

The Audacity of Hope

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Ok. so I'm a thief, but I know a good title when I see one! Those of you in the know will recognize "The Audacity of Hope" as the new book by one of our rising political stars, Barack Obama. Unfortunately, I must confess that I haven't read the book yet, but I can only assume that it refers to the power of hope to pull us through difficult and tumultuous times...in our lives and in the country.

I love this title because it strikes me as nailing one of the challenging emotional realities of "hope": the fact that it has a hubristic, almost fantastical quality at times. I know that when my clients hit emotional low points due to circumstances, life, or depression, it is almost impossible to get them to have hope for a brighter future. At those times, it often falls to the therapist or loved ones to hold the hope for the client, until he or she is ready to reach out—or better said, reach in—and begin to get in touch with possibility...and hope...once again. Hope offers no guarantees. Hope can be whimsical and fleeting. Hope is also contagious and expansive. It is a purely human invention that somehow, audaciously, seems to work.

Recently, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand how the power of hope to heal and transform actually operates in the real world. A good friend of mine has an amazing job: he is the director of "[Project Rebirth](#)" a non-profit initiative that is chronicling the aftermath and re-construction of Ground Zero, through film, video and story-telling. The film-makers have set up cameras all around the World Trade Center site in downtown New York City. Using time-lapse photography, they will film the on-going re-construction of Ground Zero over a ten-year period. At the same time, researchers are interviewing and video-taping ten survivors and their families, telling their stories up close and personal, as they move from devastation and recovery to re-building their lives...again over a ten-year period.

This film/video project is now in its fifth year and I had the opportunity to see the product in its latest incarnation at a recent fund-raising event and screening. To say the least, the story is compelling, heart-wrenching and moving. The film juxtaposes interviews with the survivors and family members—a wife, a son, a fireman—with time-lapsed photography of the construction site that is now Ground Zero. What is most striking about the parallel processes that we witness in the film are the long stretches of time where it appears that very little is happening—both at Ground Zero and in the lives of those in recovery. The cameras pan the site of the original World Trade Centers, and for months, now years, there is literally no change, virtually no activity—just a huge, dark, ominous hole in the ground. The hole appears immovable, endlessly deep and foreboding. Only four years after the event do we slowly begin to see the site come alive with activity. Crews begin to show up and start excavating, lighting is put in, construction scaffolding slowly appears. Yet still, years after the tragedy, the site still looks empty, hollow and grieving, a huge gaping wound in the side of the earth.

Likewise, as we trace the lives of the survivors and families through interviews each year on the anniversary of that tragic day, we see the process of grieving and suffering writ large. Time passes and the wounds remain visible, close-to-the-surface. Tears flow quickly, memories remain vivid and the dead linger in the hearts of those left behind. Only four years later do we see one survivor finally get the proper surgeries that may once and for all heal her burned face and limbs. While another victim, a surviving spouse who lost her new husband in the collapse of tower #2, finally turns a page, moves away from New York and starts dating again, four years later. Four years of grief, darkness and suffering.

And then, in the fifth year, all of a sudden, just like at the site itself, there is a spark of activity, a movement, the appearance of possibility—the rebirth of hope. It is a powerful film. And it is only half complete, as the project initiators, perhaps with an uncanny intuitive prescience, chose to set up the narrative as a decade-long endeavor. So today, with the emergence of *hope*, in the fifth year of recovery, we can begin to see the seeds being sown of a new life—for the site, for the survivors.

Now what does this have to do with the process of “Life-Shifting”, you might ask? Well, just EVERYTHING! Ok, I resort to a bit of hyperbole here, but really, I believe that one of the core distinctions of the life-shifting approach to self-renewal is the recognition that CHANGE, be it recovery or transformation, takes time! I am always amazed at all the coaching literature that is being promulgated these days that is all about goal-setting and action and focus and “getting on with it”. What is new here? Haven’t we always known that you have to set goals and act in order to achieve anything in life? Yet, these motivational tools rarely work over a sustained period of time. Why? Because they avoid telling you the truth about life: that things take time; that life moves in cycles; that recovering from hurt and loss and devastation takes patience; that life can be slow and tedious; that we are not always in control of how quickly we move. We can accelerate our growth and healing, yes. BUT, we do not control life.

We are a partner, a dancer with life...and as such, we fool ourselves if we think we can just “turn a switch” and get to the next rung of some endless ladder of success. Life is more complex than that. Humans are more complex than that. And that is why “life-shifting” as a process and tool for healing and transformation, offers you more than just a treatise on goal-setting and a slap on the wrist for procrastination. We want to look deeper. *Sometimes we need to just let go and stand still.* Sometimes we just need to WAIT. Be patient. AND, most importantly, have hope.

With the “life-Shifting” approach to self-renewal, we honor the cycles of birth, death, and re-birth that are inherent in all forms of nature, human and otherwise. I often advocate that my clients simply sit still and breathe. Sometimes hibernation is called for—a time for reflection. The cliché “hope springs eternal” is also a truism. For it is only when the wings of hope appear that we throw off the cloak of grief and step out into the sun. The story of Project Rebirth is a powerful reminder: “Life-shifting” requires *patience*, *preparation* and *hope*. How audacious is life: even in the dark recesses of a 10-acre mud-filled hole in the ground, the seeds of a tower of freedom are germinating.

