

The Best Possible Life in a Troubled World: An Existential Positive Psychology Perspective

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PRESENTED VIRTUALLY AT THE AT THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY
SYMPOSIUM: CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVES

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Brief Bio – Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

Paul T. P. Wong, Ph.D., C.Psych, is Professor Emeritus of Trent University and Trinity Western University. He is a Fellow of APA, APS, and CPA, and the founding President of **the International Network on Personal Meaning** (INPM, also known as the International Association of Existential Positive Psychology) and the **Meaning-Centered Counselling Institute**. As a servant leader, he has been a church planter, pastor, founding director of the graduate program in counselling psychology of Trinity Western University, and head of the Division of Social Sciences of Tyndale University. A prolific writer, he has published eight books and more than 200 journal articles and chapters; he is one of the **most cited psychologists** in areas related to positive psychology of suffering. As an internationally acclaimed leader in existential positive psychology (PP2.0), integrative meaning therapy, and meaning research, he has been invited to give keynotes and workshops globally and speak at major universities, such as Harvard University and Carnegie Mellon University.

Overview

1. Positive psychology is incomplete without a multi-cultural perspective.
2. The need for research on the context of suffering as the Yin of wellbeing.
3. The seven principles of self-transcendence in existential positive psychology.
4. Conclusion.

American Positive psychology (PP) as championed by Martin Seligman

- Peace and prosperity are the ideal condition for PP
- Focus is on human experiences in neutral and positive territories
- Main themes are positive emotions, traits, and institutions
- Models after STEM disciplines – mechanistic and value-free
- PP continues to evolve and progress because of new research findings & changing times

1. Culture is important

From a Eurocentric PP to indigenous psychology:

- Numerous psychologists argue that PP is rooted in specific cultural contexts (Chang, Downey, Hirsch, & Lin, 2016; Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006; Leong & Wong, 2003; Wong, 2013).
- Each ethnic/cultural group “inform people about what is worthy, good, and desirable, and about what constitutes the good, virtue, morality, health, and well-being” (Christopher, Wendt, Marecek, & Goodman, 2014, p. 5).

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- Fadiji et al. (2022) foresee unique contributions from African perspectives towards a more holistic understanding of wellbeing that include spiritual/religious, moral, social and ecological.
 - According to Kiran Kumar (2006), the transcendent perspective holds that man is essentially spiritual in nature and has divine potentialities to be actualized.

2. Contexts of suffering

SUFFERING - HOW DIVINE IT IS, HOW MISUNDERSTOOD! WE OWE TO IT ALL THAT IS GOOD IN US, ALL THAT GIVES VALUE TO LIFE; WE OWE TO IT PITY, WE OWE TO IT COURAGE, WE OWE TO IT ALL THE VIRTUES.

- ANATOLE FRANCE -

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- Existential positive psychology (EPP or PP2.0) is the study of how to live well and die well, and how to navigate the dynamic balance between happiness and suffering.
- From the perspective of EPP, to end or transcend all suffering is the beginning of happiness; the most promising way to flourish is through the narrow gate of suffering.

“We live in a culture that only wants to talk about what’s going well. Anything that’s not going well is positioned as a detour from the main road. The truth is that pain is not a detour from the main road. Pain is part of the road we walk as human beings.”

SUSAN CAIN

Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole

Unlocking Us
WITH BRENE BROWN

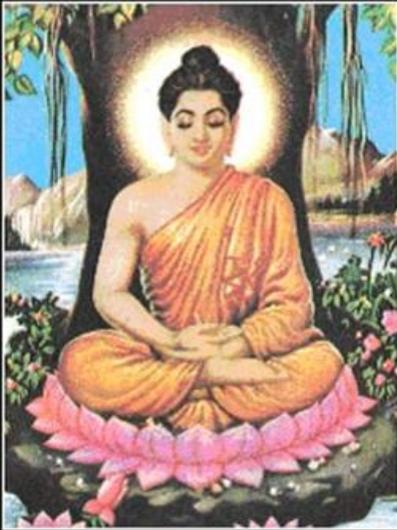
- Suffering is recognized as an important aspect of life by the traditional or old culture, but tends to be ignored in the modern or new culture

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POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

An Existential Perspective

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- Paul Wong's foreword: "The problem of suffering was posed to Seligman shortly after launching PP in 1998. His answer in his 2003 Newsletter was: 'More commonly we overcome troubles by doing end-runs around them, by deploying our highest strengths as buffers against the setbacks of life.'" However, it is very difficult if not impossible to maneuver around suffering, especially existential suffering, because it is an inherent part of life (Fowers et al., 2017)."



He who causes suffering shall suffer.
There is no escape.

— *Gautama Buddha* —

AZ QUOTES

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- We are free to choose, but we are not free from the consequences of our choices.
 - We have to suffer the consequences of inflicting pain and suffering on others.

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”
- C. S. Lewis

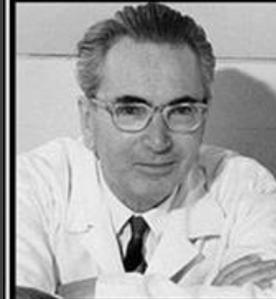
www.confidentchristians.org



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- We need to be awakened from our slumber and illusions. Suffering is God’s way to wake us up from our illusions and selfishness to a life of self-transcendence.

3. The Seven Principles of Self-transcendence

- Neither individualism nor collectivism is the answer to the universal human problem of inter-group and interpersonal conflicts and aggression. The most promising path is to inspire humanity to move beyond self-interest to the self-transcendental values of loving God and loving others as oneself.



Only to the extent that someone is living out this self transcendence of human existence, is he truly human or does he become his true self. He becomes so, not by concerning himself with his self's actualization, but by forgetting himself and giving himself, overlooking himself and focusing outward.

(Viktor E. Frankl)

izquotes.com



Self-transcendence works in two ways: 1) transcending our egotism and inherent limitations by sinking our roots into the dark soil of suffering, and growing; 2) reaching out to our highest ideals called God or Buddha and spreading our branches and fruits to serve the common good.

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.



I must also have a
dark side if I am to
be whole.

Carl Jung


www.idlehearts.com

(1) Accept life as it
is with gratitude.

- Embrace your shadow
and limitations and
learn to live with your
undesirable parts.

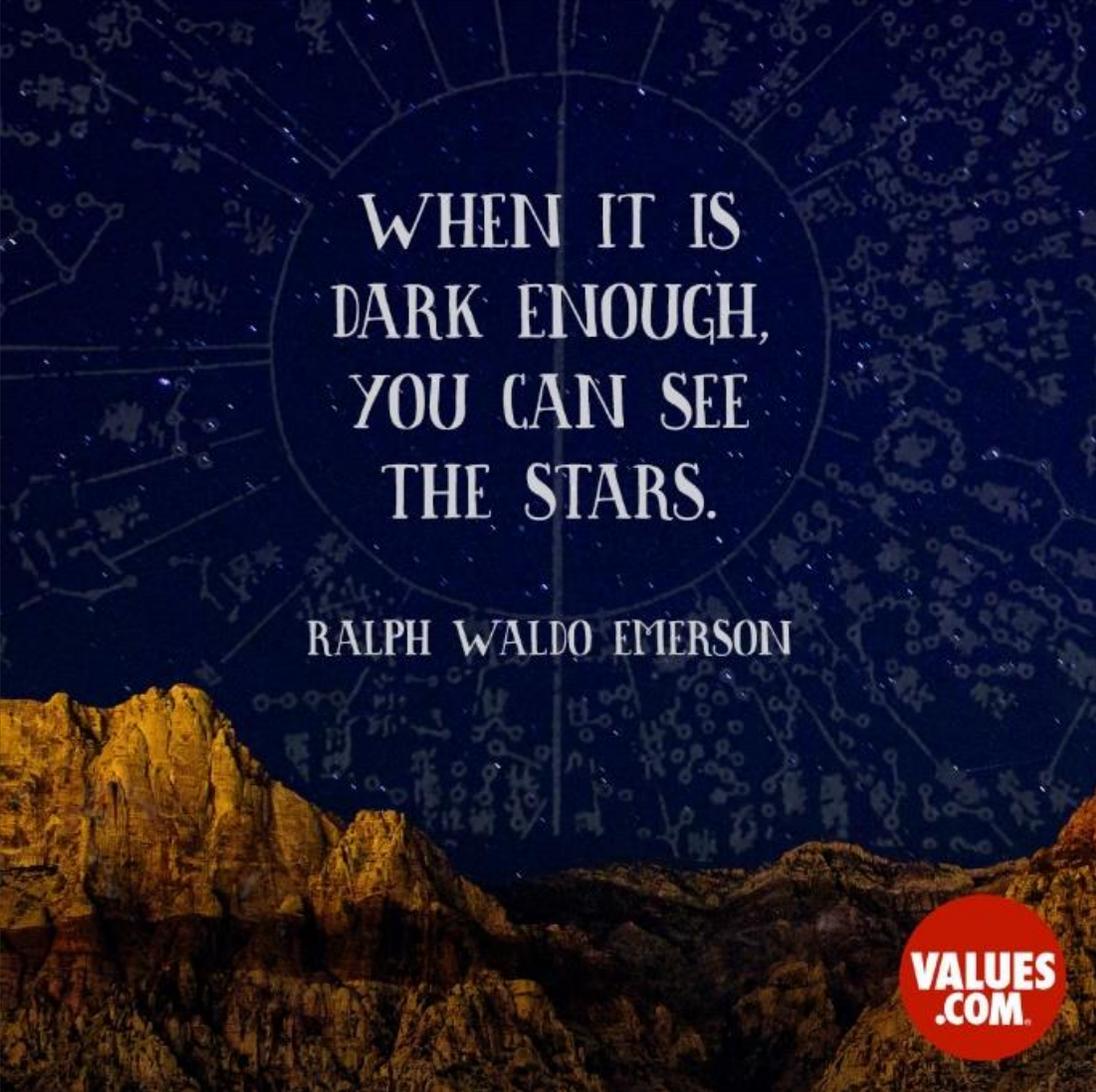
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- Accept death as a part of the life cycle and let death be our lifelong teacher



A culture that denies death inevitably becomes shallow and superficial, concerned only with the external form of things. When death is denied, life loses its depth.

— *Eckhart Tolle* —

AZ QUOTES



WHEN IT IS
DARK ENOUGH,
YOU CAN SEE
THE STARS.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

VALUES
.COM.

-
- True positivity is to see and be the light in the darkest times.

EXISTENTIAL GRATITUDE

... it is inexhaustible.

1. For life itself.
2. For the Creator of life.
- 3 For your parents who gave birth to you.
4. For all those who make your life possible.
5. For all those who have taught you how to be a good person.
6. For all the previous memories.
7. For each new day and all the tomorrows.
8. For all the good things and good people that bring you happiness.
9. For all the bad things and bad people that taught you precious lessons.
10. For the beautiful planet earth and the wonderful universe.

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

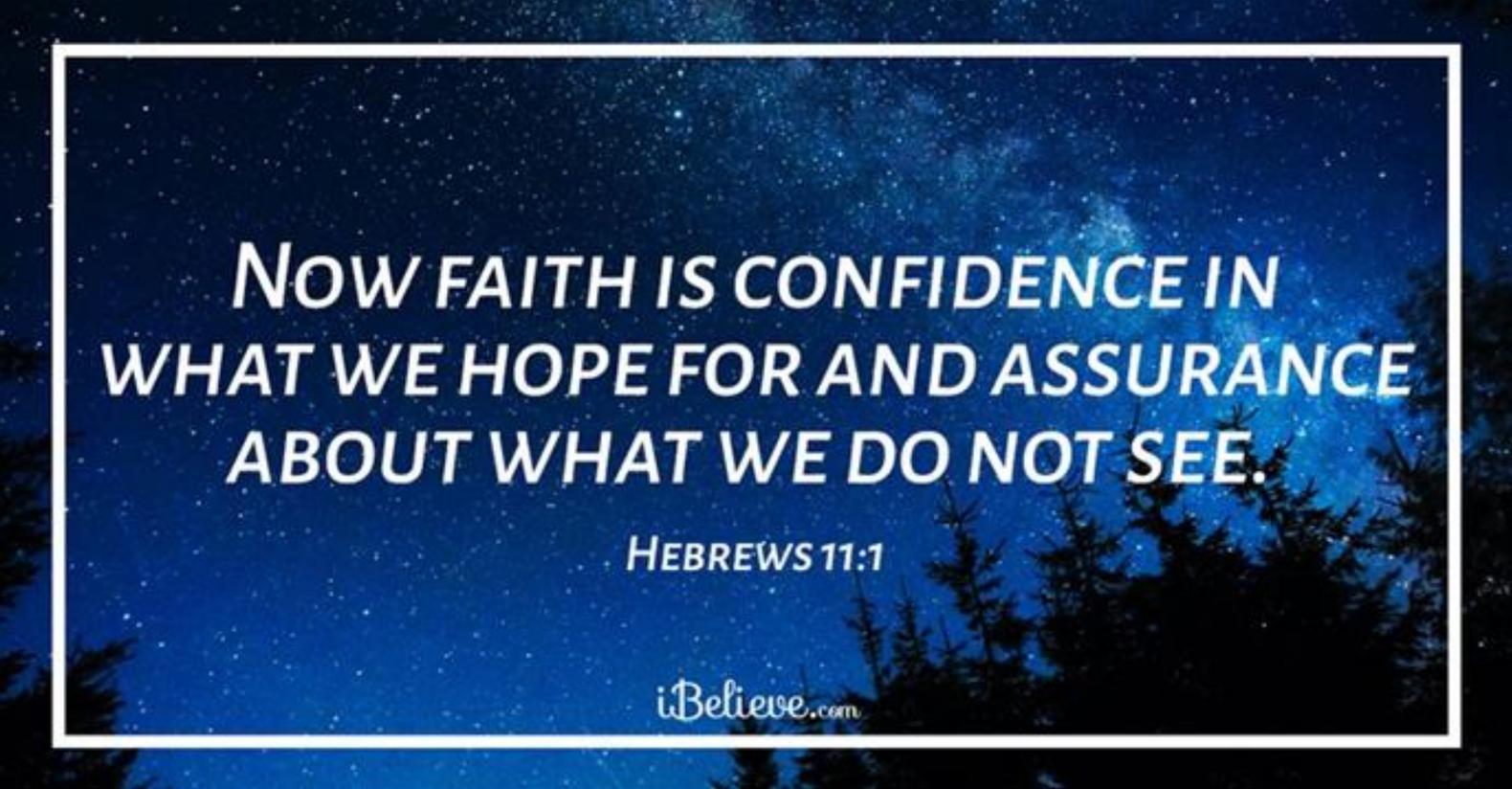


Gratitude...goes far beyond saying 'thank you'. When we are grateful, we affirm that a source of goodness exists in our lives.

- Robert A. Emmons

- Be grateful for everything in life, including the lessons from suffering

(2) Believe in creating a better future with help from God or Providence



**NOW FAITH IS CONFIDENCE IN
WHAT WE HOPE FOR AND ASSURANCE
ABOUT WHAT WE DO NOT SEE.**

HEBREWS 11:1

iBelieve.com

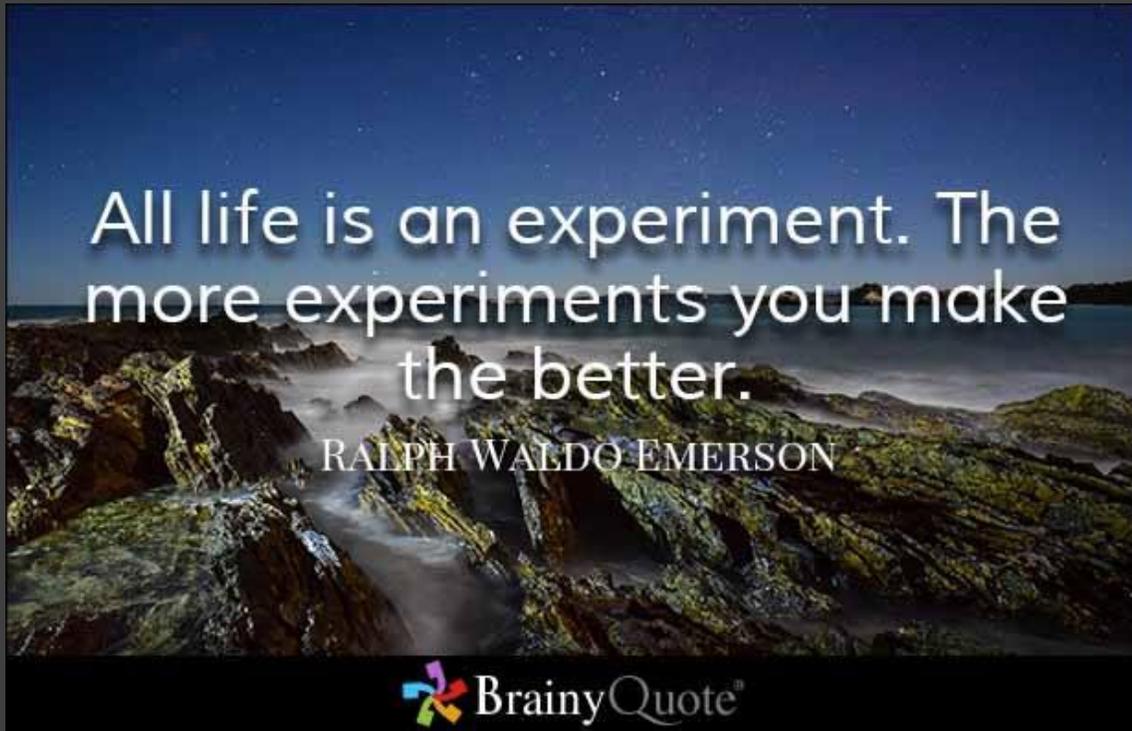
"FAITH IS TAKING
THE **FIRST STEP**
EVEN WHEN YOU
DON'T SEE THE
WHOLE STAIRCASE."

MARTIN **LUTHER** KING **DAY**



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- All the seemingly impossible things have been accomplished by people with faith in their visions.

(3) Commit to worthy goals and a life purpose



- Emmons (2005) believes that direct pursuit of happiness can be counterproductive, because ‘research indicates that happiness is often a by-product of participating in worthwhile projects and activities that do not have as their primary focus the attainment of happiness’ (p. 733).

LOVE NUDGE

*Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through **love** and in **love**.*

- Viktor E. Frankl



Coached2Love

www.coached2love.com

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- Make kindness, love, and compassion your main life goals.

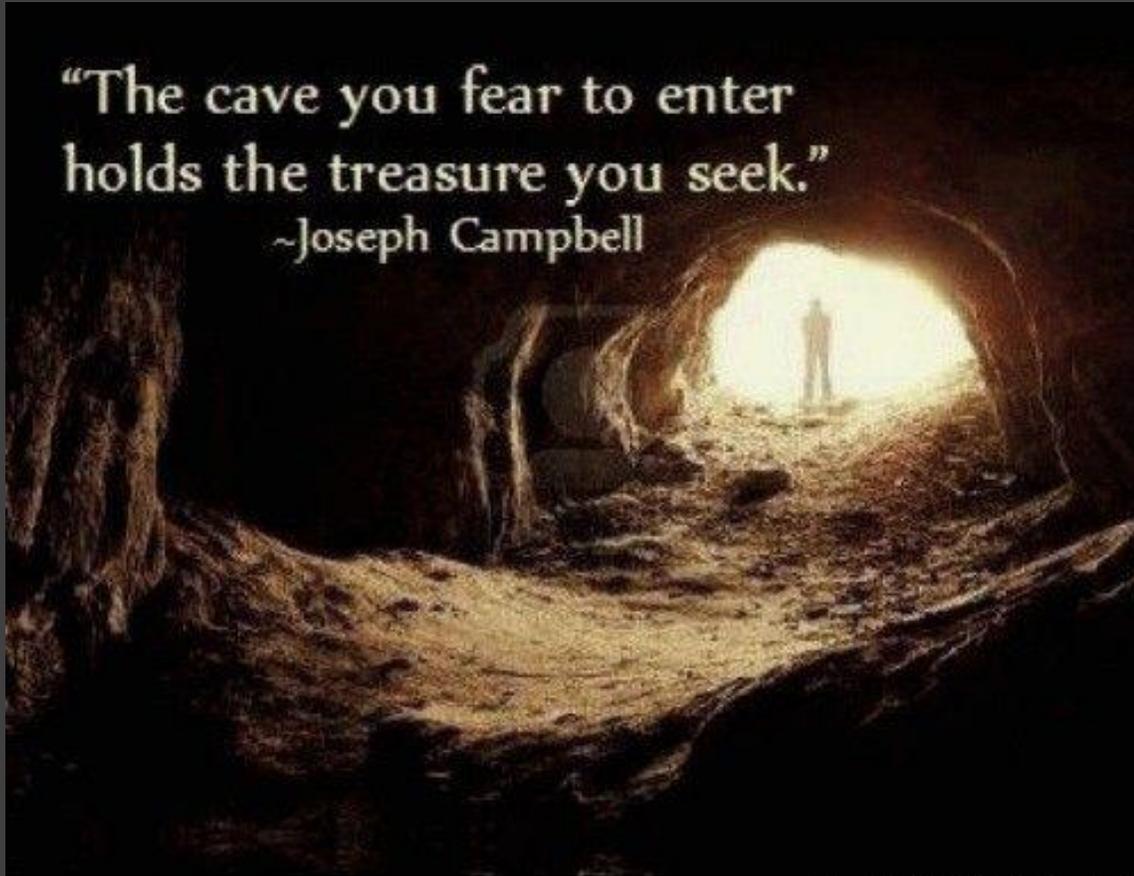
**IF YOU DON'T IMPROVE YOURSELF
CONSTANTLY, YOU WILL EITHER
BECOME STAGNANT OR GO BACKWARD.**

Paul TP Wong

4) Discover
the hidden
treasures by
digging deeper.

“The cave you fear to enter
holds the treasure you seek.”

~Joseph Campbell



THE THINGSWE SAY.COM

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- The most precious things in life are on the other side of fear.



I find that if you dig deep
enough you can almost always
find something worth the effort.

-
- If you dig deep enough and search wide enough, you will always find a way out or get what you are looking for.

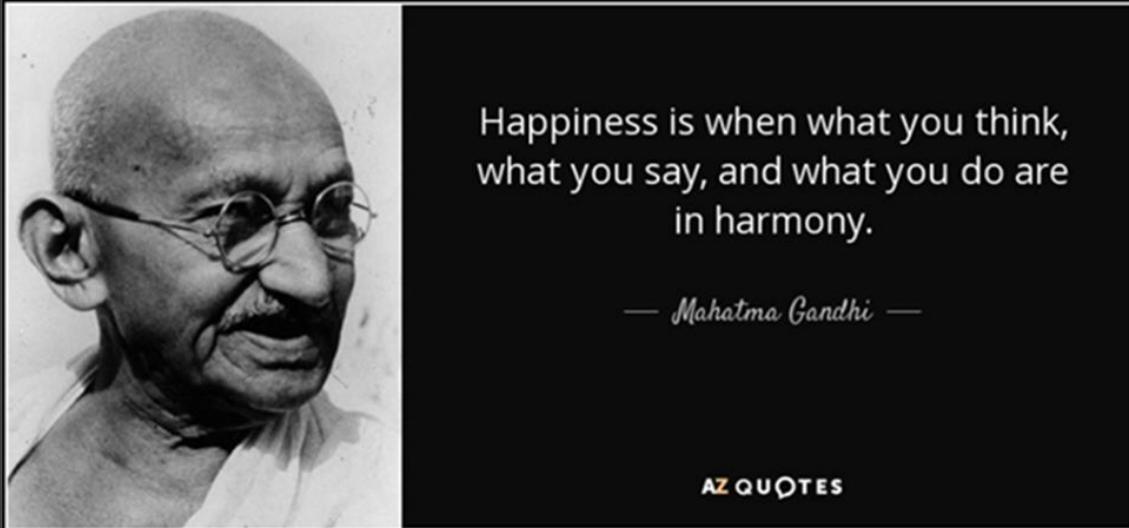
*"Either you decide to stay in the shallow end of the pool
or you go out in the ocean."*

~ Christopher Reeve

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- You can have an exciting adventure only when you are far from the shallow end.

5) Enjoy inner peace and harmony



- True happiness is an inside joy – you need to be at peace with yourself and resolve your inner conflicts.

ACTIVITIES TO BOOST SELFLESS OR MATURE HAPPINESS ACCORDING TO EXISTENTIAL POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY (PP 2.0)

1. Count your blessings in times of suffering.
2. Practice the golden rule of loving others as yourself.
3. Write an apology letter to repair relationships.
4. Practice mindful and meaningful living.
5. Strive towards worthy goals.
6. Improve yourself daily towards your best possible self.
7. Accept your worst self in order to become whole and authentic.
8. Treat people with kindness because everyone is suffering.
9. Remember the kind deeds from others and do the same to others.
10. Savor the bittersweet memories of those who were a major part of your life.



Life at best is
bittersweet.

Jack Kirby

quotation

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- The best possible life is bittersweet.
 - Optimal happiness is the optimal balance between negative and positive emotions.
 - Learning to embrace and transcend suffering is essential for happiness.
 - The best possible mental health is the optimal balance between pain and happiness.



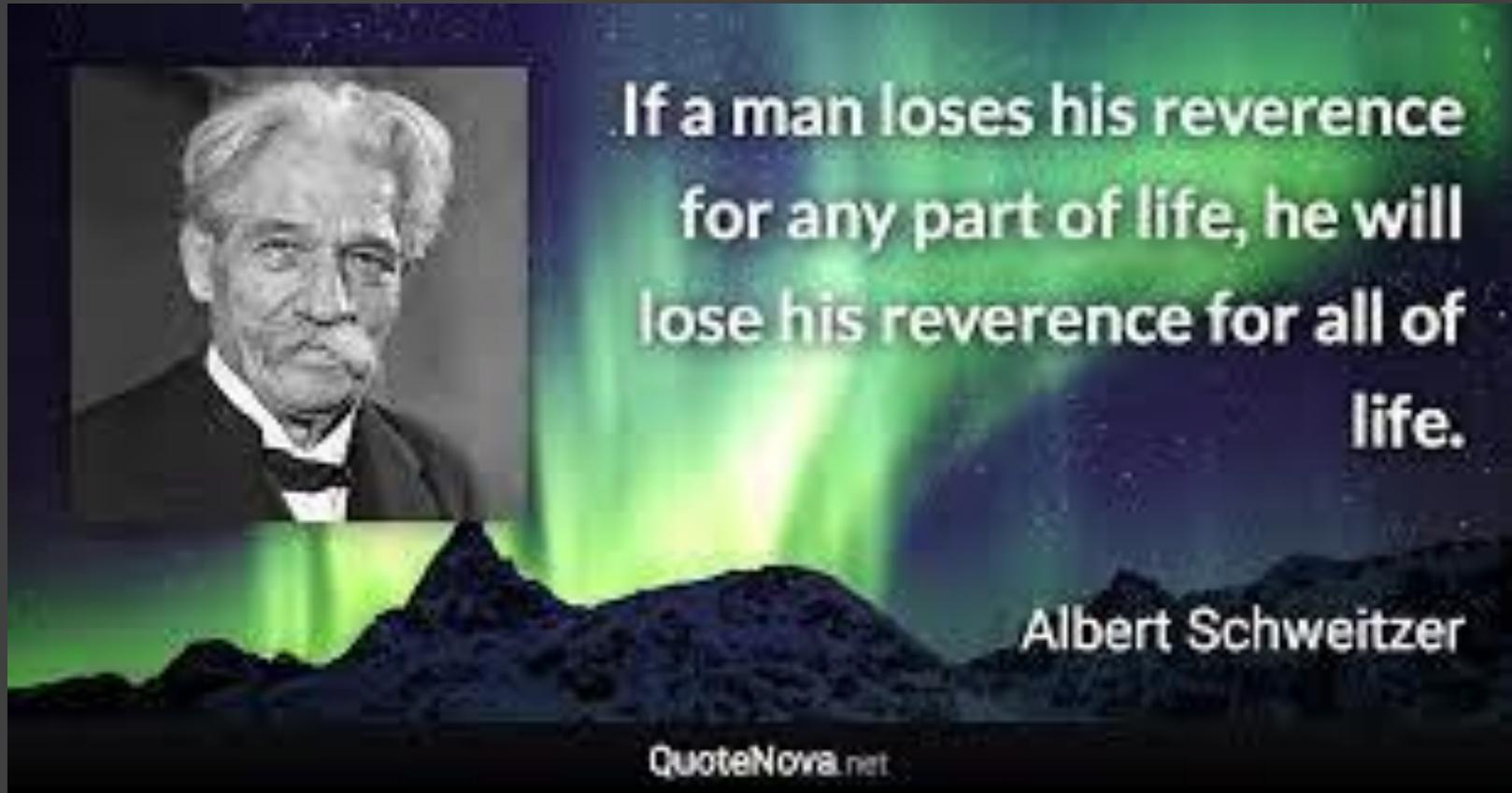
"Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive"

Dalai Lama

Awareness

6. Love others as yourself

- All life is sacred. Therefore, have a sense of reverence for all of life.





Let us hear the conclusion
of the whole matter

Fear God

and keep His Commandments
for this is the Whole Duty of Man

Ecclesiastes 12:13

7) Fear God and obey
his commandments

Fear of God or a Higher
Power is needed in order
to stay within our
boundary and fear the
consequences of our
hideous deeds.



*The Best Lessons You
Need to Learn from*
**ADAM AND
EVE**

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- Most human tragedies happen because someone wants to be like God.
 - We need to act as if God exists (i.e., God watches us and holds us accountable).
 - What one is more attracted to may be one's forbidden fruit.
 - The best possible life is to live in harmony with Heaven, people, and ourselves.

THE 7 PRINCIPLES OF SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

◆ DR. PAUL T. P. WONG

*The first five principles are proven
strategies of overcoming and
transcending suffering...*

1. Accept life as it is with gratitude.
2. Believe in creating a better future with help from Providence.
3. Commit to worthy goals and a life purpose.
4. Discover the hidden treasures by digging deeper.
5. Enjoy inner peace and harmony.
6. Love others as yourself.
7. Fear God and obey his commandments.

*...The last two principles are
the moral foundations of
caring and doing no harm.*

4. Conclusion

The primary teaching of every religion?

Christianity: In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (Jesus, Matthew 7:12)



Zoroastrianism: Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself. (Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29)



Judaism: What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. (Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a)



Sikhism: I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all. (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299)



Hinduism: This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you. (Mahabharata 5:1517)



Jainism: One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated. (Mahavira, Sutrakritanga)



Islam: Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself. (The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith)



Buddhism: Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. (Udana-Varga 5.18)



Taoism: Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss. (T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213-218)



The golden rule in different cultures

Do No Harm

Interpreters can benefit from a deeper understanding of the principle of Do No Harm in all three categories.



One way to advance our deeper understanding is to utilize a more system-centric approach to ethical decision-making.

This unit will do that within the context of the VR setting and VR professionals. This unit considers how this framework relates to and impacts the standards of practice of interpreters working in the VR setting.

The universal
ethical
principle of
doing no
harm

Thank you for your interest!

- For more information on Existential Positive Psychology and Life Intelligence, please visit www.drpaulwong.com