help you adopt the attitude and belief that the life you and I share now is a divine gift promised each of us at the beginning of time—the “Big Bang,” 13.75 billion years ago! The challenge and reward of our life is to remember this promise, blessed by the awesome abundance of the created and continuously evolving Universe. This is our healing. Knowing that abundance, we need only accept the rewards with gratitude, and live the life promised us from the beginning of time. The simple purpose of any H.O.P.E. Group is to help human beings find their gifts and help each other determine how best to share them with other human beings.

Remember, too, if the old choice of seeing life as a curse is not working, choose again!

Earl Nightingale, a gifted entrepreneur of success, had a three-part gift for us regarding our work with The Gift: a *Formula*, a *Gold Mine*, and a *Word*. The Formula, which Nightingale found to be common to all spiritual traditions, was, “We become what we think about most.” The Gold Mine that made the formula work was the *Mind*, and the Word was *Attitude*. He pointed out how his lifetime study of success showed him that attitudes were always *chosen*⁵, and any that were not working any longer could be replaced by ones that could—fear and anger typically representing the old ones that sooner or later stop working, and peace and compassion representing the new.

Bernie Siegel, MD, a far-sighted cancer surgeon, created successful supportive groups for people with cancer that focused on helping them find healing attitudes. He called them ECaP (Exceptional Cancer Patients) Groups. He told me that he came to a wish to call his groups H.O.P.E. Groups, but he could not figure out the acronym. When I later convened the first H.O.P.E. Group, the co-founder of that group, Sharon Williams, RN, produced the acronym—*Healing of Persons Exceptional*—and the group accepted it eagerly. One month after meeting Bernie, I was introduced to the psychiatrist, Jerry Jampolsky, M.D., and his Attitudinal Healing support group work with children who had life-threatening illnesses. In the 1970s, Jerry had been introduced to the spiritual text, *A Course In Miracles* (ACIM) and its attitudinal shifts led Jerry out of a life of fear and conflict into a rich life of peacefulness and love.

Hope and Success

Hope encourages us to remember that life has *meaning*, *value*, and *purpose*. Earl Nightingale helps us connect this to success because his lifetime studies of its *essence* led him to define success as “the progressive realization of a worthy ideal”⁶. He always maintained that each of us is born with a personal “worthy ideal” and serving it is powerfully hopeful and healthy. Such a way of looking at hope in relationship to faith and love sustains their life-preserving and nurturing properties through the challenges that life inevitably offers.

Consider what we might call hope’s “mechanism of action”. How and why does it work? It is all about *projections*, *intentions*, and *success*. Hope *projects* into the future and finds fear there, sitting on a pedestal of control over the present. Indeed, J. Krishnamurti described fear as “a product of time and thought.” Well, so is hope, which has the power to knock fear off its

⁵ Earl Nightingale, personal communication through his INSIGHT tapes.

⁶ Earl Nightingale, personal communication through his INSIGHT tapes.

pedestal.

Consider this: with fear off its pedestal of projection, hope stops being a projection and becomes a possibility. In that instant, described by *A Course In Miracles* (ACIM)(1992) as “holy,” fear becomes *awareness* and anger becomes *presence!*⁷ So let us replace fear with hope on the pedestal of tomorrow. Thus, it encourages and nurtures meaningful life in what J. Krishnamurti called the “now–moment”—also a product of thought, but now *without time*—where, as Earl Nightingale knew, *we realize our worthy ideals*.

How did fear become so powerful? With thought projected backwards in time by the ego, finding pain and experience, it now wants to try to protect itself from hurtful and hateful things that happened back then by making the future look at the past and building fearful images out of its experience—justifying attack thoughts called *anger* for self- defense. This is illusory thinking because it projects forward and backward to times that do not yet or any longer exist, and then it projects to the space occupied by another person place or thing—another illusion. When one projects in time or space, one is not home, but in a non-existent illusion that robs a person of her or his creative power⁸. This illusionary thinking lies behind the nuclear arsenal that threatens the life of the world!

As the past contains our reservoir of mistakes and the guilt that springs from our judgment of those mistakes, it, too, appears to be powerful. However, it is only through our ego's *guilty attachments* to that past that it has any power. In order to overcome that power, hope turns to compassion and forgiveness to help it bring us back to the present and eliminate our defensive/offensive thoughts and actions. It nurtures relationships based on love. Become *responsible* for your choices of actions in the past and be *accountable* for them—and make amends where possible for harm done⁹.

*You can stop projecting and attaching; come home and be you, a divinely created presence in the world! Be here now!*¹⁰

Think about coming home. I would like you to consider adopting a personal *centering* practice based on the integration and balance of the four elements of the person: body, mind, soul, and spirit. Look at the notion that taking care of yourself in this way may have a direct beneficial effect on those with whom you have a significant relationship. (And the law of returns says that this effect will come back to you as well!)

In other words, if you would do unto others as you would have them do unto you, it might just be a good idea to know what you are doing by practicing it on yourself. It might include:

- Prayer and meditation
- Exercise and work
- Balanced nutrition

⁷ I got this simple metamorphosis from Sogyal Rinpoche (1992).

⁸ To test this, simply go to a martial arts dojo and ask what makes a person win or lose a match... The answer will be, "attitude".

⁹ With respect and gratitude for the good work of the 12-step programs.

¹⁰ This is the title of Ram Dass's well-known 1971 book on spirituality, yoga, and meditation (Dass).

- Pleasure and fun
- Spontaneous acts of beauty and universal kindness.
- Mindfulness of every thought and action.

What might happen if we were to begin to look at every human life as a gift of the Universe, given at the instant of conception and promised for the whole of that life? What if we were to take the idea that there is a never-duplicated set of coordinates in space and time that define each life as if it were a plot of land to till? What would the consequences be for all of us if we could begin to get the idea that we live because the Universe lives; we think because the Universe thinks; we have bodies because the Universe has a body; and we love because the Universe loves. Let your H.O.P.E. Group be a place where you can safely explore these possibilities with and for each other:

- To live as if time and space do not exist is to live free of attachments. To live free of attachments is to end suffering.
- A guiding principle: “Our rewards in life are always in exact proportion to the level and degree of our service.”(Napoleon Hill).
- A rule to enrich that service: “Beginning today, treat everyone you meet as if he or she were going to be dead by midnight. Extend to them all the care, kindness and understanding you can muster, and do it with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again.” (Og Mandino)

HOPE: THE ATTITUDE OF THE SOUL

“Hope is the beacon that lights the way through your problems to your possibilities.” (Bernie Siegel to the author in 1988)

“Hope is a state of mind, not of the world.... Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart.... In this deep and powerful sense (it) is... an ability to work for something because it is good.... (It is) the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.” (Václav Havel)

“Hope” is a powerful word today. Pandora’s hope was a promise of good things. However, we are discovering that hope contains a *memory* of good things. Alice Miller, who was among the first to offer that idea, has helped many people recover their soul by regressing them to places that seem to precede their present human existence. When things seem to make no sense, we naturally tend to turn from them in fear. When we pause in our aversion and realize that everything makes sense to the Unmanifest (Creator), we become empowered to seek the sense in that which we observe. We conquer our fear with the only attitude we have with that power—love—which gives us the strength to **remember** our future.

A metaphor that speaks to this is “the ray of hope”. On the one hand, a ray is a narrow beam of radiation—usually visible light—and on the other hand it is a foretaste, a glimmer, a gleam or a glimpse. I can see myself in darkness on a turbulent, storm-tossed sea, not sure of my bearings or position. I am looking for a sign of a safe port where I can wait out the storm. I see a glimmer on the horizon... a flashing beacon! I can set my course to it! I can imagine the

safety to which the source of that ray of light points.

In the same way, a healthy young wife and mother finds that the sea of her life has become turbulent and storm-tossed through cancer, death, separation or other natural calamity, and she looks about her for that promise of a safe haven where she can mend her sails and wait out the storm of her life. What is her beacon on the horizon? It comes in the form of the hand of another reaching out to her and giving her support and nurturing while she finds that safe haven in which she can lie while the storm passes. Through another, she finds hope. Both of these have been found in H.O.P.E. Group meetings; they can be found in yours.

Hope is the story of the butterflies that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross tells. When she was young and just beginning to practice child psychiatry in Switzerland, the war in Europe ended, and among the liberated concentration camps was one that had been just for children. Of the thousands of children interned there, only about one hundred remained. The discovery of the horror led to the formation of an international team of helpers to bring the children back to the “real” world, and Elisabeth was one of them.

The children had been kept in two rows of plain wooden barracks buildings. The survivors showed them a building at the end of each row, to which children were taken every night, never to be seen again. With their hearts in their mouths, the team went to the two buildings to see what evidence remained, if any, of the children’s experience. To their amazement, they found no sign of violence or fear in either building; instead, they found drawings of butterflies, thousands upon thousands of them covering all the wooden surfaces of both buildings! The children had scratched these symbols of miracle into the wood with the only tool they had—their fingernails!

Today, people I have met who worked with children with life-threatening diseases often found these children, when they were nearing the end of their lives, doing spontaneous drawings of butterflies! The world shares a common belief in the promise of transformation that leads the caterpillar to create its cocoon. A simple question: are we seeing an example of *a priori* knowledge? I suggest to you that if we keep in mind the idea that both linear and non-linear time do exist; then *a priori* knowledge becomes possible as knowledge that exists in this moment and is accessible to us in our linear dimensions. Hope, as Alice Miller suggests, may just be a “memory of the future!” I also suggest that our soul, considered by many to have a quantum nature, is that which is *conscious* of past, present, and future... in the field of consciousness, now is the only time there is.

The caterpillar– butterfly metamorphosis:

This miraculous process stuns the imagination with its intricate weave of complex processes, and yet it has a striking metaphoric resemblance to human metamorphosis. The H.O.P.E. process, be it in a H.O.P.E. Group or a SoulCircling workshop¹¹, metaphorically contains all of the elements of this transformation. Let us then examine the process for the butterfly.

The butterfly egg contains DNA with two sets of cellular instructions: one set develops the *larva*—the caterpillar—and the second set creates the *imago*—the adult butterfly. The larva has but one purpose: to eat twenty-four hours a day and acquire all of the necessary elements

¹¹ A one-day H.O.P.E. Group experience of finding that which gives one’s life meaning, value, and purpose... finding out what Teilhard de Chardin meant when he said, “we are spiritual beings immersed in the human condition.”

for the formation of the butterfly. Its eyes and antenna-like feelers are specialized for the detection of the right kind of food. Its mouth is specialized for reducing its food to a size manageable by its digestive tract. Its gastrointestinal tract is specialized for the digestion of that food. Its respiratory and circulatory systems are specialized to support these functions.

And in its body lie inert collections of cells that contain the instructions to become the adult butterfly. Science has named these collections “imaginal disks”—words rich in their implication of the presence of an image that will fully express itself in the emergence of the butterfly, the scientific name for which is *imago*!

The larva will molt once or twice as it grows, and when it reaches a critical size, it will hook its end into a plug of its silk, molt once more, and become immobile, hardening its skin. Its digestive system will break down, sending digestive enzymes throughout its body. All cell walls will dissolve. All intracellular structures will become formless, reduced to unrecognizable molecular components. The imaginal disks and the central nervous system remain unaffected by these powerful forces.

When the destruction ends, the imaginal disks will begin to draw material out of this primordial stew and begin to replicate themselves with a new set of instructions—butterfly-making instructions, and a new cellular form develops that was always implied in the DNA instruction of the imaginal disks—the butterfly—that builds itself around the only thing left from the caterpillar—its central nervous system.

When this process is complete, no similarity to the larva remains. This new form has true antennae to sense the pheromones coming from a mate that might be as far away as three miles. It has wings that make it possible for the creature to cover as many as three thousand miles to its winter home. It has no chewing mouthparts but a long tongue for reaching into a blossom for nectar and water. It has six long legs to carry it gently over the flower blossom. It has eyes capable of recognizing the color spectrum of the flowers that nourish it, and that it, in turn, fertilizes. It has a memory of the future, for it knows the way to its winter home (Mexico for the Monarch butterfly), even though it has never been there before.

Moreover, when it swelled and burst the skin of the pupa, now chrysalis, its wings were little fat nubbins completely incapable of flight. It had to struggle to get itself out of the rigid, protective confines of the chrysalis. In struggling, it built up its flight muscles. It drained the blood out of the wings, allowing them to expand to their full span. It had to endure this struggle... any attempt to help it would result in its death.

The ancient Greeks knew something special about this metamorphosis... they gave the butterfly the name of their goddess of the soul—Psyche! Might it just be that as the caterpillar became a butterfly through physical metamorphosis, the human becomes a spiritual being—a soul—through its mental metamorphosis? Might that metamorphosis simply be a shift from guilt/fear/anger to love/compassion/forgiveness? Simple? Yes. Easy? No.

An important question before us is whether or not the so-called helping professions really do help a human being who is in the process of deep personal transformation, such as through a serious illness or mental crisis. Is it possible to be present to the situation in such a way that the individual in metamorphosis becomes aware that the process is not a dis-ease but a natural phenomenon of growth and development? Is it possible to be present to suffering in a beneficial way without trying to stop it?

It is not only possible but it is a natural function of H.O.P.E.'s service, be it in H.O.P.E. Groups or SoulCircling. How then, do H.O.P.E. Groups and SoulCircles help without helping? They have the power of the most power-full attitude of all—love. Love puts everything in relationship. It encourages with the strength of the heart. It cares through compassion—that powerful manifestation and expression of love. It is the power to be present to the suffering regardless of its depth. It is not the same as empathy, the power of which is to experience the feelings that give rise to the suffering. Without compassion, empathy can run rampant in the empathic person. With compassion, especially as expressed in the Tibetan Buddhist practice of Tonglen, one breathes the suffering into the space around the “noble heart” (Chödrön) where that heart acts as a transformer which turns the suffering into peace; then one breathes out peace, *sharing it with self and others*. This simple practice is wondrously effective... one can learn it by practicing it everywhere, starting with another person to whom one is neutral, then toward another for whom one has a positive feeling, then toward one's own self, and then, and only then, toward one for whom one holds a negative feeling. Compassion empowers hope with the memory of the future.... In other words, H.O.P.E. Groups need only be in compassionate relationship to the one who is struggling out of her—his chrysalis... and that is all s—he needs! Indeed, herein lies the primary ethos of H.O.P.E. Group guiding—compassion—and the care that naturally flows from its practice. Consider this: our capacity for compassion is huge; for it is actually hard-wired into our brains in wonderful cells in a fold of the outer cortex called “mirror neurons.” These cells pick up the feelings of others around us... their sufferings, be they pain or joy, out of which the practice of altruism grows.

Such care is kind and considerate. It creates an atmosphere of safety, in which sharing our experience becomes possible. This kind and considerate care makes forgiveness possible. We err and err greatly by assuming that we have the power to forgive another. However we do have the power to forgive our attachments to the other. By this, I mean we go to the core meaning of the word, forgive—give away completely. What is it that we can give away completely that frees ourselves from other people places and things? Our attachments to them, their thoughts, and their actions. How do we attach? Through guilt, fear, and anger!

Consider this... anyone who harms another does so with a subconscious drive to try to give away their woundedness that consists of the same kind of attachments I am talking about. I call this the perpetuation of perpetration. Those who have wounded me have been trying to free themselves of attachments to those who wounded them, but that, sadly enough only perpetuates the wounds. It is through cutting or breaking those attachments that we free ourselves from those people places and things to which we have been attached. As we thus free ourselves, not only can we move forward by this process of forgiving and remembering, but remembering with compassion toward the other that makes it possible for the other to heal... to be free of those attachments... even if those egos are no longer with us... their souls are free of the dimensions and can join the present and the past in a healing relationship. Consider this, then... it is through and with the power of compassion that we access the rich healing power of forgiveness within our own selves. And through that same rich healing power we come to find meaning, value, and purpose in the seeming chaos of our lives... the core function of your H.O.P.E. Group.

WHAT IS H.O.P.E.?

This question has come up frequently over the years since the first H.O.P.E. Group came into being on February 12, 1987. At that meeting, we chose to call ourselves a H.O.P.E. Group with the proviso that we had to come up with the name to fit the acronym if we wanted to continue to use it. At the second meeting one week later, Sharon Williams, RN, the nurse who started this work with the author, proposed “Healing of Persons Exceptional” and all those present enthusiastically agreed. We also agreed to the following: “Healing” literally means to become whole... to integrate all of one’s parts or fragments into one Being. “Persons” reflects our shared human-ness. “Exceptional” reflects the fact that no two of us are alike. “Reframing” becomes an essential H.O.P.E. Group function. Indeed, H.O.P.E. and H.O.P.E. Groups are all about the *reframe* of “moving through our problems to our possibilities”.

The author knows how powerful this work can be in healthcare, for he began it in the early 70’s in his own practice and developed it through continuous study and practice. To a healthcare skeptic, he makes this offer: We’ll train a professional in your practice to do this work and then we’ll study the data and the patient over time and see if either or both change.

The first H.O.P.E. Group comprised five of his patients with cancer. The word got out that something unusual was at hand, and the author was called on to lead other H.O.P.E. Groups for people with cancer and other debilitating physical conditions, and improvements were found everywhere... H.O.P.E. Groups complement conventional medical therapies. Again, the primary focus of the H.O.P.E. Group was not on a disease but on a life and what gave it meaning. Even in hospice work, H.O.P.E. carried its focus on life into the work with the terminally ill that we had been asked to undertake. It gave us the opportunity to recognize that H.O.P.E. work is all about working with people whose bodies and minds have been challenged by Life, itself. We found out that what works for people with terminal cancer works for people newly diagnosed with cancer... or heart disease... or multiple sclerosis... or chronic pain. It works for depressed people and for people whose lives seem empty. It works for anxious people. It works for prisoners. It simply works for people... not all, but a good many. It is called “care.”

Our vision settled into helping people explore how hope, the attitude, and vision, the intention, could come together to bring meaning and value into a life in the immediate moment. Then, perhaps for the first time in that life, all winds are fair winds.

H.O.P.E. helps people identify and acknowledge the resources that Life has given them to meet It with; next describe the sequence of events that make up the *story* of their life—what life has met them with—and then decide what to do with it all.

We have discovered how interesting and wonderful it is to see how we all seem to need acknowledgment of the different packaging, all the while recognizing the shared essence of being that came into existence at the beginning of time¹¹. As Cheri Huber offered:

“Yes, I am me, but what animates me is what animates Uncle Bob, the cat, the tree, the rock and all that is. We are packaged differently, but we share the same essence. There are many of us and we are not the same but we are all one.”¹²

This is what H.O.P.E. is about... finding and honoring the one in the different packaging.

WHAT IS A H.O.P.E. GROUP?

H.O.P.E. Groups are “small group” gatherings of humans who come together to find wellness by replacing fear with love and hope—the key to deepening the meaning, value and purpose of their lives.... They are catalysts of change where the attitude is hope—the attitude of meaning and possibility—and their context is love, the context of true relationships. H.O.P.E. Groups evoke strengths that increase the possibility that exists within each one of us for living a creative life, and they focus on bringing that life into its creativity—its meaning.

H.O.P.E. Groups work with an open agenda that walks in through the door by sharing coping skills, experience, and a will to support each other in finding meaning, at the same time avoiding “fixing,” criticizing, or giving advice. H.O.P.E. Groups focus on problem-solving, meeting challenges, and focusing on meaningful thought and action according to one’s ability to do so in any given moment... helping their participants find meaning in their lives so they can get on with those lives¹². They encourage participants to focus on life rather than its problems, and in the case of a disease that is the problem, to turn to helping professionals to manage the disease. Thus H.O.P.E. Groups acknowledge the value of having good support in understanding the presenting problem. They gently and safely unconditionally share experience to help *guide* a person to focus on the meaning and possibilities that life contains, because such focus lies beyond the problem up to a level higher than that at which the problems developed—the only level at which a problem can be solved (from Albert Einstein).

While H.O.P.E. Groups are not expected to provide any form of therapy that is the domain of highly trained professionals, they encourage anyone needing conventional therapy to find it outside the group. On the other hand, H.O.P.E. Groups in professional, therapeutic clinical services provide a safe environment in which the participants can explore the qualities of their relationships with their healthcare professionals and the medical therapies they provide. They provide a healthy, safe forum in which to discuss the effects of the individual participant’s therapies. Guided by trained professionals (nurses, physician assistants, and physicians) acting at all times within the ethical standards of their respective professions, they provide valuable information about their individual therapies that help their healthcare professionals make well-informed therapeutic decisions. H.O.P.E. Groups provide a safe venue for the (re-) implementation of the placebo effect¹³ on all therapies. They respect the “Medical Model” that comprises basically the following three questions: *What’s wrong? What caused it? What can we do to fix it?* And science in its method derived from data-collection, repetition, and prediction would define collections of those data as *diagnoses*, and for every diagnosis there would be an established *protocol of therapies* that have been scientifically determined to be valid “fixes”. There is another “model” of thought and belief that I am convinced every single human being wants, for her– or him–self, a model of *meaning*.

The Viennese psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, deserves all credit for this model. In contrast to Sigmund Freud’s psychology of “will to pleasure” and Alfred Adler’s psychology of “will to

¹² H.O.P.E.’s “prime directive”

¹³ The author has always wondered why medical scientists do not restore the placebo effect on completion of their study from which they removed the placebo effect in order to “objectively” evaluate the effectiveness of their treatment!

power,” Frankl saw that the basic psychological drive of the human is “will to meaning.” He developed this psychology in the 1920s and early 30s, and took it with him to Auschwitz when the Nazis decided it was time to kill him. The concentration camp came close to killing him many times, but ultimately failed. As soon as he got his strength back in 1945, he wrote the fundamental text on the meaning model, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl), which I recommend to anyone seeking the underlying psychology of H.O.P.E.

This “Meaning Model” identifies a person's struggle to find meaning in the face of whatever physical and mental challenges present themselves. It looks for the story—the experience—behind the struggle. It nurtures the compassion that makes it possible to see the struggle in the light of meaning. It recognizes the power of experience that the author saw at an early age gave *experience* the same qualities that comprised *love*: it was indestructible, to be shared without condition (meaning having no attachment to whether it is used or not and to what degree), and with the knowledge that in the sharing it returns larger, fuller, richer than it was when it was given away.

Whereas the medical model can be a source of stress, the meaning model relieves stress... not by avoiding it, but by either confronting it, shaking its hand, or embracing it (O'Dea). It helps people face their demons (*Gr, daemon*, a guide or escort), and confront them with the demand that they reveal their true meaning, and then accept peacefully the information returned. The meaning model nurtures compassion, out of which forgiveness (meaning literally “to give away”) makes it possible to cut one's attachments to the people, places, and things of their past that literally suck the life force out of a person. Once cut, it is possible to sense that not only is the victim of the trauma free, but the perpetrator is free to heal his or her own history of trauma whether they are still alive or not!(p. 9) The remarkable power of the meaning model makes it possible to love one's enemies without having to like them. This love makes possible the healing of all wounds.

The meaning model makes it possible to be fully present to what is and to let go of every element of fear that it contains. It enables one to be in one's “center that is everywhere—a center “where there are no illusions and where none can ever enter (Anonymous).” Whenever an individual with a wound or a disease of virtually any kind attains that Center, the medical model no longer obtains because that center is dimensionless, making the impossible possible!

The meaning model works with the four “success questions” other than those used in the medical model: *Who are you? Why are you here? How are you going to get what you came for? What are you going to do with it when you have it?* These four questions are spiritual in nature, and have been around for countless years. They comprise the working business plan of virtually every successful person in history. It is essential that we pay attention to two separate ways of answering the first question: the first comprises what you have, what you have done, and what others think of you—the “exteriority” of your ego. The second comprises the nature of your call to life by Life, itself, acknowledging the blessing in that call, acknowledging the fact that Life may well have wounded you because It has important work for you to do for It, and choosing to put that work under the “blessing”— the “interiority” of your soul.

H.O.P.E. Groups build a safe context in which the questions can be asked, and the answers can come forward. H.O.P.E. Groups have simple “Guidelines” of behavior that sustain the safety of the environment. Some people who run volunteer-facilitated groups believe that these

questions are “therapy” that belongs in licensed, certified, “degreed” practices. These questions come out of the public, “non–therapeutic” domain and not from any texts of psychology or psychotherapy, for H.O.P.E.’s psychology comes exclusively from the world’s literature comprising the essence of success. H.O.P.E. willingly offers these evocative skills to the facilitators of any of this nation’s thousands of self-help groups. The need to participate in a H.O.P.E. Group exists in almost every one of us at some time or other. We are learning to seek the support of a group when a serious disease confronts us, such as cancer, AIDS, depression, or alcoholism. For some, life just isn’t going the way they want. H.O.P.E. seeks to respond to the wishes of each group. H.O.P.E.’s belief and experience is that there is a way for each of us through the challenging difficulties of dis–ease to the dis–covery of health.

Starting a H.O.P.E. Group in a Healthcare provider setting

When a healthcare provider senses a need to bring her/his patients together in a mutually supportive, facilitated group, H.O.P.E. will train, certify, and support a person from that practice. This is covered on the hopehealing.org website. The primary benefit of such a group would be to relieve the practice of having to focus separately on similar questions asked by their patients. It would increase the efficiency of the practice. How often it would need to meet would be determined by the practice, itself.

Such a H.O.P.E. Group would not only focus on matters arising in current therapies, but in the context of helping the patient(s) “get on with their lives”. The direct effect of this is to provide another aspect of healthcare that we have found lends itself to improving the desired responses to therapies of all kinds.

Concerns about reimbursement for such a service are real in today’s attitude to the effectiveness of “mind-body” work. The commitment of as little as 30 minutes to this work would comprise a far-reaching benefit to all concerned.

Starting a H.O.P.E Group outside of a professional setting

The H.O.P.E. experience here has been positive. Such a group is a true “self–help group” that convenes itself by direct invitation coming from one or more individuals who have a sense that a personal challenge would be best met by meeting with friends and acquaintances. The group would use the H.O.P.E. Goldbook to provide guidelines for the direction, context, and conduct of the group. In this way the group is responsible for itself. H.O.P.E. would make itself available in support of any such group, as long as they are registered with the H.O.P.E. organization at hopehealing.org.

The safety of the group is maintained by the fact that it is an *invitational* group. H.O.P.E. maintains a blog page on its website with (monitored) responses available to all to share helpful experiences. The site is monitored by certified senior H.O.P.E. Guides. The frequency and duration of these meetings are determined by the group.

This publication and its sister publication, *SoulCircling: the Journey to the Who*, are available at the H.O.P.E. website for a reasonable cost so that people in these self–help groups can help each other find the answers they seek. We do encourage the use of guided imagery to close each meeting. H.O.P.E. has over 20 such imageries available at hopehealing.org/store/guided-imageries, all of which come from the experience of our founder, Ken Hamilton, MD, whose gentle voice does the guiding.

Of significant importance here is emphasizing the widely held spiritual perception that if one has the question, they already have the answer. So a H.O.P.E. Group only helps its members become aware of their own solutions... without the *advice* of others. Of additional importance is the adoption of honoring each person's voice with open, unconditional and compassionate listening—the “holy listening” of such exemplars of spirituality as Douglas Van Steere who brought it up in his 1955 keynote address to the British Society of Friends at their annual meeting... "It listens another's soul into life through a condition of discovery and discernment that may be the single greatest service one human being can do for another."

The H.O.P.E. Group Process

H.O.P.E. Groups focus on health and healing through the power of hope to open doors otherwise closed by fear. The words, “health” and “healing,” come from the same root as the words, “whole” and “holy”. In this light, healing is the result of bringing together in a balance the traditional *four* component parts of the human being; *body, mind, soul and spirit*. The soul is unquestionably the spiritual director of a person's life. It knows, through love, that death's sting is but a moment in a rich succession of lives. We are left with the narrow-minded, narrow-visioned secular director of life—the ego—which *fears* the anguish of all forms of pain and death, itself.

It is common to our ego-driven human experience that we tend to be stuck in states of fear and anger that prevent us from allowing ourselves to grieve. We do not recognize that grief is a transitional emotion that frees us from our attachments, allowing us to move toward peace, and subsequently, to happiness and joy. Medical science is just now coming to understand the role of grief, happiness, and joy in dealing with illness and in moving toward health. H.O.P.E. nurtures the move toward states of happiness and joy by encouraging an awareness of the nature of “inner peace”. We find that many people seek this state, but have little understanding of it, let alone how to achieve it. We believe that it is not difficult to find. However, it might take some work to find it. H.O.P.E. Groups facilitate this change, aware that it is a *process*.

A popular perception of health defines it as “the absence of disease.” Health is not the absence of anything, let alone “disease,” rather, it is a *wholeness of self*. Disease does not have to mean “the absence of health”; rather it can mean a condition in which “ease” is not present, thus threatening a fragmentation of the self. Disease is a condition related to a wounding of the body or mind by any conceivable agent or entity that causes it to lose its “ease”. There are times when the agent that causes the dis–ease needs to be identified and removed with some kind of “treatment”, such as a strep throat requiring penicillin, a heart attack requiring angioplasty, a cancer requiring surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, or a depression requiring antidepressants. There are other times when the “cause” cannot be found, and health cannot be sought by moving away from the disease by any of these means. First, though, it is important to acknowledge the existence of dis–ease because denying its existence is fragile and can prevent any movement at all. When one recognizes and acknowledges the existence of dis– ease, one has a base from which s–he can begin to move toward a teacher of the way to health.

We have learned that the many small voices that cry out in the wilderness, “I'm not worth anything!” can begin to find hope—meaning, value, and purpose—in each life. The tiniest ray

of hope can become a beacon that lights the way through a problem to its possibilities. In H.O.P.E., we believe in possibility. We also know that it is harmful to carry expectations; so we share in an inviting, caring, loving manner what we have seen work, because we believe in the great value of experience. It is only great if it is shared without any “shoulds”—obligations/attachments to specific outcomes. We learn to let go of guilt with the “shoulda,” “woulda,” and “coulda” that we so often carry with it. We learn to focus on the quality of life as we live it. We learn to see life as full of lessons, from one end to the other.

We know that the past is gone, and the future never comes¹⁴. What works is what is working now. It is implied by our heredity, influenced by our environment, and ultimately framed and determined in our attitudes. We are free to mold it as we want through attitudinal shifts, and if we do not like what is coming up for us, we can choose to change our attitude toward ourselves and what we believe is happening to us.

We also know that there is great importance in having a vision. There are soft balances between its details and its generalities. The general rule is that the vision must make sense to the person who has it. It is part of a group’s challenge to help foster the idea of the vision making sense. These ideas are seminal to the H.O.P.E. Group process. Of equal importance is the way in which they are brought to the group. We use a method that has been in use by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) for over 300 years—the “Clearness Committee”. Using it, Quakers have solved the problem of providing pastoral ministry and counsel in the absence of a pastor. When a member of any Quaker Meeting has a “concern” (getting married, solving an interpersonal conflict, experiencing business difficulties—in other words, virtually any of the mundane challenges that humans meet from day-to-day, week-to-week, or year-to-year), s— he calls together a group of four to seven friends and family members in one of these Clearness Committees. (You can see that this is already potentially an ideal “small group”).

S—he presents her—his concern to the group, becoming its “focus person”. The group members are “support persons,” all of whom share the belief that the responses and answers to the concern lie in the person with it and not in the group. Therefore, the group is not there to fix, judge, criticize, or even give advice. Rather, its responsibility is to listen carefully and respectfully, ask open questions to gain a greater appreciation of the exact nature of the concern, reflect on the associations heard in the expression of the concern, and affirm the person for bringing the concern to the attention of the group and her—his ability to resolve it. This is Douglas Steere's “holy listening” that “listens a soul into life”. Indeed, it is the soul that knows the gift that it brought into this particular life... and it knows what it had to do to hide the gift in order to protect it from abuse from others who do not understand that they, too, came with a gift. The safety of your H.O.P.E. Group will help you recover what you had hidden.

These last two paragraphs speak to and for countless thousands of episodes of human experience. The process is exquisitely simple. It is also easy to follow. I do not need to amplify on what I have said beyond acknowledging that “simple” is seldom “easy”.

The H.O.P.E. Goldbook

Participating in a H.O.P.E. Group is an opportunity for an individual to discover the gifts

¹⁴ As a sign in a local pub promises, "Free beer tomorrow!"

that make it possible to have an *intention* for their life and then choose their current path and its timetable that together point to the realization of that intention... today, acknowledging that the past and the timetable will have their own adjustments in response to yet another moment of living *now*. H.O.P.E. Groups use the H.O.P.E. *GoldBook*, a letter size publication that is folded and laminated to create a very durable four-page document that sets the *context* for the meeting with the H.O.P.E. Group's primary function: "We come together to find the wellness that comes with the discovery of peace of mind." In this way, group participants create a safe container to hold the agenda for each meeting—an agenda that walks in through the door representing that which is important today. H.O.P.E. Groups' primary responsibilities to themselves are to model holy listening, affirming the presence of movement and direction aligned to every person's *intention*; and trust that the sought-after answers lie within the person with the question or concern.

H.O.P.E. Groups are places where people explore *who* they are, not *what they have*, *what they have done*, or *what others think of them*, which includes their labels—their diagnoses and prognoses. They learn to see life as Henri Nouwen described it: a *call* from Life, itself—a *blessing*. They learn to see that Life has met them with a set of circumstances that may well have contained heartbreak, and how they see that heartbreak determines the quality of the gift that they have to give Life in return for that life. They do so by asking the four questions that evoke meaning.

The meetings establish their context by reading the *GoldBook*, sentence by sentence, beginning with the *H.O.P.E. Group Opening* that came to the author one day in the midst of a quiet, Sunday morning meditation, and which answers the four "success" questions:

- We are a H.O.P.E. Group.
- We come together to find wellness.
- Wellness comes with the discovery of peace of mind.
- We find peace of mind through understanding and letting go of guilt and fear.
- In this way, we learn to live in each moment.
- In this moment, we can choose to focus on the whole of life rather than its fragments.
- We seek the power that makes this choice possible.
- We come to realize that this power lies within each one of us.
- This power, as we understand it, is love.
- With Love's power, we come to realize the promise of hope.

The group then reads the twelve *Principles of Attitudinal Healing* (Jampolsky 1979) to set the attitudinal tone for the meeting:

1. The essence of our being is love
2. Health is inner peace. Healing is letting go of fear
3. Giving and receiving are the same.
4. We can let go of the past and of the future.
5. Now is the only time there is and each instant is for giving.
6. We can learn to love ourselves and others by forgiving rather than judging.

7. We can become love finders rather than fault finders.
8. We can choose and direct ourselves to be peaceful inside regardless of what is happening outside.
9. We are students and teachers to each other.
10. We can focus on the whole of life rather than the fragments.
11. Since love is eternal, death need not be viewed as fearful.
12. We can always perceive others as either extending love or giving a call for help. (H.O.P.E. prefers to replace “help” with “love”.)

The group then goes on to read the *H.O.P.E. Group Guidelines*, which comprise ten verbal agreements that honor time commitments and confidentiality, focus on the one speaking in that moment, work on one’s own process in light of one’s own experience, and see others in a loving way that supports others in their process, free of judgment, confrontation or preaching. The guidelines point out the choice between hope and fear; between peace and conflict; and that seeks love in its highest sense (*agape*). We share what has worked for us; we risk and expose our own emotional states; we create a common experience that allows for joining—breaking down the fear that causes the illusion of separation between us.

The GoldBook is a *crucible*¹⁵ that we build at the start of every H.O.P.E. group meeting to hold the content of the meeting that always walks in through the door. With everyone agreeing to use it, the group finds the guidance to govern itself for the duration of the meeting. According to the guidelines, any one of us can speak up, should we find a violation of any of the statements in the Opening, the Principles, or the Guidelines. The author finds that some people who have been in other “support” groups raise their hand as if they're asking permission to speak.... Here, once again, we have set up a hierarchy where we do not need one because “We agree to treat each other with mutual care, consideration and respect,” which means that there are always breaks in the dialogue, even in monologues that fail to honor this agreement. A H.O.P.E. Group is autonomous—self-governing. Consider for a moment the power in that. Consider too that certain members of the group can be looked at as “elders”—a title of respect for their serenity, courage, and wisdom, all of which have a reputation for coming with age. The role of the “elder” is an important role, and “eldering” is not about controlling as much as it is about building wisdom—the wisdom that comes along with lots of rich life experience.

When I laminate *GoldBooks* for my H.O.P.E. Group members, H.O.P.E. buys 100 GBC .003” laminating pouches at a time for a little less than \$0.10 each, and I print out a two sided copy of the H.O.P.E. Group Opening on Goldenrod colored copy paper for an additional \$0.20. This is a service any print shop can provide for a reasonable cost that virtually any H.O.P.E. Group participant can afford. The .pdf file of the H.O.P.E. Group Opening is a free download at www.hopehealing.org/GoldBook

A Fairly Typical H.O.P.E. Group Meeting:

The meeting begins when it begins with those who are there, and we believe that no one is

¹⁵ A high temperature ceramic vessel that can be used only once to alloy metals... or hold an alchemical process—a H.O.P.E. Group meeting.

ever late to a H.O.P.E. Group meeting... they are simply arriving on their time to contribute what they are there to share. The meeting usually lasts two hours but always ends just when it ends, and nobody ever leaves too early... they're simply exercising the rule of two feet.¹⁶

We optionally use guided imagery near the end of the meeting. We train interested parties¹⁷ to use the immediate focus of the group as a metaphor for the structure of the imagery process. We teach means to explore the meaning of safety and how to establish a safe place for the group in preparation for any guided imagery.¹⁸ We use other forms of closure such as songs or affirmations, as the group considers appropriate. All meetings end with standing in a circle and holding hands, reciting *The Prayer for Serenity*¹⁹(using words like "Love," "Great Spirit," "Source" other than "God" if so desired). This simple closing is a quick and powerful form of centering because it is a prayer for the inner qualities of serenity, courage, and wisdom. At the group's discretion, further forms of centering can be used before this last one: a few moments of silence with a request to simply go quietly into one's own center and let the experience of the preceding time settle there.

Closing a meeting with hugs is a pleasant, informal, and safely intimate way of saying "thank you and good travels until we meet again." However, that level of intimacy is more than some people wish to share. Hugs must always be an option... never mandatory.

We have come to know that the agenda for each H.O.P.E. Group meeting consists of the life experiences that have presented themselves for each participant in the time since they were last in the group. The H.O.P.E. Group agrees that time management is important for all of the participants. We discourage people from developing the attitude that anyone in the group is a therapist, even if their career is that of therapist or counselor. Titles like "therapist," "counselor," or even "guide," automatically set up hierarchies, and H.O.P.E. Groups do much better if there are no hierarchies.

We conduct H.O.P.E. Groups in complete confidentiality that respects the identity of their members. We believe that individual members are free to divulge their own personal information according to their own discretion, and they are to protect the right to privacy of all other group members. This protection makes H.O.P.E. Groups safe. A good working response to violation of safety is to simply "uninvite" the unsafe person from the group. In small groups, the exercise of the "rule of two feet" is a prerogative of everybody in the group in order to maintain safety, even to the point of closing down the group. We must at all times remind ourselves that the essence of our being is love and we have come together to find wellness in the context of all H.O.P.E.'s prime directive.

If new members are present, we ask for simple introductions all around, pointing out that

¹⁶ Harrison Owen's Open Space Technology: <http://www.openspaceworld.com/>

¹⁷ Guided imagery is an art... some people have it and some don't; so this training must be purely voluntary.

(H.O.P.E. is in the process of creating a unique guided imagery training manual we have chosen to call *The Guided Imagination*.)

¹⁸ The author saw the effectiveness of guided imagery when he went to that first workshop with Bernie Siegel. Another physician encouraged him to listen and look for metaphors in his interactions with patients. He started using guided imagery in 1987, and now teaches it as an advanced segment of H.O.P.E. Guide training.

¹⁹ The supplication to The Divine for serenity, courage, and wisdom is hundreds of years old, according to Reinhold Niebuhr who quoted this prayer at a Union Theological Seminary commencement in the early nineteenth century.

everyone always has the right to “pass” and, in this safe context, ask the new member(s) if they would like to tell how they found their way to H.O.P.E. and this H.O.P.E. Group.

All participants join in reading the *GoldBook*. (As one H.O.P.E. Group participant described the essence of the *GoldBook*: “H.O.P.E. is a prayer for Peace through Love in every line of the *GoldBook*—Love is the Power—Peace is the Force—Intention is the Creative Thoughts—Choice directs the Energy.”)

Someone may then have something vitally important that kicks off the talk. Wait and listen. Virginia Satir’s question, “Is there anything bubbling up for anyone just now?” can bring things up quite nicely. If no one comes forward, one can ask another question that is more intentional: “What one thing would each one of you like to take home with you (tonight, today, this afternoon, etc.). Please take a moment to let the answer come, and let’s go around the circle. You are always free to ‘pass’ if that is your felt sense of what is right for you.” As each person states her (or his) intention, pause silently to hold that intention with respect before going on to the next person.

If conversation kicks off immediately, fine. If not, consider that holding the silence as a form of speech. (Offer that if anyone seems to feel uncomfortable with silence.)

H.O.P.E. Groups are aware of and respectful of the value of listening, and how empowering it is when a person knows s–he has really been heard.

The following is simply meant as a set of suggestions for making newcomers welcome to the group based on 25+ years of experience and over 6,000 H.O.P.E. Group meetings:

- Introductions:
After welcoming the new person, invite them in an indirect way to give/share her or his name with the group... emphasizing that privacy may invite a simple “Pass”. Next, invite the older group members to give their names, the reason they came to H.O.P.E., and the reason they keep coming back. Finally, ask the newcomer if s–he would care to tell the group how s–he found out about H.O.P.E. and tell her or him that there is no rule that says s–he has to tell anything of her or his story.
- Ask for a volunteer to describe the nature of the group: Explain the acronym. Describe the attitude of H.O.P.E., the attitude of meaning. Tell how the agenda walks in through the door and that it is important to set the context—the crucible—for the agenda.
- Ask for a volunteer to tell the person about the *GoldBook*:
How we read it — going around the circle, one phrase at a time.
The nature of the H.O.P.E. Group opening: naming ourselves, setting intention (why we are here), describing the way to realizing the intention (how we get what we came for), setting a new intention, and describing the results of attaining that intention (what we’re going to do with it).
Describe the affirming qualities of the Principles of Attitudinal Healing and how their positive nature sets the tone for a beneficial outcome of the H.O.P.E. Group Opening. Describe the H.O.P.E. Group Guidelines as a verbal contract for how we will get along for the duration of the meeting.
- Spend 20 minutes in meditation, with or without a guided imagery as the focus of the meditation.

- At the end of the meeting:
Tell the new person(s) that s-he has had the experience of one H.O.P.E. Group meeting and that next week's experience may well be quite different. Invite her or him back for at least a couple more meetings before deciding if the H.O.P.E. Group is for her (or him).
Give the new person(s) the opportunity to give a closing comment or thought before gathering in a circle and the option of repeating the Prayer for Serenity.

Additional Considerations

The therapeutic benefits of support groups in the management of serious disease have been well studied over several decades now with contrasting results, especially those that have to do with the benefit to disease treatment. It is my perception, based on the psychological truism, "what we focus on expands," that focusing on a particular disease named in the title of the group keeps the focus on the disease. H.O.P.E. Groups focus on health, wellness, compassion, forgiveness and love—in short, attitudes that nurture hope. They place a person's condition in the context of a life with those focuses, removing prognosis from that life and freeing the individual from living longer or shorter than their life needs in order to do everything the soul came here to do. Indeed, the 12-step programs encourage us to live our lives "one day at a time," and even that length of time makes it possible to project to a time that is not yet yours; so we encourage you to narrow down your parameters of time to "one breath at a time"... and it is surprising to find that that small parameter actually enriches the life.

Major concerns have arisen over a belief that one has created his/her own life-threatening disease out of past wounds and/or unforgiven errors. Therefore, the thinking goes, one should be able to get rid of the condition by healing the past. The corollary to that kind of thinking is that should one fail to recover from her/his disease, s—he is a failure. This belief system has acquired the name, "New Age Guilt." The criticisms leveled against such thinking are all valid. Indeed, a H.O.P.E. Group addresses the correction of this in repeating the combination of two of the Principles of Attitudinal Healing: "We can let go of the past and of the future. Now is the only time there is and each instant is for giving."

To continue the argument, such guilt-based thinking is an "awfulizing" of the sort with which we all have some experience. Please note that such thinking is based on judgment and judging; so, in criticizing self and/or others, we hobble ourselves in our movement toward our healing by the judgmental nature of criticism. We must "reframe" our thinking, and perhaps a good frame to start with is in reframing "criticizing" into "critiquing"... shifting from judging another's thought to offering valid, helpful observations based on listening—holy listening—to the thoughts and experience of a fellow human being. Keep in mind that judging another causes judging of self, the result of which is literally one of boxing the other in while you box yourself in another box. Knock down the walls with compassion and forgiveness and you come to see yourself and the other with appreciation and understanding of what you each, in your own way, are going through.

Many different supportive systems support healing though "working" a personal "process". However, the basis of thinking for most of them is that something is "wrong" with the individual. This is the conundrum of medicine... it has heretofore focused on disease and illness,

instead of focusing on health and wellness, which effectively prevents healthcare professionals from achieving the status of *healthcare provider*. (Another form of making boxes to put things in; if medicine cannot focus on restoring health, it cannot possibly be called the healthcare profession.) The chief obstacle to our healing is our use of the word “wrong” when we use it in regards to the actual nature of disease. We fail to solve the problem because the problem actually contains its solution at a higher level! We need to allow medical science to be expert in therapy, which is “medical treatment of disease”. Then we need another kind of expert—an expert in healing—who can focus on what is “right” with a person's life... and could it be possible that both means of dealing with disease could take place in one physician's mind and practice?

Consider the practicality of nurturing that healer function while we train the professional. The Faculty of Medicine of McGill University has already developed just such a curriculum. They have created a new word for that curriculum... “Physicianship,” and in 2009 graduated the first group of 167 young physicians with four years of the Physicianship curriculum. Is it possible to help the body of over 700,000 American doctors develop Physicianship in their current practices? Of course it is... Malcolm Gladwell (2000) describes how to get such an idea to catch on and “tip” into general use by getting 2.5% of the physician population—17,500 of them—convinced of the need for just such an individual shift in consciousness. Healing takes place in H.O.P.E. Groups in part because there is time to care—time for compassion and forgiveness.

A support group is an effective complement to the technology of modern medicine, offering a nurturing psychospiritual environment for the exploration of healing. The group experience is decades old, and tradition has established its validity. We apply the principles of group work in many ways today, and understand more of its potential to facilitate healing. We find that the group helps the participant discover her or his own inner resources to become whole. The group is much like the individual; its experience is limited, and the ability to explore that experience is limited as well. The group must preserve the validity and integrity of each individual, or else the group is susceptible to the pitfalls of creating disease by focusing on “what’s wrong”. In a H.O.P.E. Group, listening to a person sharing the rocky nature of their story is not an opportunity to criticize or give advice. Rather, it is an opportunity to be fully “present” to that story, only offering experience that might be useful, knowing that the rocky path must be navigated if healing is to occur. The H.O.P.E. experience is that each and every individual has to find her or his own way through her or his particular danger path, and to help us help each other, “We agree to share what has worked for us in our own lives without expectation of it working for others.”

The H.O.P.E. experience has come to include people working together without a H.O.P.E. Guide in human form, but using the GoldBook as a guide. In developing this idea, the last verse of the Grateful Dead song *Ripple* builds an encouraging image:

You who choose to lead must follow
 But if you fall, you fall alone.
 If you should stand, then who's to guide you?
 If I knew the way, I would take you home.²⁰

²⁰ From their album, *American Beauty*

In using the GoldBook to build the container—the crucible—for the meeting, the meeting, itself, becomes its own guide. With patience and compassion, the answers sought by anyone with a question can show up in due time. With patience and compassion, the group creates its own safety. The group needs to remember that advice-giving is invasive, and that sometimes the only thing one can say is, “I wish I had an answer or advice for you, but I don't, and I'm willing to be with you as you find your answer.” At such a point in time, the group can be well reminded that before it breaks up for the day, it ends with that simple prayer asking for serenity, courage, and wisdom, and realize that a week is a generous chunk of time for those answers to come to all of the participants. Let your *GoldBook* be your guide.

HOW THEN DOES A H.O.P.E. GROUP “GUIDE”?

Therefore, the function of a H.O.P.E. Group is to look at each life as a rich, though sometimes painful, but always challenging experience. The Group's purpose is not to analyze a life nor to help people find specific goals in their life, but to follow the leadings of this psychology of success. H.O.P.E. Group work bridges the past and the future by focusing on living in the present moment—the “now moment” of Krishnamurti, and, more recently, Eckhart Tolle.

Loving kindness—compassion—is the motor of this psychology; and forgiveness leading to inner peace and, ultimately, to happiness, is the consequence.

- H.O.P.E. Groups help their members identify and describe the elements of each person's success: the worthy ideal that is their life's mission and the patterns that can help a person to achieve that mission. The Group then helps its members keep their focus on the mission, knowing that what we focus on expands, and acknowledging that the circumstances and accidents of life tend to draw us away from our purpose.
- H.O.P.E. Groups remind us that we must remember the past in order to forgive judgments about it that paralyze both our present and future growth. Forgiveness is possible only where love and compassion prevail.
- H.O.P.E. Groups avoid the use of the pathological assumption and questions: “Something's broke—what?” “What caused it?” and “What can we do to fix it?” Instead, it prefers questions that ask for the story of the individuals' experiences of life, how they have met it in the past, how they would like to meet it in both the present and the future, and how they will feel when they know they have succeeded.
- H.O.P.E. Groups provide people with a compassionate, soft-eyed approach to their lives. It encourages people to see themselves as beings called to life by Life itself, which has provided them with a set of personal resources with which to meet the unique circumstances that Life gives them to heal... past, present, and future.
- H.O.P.E. Groups encourage their members to believe in themselves as spiritual beings with the power to use their resources and circumstances to transform their lives into meaningful blessing—gifts to themselves, to their fellow human beings, and to Life itself.

H.O.P.E. Groups are familiar with the practice of “presence and letting go of fear” as a close acquaintance with a rich background in Ojibwe indigenous healing teaches us. We in H.O.P.E. have seen life-threatening disease heal through this process.

- H.O.P.E. Groups ensure that confidentiality is essential to the establishment of a safe place.

H.O.P.E. Groups do not keep records of their work unless they are part of a professional healthcare practice. Furthermore, the H.O.P.E. Group Guidelines of the *GoldBook* set and maintain the specific ethical qualities that pertain to H.O.P.E. Group function. They are repeated at the beginning of every H.O.P.E. Group meeting by all participants joining in reading these guidelines.

- Importantly, these guidelines close with the agreement to “keep all personal information that is shared in a H.O.P.E. group meeting strictly confidential.” Fortunately, in the experience of over 6,000 H.O.P.E. Group meetings, there have been fewer than a half dozen incidences of violation of this agreement. Every violation consists of somebody saying something of a private nature heard in that person's H.O.P.E. Group meeting in a checkout line at a supermarket that could be traced back to an individual in that H.O.P.E. group. The way this has been handled effectively is to confront the person who spoke inappropriately, and advise that person that this is a warning that should such an indiscretion occur a second time, then that person would have to be asked to leave the group.
- H.O.P.E. Groups work with clarity of intent and purpose that follows the context of the *GoldBook*, which acknowledges past experiences and validates present life. The Group helps its members recognize and describe their potential and it encourages them to reach out for it.
- H.O.P.E. Groups help participants focus on setting and clarifying their intentions, and then developing and implementing initiatives derived from the intentions. The process of intention moves people forward, appreciating the ego's disappointment with a situation that the soul knows is a gift from the Divine.
- H.O.P.E. Groups help their participants recognize that emotions and attitudes are intimately connected and have a profound subconscious effect on the life of every individual. In this way, H.O.P.E. Groups work to create attitudinal shifts that transform harmful responses based on the harmful, dark triad of guilt, fear, and anger into the beneficial, peaceful effects of accountability, hope, and love. In this way, H.O.P.E. Group members come to identify with the order that created the Universe.
- H.O.P.E. Groups also recognize the power of the dark triad to overwhelm people and are readily prepared to advise those so affected to seek professional help that augments their recovery program.
- H.O.P.E. Groups help people construct and reconstruct their lives by focusing on that which makes them feel whole, integrated, and healthy—an attitudinal belief that things can make sense (Havel) and give life meaning (Frankl). This process helps people recognize old labels with which they previously identified themselves and create new, honest, and realistic descriptions that help them shift their state of mind from illness toward wellness. It encourages them to live in the present moment, free of projections and attachments, and focus on the whole of life rather than its fragments. It encourages them to use the two attitudes that Victor Frankl found common to all concentration camp survivors—hope and love—and use them to focus on developing a life story that contains a worthy

ideal—the very essence of success.

- H.O.P.E. Groups have the option of using guided imagery to help their participants move through the steps outlined above. The author has extensive experience with closing H.O.P.E. Group meetings using twenty–minute guided imageries that he has learned to reflect on ideas that have come up in the group meetings. He has recorded fifteen of these "themes" that appear most commonly in H.O.P.E. Group meetings, each one of which contains a single "metaphor" (such as the "path of life," the "inner guide," and the "tapestry of life").
- H.O.P.E. Groups have a simple structure that has withstood the test of time and over 6000 hope group meetings.

The "guiding" process of H.O.P.E. Groups comprises five simple elements that define the operating system:

1. Listening with open heart and mind—Steere's "holy listening".
2. Asking open, honest questions for clarification and deeper understanding.
3. Avoiding criticizing or advice-giving.
4. Affirming people for their experience of the way in which they have met life's circumstances.
5. And encouraging them to create benefit for self and others from that experience. (All these concepts comprise H.O.P.E.'s "Prime Directive")

PRECEPTS OF H.O.P.E.'S FUNCTION AND SERVICE:

The Universe is conscious, subjective, and experiential. Though it has rational, measurable aspects, it is and will always be a non-rational mystery.

We are not human beings in search of a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings immersed in the human condition (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin).

We are here because Life has created us—literally "evolved" into each one of us. It has given us resources with which to meet It. It has met us with a set of circumstances that comprise an important piece of work that It needs us to do for It in Its fantastic and ongoing evolution.²¹ We have created unique individual experiences out of that meeting. Whether we like it or not, we always share that experience with others—and our attitude toward it—24/7. We have chosen that attitude, which the world constantly, accurately mirrors back at us. As that attitude was a choice, we have the power to make another choice.

Love defines the all-inclusive relationships that describe the Universe. It is also the attitude of inter-relationship. The dimensions of time and space do not confine or define it. It knows but one time—Now—and one space—Here. It brings us inner peace, and inner peace is the way to love... and to happiness²². When we let go of our attachments to the past and the future and become present

²¹ As we have come to know that our Universe began 13.75 billion years ago as an incredible point of light that had to have been in the consciousness of the Creator, it is beautifully apparent that it got to its magnificence of today through the process of its own evolution. As we also have become aware, all of the tiniest subatomic particles that comprise our present universe were there within the tiniest microsecond of the beginning of that incredible point of light.

²² according to the Dalai Lama.

to any given situation, no matter how bleak, the bleakness opens revealing the brilliance of the light within... and we heal.

All experience uniquely reflects the vital, changing nature of the Universe. It ultimately becomes a soul-gift to the Universe in gratitude for the lives that the soul came to live.

Dialogue, as David Bohm shows us (http://www.david-bohm.net/dialogue/dialogue_proposal.html), is an excellent, subjective means for sharing experience, for it reveals the order of wholeness enfolded in apparent chaos, and it does so (in part) by validating emotions.

Everyone seeks that inner, spiritual essence that gives meaning to every life. They reveal its presence in their questions and concerns about that which they see around them, not knowing that it is a reflection of that which lies within. H.O.P.E. Group participants listen and reflect what they hear and feel in the presence of these seekers.

Subjective (offering) “I” statements always take preference over objective (instructing, advising) “you” statements.

Advice-giving is self-serving; experience-offering is other-serving. H.O.P.E. Groups “guide” themselves by compassionately encouraging their members to share experiences of self and others.

H.O.P.E. Group guiding seeks clarity.

H.O.P.E. Group guiding holds integrity.

In Summary:

“H.O.P.E. is spiritual. H.O.P.E. Groups and SoulCircling are sacred processes. It cuts through all that is superficial. Engaging in H.O.P.E. eliminates all pretenses. This is what you call an ‘open heart’. Nowhere else does this happen with such regularity.” —Colleen R.