

# Beyond Happiness and Success: The New Science of Self-transcendence

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# Overview

1. Beyond happiness and success
2. The need for an alternative framework – Existential positive psychology (EPP or PP 2.0)
3. The definition of self-transcendence (ST)
4. ST as a process of personal growth and lifespan development
5. ST as an inverted pyramid of 12 rules of flourishing

# Part 1. Beyond Happiness and Success



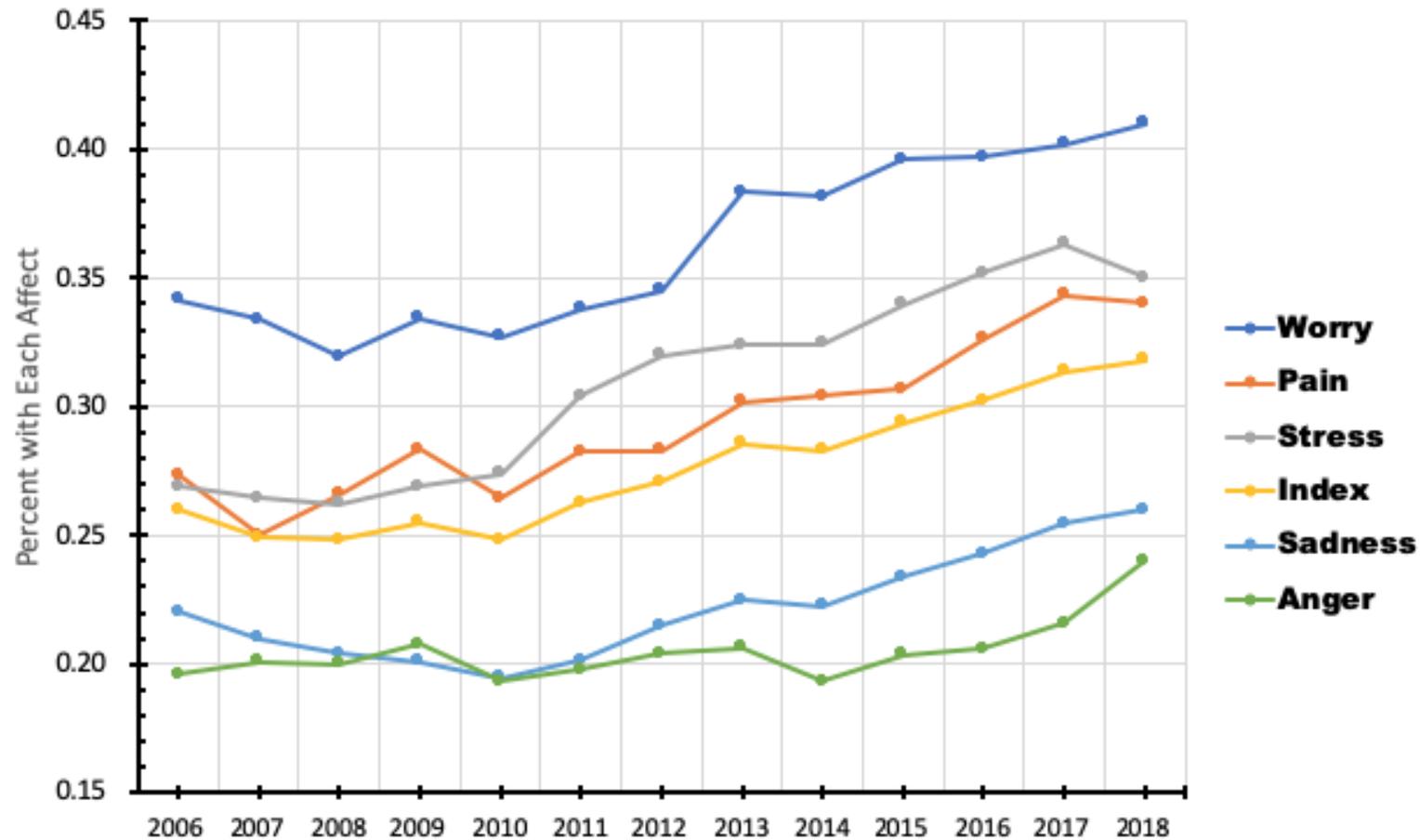
*What is the*  
**HEDONIC  
TREADMILL?**  
*And How Hedonic  
Adaptation*  
**Prevents Lasting  
Happiness**

- The road to success is littered with victims
- The end of the road is disillusion and emptiness



# Everyone needs happiness and success, but most people are unhappy

**Rising Negative Affect in All Countries (Gallup)**

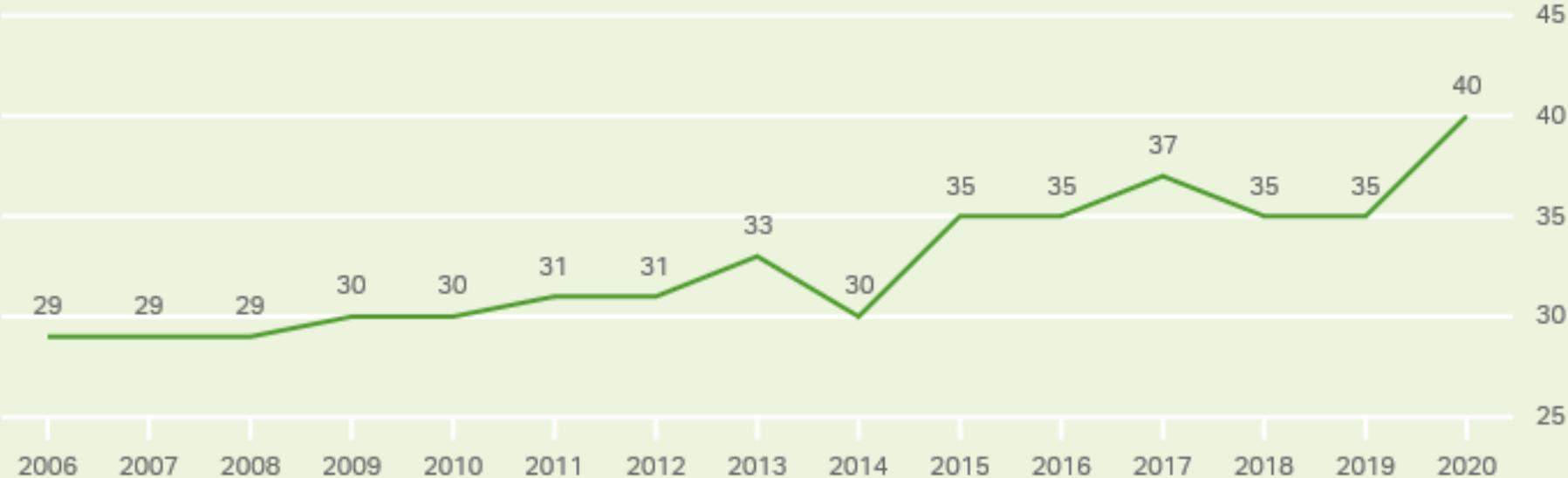


# The pandemic brings more stress

## 2020: A Stressful Year for the World

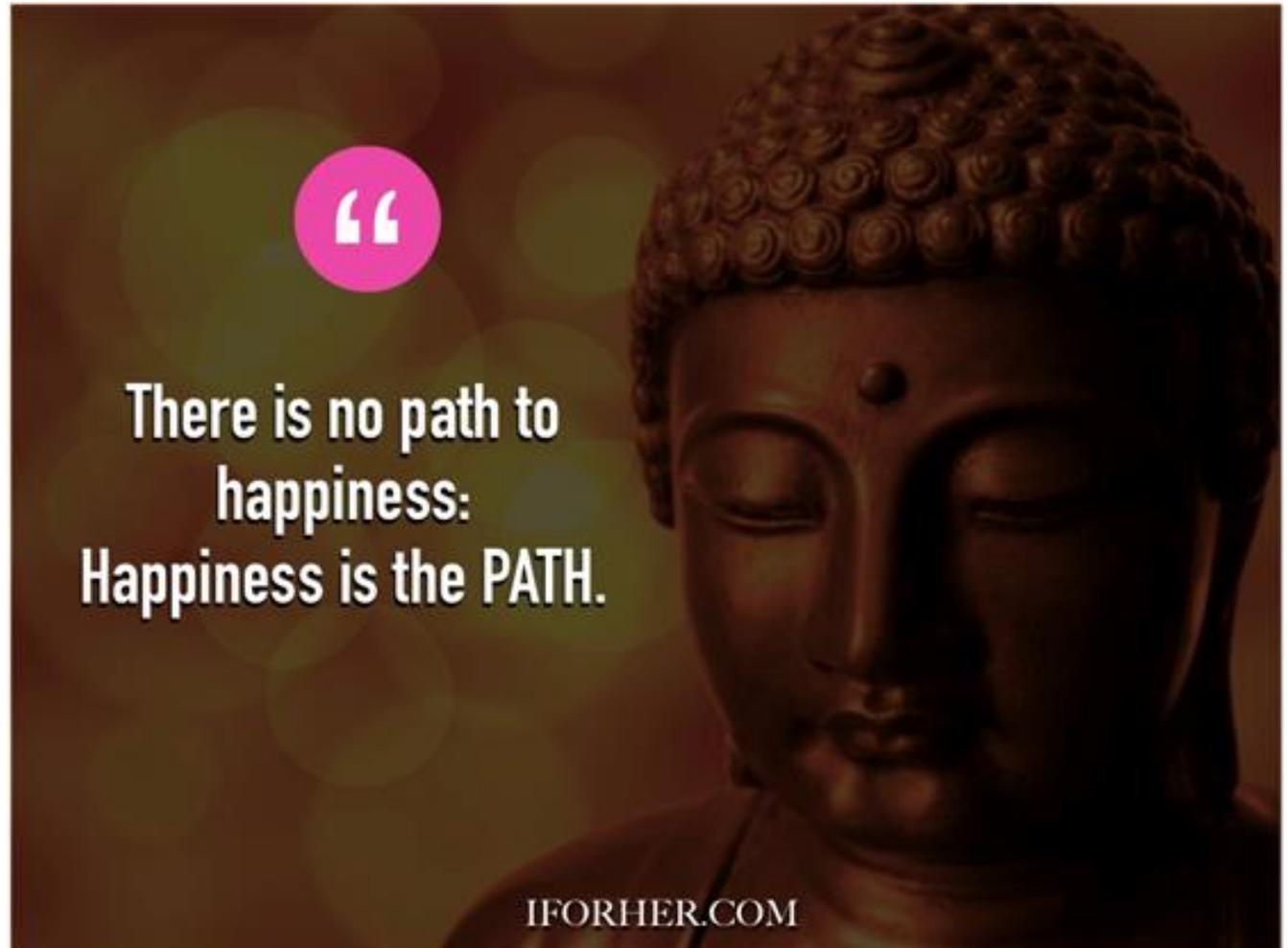
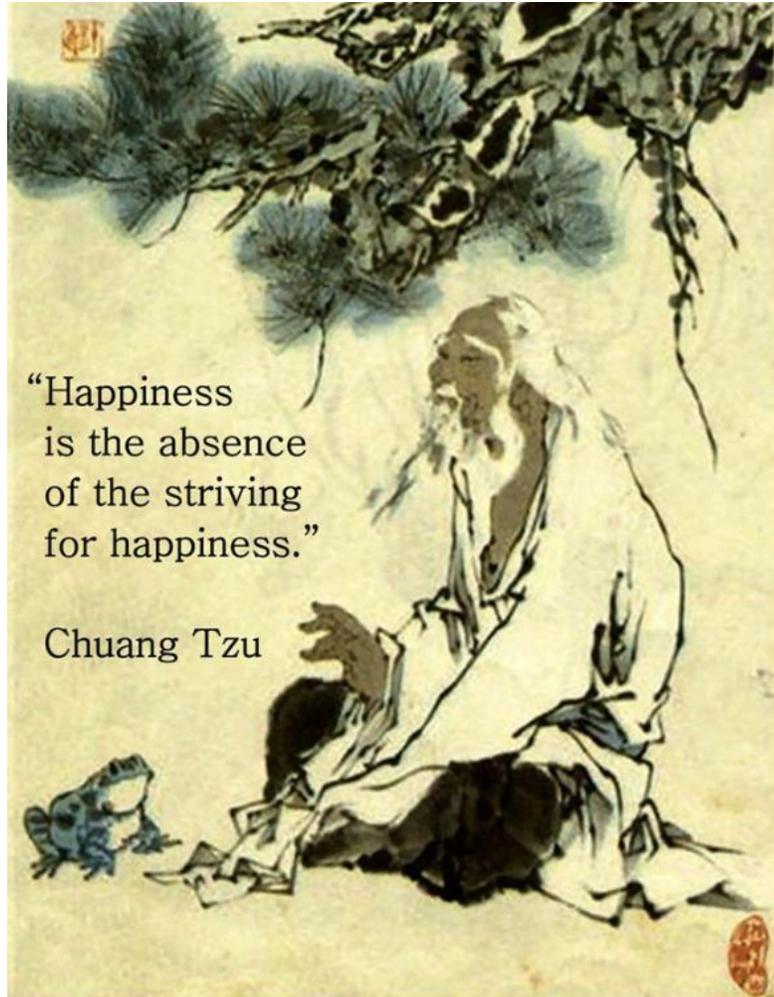
Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday? How about stress?

— % Experienced stress yesterday



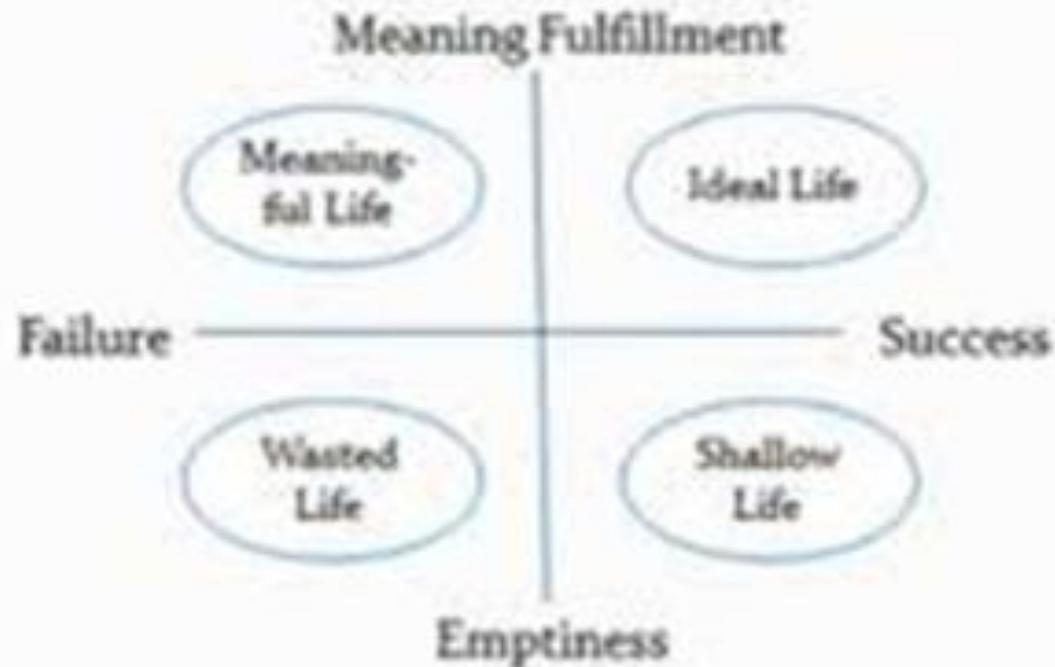
GALLUP WORLD POLL

# What can we learn from ancient wisdom about happiness?



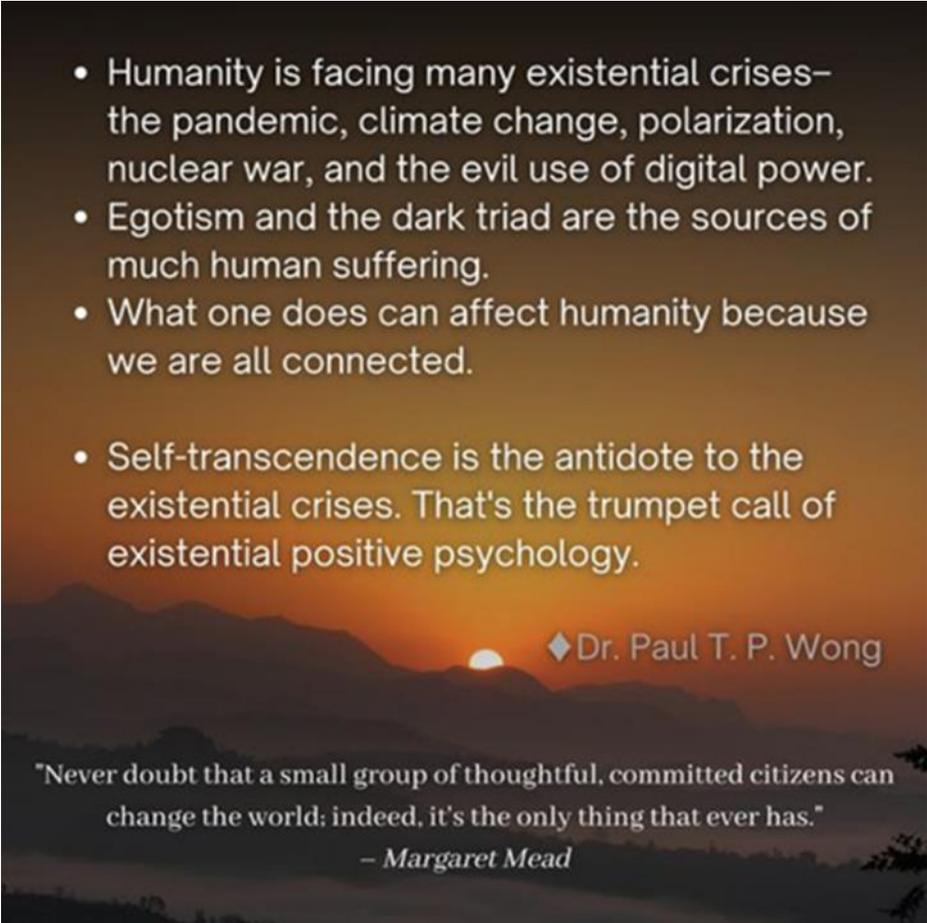
# The spiritual way according to Frankl

## The Meaning Mindset vs. The Success Mindset



# Part 2: The Need for existential positive psychology (EPP or PP 2.0)

- Humanity is facing many existential threats from the pandemic & climate change.
- We all need to face our dark side of life and our inherent vulnerabilities
- Much of human suffering is existential suffering.
- Life is full of paradoxes: Only in the darkness can you see the stars.

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- Humanity is facing many existential crises—the pandemic, climate change, polarization, nuclear war, and the evil use of digital power.
  - Egotism and the dark triad are the sources of much human suffering.
  - What one does can affect humanity because we are all connected.
  - Self-transcendence is the antidote to the existential crises. That's the trumpet call of existential positive psychology.

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

– Margaret Mead

- We need to transcend our brokenness and suffering in order to find wholeness and wellbeing.
- We need to lose ourselves in order to find our true self.
- We need to make the necessary sacrifices in order to pursue something greater than we are.
- The best possible life is to balance our dark and bright sides.
- The above struggles make us stronger and better, resulting in a sense of inner peace, harmony, and fulfillment.



The words of truth  
are always paradoxical.  
- Lao Tzu

- These three basic tenets provide a very different perspective on how to bring out what is good and right in people.

Here are three powerful ideas that can transform both psychology and society for the betterment of humanity:

1. Polarity--all things in nature exist not as opposite poles on the same dimension but as two complementary and opposite dimensions.
2. Transcendence--the creative force or tension holds the opposites together.
3. Balance and Harmony--Inner peace and wellbeing result from navigating a balance between opposites.

The **Self-transcendence paradigm**, based on the above three inter-related tenets, charts a new path towards global wellbeing, world peace, and individual flourishing even in turbulent times.

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◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

"In the self good and evil are indeed closer than identical twins!"

– *Carl Jung, CW 12, Para 24*

# Here is a contrast between the two perspectives of positive psychology

	Seligman's (2011) <b>Model of Flourishing</b>	Wong's (2021) <b>Self-transcendence Model of Flourishing Through Suffering</b>
<b>P</b>	Positive Emotions	<b>Positivity through embracing the dark side of life.</b>
<b>E</b>	Engagement	<b>Engagement through painful discipline.</b>
<b>R</b>	Positive Relationships	<b>Strong relationships through forgiving and enduring the foibles of others.</b>
<b>M</b>	Meaning	<b>Meaning through transcending egotism and external obstacles.</b>
<b>A</b>	Accomplishments	<b>Achievement through transcending sacrifices and failures.</b>

# Part Three: The Definition of Self-transcendence

- Frankl's emphasis on ST as a spiritual motivation and the process to become fully human.
- Less emphasis on ST as an experience, which is attracting a lot of research interest now (e.g., David Yaden)

“ The more one forgets himself —by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. Self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence. ”

– Viktor Frankl



- But here is another definition on transcending suffering.
- Buddha's emphasis is also on pursuing meaning as a way to reduce suffering and achieve enduring happiness.

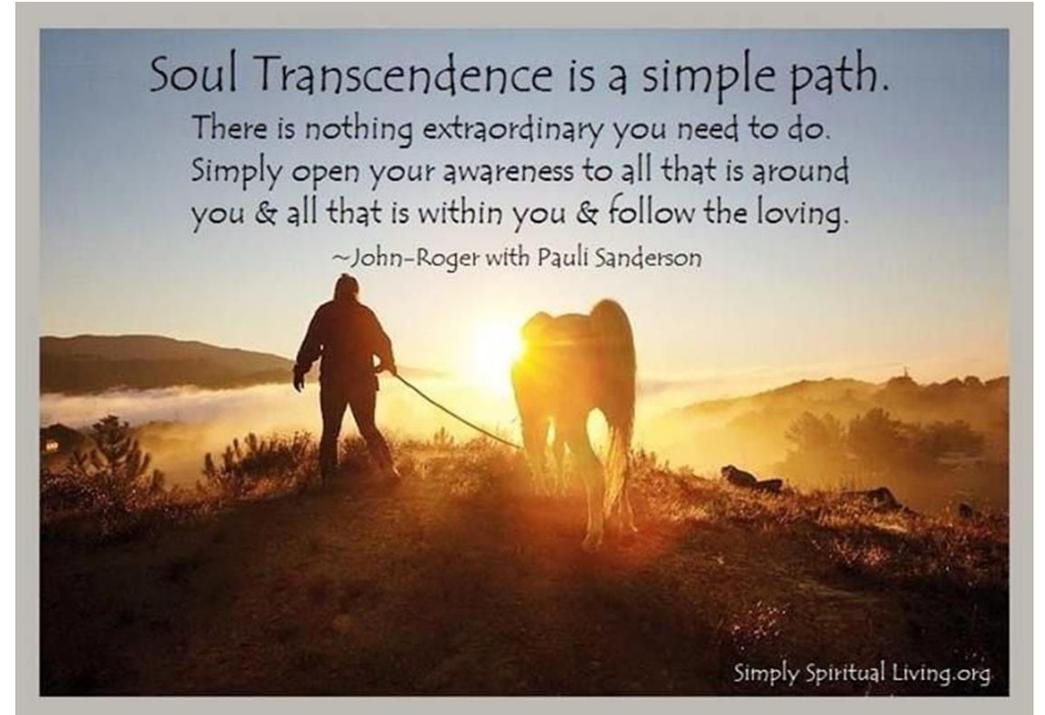
## **Self-Transcendence according to the Buddha**

"A man struggling for existence will naturally look for something of value. There are two ways of looking...if he looks in the right direction, he recognizes the true nature of sickness, old age, and death, and then he searches for meaning in that which transcends all human suffering. In my life of pleasures, I seem to be looking in the wrong way."

(Shakyamuni Buddha, 1966, p. 8)

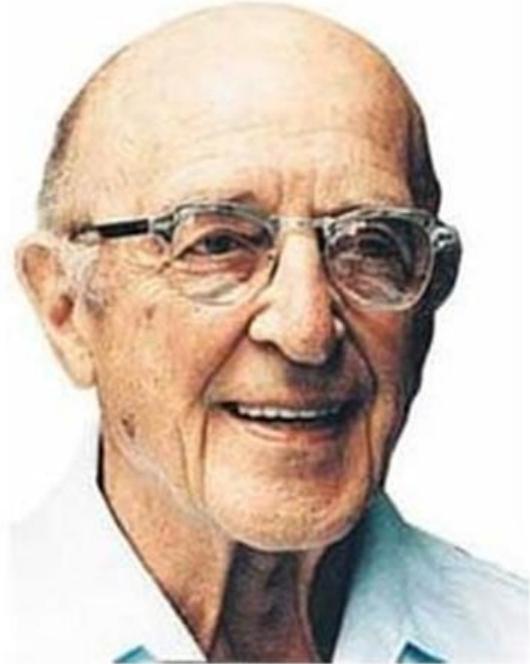
# Here is my expanded definition of ST

- ST is the path to transcend human suffering, limitations and the ordinariness of daily life in order to pursue and experience something greater than oneself.
- It involved the process of organismic growth and spiritual transformation.
- One usually experiences ST as a profound sense of inner peace, joy, or awe through connecting with something sacred or amazing.



ST in times of suffering typically involves three paradoxical steps: Acceptance, Engagement and Transformation

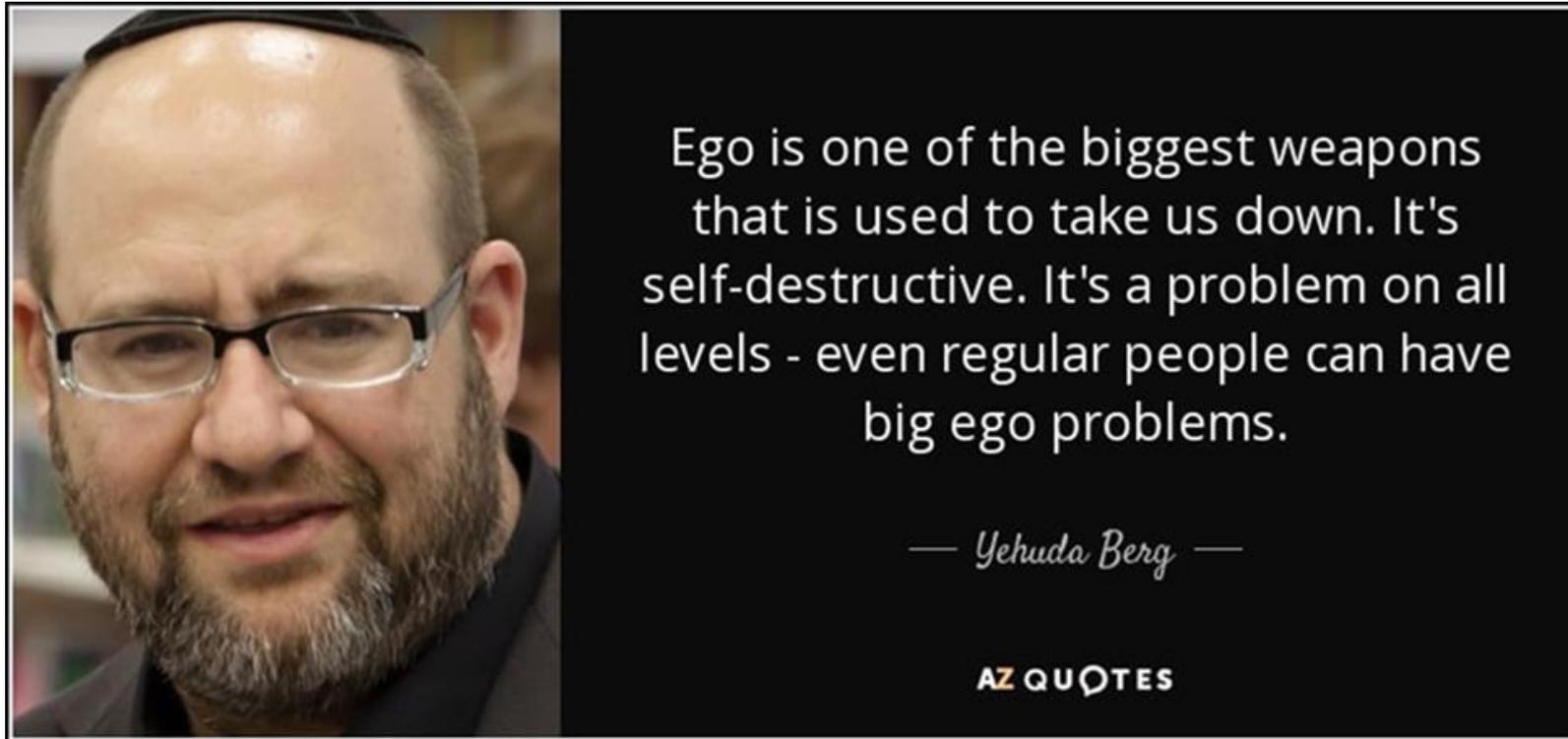
# Step One: Self-acceptance is the first step of change



**The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.**

***Carl Rogers***

Step Two: Engagement in inner struggle between the ego and soul & in embracing one's dark side.

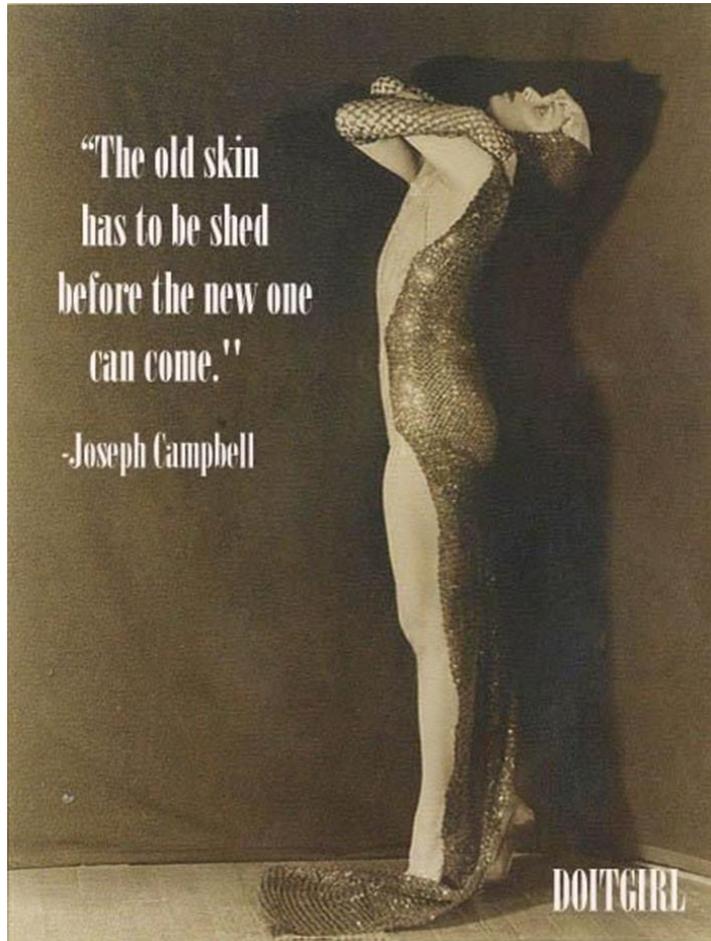


Ego is one of the biggest weapons that is used to take us down. It's self-destructive. It's a problem on all levels - even regular people can have big ego problems.

— *Yehuda Berg* —

AZ QUOTES

Step Three: Spiritual transformation -- replacing our old self-identity and habits with new ones.



# Part 4: ST as a process of personal growth and lifespan development

- Each developmental stage is characterized by transcending some limitation in order to achieve an appropriate developmental task.

An Existential Model of the 9 Stages of Life-Span Psychology, Tracing the Developmental Roots of Human Vulnerability, Frailty and Virtues.

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

	Stage	Age	Existential Crisis	Main Task	Gains	Risks
1.	Infancy	Birth–2 years	Separation anxiety	Necessary gradual separation from mother	- Trust, faith, and hope - Secure attachment (love) - Enduring discomfort - Delayed gratification	- Dependency - Anxious/avoidant attachment - No frustration tolerance - Narcissism - Fear of abandonment
2.	Preschooler	3–4 years	Safety anxiety (Fear of getting hurt)	Testing limits of autonomy	- Obedience - Freedom and security within boundaries - Honesty and speaking the truth - Respect for rules and authority	- No respect for parents and authority - No impulse control - Exerting power through temper tantrums - Deception - Aggression
3.	Kindergarten to primary school	4–12 years	Social anxiety (Fear of not belonging)	School	- Sharing and belonging - Playing fair (justice) - Humility and forgiveness - Curiosity about the world	- Isolation/loneliness - Social anxiety - Fear of rejection - Bullying and cruelty - Poor self-esteem - Manipulation
4.	Adolescence	12–18 years	Identity crisis	- Puberty - Preparation for adulthood	- Self-knowledge - Self-awareness - Sexual orientation - Discovery of areas of strengths	- Role confusion - Dropping out of school - Low achievement motivation - Seeking pleasure and risky behaviour - Rebelliousness and antisocial behaviour
5.	Young adult or early career	19–25	Independence anxiety	- Love relationship - Entry into work force	- Courage - Hope - Purpose - Confidence in love relationship and work	- No meaning and purpose - Depression - Aggressiveness - Addiction - Loner - Making a living through illegal means
6.	Adult or mid-career	25–40	- Achievement anxiety (Fear of failure in career and marriage)	- Supporting a family - Parenting	- Responsibility - Resourcefulness - Perseverance - Career success - Happy marriage - A sense of actualization	- Getting stuck in a bad job or bad marriage - Divorce - Delinquent children - No close friends - Depression and addiction
7.	Mature adult or late career	40–60	Mid-life crisis	- Reflection on the first half of life - Ready for major change	- Generativity - Life satisfaction - Life transformation - Social conscience - Consolidating one's contributions - Redemption	- Stagnation - Regression to adolescence - Taking unwise risks - Taking early retirement - Giving up on life
8.	Early old age	60–75	Ultimate concerns about boredom and meaninglessness	Retirement	- Self-transcendence - Integrity - Spiritual growth - Enjoying life to the fullest - Volunteering - Grand-parenting	- Despair - Depression - Bitterness - Resentment - Blaming and complaining - Cranky old person
9.	Late old age	76–death	Worrying about unfinished business	Completing the race gracefully	- Letting go, facing death with gratitude and faith - Integration - Death acceptance - Legacy - Hope for immortality - Wisdom - Spiritual maturity - Mature happiness	- Regrets - Despair - Depression - Anger towards life - Suicide - Alienating adult children

# Part Five: ST as an inverted pyramid of 12 rules of meaningful living or flourishing

- These 12 rules can be grouped into four triangles.

## 12 Rules of Meaningful Living During Hard Times

1. Connect with our true self. 2. Connect with others. 3. Connect with God.	<b>THE CONNECTED LIFE</b>
4. Face an uncertain and risky future with courage. 5. Accept the dark side of life. 6. Transform tragedy into triumph.	<b>THE RESILIENT LIFE</b>
7. Be aware of one's need for change. 8. Control one's impulses & inordinate desires. 9. Determine to do the right thing & follow the right path.	<b>THE RESPONSIBLE LIFE</b>
10. Create a new path when is no path. 11. Imagine a better way, a better future. 12. Look up for inspiration.	<b>THE CREATIVE LIFE</b>

# The Self-transcendence Paradigm of Global Wellbeing & Flourishing

The golden triangle of mental health and wellbeing is about how to live a meaningful life through expanding one's innate capacity for connections in 3 life domains in spite of hardships.

**FAITH**

*(Spirituality)*

Connecting with God, a higher power, or nature by transcending doubts and disbelief.

**AGAPE**

**HOPE**

*(Agency)*

Connecting with one's soul, calling, or authentic self by transcending one's limitations and egotism.

**LOVE**

*(Communion)*

Connecting with others and loved ones by transcending relational conflict and frustrations.



*Faith makes all things possible*  
*Believe in yourself*

*Hope makes all things brighter*  
*Believe in your future*

*Love connects us all together*  
*Believe in others*

# IRON TRIANGLE

*to deal with the*

## TERRORS OF LIFE

**COURAGE**

*to face the  
dark side of life*

**ACCEPT**

*what cannot be  
avoided or changed*

**TRANSFORM**

*suffering into strength  
through meaning*

# Wong's Executive Triangle

*for mental health*

**Self-control**

*inhibition of impulses*

**Self-determination**

*accountability for making the  
right choice*



**Executive  
Triangle**

**Self-awareness**

*of one's need to change*

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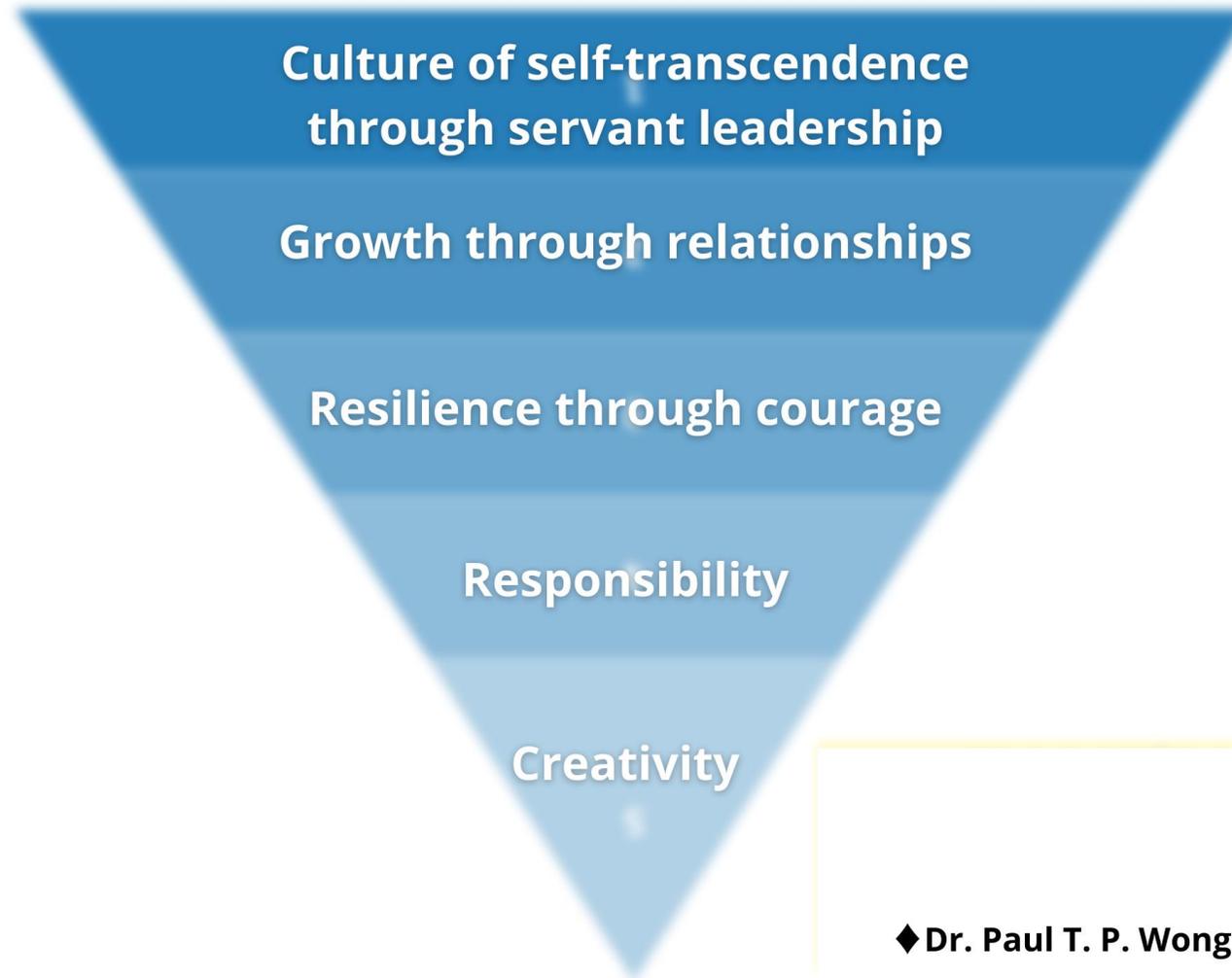
# Wong's Creativity Triangle

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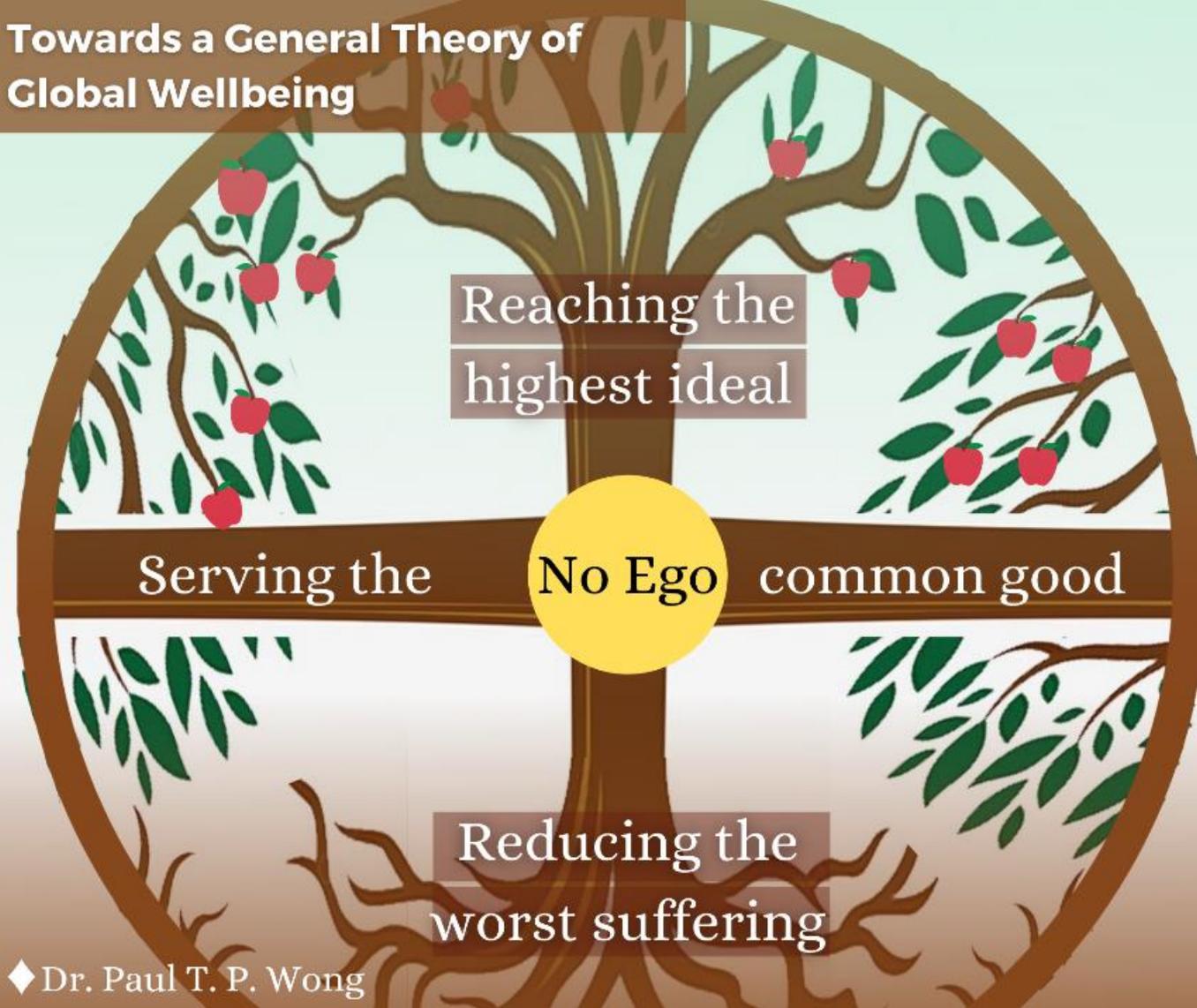


*AN INVERTED PYRAMID OF*  
**SELF-TRANSCENDENCE**

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## Towards a General Theory of Global Wellbeing



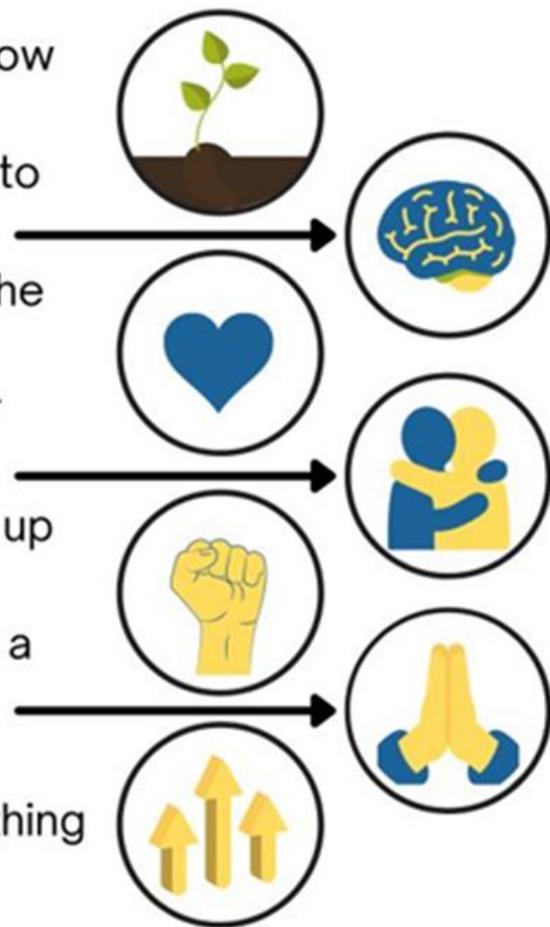
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Through levels of processing, at the deepest level, all disciplines reach the same conclusion. Through the dialectical process of self-transcendence, at the highest level, all people can reach the same awe-inspiring mystery. Through selfless sacrifice, we can serve the greatest number of people. Through holistic integrative research, we can best approximate the ultimate truth of wellbeing.

## The 7 Ways to Boost Awe and Wellbeing Based on the Self-transcendence Model of Flourishing

I stand in awe of:

1. **The power of the life force** to grow and bear fruits against all odds.
2. **The wisdom of the human mind** to probe into the mysteries of life.
3. **The virtue of love** in sacrificing the self for others.
4. **The magic of gratitude** to fill our hearts with happiness.
5. **The invincible courage** to stand up against evil.
6. **The unwavering faith** in creating a better future.
7. **The unspeakable joy** of losing oneself to become a part of something greater (e.g., nature, the Creator).





Like art, religion is an imaginative  
and creative effort to find a meaning  
and value in human life.

— *Karen Armstrong* —

AZ QUOTES



2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020

# **A DECADE OF HAPPINESS THROUGH SUFFERING**

PP 2.0 ADVOCATES THE NEW SCIENCE OF FLOURISHING  
THROUGH EMBRACING AND TRANSFORMING THE INEVITABLE SUFFERING.

**The correct understanding of suffering can save many lives and give people joy.**

Thanks for taking part in my keynote.

If you are interested in my PowerPoints or other related material, please visit [www.drpaulwong.com](http://www.drpaulwong.com)

(My Meaning Conference PowerPoints will be uploaded to that website within the next few weeks)