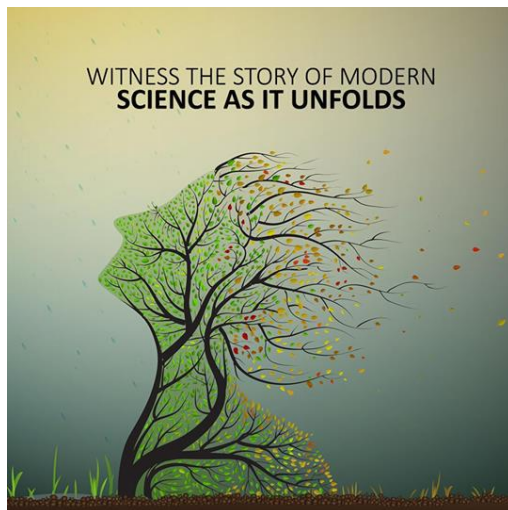


# Chapter 3 | Why we Need the New Science of Suffering and Flourishing



The new science of suffering and flourishing will blow your mind because it turns positive psychology, as you know it, on its head. It is based on the new understanding that the positive psychology of happiness is only half of the circle of wellbeing; the other half is the existential positive psychology of suffering.

One cannot find wholeness and life balance without integrating the Yin and Yang aspects of life. The ultimate goal of life is to live a life of balance and harmony – a theme that will be explained in depth in a later chapter.

The agenda of existential positive psychology (PP 2.0) for both research and applications can be summed up as *transforming suffering into strength and joy*. That is the message in need during the age of COVID-19 and the following post-pandemic years. More specifically, PP 2.0 is about transforming your life by turning:

- Depression into meaning,
- Anxiety into mindfulness,
- Anger into activism for change,
- Shame into self improvement,
- Fear into courage,
- Failure into industriousness,
- Hopelessness into faith and tragic optimism,
- Grieving or sadness into serenity,
- Loneliness into social interest and intimacy,
- Feeling imprisoned into self-transcendence,
- Weakness into resilience.

There is already considerable research on the above, which I will not review here. Throughout this book, you will learn a lot more about how to develop the above skills that will make you stronger and better.

If you still feel that Frankl's cure does not provide the help you need, here is some additional information from the new science of suffering and flourishing.

There is a long history in wrestling with the problem of suffering. For example, in Buddhism, the four Noble Truths are:

- The truth of suffering (dukkha),
- The truth of the cause of suffering (samudaya),
- The truth of the end of suffering (nirhodha).
- The truth of the path that frees us from suffering (magga).

Collectively, these principles explain why human beings suffer and how to overcome suffering. Mindful meditation is just one of the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhist spiritual practices leading to liberation from suffering and attaining Nirvana. (History.com editors, 2017).

But there is also a short history in the scientific study of pain and suffering in the science of medicine and psychology at the biological, psychological, and existential levels (Cassell, 1991/2004; Grinker, et al., 1968; Wall, 2002). Human beings have the need for physical and psychological wellbeing (Bakan, 1968, Cabos, 2014; Reich, 1989). Clinical psychology focuses on reducing suffering as a moral duty (Miller, 2005) and Viktor Frankl (1985) considered logotherapy as a medical ministry for physicians. Philosophers and religious leaders from both the East and West represent the oldest attempts to find solutions to suffering. Mindfulness has recently become an area of scientific study in the reduction of stress (e.g, Davis & Hayes, 2012). But in another sense, PP 2.0 is an emerging science for at least 3 reasons:

**First, it is an attempt to fill a missing gap in positive psychology.** Positive psychology advocates that we can develop a science of wellbeing by focusing on neutral or positive territories of life, without the need to factor in the objective misery index and subjective suffering (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). That is why this new science is often referred to as second wave positive psychology or PP 2.0 (Ivtzan et al., 2015; Wong, 2011).

**Second, it adopts a holistic approach towards the study of pain and suffering.** The human phenomena cannot be simply understood in terms of material things, because human beings are complicated systems with several interdependent and integrated dimensions – biological, psychological, spiritual, social, and cultural. That is why the efficacy of CBT in treating depression may be failing in the last three decades (e.g., Johnson & Friberg, 2015) because life has become more complicated and depression can no longer be treated by fixing one's dysfunctional thinking.

As case in point, the psychic pain of being ostracised and oppressed can be even more unbearable than physical pain, because it cannot be resolved without correcting systemic racial discrimination and biases. I have personally experienced this pain all my adult life living in North America. The mental health problems of COVID-19 are more serious for some vulnerable minorities. That is why this new science merges PP 2.0 (Wong, 2009) with indigenous/cross cultural positive psychology (Wong, 2016a, 2013).

**Third, it involves a radically different set of assumptions.** These assumptions were also emphasized by Frankl, several being: (a) an existential/spiritual worldview, (b) suffering as the foundation of wellbeing, and (c) sustainable or mature happiness the by-product of human quest for meaning. Fowers, Richardson & Slife (2017) provide the most compelling case for this new science; I have built on the foundation laid by them (Wong, 2019a, 2020). It would be good for psychology and our society if more suffering people can benefit from this new science.

There is already research demonstrating that suffering can lead to posttraumatic growth and superior survivorship (Suttie, 2014). There is also a fair amount of research on *resilience*, defined as the ability to bounce back after a setback (Bonanno, 2004). The American Psychological Association (2020) defined resilience as:

“the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. As much as resilience involves ‘bouncing back’ from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth.”

The ability to bounce back requires cognitive flexibility to promote personal wellbeing (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Research also shows that resilience depends on an individual’s resources, competencies, psychological strengths (such as positive emotions, positive traits), social factors (Kobau et al., 2011), and other psychological resources (such as meaning and religion; Park, 2005; Wong, 2007). There is considerable scientific support from evolutionary psychology for the power of positive thoughts in contributing to resilience and wellbeing (Geher & Wedberg, 2020).

However, I am proposing that this new science is about the Why and How of embracing suffering through meaning should be the cornerstone of positive psychology and positive education (Wong, 2019b). The hallmark of resilience is feeling good about who we are and what we do so we are not afraid of suffering and dying for our mission.

It is no longer about bouncing back from adversity or the cognitive-behaviour mechanisms of hardiness (Maddi, 2006). Rather, it about a lifelong preparation from childhood for a resilience mindset and character in order to survive and thrive in a dangerous or hostile world as a decent human being.

Recently, I was interviewed by someone from a University in Mexico (Aladro, 2020) regarding the meaning in life and Covid-19. The interviewer asked me two surprising questions.

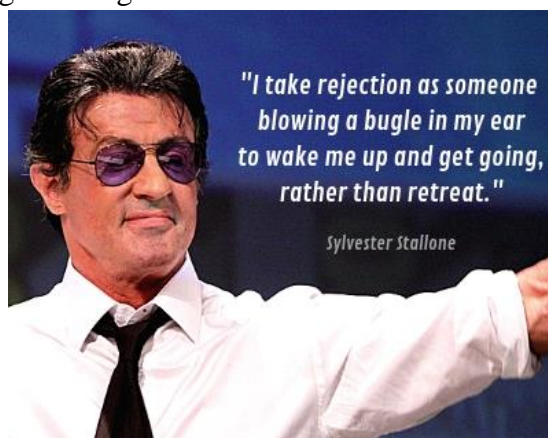
The first question was: What are the most valuable lessons that you learned in childhood? My answer was that my parents and school really taught me the importance of three things: (a) enduring hardships and suffering, (b) the discipline of working hard, and (c) the willpower to focus on what needs to be done. They prepared me well to survive and succeed in a very harsh world as a refugee in Hong Kong and an immigrant in Canada.

The last question he asked me was: What do you have to say to our students to inspire them during the age of COVID-19? I said that my answer was still the same. In the post-pandemic world, jobs would be scarce and competition would be tough; they would have little chance of success to realize their dreams unless they were prepared to embrace hardships, to work hard, and to work creatively towards a worthy life goal. If they choose to have mentality of living a happy and safe life described in the *Coddling of the American mind* (2018) by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, it will set them up for failure, because their cultural value of “Safetyism”, a term created by Lukianoff and Haidt, is no match to the cultural value of embracing hardships and suffering necessary for success.

In sum, this new science is not just an old wine in a new wineskin, but a new wine designed to empower suffering people to build a meaningful life, despite all the obstacles and setbacks.

You are now more than halfway through this guided tour. Read on for more helpful information. The remaining sections will show you how the new science of suffering contribute to a deeper understanding of meaning and positive affect in a hostile world when we are overwhelmed with all kinds of negative experiences. The unique contribution of our research is to embrace suffering as the foundation for wellbeing in the age of COVID-19.

I can begin with a personal example. I often consider myself as Rocky, the iconic movie character played by Sylvester Stallone. I could be knocked down repeatedly, but I manage to get back on my feet each time. I could be beaten, but not broken. Every rejection makes me stronger. Every blow makes me more resolved. Every pain makes me more compassionate. I always have a fire in my belly, fueled by both the negative emotions of anger and frustration and the positive emotions of hope and joy of bringing meaning and happiness to the suffering people. In addition, through my faith, I am more than a conqueror through Christ who strengthens me (the Bible, Rom 8:37). I am unstoppable because the forces of natural and supernatural power are with me. My life story is my proof (Wong, 2019b).



Some of my Chinese friends considered me the Frankl for the 21st century or China's Frankl. Dr. Joseph Fabry (Wong, 1999) considered me the best thing that ever happened to logotherapy after Frankl. But I would rather consider myself one of the founding fathers of the

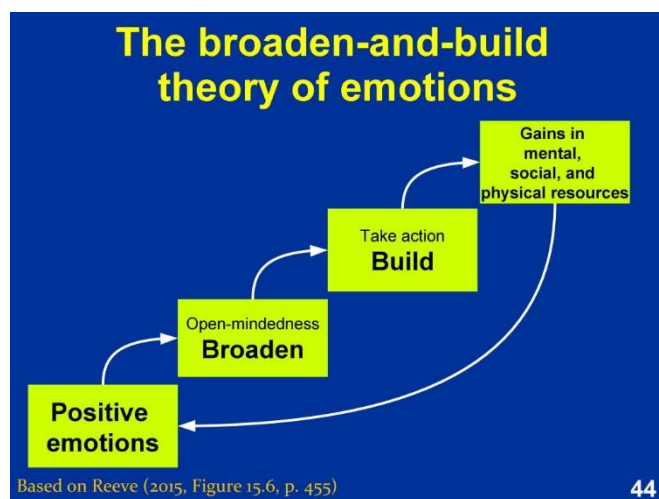
fledging science of suffering and flourishing, even though I knew from the very beginning that this banner could never attract a large following as the science of happiness (Wong, 2019b).

As you face an uncertain future with so many obstacles and challenges ahead of you, the science of suffering will give you the best preparation for survival and success. You can discover for yourself how the additional values and skills of PP 2.0 can give you the necessary tools to overcome when the world seems to conspire against you.

### Contributions From the Positive Psychology of Happiness

It would be amiss not to mention the many contributions of positive psychology, which focus on positive emotions (PE) and positive traits. PE contributes to flourishing and meaningful living:

- 1) PE predispose one to experience meaning (King et al., 2006).
- 2) PE broaden one's mind on future possibilities and provides the energy to build resources needed for a meaningful life (Fredrickson et al., 2000).
- 3) PE contributes to flourishing according to Seligman's (2011) PERMA theory, which consists of five elements (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement) that contributes to wellbeing.



PE also plays a major role in building resilience and positive mental health (Fredrickson, 2009). In a prospective study of resilience and positive emotion following the 9/11 terrorist attack, Fredrickson and colleagues (2003) supported the hypothesis from the broaden-and-build theory that positive emotions are active ingredients within trait resilience.

They found that positive emotions in the aftermath of crises provided a buffer for resilient people against depression and

fueled their thriving. The study participants also shared the same anxiety and distress like the population at large after 9/11, but they experienced more positive emotions (compared to the less resilient ones), such as gratitude and love, even during a time of crisis, much like the present pandemic. They proposed that such emotions represent deeper or more mature kind of happiness such as gratitude, meaning, and love, which may be better predictor of resilience than purely positive affect.

Meaning and happiness are the two pillars of resilience according to positive psychology. The literature has provided an abundance of evidence that meaning and positive emotions are the key to resilience (Batthyany & Russon-Netzer, 2014; Hicks & Routledge, 2013; Wong, 2012). For example, meaning in life and mastery as a psychological resource mediate between reminiscence and psychological distress (Korte et al., 2012) and meaning in life served as a

protective factor for adolescent's psychological health (Brassai et al., 2011). All the research on post-traumatic growth (e.g. Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2004) also showed that people who were able to bounce back and grow were able to make sense of the trauma and find new meaning for their future.

Meaning and positive affect are closely connected. Reker & Wong (1988) showed that when people do things that are meaningful, such as doing something for the greater good, that activity would be automatically accompanied by feeling good. Schnell & Hoof (2012) demonstrated that volunteers experienced a higher level of meaningfulness and life satisfaction. Armstrong and colleagues (2018) also found that volunteering was a strong predictor of health, and life satisfaction for all adults over 35 years of age. Therefore, serving some common good was a source of meaning and wellbeing.

However, the pandemic has brought a lot of anxiety, anger, grieving, loss, and frustration into our lives; it is difficult, if not impossible, to feel happy all the time, according to Feldmen (2020). How could I be happy all the time when my brothers are being beaten and arrested, when my sisters are being abused and abandoned? It would make me a heartless person if I do not feel the pain of the downtrodden. A stronger reason why we should not only focus on happiness is that our survival and thriving depends on embracing negative feelings.

Positive psychology has been an important source of inspiration and practical guide on how to flourish. For example, when you are all stressed out, give yourself the permission to enjoy some simple and healthy pleasures, such as taking a walk in the park or watching an uplifting movie. Similarly, when you find yourself stuck in a difficult task, why not get away from it for a while, and do something fun so that you can feel more relaxed and be in a more positive frame of mind to find a solution. However, the concepts and tools of positive psychology research for times of peace and prosperity may not be adequate for times of war and adversity. That's why you need to move on to PP 2.0 (Wong, 2020).

#### [Contributions From the Positive Psychology of Suffering \(PP 2.0\)](#)

There is already a growing literature of PP 2.0 (Wong, 2019c). Here I want highlight three areas of research that support Frankl's emphasis on self-transcendence, acceptance and courage or the defiant power of the human spirit.

**Figure 1***The Iron Triangle*

**1. The new science of transcendence.** Kaufman (2020) and Wong (2016b) both provide empirical support for the importance of self-transcendence for living a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Frankl's key concept that we become truly human only when our spiritual need for serving others is awakened. Love awakens our soul and inspires us to live at a deeper level.

There are encouraging signs that more and more ordinary people are doing little things to contribute to the wellbeing of frontline workers or to bring joy to others. Frankl's genius was his discovery that the most effective way to be protect oneself against traumas, or free oneself from the hellhole that is the concentration camp, is to lose yourself in trying to help others that are suffering from the same or even worse fate.

By offering someone a cup of water, you may be meeting an angel who will change your life. If you have any question about the effectiveness of this remedy, try to really help someone worse off than you.

The transformative power of self-transcendence can also be experienced in the following ways: (a) pursuing something or someone greater than oneself, (b) expressive writing (Pennebaker, 2017), (c) re-authoring (Hutto & Gallagher, 2017), and (d) rediscovering a sense of awe and mystery (Schneider, 2004). Frankl's three values and Wong's PURE model of meaning are essential guides to help you discover the meaning that can transcend all your existential concerns, such as fear of death, loneliness, and meaninglessness.

**2. The science of mindful acceptance.** Accepting the world as it is, with all its suffering and absurdity is a key component of a resilient mindset (Hanson, 2014); it is also an essential aspect

of existential coping (Wong, 2007). Acceptance is positively related to wellbeing (Pillay, 2016). According Jon Kabat-Zinn (2006):

“Acceptance doesn’t, by any stretch of the imagination, mean passive resignation. Quite the opposite. It takes a huge amount of fortitude and motivation to accept what is—especially when you don’t like it—and then work wisely and effectively as best you possibly can with the circumstances you find yourself in and with the resources at your disposal, both inner and outer, to mitigate, heal, redirect, and change what can be changed.” (p. 407)

Thus, stop fighting against reality and accept all the problems related to the pandemic, such as physical distancing and government-imposed lockdown. Better still, we can accept it as a self-transcending act of promoting the common good. Meaning and self-transcendence can also be achieved through appreciating what happens to us. As we embrace what unfolds with the attitude of appreciation, we will be able to forget our own miseries and find something good, beautiful, and true that calls for our sense of gratitude.



**3. The science of existential courage.** Whether you are an entrepreneur or a frontline worker, it takes courage to face all the risks, both expected and unexpected (Kramer, 2016; Maddi, 2013). Life can throw you an unexpected curveball or you could suddenly find yourself in terrifying, unknown territory. It takes courage to turn this adventure into a hero’s journey, which will be discussed in a later chapter (chapter 10). In our battle against COVID-19, no one can feel safe because the invisible deadly virus can attack us from any opening, even when we dutifully follow government guidelines. It even takes courage to visit your family members or greet your friends because of the fear of infection. Fear, and flight from fear contributes to a vicious cycle to increase our fear, according to Frankl (1988). That is why we need to put on the armour of courage as a virtue.





Many people are wrestling with an existential crisis, and are confronted with the following questions:

- To be or not to be
- To do it or not to do
- To make some change or to stay the same
- To confront or to keep quiet
- To fight or to surrender

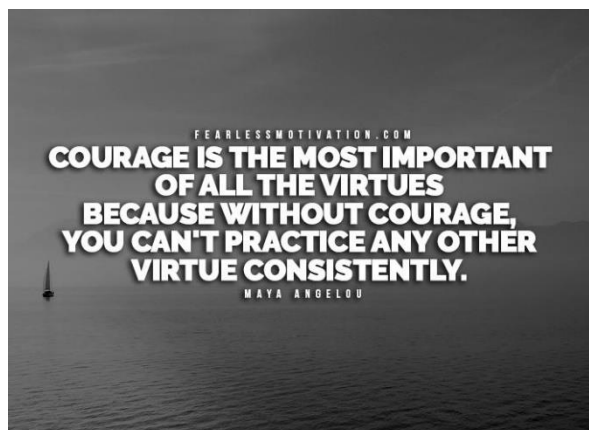
A split second could change your destiny, depending whether you have the courage to take the risk. In my own life, each conquest, each expansion in the face of overwhelming danger was the result of making the courageous decision on the Yes side. I believe that research also shows that the courage to take risks is a better bet than the avoidance strategy (McRoberts, 2017).

Attempts to avoid or escape from the horrors of life will only lead to more pain and more problems. All such attempts are self-destructive, from wasting one's life in hedonic pursuit and addictions, to becoming a victim to phobia and suicide. A better strategy is to face your worst fear with courage and come out the other side stronger.

Life is a long journey, full of ups and downs, twists and turns. We are now going to through the dark valley of fear ,but a bright future still beckons those who are willing to learn new attitudes and skills to come out stronger.

In some ways, PP 2.0 is a logical extension of the positive psychology of suffering to meet the new challenges. For example, we have extended Frederickson's positivity (2009), to the mature positive happiness of contentment (Wong & Bowers, 2018), from learned optimism (Lee et al., 2019; Seligman, 1990) to tragic optimism (Frankl, 1985; Wong, 2007), and from Emmons's gratitude to existential gratitude in times of suffering (Jans-Beken & Wong, 2019; Wong, 2016c).

But in other ways, PP 2.0 is based on a totally different set of assumptions such as suffering as the foundation of wellbeing (Fowers et al., 2017, Wong, 2020), and a new orientation regarding the resilience revolution. The main message of this book is that cultivating a resilient mindset is our first line of defense in a hostile and dangerous world:



1) Be **TOUGH** mentally to face a dangerous world—When life gets tough, the tough gets going. We need courage and fortitude to face all the problems and risks confronting us. You are tougher than you think. It takes mental and emotional toughness to get through the pandemic and a toxic system to survive and flourish.

2) Be **RESPONSIBLE** for adapting to the new reality—You need to assume full responsibility (both personal and social) to adapt to the reality of a constant struggle against destructive forces to get what you have always wanted. No one can do it for you. You just have to make it with whatever you have.

3) **APPRECIATE** what you still have—During the lockdown, it is a good time to slow down and appreciate all the little things in life. You can taste the coffee and give thanks for food on the table. You can smell the roses and enjoy the beauty of nature, from sunset to sunrise. You can also review the good times in the past and express gratitude to all the people who have supported you. You can even appreciate all your hardships as blessings in disguise.

4) Practice **MINDFULNESS** by receiving life at it is, with all its problems & disappointments—When you feel stuck in a hellhole where there is no exit, the avoidance strategy only makes things worse. You need to embrace it with openness and without judgement in order to have the clarity of mind to do the right thing.

5) Practice the **MEANING** mindset by looking for what is beautiful, good and true in all situations—Transform negative experiences into positive ones through meaning-focused coping, from reframing to seeking a higher purpose of self-transcendence. When you find a life purpose which is worth dying for, you will become fearless and unstoppable.

6) **BELIEVE** in a better future through faith and hope—When you find yourself in helpless and hopeless situations, the only positive thing you can do is to seek consolation and help from God or a higher power. In fact, what kept Frankl alive in Nazi concentration camp is his faith in seeing his wife and speaking in an American university about his logotherapy. There is already a growing literature supporting the above 6 elements of the resilient mindset (TRAMMB). You will be able to persevere and receive your due reward if you practice the above.

**The New Science of Suffering for the Age of COVID-19  
Developing a Resilient Mindset (TRAMMB):**

Be **TOUGH** mentally  
to face a dangerous world,

Be **RESPONSIBLE** for  
adapting to the new reality,

**APPRECIATE** what we still have  
and for blessings in disguise,

**MINDFULLY** accept life with all  
its problems and disappointments,

**MEANINGFUL** transformation  
of all things negative,

**BELIEF** in a better future through faith  
and hope in God for things beyond our control.

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

## How can I Find Happiness When I am Living in Pain in a Hostile World?

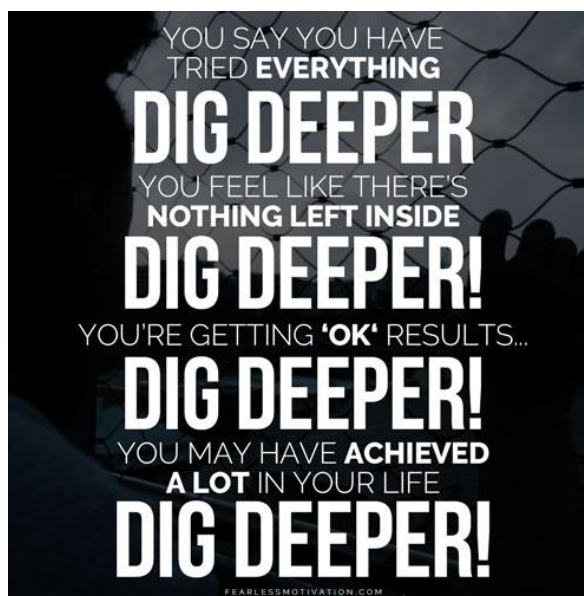
It is when the rubber hits the road that you will discover whether your theory is of any use. I live with all kinds of pain (Do you want to know all the medications I take everyday?). I have had more than my fair share of struggles with illnesses and misfortunes, but I am not living in pain. Even during my darkest days, I can still feel good about myself and my life. I dug my way out of all the pain, still feeling hopeful and meaningful, and I have emerged stronger and better. You too can have this kind of deep-rooted mature happiness.

Yes, I can hear you raising the following questions:

1. What should I do when I am perpetually frustrated in my struggle to fulfill my dreams?
2. How can I find a way out when I feel stuck in a hellhole with no way out?
3. How can I find a true and loyal friend who understands my pain and who would not abandon me after using me?
4. How can I be happy when I am hurt by so many bad things happening to me and other minorities?
5. How can I be motivated to work hard when all my efforts have ended in failure?
6. Where can I turn get help when I feel that I will never make it because all my competitors are stronger and better connected?
7. How can I find meaning and hope when life is brief, fragile, full of absurdity, evil, and suffering?
8. How can I develop the strength and resilience to overcome all my limitations, pain, obstacles, and achieve the success and happiness I have always wanted?

If you are asking any of the above questions, then you have come to the right place, because my lifelong research is about finding scientific answers to these questions. You may feel better if you know that you are not alone in wrestling with the mystery of suffering—why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? People far wiser than I have not found a satisfying answer to this perennial human problem. All I can offer are practical solutions based on scientific research and clinical experience.

I have already alluded to the discovery that digging deeper and deeper is one sure way to discover meaning and true happiness, because the most valuable treasures are hidden in the deepest recesses of the human soul just as diamond and oil are hidden inside the earth. Thankfully, science has provided a guide on how to be a successful digger (Wong & Worth, 2017; details will be explained in the chapter on coping (Chapter 4).



Therefore, it is indeed possible to have happiness in a hostile world, but a different kind of happiness. The era of COVID-19 has ushered in the reality of living in a hostile world with a deadly invisible enemy lurking everywhere. We even have to be on guard with our family and friends and practice physical distancing. In addition, quarantine may lead to suffering because of the frustration, anger, and boredom. The fact is that when we suffer alone, the feeling of loneliness only makes our suffering more unbearable, which further reinforces our sense of alienation and loneliness. Dov Shmotkin (2005) was the first psychologist who raised the question: How can we be happy in a such a hostile world?

He answered in the affirmative but suggested that there are different kinds of happiness. For example, according to the model of evaluative space (ESM; Cacioppo et al., 1999), approach and avoidance systems may operate as two separate and independent dimensions, and yield a variety of interactions between positive and negative affect. This is similar to Wong's (2012) dual-system model, which allows for maximum behavior flexibility and emotional agility in the face of adversity.

Another important factor of subjective wellbeing in coping with adversity is to embrace or accept the dark side of life. This should not be equated with pessimism. It is the realistic and adaptive response of "bracing for the worst" (King, 1998) to avoid further painful disappointments, when optimistic expectations have been already disproved repeatedly. That is why acceptance of the bleak situation is part of coping with what is beyond individual control (Wong, 1993). I have just mentioned earlier that there is no limit to the depth of acceptance, and this may be the hardest lesson to learn.

Shmotkin (2005) has provided a framework which allows for many different kinds of happiness. For example, you can experience happiness that is high in cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction, but low in positive affect. One can also have happiness where negative and positive emotions co-exist.

Research on many different types of happiness is a positive new development (Storey, 2020). However, most positive psychologists still limit themselves to happiness research in normal life circumstances. But the age of COVID-19 beckons them to explore the following types of mature happiness which can really contribute to subjective wellbeing and health, even when all the news we get are bad news and it is very difficult to feel positive about anything. There is no short-term excitement and no pure positivity in these types of deep-rooted mature happiness, but it can sustain you through any storm and allow you to maintain inner serenity and sanity. This may be the best thing that can happen to you.

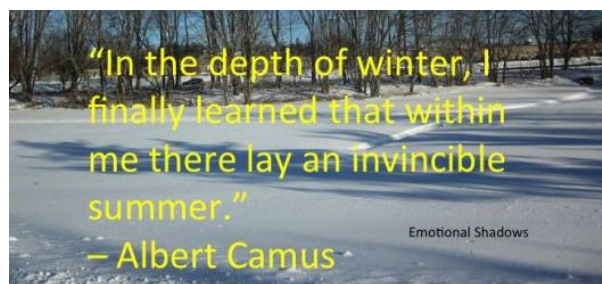
Mature Happiness Through Transforming Negative Emotions

The greatest strength of PP 2.0 is its ability to transform all the negative experiences and emotions into positive ones. To me, that is the highest level of emotional intelligence (or EQ 2.0).

We can achieve such positive transformation of negative emotions through the following steps:

This promising area of PP 2.0 is built on the ground-breaking work done by Kashdan and Biswas-Diener (2015). It should be most helpful for the first responders who have to face the waves and waves of negative emotions.

We can transform any unpleasant experiences and emotions into positive emotions and actions. The result is mature happiness because most likely, it entails a calm emotion deep enough to co-exist with a negative one.



**6 SELF-REFERRAL STEPS IN POSITIVE TRANSFORMATION OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONS (NE):**  
**THE TAI CHI EMOTION SELF-DEFENCE**

1. I must protect my mental health
2. I must face the NE with courage
3. I can turn it to my advantage
4. I need to accept it calmly
5. I can reframe it positively
6. I am grateful for this experience

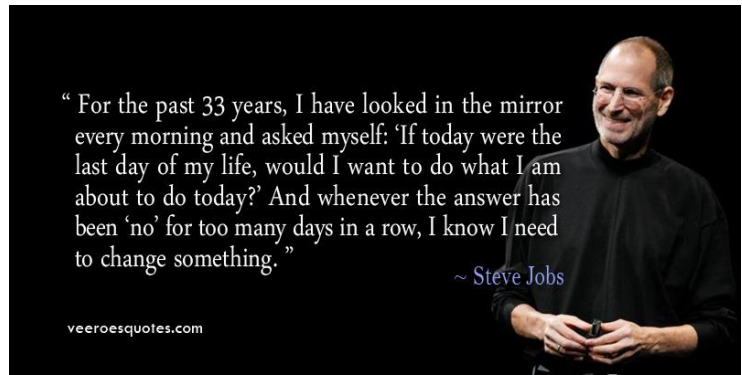
◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

**Examples of Meaning Transformation**

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

Negative emotions	Meaning transformation	Positive emotions
Anger towards discrimination	Need social justice	Fired up for some action
Hopelessness	Pray for God's help	Feeling hopeful for a way out
Guilt	Seek forgiveness	Feeling grateful for a second chance
Shame	Need self-improvement	Feeling motivated for change
Fear or anxiety	Need mental toughness	Feeling courageous in facing reality
Depression	Need meaning in my life	Feeling purposeful

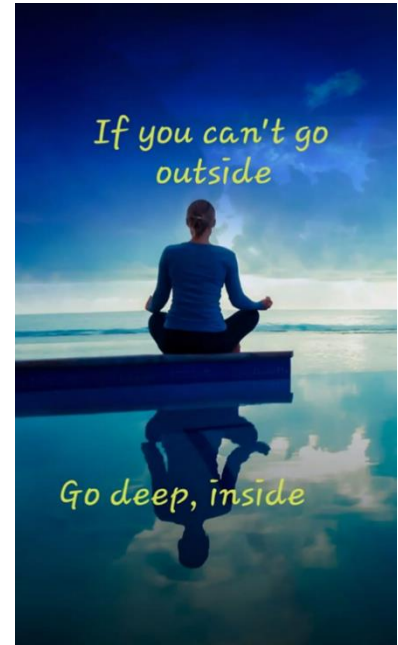
Another way to experience mature happiness is to feel the deep satisfaction of discovering what makes life worth living and then actually pursuing it. It is never easy to find one's calling, but you need to keep on knocking on doors until you find the right one. You can start by doing the simple "mirror exercise" as described by Steve Jobs.



You can also do the "funeral service" exercise by imagining yourself lying in a coffin and listening to others giving a eulogy of your life. What kind of eulogy do you want to hear from people who know you most? For me, I would like to hear people say, "Here lies a man who fought for the underdogs all his life and brought meaning and happiness to suffering people".

Such exercises of self-reflection and self-awareness can turn your discontentment with your life into a new birth. Frankl (1985) wrote, "So live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!" (p. 100).

Find yourself a quiet corner so that you can focus on meditation and reflection. Don't go too deep at the beginning because you may not be ready to handle the powerful experiences all by yourself. You can start by reflecting on some basic questions such as:



- What am I really good at? What did I always dream about becoming?
- What matters most of me? What may be more important than my own life?
- What do I believe? Do I only believe in myself? Will that be sufficient to get me through life?
- To whom I really own a great debt of gratitude? What were some of his/her good deeds? How can I show my appreciation?
- What can I do to support the frontline workers?
- How can I help others who might need my help?
- Why can't I let go some of the things that trouble me? How can free myself from my self-imposed prison? Isn't inner peace more important?

With some professional help, you can get better and deeper in your meditation and your ability to focus and relax. Right now, all you have is time; why not take the time to discover the true meaning and happiness of life?

According to this new science of resilience the closest thing that feels like a positive state of mind in times of suffering is mature happiness (Wong & Bowers, 2018), characterized by calmness, contentment, inner harmony, and life satisfaction. This may be more important than fleeting feelings of excitement for long-term success. For example, Ali Pattilo (2020) reported that recent psychological research showed that “positive external outcomes cause only fleeting happiness. However, daily habits that cultivate positive thinking and optimism create sustainable happiness”. He pointed out that such actions as practicing gratitude, reviewing good memories, and activating your social network can increase mental health and improve performance.

Similarly, Mayer Tamir et al. (2017) found that happiness is more about having meaningful and valuable experiences than seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. In a cross-cultural multinational study, they found that participants who experienced more of the desired emotions, such as anger about abuse, reported greater life satisfaction and fewer depressive symptoms, even when those emotions were unpleasant. “People want to feel very good all the time in Western cultures, especially in the United States,” says Tamir, “Even if they feel good most of the time, they may still think that they should feel even better, which might make them less happy overall.” (American Psychological Association, 2017).

The importance of this study is that happiness may involve some unpleasant emotions, resulting in ambivalence because of the co-existence of negative emotion with the positive emotions. It takes practice to be able to hold two opposing thoughts and emotions with both hands without being troubled by dissonance.

In view of the above review of literature, here are 10 types of mature happiness in times of suffering. It will take time to understand and experience each of the following types of mature happiness.

## Conclusion



Flattening the mental health curve is the next big coronavirus challenge. Throughout this book, I will show you that we can do better than simply flattening the mental health curve—we can be stronger and better, if we practice the skills based on Frankl’s cure and the science of flourishing through suffering.

There are many ways to represent Frankl’s cure, but for the sake of focusing on battling COVID-19, we need to practice daily the micro skills of self-distancing and self-transcendence, the DNA for mental health, until this becomes your second nature. Then practice the strategies of the 3-second rule and the 6 referral steps in positive transformation. Finally, receive the Frankl vaccine against suffering based on the Golden and Iron triangles.

To recap, the golden triangle of meaning, love, and faith functions like food, water, and air, necessary for positive mental health and happiness. The iron triangle of courage, acceptance, and transcendence functions as armor, protecting us from injury and enabling us to transform all the evil into good.

This iron triangle represents the Yin half of the mandala tree and fills in the missing part of positive psychology. Working together with the golden triangle of meaning, love, and faith, one can then move forward in life and maintain balance, as if on a bicycle, whatever the circumstances.

I want to conclude this rather comprehensive introduction with a symbol of mandala tree of life, which can integrate Frankl's cure and my PP 2.0 of suffering and flourishing.

The Mandala tree of a flourishing life.



The roots represent the process of acceptance—the deeper it goes, the stronger the roots. It is the process of courageous confrontation with our Shadow and our painful memories/emotions. It is the brutal honesty and humility of accepting our limitations and vulnerability. There is no limit to how deep it can go until it reaches the hidden “true self” or the sacred spot. It is the Yin part of flourishing. It is Frankl's *Tragic Optimism* of accepting the brevity and fragility of life.

The tree with its trunk, branches, and fruits represents the process of self-transcendence—the higher the tree grows, the more fruits it produces. It is the process of courageous overcoming and rising above all the limitations and absorbing love, meaning, and faith. It is the Yang part of flourishing. There is no limit to how high it can grow until it connects with the ultimate good, truth, and beauty. It is Frankl's concept of heroic transformation of tragedy into triumph through the quest for meaning.

This is similar to Carl Jung's idea: “No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell.” It is also similar to Nietzsche's idea in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885/1954):

“But it is the same with man as with the tree. The more he seeks to rise into the height and light, the more vigorously do his roots struggle earthward, downward, into the dark, the deep-into evil.”

This mandala tree is a symbol of the integration of both good and evil in order for the tree of life to flourish. This can be accomplished only with the two Yin and Yang systems working together to achieve the ideal balance and optimal wellbeing in each context, as suggested by the



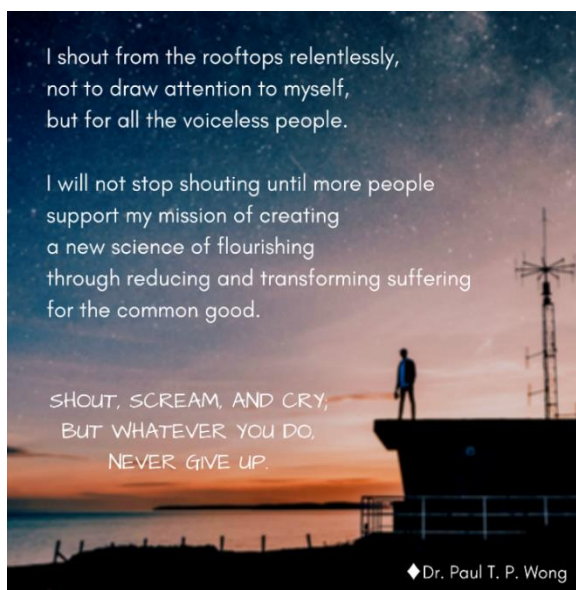
dual-system model (Wong, 2012). It is helpful to keep this this mandala at the back of your mind, as you read deeper into the content of this book.



If you are really sick and tired of getting stuck where you are, but afraid to make any changes, maybe you need to consider taking a leap of faith if you really want to achieve what you have always wanted. Without plunging into the ocean and struggling against the waves, you will never know how brave you are, and you will never develop the resilience you need

It may take longer than you initially thought to reach your desired destination, but it is worth it. Personally, I have persevered for 50 years, but I still have not arrived yet. It is not pleasant to be ostracised, squeezed, and attacked for daring to blaze a new trail, but my best ideas were developed in the crucibles of suffering, for which I am grateful. That is how I am able to leave my footprints for others who are suffering. Now, I can now die without any regrets and have the deep satisfaction that “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (The Bible, 2 Timothy 4:7).

You are tougher than you think. You are valued more than you believe. Life is a constant battle. Yet the beauty of life is found the thick of the struggle with the joyful anticipating of arriving at your destination.



If you find this book helpful, I invite you to sign up for the free *Positive Living Newsletter* (<http://www.drpaulwong.com/positive-living-newsletter/>) which will provide you with more resources and information on training opportunities in logotherapy, meaning therapy, and PP 2.0.

My vision is to have thousands of people join me in the mission of advancing meaning, spirituality, wellbeing, and world peace at the International Network of Personal Meaning and the new Research Institute on Flourishing and Suffering. Become a member ([www.meaning.ca](http://www.meaning.ca)) so that we can work together to spread the encouraging news of how to survive and thrive in the age of COVID-19.