

Session 2: The Meaning of Suffering

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What is the Meaning of Suffering?

To make life more purposeful and bearable

"This is the core of the human spirit ... If we can find something to live for - if we can find some meaning to put at the center of our lives - even the worst kind of suffering becomes bearable."

Viktor Frankl

ThePassionPeople.com

What is suffering?

An umbrella term for all things uncomfortable

Sources of Suffering

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

	Internal	External
<i>Controllable</i>	Poor self-concept Getting stuck Irresponsible behaviours Unfavourable social comparison	- Situational stress - Obstacles - Work pressure - Toxic relationships
<i>Uncontrollable</i>	Negative emotions and thoughts Existential suffering (meaninglessness etc.) Undesirable physical characteristics One's dark or hidden side	- Natural disasters - Pandemic - Social injustice - Economic recession

Figure: 2x2 Contingency Table of Suffering

Suffering is often self-inflicted – through overthinking, self-sabotaging, and irresponsible behaviors.



**The Truth is,
Your Own
Thoughts
Cause You
the Most
Suffering**

www.TerriKozlowski.com

Why do bad things happen to good people? (The proverbial Job)

- Suffering is diagnostic
- Suffering is curative
- Suffering is redemptive
- Suffering contributes to our growth



Can't expect others to end our suffering or fix our problems if we are to take ownership of our own life.

We should avoid blaming the victim but assuming some responsibility for recovery can contribute to healing.



The Emergency Stress Response

Fight-Flight

Freeze-Submit

Cortisol release
triggers
Parasympathetic
System

Sympathetic Nervous System: noradrenaline release, increased heart rate and respiration, rush of energy to muscle tissue, suppression of non-essential systems, frontal lobe inhibition

Parasympathetic Nervous System: decreased autonomic activation, shaking and trembling, rebound gastro-intestinal activity, exhaustion, depletion, shutting down, numbing, total collapse, "licking the wounds"

The instinctive fight-flight-freeze response is effective for emergency or acute stress

The General Adaptation Syndrome by Hans Selye



Prolonged stress will result in exhaustion and make one vulnerable to diseases

Meaning-focused coping

1. Re-appraisal or cognitive reframing
2. Accepting or letting go
3. Finding a silver-lining or some lesson
4. Prayer and meditation
5. Expressive writing
6. Life review



The new science of flourishing through suffering consists of the dialectical process of (a) sinking one's roots to the deepest parts of hell through level of processing, and (b) spreading one's branches to the highest parts of Heaven and the broadest parts of earth through self-transcendence.

This is the less travelled road to finding joy and peace on earth through the vertical dimension of human existence of reaching downward to face and transform suffering, and reaching upward through self-transcendence and connections with the highest ideals of faith, hope, and love.

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

*"No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven
unless its roots reach down to hell."*

—C.G. Jung

In desperate situations, we can go deeper and higher – Wong's (2021) self-transcendence model

JUST AS

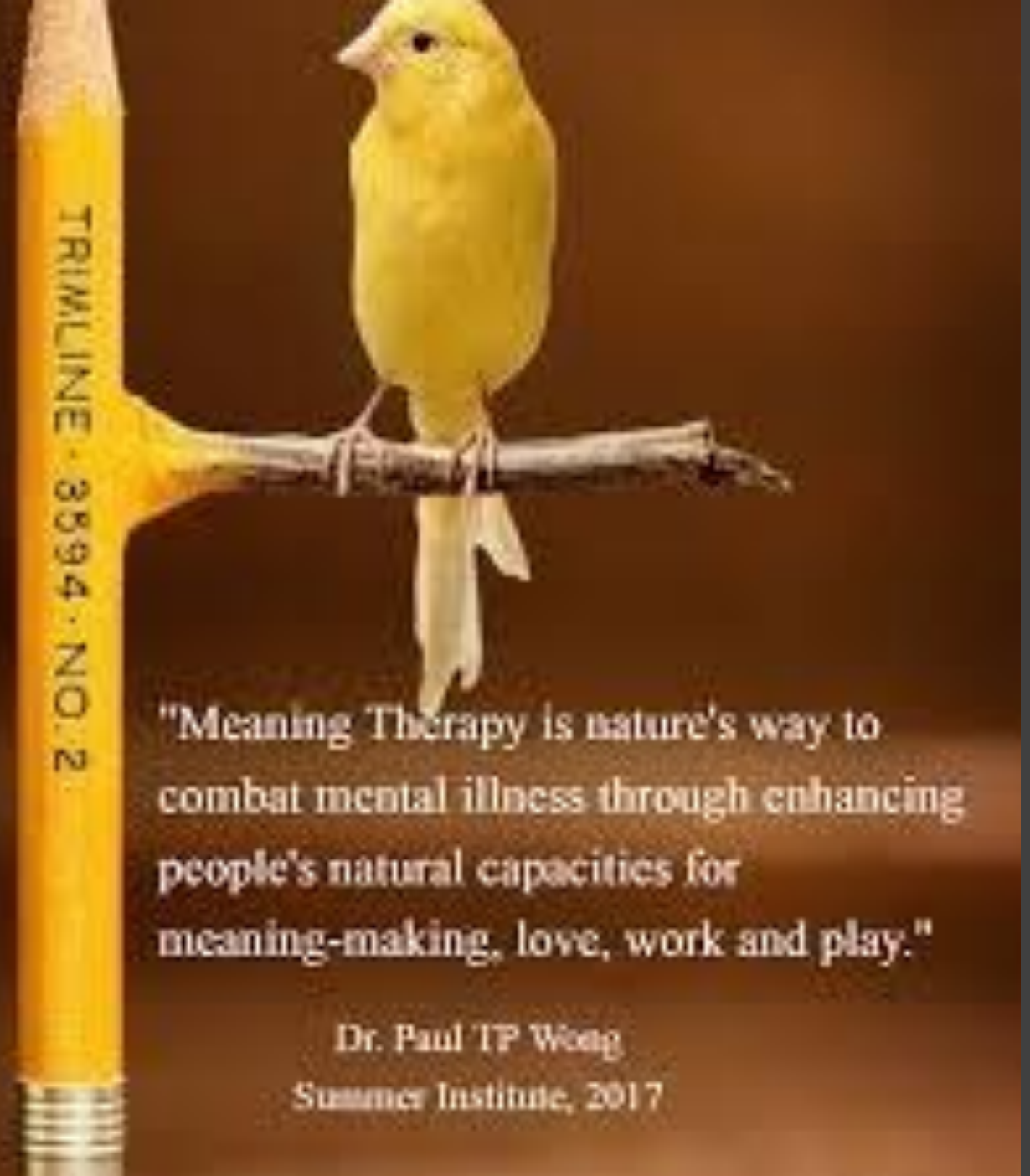
Good Food 	Clean water 	Clean Air 
ARE ESSENTIAL FOR PHYSICAL HEALTH,		
Meaningful Work 	Loving Relationships 	Spiritual Faith 
ARE ESSENTIAL FOR MENTAL HEALTH.		

Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

MT usually explores possible deficits in these three areas – meaning, love and faith.

What is meaning therapy?

The most powerful tool for healing & thriving is our capacity for meaning-focused coping (Wong, 2020 [*Made for Resilience and Happiness*](#))



"Meaning Therapy is nature's way to combat mental illness through enhancing people's natural capacities for meaning-making, love, work and play."

Dr. Paul TP Wong
Summer Institute, 2017

References

Wong, P. T. P. (2020). *Made for Resilience and Happiness: Effective Coping with COVID-19 According to Viktor E. Frankl and Paul T. P. Wong*. Toronto, ON: INPM Press.

Wong, P. T. P. (2021, August 6-8). *Beyond happiness and success: The new science of self-transcendence* [keynote]. International Network on Personal Meaning 11th Biennial International Meaning Conference, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Thank you for attending

If you want to learn more about the new science of suffering or meaning therapy, please visit www.drpaulwong.com