

The International Forum  
for  
**LOGOTHERAPY**  
Journal of Search for Meaning

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THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR LOGOTHERAPY is the official publication of the Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy. It presents the meaning-oriented existential philosophy and therapy developed by Dr. Viktor Frankl and expanded by logotherapists throughout the world, working in counseling, education, medicine, nursing, psychology, social work, and other fields where the question of meaning becomes pertinent. The FORUM publishes experiential reports, theoretical papers, personal essays, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research studies, practice and innovative logotherapeutic techniques for individuals and groups, and book and reviews. Case studies are not currently being published.

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**Watch website for announcements for manuscript submission guidelines**

## Editor's Note

As the Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy moves forward, it is through a period of much change and with a heavy heart. Since the last journal was published, we have lost Dr. Bob, Robert Barnes, the President of the Institute since 1993. It is in the atmosphere of honoring him that the board has unanimously agreed to continue plans for World Congress XXIII to be held virtually October 21, 22, and 23. The Congress theme, **The Imperative Need for Finding Meaning and Purpose in our Troubled World**, has intensified our focus on authentic meaning as we, as an institute, face the death of Dr. Barnes and we, as a global community, face a new, more deadly wave of COVID-19 and its effects.

As interim editor, my goal was to have this edition published by the last of May. With the worsening illness of Dr. Barnes, my goal was not met. I wish to apologize to each of the contributors who have submitted their memories of Dr. Viktor Frankl for this lengthy delay.

As time marches forward, the personal memories of those who knew and experienced the friendship of Dr. Frankl becomes more important to document and I appreciate the willingness of our authors to share. Because of the personal nature of these articles, they are shared as submitted from the authors.

In addition to the contributions of these writers, I would encourage readers to review Volume 21, Number 1, Spring 1998 of The Forum dedicated to the "Episodes, Anecdotes, and Memories of Viktor Frankl" after his death.

Finally, with the publication of this edition, the editorship will be moved to Rodney Dieser, PhD. The board is pleased to welcome Dr. Dieser to this position. Dr. Dieser may be contacted at [Rodney.dieser@uni.edu](mailto:Rodney.dieser@uni.edu) or (319) 273-7775. He will be sharing the guidelines for submitting articles as he transitions The Forum to a peer reviewed journal. However, as always, The Forum will also be accepting creative works.

As I transition out of the role of interim editor and into the role of President of the Institute, I welcome your comments and questions for the Institute. I can be contacted at [cynthia.wimberlyphd@gmail.com](mailto:cynthia.wimberlyphd@gmail.com) or (325) 439-8777.

As we move the Institute forward, we hope to live the meaningfulness Dr. Frankl challenged us to live in *The Doctor and the Soul* (1955):

***The meaningfulness of human existence is based upon the uniqueness and singularity of the human person.***

***Life never ceases to put new questions to us, never permits us to come to rest.***

***The man who stands still is passed by; the man who is smugly contented losses himself.***

***Every hour makes new deeds necessary and new experience possible.***

**Dr. Viktor Frankl and Drs. Robert and Dorothy Barnes**

### **Robert Barnes**

The first time Mrs. Frankl (Elly) met my wife, she exclaimed, “Oh, Dorothy, you are so tall!” To us, 5’7” is a healthy, attractive height. This comment was an expression of Elly’s genuineness.

As years passed, Elly told me I was away from home too frequently. “Bob, you and your Dorothy are separated from each other too often. Viktor and I never travel alone. We are always together.” While I never missed a class at the university where I taught, I was often away from home for two weekends each month. This gave me the opportunity either to make speeches about Dr. Frankl’s Logotherapy, or to conduct workshops where I taught the Institute’s curriculum involving Logotherapy.

Dr. Irmeli Sjolie, a prominent member of the Institute’s Board of Directors, sponsored a committee of five scholars who worked together one session per semester for five years studying Frankl’s Logotherapy and established a curriculum that is taught by the Institute’s faculty to students around the world. From the Foundation course all the way to Clinical Diplomate, Prof. Frankl’s curriculum is currently being taught in more than 40 countries.

During Dr. Frankl’s and my international teleconferences as his “private pupil”, Prof. Frankl was very strict with me. One time I mentioned his having been liberated from Auschwitz camp. He quickly responded, “Bob, you know I was not liberated from Auschwitz. I was liberated from Turkheim by a regiment of United States soldiers from Austin, Texas.”

Two of Prof. Frankl’s concepts that are particularly important to me are: (1) not to identify with our illness or handicap, and (2) we are three dimensional beings. Dr. Frankl dearly loved young Jerry Long. Jerry had suffered in an accident that broke his neck when he was 19

years old. When Jerry returned to a junior college, his professor assigned his students to read Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl's concepts in that book meant so much to Jerry that he wrote to Viktor Frankl and said, "Your book taught me that the accident broke my neck, it did not break me."

Dr. Frankl emphasized the importance of not identifying with our illness nor handicap. While he was very grateful for the good work done world-wide by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), he used this concept to teach me. He said at an AA's meeting, a person might say, "My name is Bill, and I am an alcoholic". When referring to Jerry's condition, we should not have his handicap be part of his identity. For example, I could say, "Because of the accident, Jerry struggles with quadriplegia," not that Jerry is a quadriplegic. This brave young man went all the way, earning his PhD degree, and becoming an outstanding university professor. In my own case, I had an illness known as polio as a teenager. At this time in my life, I am dealing with what is known as the post-polio syndrome. I would never think of introducing myself by saying, "My name is Bob, and I am a lame leg."

I also want to emphasize the significance about Dr. Frankl's concepts of being three dimensional. He taught us that body and mind are what we have. Spirit is what we are. In June, 1996, Prof. Frankl called me and said, "Bob, come soon or we will have to postpone our reunion until we are together in heaven someday." That year, the Fourth of July (America's Independence Day) was on Thursday. Dorothy and I turned in our graduate students' grades for the first summer semester on Wednesday July 3<sup>rd</sup>. We flew from Texas to Vienna that night. That was the beginning of a memorable weekend. I want to use this example from our shared interactions that weekend. You will remember that Frankl was a scientist, not a theologian. Nevertheless, it was during that weekend that he referred to being of the Jewish faith. He said,

“In the Jewish tradition, I have retained the faith of the mother who bore me. You probably remember that in our bedroom, there is a crucifix over Elly’s bed, and the Star of David over my bed. In Vienna, we will not be allowed to be buried in the same cemetery because of the faith that we practiced. I have tried to teach that in my concepts of being three dimensional beings, body and mind are what we have, but spirit is what we are. Spirit does not come from matter. It can never get sick, old, nor die. For us, that has a special meaning. All that is going to be buried is the body we lived in, our spirit will always be together with each other.” He went on to add these powerful thoughts, “Recently, someone asked me how long eternity is. I responded by saying, ‘You are asking the wrong question, there is no time in eternity, eternity is forever.’” Those were memorable days that we spent together.

Adding to the concept of togetherness, Elly pointed to her typewriter. “See that chair. That’s where Viktor sits next to me while I type his answers to 9 or 10 letters that he still receives every day from around the world. That’s how we are Bob. We are always together.” This very special couple continued to enlighten the world with Viktor Frankl’s concepts. They did it together!

When the taxi came to take Dorothy and me to the airport to fly home to Texas, Dr. Frankl leaned into the open window and gave me a kiss on the forehead. He closed his eyes and uttered words from another language. He said, “My tears are tears of joy. I have given you my blessing.”

Later he wrote, “It comforts me to know that, at this time in my life, a significant part of my legacy is passed into the hands and entrusted to the leadership of Dr. Robert Barnes. He represents Logotherapy at its best.”

Fourteen months after our memorable weekend together, Dr. Jay Levinson telephoned me and said that Dr. Frankl's son-in-law, Dr. Franz Vesely, had just telephoned him that Dr. Frankl had died earlier that day. Dr. Vesely wanted Dr. Levinson to relay the message to me. Truly, the spirit of this humble, great man had transcended into eternity!

Today, we join Dr. Frankl in having many devoted scholars who are teaching Frankl's Logotherapy, and enriching so many lives at our Institute's biennial World Congresses. We have many participants attending from as many as 37 nations and speaking 11 languages. Our Congress this year will have to be a virtual Congress. We regret that Covid-19 has prevented our being together, other than together in spirit. Our theme is extremely timely: The Imperative Need for Finding Meaning and Purpose in our Troubled World. You will be excited and grateful for the Institute's new webpage. We believe that you will welcome the re-establishing of the The International Forum for Logotherapy: Journal for Search of Meaning.

Dr. Robert C. Barnes, PhD., President  
International Board of Directors  
Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy

## Some Frankl-Related Thoughts and Memories

### Bob and Vicki Hutzell

In Man's Search for Meaning, Dr. Viktor Frankl notes that meaning opportunities are available across time. Presented below are four of the meaning opportunities presented to Bob and Vicki Hutzell by Frankl across the years in various ways. Sometimes, he was aware he offered these opportunities; on other occasions, he wasn't. The Hutzell's provide four personal memories, significant to the meaning of their lives, where Dr. Viktor Frankl impacted them in both direct and indirect ways. The first three are in Bob's voice; the fourth is in Vicki's perspective.

#### Logotherapy Came First

In the fall of 1974, as a clinical psychology intern under Dr. Jim Crumbaugh's supervision, I read Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning. Then, at Jim's direction, I read Frankl's other books available in English at that time: The Doctor and the Soul, Psychotherapy and Existentialism, and The Will to Meaning.

I thought: Wow, Frankl has the same philosophy about life as I do ... well, not a hundred percent, but very similar, and more comparable than any other philosophy I have encountered.

I commented to Jim that, in practice, I saw overlap in logotherapy and some other psychotherapies, particularly Frankl's paradoxical intention and dereflection. However, logotherapy added an additional, important dimension.

"Uh-huh, yes," Jim responded. "Yes ... I see."

I told Jim, "Logotherapists' procedures sometimes look very similar to treatments offered by other types of therapists."



Jim stroked his goatee. “No, Bob, it’s the opposite. It’s not that sometimes logotherapy looks like other psychotherapy procedures. Rather, instead, those other procedures look like logotherapy, you see, and the practitioners don’t always know it.”

I agreed; the original logotherapy books and journal articles predated the “newer” psychotherapies by years in many areas.

#### Others Will Discover the Same Truths

On more than one occasion, I heard Viktor Frankl state that if his theories revealed universal truths about humans, then other persons would discover those same truths in their own ways, with their own words. I think today we see the rediscovery of those same basic truths through different methods, in different words.

One example in mental health comes within the Positive Psychology movement. Early on, Positive Psychology focused on optimism. It moved on to happiness.

Now it has come to meaning in life as a salient topic. At times, the current authors know their recent work parallels Frankl. At other times, they aren’t aware they have discovered the same truths Frankl described.

Over the years, several persons alleged that others’ work was lifted from Frankl. They proposed writing articles in The International Forum for Logotherapy exposing this.

I questioned whether the others stole from Frankl or whether they rediscovered some of the universal truths Frankl realized and articulated so well. Did the newer authors misappropriate Frankl’s ideas, or did they corroborate his ideas without knowing it?

I suggested the persons who contacted me ask the others if they knew Frankl discovered the same truths years earlier. Rather than accuse others (from which a negative, defensive response

is probable), help them grow through increased knowledge upon which they might build and expand. Thus, they could gain from what Frankl and logotherapists have already set out.

While editor of the Forum, I contacted persons whose research publications in other journals paralleled Frankl's earlier work. I discussed the similarities with Frankl's theories and invited them to submit summaries of their research to the Forum, with reference to how their work fit Frankl's. Several of these researchers thanked me and submitted excellent articles.

### A Postcard's Impact

Another notable memory came on a blustery 1994 fall day in Iowa. I picked up my mail at the post office to find an unanticipated postcard in the stack.

I immediately recognized the tiny, scratchy penmanship of Joe Fabry. Then there was more—the characteristic felt-tip penmanship of Viktor Frankl! The two had co-written the card to Vicki and me just to say they were having a good occasion together in Vienna, and they hoped we were doing well.

I suspect the two of them thought it would be meaningful for Vicki and me to receive the co-authored postcard, just to let us know they had thought of us. They were correct!

I framed the postcard. It hung in my office over the years as a reminder of the unexpected kindness of two persons I held in high respect.

I received a few Frankl letters across time, but those were formal and academic. And I received many Fabry letters, both formal and informal. However, that one casual postcard, signed by both Joe Fabry and Viktor Frankl, stood out as an example, a reminder that reaching out to others with kind, positive words can result in affirmative, meaningful memories.

From time to time, I noticed the postcard on my wall and used it as a cue to send a confirmative message to someone I had not contacted in a while. Of course, neither Frankl nor

Fabry knew I used their card as a reminder to affirm others at unanticipated moments. So, the Frankl/Fabry card impacted not only my memories but also my behavior over the years.

### Frankl's Grandchildren Represented Him Well

The ninth World Congress of Logotherapy, in 1993, in Toronto, Canada, provided the Hutzell family with lots of meaningful moments. We traveled by car over 800 miles from our home in central Iowa, through Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, into Ontario and on to the city of Toronto.

Per usual for us back then, our daughters attended the World Congress with us. Daisy turned 17 the month before, and Jilly turned 15 a week prior to our departure.

Viktor Frankl did not attend the '93 World Congress. Instead, he sent his grandchildren, Alexander and Katharina (Katja) Vesely, as his representatives.

The Frankl grandchildren were probably in their early 20s, so our girls thought the two Veselys were pretty cool. The Hutzell children hung out with the Veselys. One evening, Alex and Katja and a group of college-age students decided to venture out for ice cream, and they invited Daisy and Jilly to go along.

Of course, our children had a strong desire to participate. We, however, had reservations—our high school girls out with a college-age assemblage in a large unfamiliar city, hundreds of miles away from small-town Iowa? The Veselys assured us they would represent their grandfather well and would watch out for our girls. Then Arlen Salthouse, an adult, offered to accompany the adventure since his niece, Samantha, was part of the group.

With these assurances, we relented. The Hutzell girls enjoyed the experience and were impressed by the Veselys. After the group returned, Alex made a point of telling us the excursion

had been a meaningful experience, enjoyable, and quite under control. In fact, Katja and Daisy went on to exchange letters, and the correspondence continued several years.

### Postface

Frankl has impacted countless people in many ways. Often this has come indirectly, to the millions who read *Man's Search for Meaning*.

We Hutzells consider ourselves privileged to have experienced Frankl in direct and indirect ways. We selected the four particular memories above because they represented a variety of memories that stood out to us as significant in our lives.

Robert R. Hutzell, PhD, is a clinical psychologist who holds a Diplomate credential from The Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy. Bob has held several professional organization positions (including President of the National Organization of VA Psychologists, President of the Iowa Psychological Association). He and his wife, Vicki, produced *The International Forum For Logotherapy* for many years. Bob is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, and is a certified Health Service Provider in Psychology. He has published widely and has received several national and international recognitions.

Vicki L. Hutzell, BA, was long-time production manager of *The International Forum For Logotherapy*. She is a Lifetime Member of The Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy. Among other awards, she and Bob together have received the Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award.

## **Knowing Viktor Frankl**

**Patricia Starck**

In the late 1970s I was a doctoral student in nursing at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. I was interested in spinal cord injured patients—who were most often young men in the prime of life who had suffered a catastrophic and life-changing event. As a rehabilitation nurse, I had long observed that some took the path of feeling sorry for themselves, feeling the world owed them a living, bitter and unhappy, and these were the ones more likely to fail to take care of themselves and end up with pressure ulcers of the skin, kidney infections, and various other complications. On the other hand, there were those patients who in spite of what had happened were an inspiration to others. They determined that life would go on and they would accomplish their goals. They worked hard at rehabilitation and lived up to their potential. I pondered what a nurse could do to help patients get on the right path.

One of the pleasures of doctoral study is that you get to read and explore a wide scope of literature. In doing so, I came across the work of Joyce Travelbee, a psychiatric nurse from New Orleans. It was here I first read about Viktor Frankl and the light bulb in my head immediately went off! Of course, finding a new sense of purpose could stimulate my young patients to find new meaning in spite of their life circumstances. From everything I could find, Frankl's Logotherapy had only been used with those with mental health disorders. As a brash young doctoral student, I decided to write to Dr. Frankl and ask if Logotherapy had been used with patients like mine. I'm not sure I even expected a reply from this famous man all the way across the sea in Vienna. But imagine my surprise when I did receive a reply, encouraging me to go forward as the first person to use Logotherapy with the physically disabled

I developed a nursing intervention for my study with patients referred from the Spain Rehabilitation Center who lived in their homes and were past the acute phase of injury. With

control and experimental groups, I tested my intervention model which consisted of assessment using the Purpose in Life (PIL) and the Seeking of Noetic Goals (SONG) test. The intervention I designed incorporated Socratic dialog, paradoxical intention, and dereflection. I measured results by comparing scores on the PIL and SONG pre-and post- tests. Like much doctoral student research, my results were not statistically earth shattering, but clinically, I could see the effect even on those in the control group who by just taking the PIL and SONG were stimulated to think about meaning and purpose in life (Starck, 1979).

In 1979 I submitted a paper describing my research to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress of Logotherapy in San Diego and I was thrilled to have it accepted for presentation. Going from an impoverished student to a professional woman now addressed as “Dr.” and registering at a fancy hotel was a thrill in itself, but imagine my surprise upon registration of being told, “Dr. Frankl is looking for you.”

“Dr. Frankl is looking for ME?” was my startled reply. And just about that time, an energetic, charismatic, gray-haired man followed by others came up to me and enthusiastically told me “I quoted from your study last week when I gave a talk in Montreal about Logotherapy being used with the physically handicapped.”

It was a wonderful Congress and I was awed to be in the presence of so many professionals dedicated to Logotherapy, such as Joseph Fabry. Yes, I was star-struck. But the amazing thing was how down to earth these icons were. I felt welcomed into the inner circle and it was a tremendously inspiring and satisfying feeling.

I continued to see Dr. Frankl at subsequent World Congresses and in 1987, just three years after accepting a new job as Dean, School of Nursing at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, I was able to invite Dr. Frankl to the Texas Medical Center to give a

lecture, thanks to the sponsorship of Dr. John P. McGovern, a benefactor of scholarly work and an admirer of Dr. Frankl's.

I met Dr. Frankl and his wife Elly at our local airport and he amazed me with his energy level and no sign of travel fatigue. In fact, he was moving so fast that before I could stop him he headed the wrong way through an automatic door and received a cut on his hand. Oh, great—five minutes in my presence and already he is injured! We got a flesh colored band aid, and he didn't miss a beat. I was to learn that it took Elly and me both to try and slow him down. I told him I had just gotten a new edition of his book *Man's Search for Meaning* and he asked to be taken to the bookstore to get a copy. Elly said, "No, Viktor. You must go to the hotel to rest," and that is where I headed.

The next morning I picked them up at the hotel and headed to the auditorium where the lecture was to take place. It was in Sammons Hall in the Jones Building which also housed the Texas Medical Center Library. As we got everyone seated on the stage, Dr. Frankl asked me if he could get a cup of coffee. I surmised that the caffeine must help him with the energy level he would need for his lecture. But to be sure, I asked him, "Regular or Decaf?" He said, "Regular, but do not tell them 'Not Decaf' because all they will hear is 'Decaf' and they will get it wrong." I have remembered that so many times—don't state what you don't want because the listener will be confused and get it wrong.

The event was a historic one in the life of the 40 or so institutions belonging to the Texas Medical Center. The mayor's office presented a key to the city of Houston, many other dignitaries welcomed Dr. Frankl. The auditorium was packed with Houston icon physicians in white coats and others who came to hear this famous man speak. Something happened which has never happened before or since in the Texas Medical Center—not a person stirred from their

seats, no beepers were heard, no one made a quiet exit for the 90 minutes that Dr. Frankl spoke. The audience was spell bound. The lecture was recorded and is available on YouTube- The Rehumanization of Psychotherapy. During his stay in Houston, the two of us conducted an interview with Jerry Long, a spinal cord injured patient who had discovered Dr. Frankl's work which had become an inspiration for him. That interview is also available on YouTube- Logotherapy: A Conversation with Viktor Frankl, M.D. Ph. D.

Some years later I was able to travel to Vienna and accept Dr. Frankl's invitation to visit him and Elly in their home. They were very gracious host and hostess, and Viktor was his usually animated self, showing me various items in their home, including a couch that had been in Freud's office. We took photos and when my visit was over, Dr. Frankl insisted on giving me money for a cab. Of course, I didn't spend it, but rather framed it. Not many people can claim such an artifact!

I consider it a precious privilege to have known Dr. Viktor Frankl over a period of 20 years. His thoughts have permeated and influenced my work, my family, and all aspects of my life.

Starck, Patricia Lee (1979) Spinal Cord Injured Clients' Perception of Meaning and Purpose in Life: Measurement Before and After Nursing Intervention. Dissertation Abstracts.

Videos available on YouTube

**Existential Analysis, the precondition for effective psychotherapeutic help.**





**Willem Maas, Ph.D., MA Psychol., Diplomate of Logotherapy.**

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“Reality is a hardship anyway, but life is beautiful! It is full of challenges for improvement, my presence is required”.

Introduction

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) made Existential Analysis a precondition for any psychotherapeutic help<sup>1</sup>. My contribution deals with the question of what an Existential Analysis<sup>2</sup> according to Viktor Frankl is meant to be, and I will explain my contribution to its further theoretical and practical development.

My name is Dr. Willem Maas. I met with Dr. Frankl’s work during the early 1970s while standing in front of a bookcase in the library of the theology department of the protestant university in Brussels, looking for literature supporting my guess that pastoral care should follow the dynamics of the biblical narrative rather than borrow its theory and practice from psychology. The books I found were Frankl’s “Men’s search for Meaning”, and “The doctor and the Soul”, and “Man’s search for ultimate Meaning”. Having no clue who Frankl was and what his work meant, I started reading. During my doctoral work, I focused on the Theory and practice of Questions for Meaning, Psychology, and Philosophy. My 1987 Ph.D. is in theology, dealing with the issue of “ἐξουσία”, the ultimate freedom (authority) for change as the pragmatic explication of what is meant in “Being created in the image and likeness of G`d”. The book centers around the gospel according to Marc. In 1988 I founded the Netherlands Institute for Logotherapy and Existential Analysis according to Viktor Frankl, at the same time working as a

part-time business manager's coach, and teaching Logotherapy to social workers, nurses, pastoral caregivers. With the help of Prof. Dr. Jerry Long and Prof. Dr. Gina Giovinco, my supervisor, I was able to set up and stabilize a training program. The training program was established in coordination with Dr. Frankl and received his written agreement and blessing. I authored several training manuals, both in Dutch and in English, as I was invited to be a therapist - supervisor with the Sherwood Psychotherapy Institute in Nottingham. My training manuals found their way to Scotland, Turkey, and India. During the 1990's I undertook training in natural and holistic complementary medicine. During the years 1992- 2004, I served as a national representative of the Netherlands in the Board of the European Association of Psychotherapy in Vienna. In 2006 I moved to Germany, working as a technical manager in the dental practice of my beloved wife. Until this date I am involved in online training and supervising for the Netherlands Institute, now managed and coordinated by my good friend and valued colleague Pieter Hoekstra ([www.viktorfrankl.nl](http://www.viktorfrankl.nl)).

Respected Members of the Board of the VFI, dear colleagues. It is a great honor to be able to present to you a short version of my work with Viktor Frankl's Existential Analysis & Logotherapy. I kindly ask you to forgive me for not being more explicit.

#### 1.0. On Existential Analysis according to Viktor Frankl.

Most of us are familiar with the meaning-oriented approach Viktor Frankl taught. Meaning depending on individual personal values, there are three categories of personal values, encompassing creative or pro-active values, experiential values, and attitudinal values. Values are the foundation of the so-called “Argumenta ad hominem ad situationem<sup>3</sup>”, the arguments speaking in favor of the person within his/her current situation, be it a predicament, a crisis, a challenge, or even in situations of having to face the end of life. Such values appear in answers to

the “How on earth did you manage?”- questions we as therapists, counselors, coaches use to ask when we are looking for a possible momentum for a Logotherapy<sup>4</sup>.

It is here that our problem begins. What we want to find out is the hierarchy of those values. Maybe you remember the story of Steven Covey about things that matter for a happier life. Happy is considered to be a value and a goal. One cannot be unhappy unless one has an earlier experience of happiness, can one? Maybe you also remember the YouTube video of a philosophy professor by the name of Kim Emerson, directed and produced by Meir Kalmanson. Professor Emerson enters his classroom, putting a large jar on the table, and he starts filling it with golf balls, asking the students if the jar is full when the last golf ball went into it. They, his students agreed. Then he adds small pebbles, asking the same question after all the pebbles the jar could contain went in. The students agree; the jar is full. Then he starts adding sand, and the sand takes up all the space left between the golf balls and the pebbles. Emerson asks his class if they think the jar is full now. They do agree, the jar is full. To conclude the experiment, Emerson takes two beers, and, uncapping both bottles, he pours some beer into the jar. Emerson explains the experiment: The golf balls represent loved ones, family, friends, the really important things in someone's life. The pebbles represent one's home, job, money, etc., and the sand stands for the rest of life's little things. It is a philosophy class, and the question is about how to lead a happier life. “Start with the great balls, set your priorities well,” says Emerson. The rest will follow those priorities. One student asks what the beer stands for. Emerson's answer: There is always time for a beer or two with a good friend. Very clear, very short, very visual. Almost tentative, as if psychotherapy is about happiness. It is not, because if happiness would be life's purpose almost all of us would be spoiling it being involved in so many other things. It is not, because if happiness would be life's goal, almost each of us would fail to reach it. Because: As soon as we

have to think about happiness, it has either not yet occurred or, we just lost it. The search for happiness, or the freedom to enjoy, perhaps an issue for a psychoanalysis and/or a behavioral psychology, however, not necessarily an issue for a logotherapy. I would say that happiness is like the phantom of what marketing made into the opera of life. We know from Frankl's work, that happiness may occur when doing the right thing in the right way, as a side effect of it. Being preoccupied with love as a goal is compulsive or even worse, narcissistic. I am fully aware of the controversial effects of my words here, but since I endorse being a realist, that is where I stand in this issue. Thanks to it, I was spared to lose a great deal of time, I would also say. Another way to find out that happiness is neither the pinnacle of quality in life nor is it the goal to achieve is when we consider the individual's taste for it. Gratification, pleasure is not happiness, and there is a world of perversions being sold under the hood of happiness as we all might be aware of. So, let us turn away from it and look into what Frankl has coined to be existential analysis. He said it was the investigative side, the research side of a Logotherapy, and he iterated that it is the foundation of psychotherapy as such. Although Frankl coined the terminology and gave it the right position, he did not claim it by issuing a set of rules or even a paradigm for it.

I        n one word: Frankl coined LTEA but -it was during the first world congress-, he warned each one of us to make him the guru of LTEA, or to impose as one ourselves (sic!). We are left with unconditional freedom for a good reason because EA is supposed to help us, therapists, counselors, caregivers, educators, parents, friends, etc., to become free for the person who is asking us for assistance or help. We are blessed with this freedom to find out who our visitor actually is before we slip into the professional gown and start trusting what we have learned instead of learning what and who we don't have a clue about. We are blessed with the freedom to suspend judgment, even diagnostical judgment, to free ourselves from ourselves for the sake of

the other, whose main problem is the conflict between his or her reality and his or her sense of meaning and dignity.

### 1.1. Existential Analysis, why is it the prerequisite of any psychotherapy?

Frankl's Existential Analysis looks for Ariadne's thread in the maze of unhappiness, discomfort, and misery. Once found, this thread becomes the lifeline for what is coined as Logotherapy, a step-by-step journey towards a meaningful life. Existential Analysis is therefore looking for the arguments that speak for this person, who is seeking to confide in us in order to facilitate us to ask what needs to be asked in order to help this person to outgrow, overcome, heal, reconcile, remobilize himself or herself to become open for the new questions of the next situation.

Defining the human being, Frankl taught us that the human is the one deciding who he or she is going to be in this next moment. Frankl underlined that it is life itself that is putting the questions in front of each of us at any time, not the demands, requirements, expectations, needs we carry around with our individualized realities.

Frankl taught us the two major benefits of being human within the features imposed by the realities of our world. Self-distance and Self-transcendence; benefits that both lead away from ego and both are being executed by the self. The self into who we will completely turn after we have left our psychophysical reality behind. I always think of the Self as a butterfly. Butterflies are quite rare these days, but when we see one, the awe for their beauty arises and a little moment of what is called the oceanic experience re-occurs. A feeling of being embedded in life, which is embedded in me at the same time. Meeting a true Self, that truly is something! In Frankl's Memories, he mentions such moments twice, as I remember. The first time, shortly before almost dying in the frozen ditch, he suddenly experiences the intense connection to the love of his wife. A second time, after his liberation,

when he was in the meadow experiencing his awe for God – and I guess at the same time- the commitment for his life to still come. We also know that he experienced grave depression after these elevated experiences. In 1983, at the 3d World Congress in Regensburg, Frankl lectures about “Arguments for a tragic optimism<sup>5</sup>”, arguments for life despite loss, guilt, death. It is this lecture that – at least in my opinion – contains a key to what is meant by the terminology “Existential Analysis” and its necessity for us as people who apply it. Of course, it means that we are looking for the values of a client. However, we do not need the obvious values, the obvious social, the obvious religious, the obvious interpersonal ones. Such values are likely trained abilities. Existential is what relates to the unconscious, somewhere hidden and therefore well-kept and protected in the background of mental processing and emotional reactions. Knowing this should help us stay as far away as possible from any sort of boot-strap ethics or Jungian interpretations. People’s realities, like ours, is a hardship because it is not providing comfortability. People’s lives, like our lives, are connected to the problems of the time spirit, prepped with expectations of comfortability and of being accepted just the way we are. People often forget, like we do, that it is exactly here that our problems occur. If you escape from your cancer, there is no returning to the life you used to live, because that is exactly the life that left you with your cancer. If your value system is connected to fake news, you will co-create your own fake reality. If you feel that the core of your life should be happiness or success, you will lead a neurotic life and it will cause a lot of damage. Why is that? Because you were only meant to be you, that is: the authentic expression of your Self.

Thus, EA is looking for the moments of experienced Self-hood. We know that this Self-hood means “being with the other”, thus avoiding misinterpretations and misunderstanding. “What about me, my ego?” – you are familiar with this, aren’t you? That is where Adler started when he

tried to improve the libidinal pleasure principle of the first version of Psychoanalysis. “But if you are right, and then, when I will actually be dead, my Self as you said before, where will I then be, what about my ego?”. For those left behind, you will be “with the Other”, and for the Self who you then will be, you will still be with the others, the ones you left behind. But it will be without the psychophysical, including the ego. Trying to be a complete Self during your lifetime? What about Selfishness? Or Spiritism? Or Energism?<sup>6</sup> All “Isms” reduce who a human being actually is. Frankl, having lived through the ultimate cruelty of such reductionisms, fiercely opposed to a one-dimension approach of the suffering human being. That is where his 3-dimensional image of the human being came in, and where we find the 2 dimensional-ontological laws. The polarity of our worldly existence requires that we as persons can only be persons due to and in connection with the other. We all do have at least one mother, don't we? The polarity Frankl clearly understood because you cannot live life with clean hands. Not everything we touch turns into gold, we know that when we face – which is in connection to the other – the crises we as humans are being confronted with. Man-made crises they are, because what we experience from nature, we have coined as a disaster. It is not so much the hurricane that makes people homeless, it is very much the way we built houses, as well as the indifference towards the victim. It is not the flood that kills cattle and destroys crops, it is due to the way we manage the water and the land we decided to live on. I know this does not solve the problems, nor does it ameliorate any type of loss. Earlier we decided to remain realistic, and that is why we call a donkey a donkey, don't we? The next question now is how we as therapists can mobilize the unconscious values, the ones that our client may not even be consciously aware of. Do such values truly exist? Are these values part of the inner compass which is always pointing in the direction of meaning, contributing to human dignity? Are these values governing our

personal spirit because once we have confirmed our being, they will govern us towards completion? Do they? What we need to find is access to the original personal attitude towards life, accepting one's psycho-physical condition without any "Yes, but". To find out, I introduced the so-called "nominal Socratic dialogue"<sup>7</sup>, which contains the search for nouns only. Nominal also refers to basic, fundamental issues that are, behind the scenes of learned behavior and/or neurotic compensations, the mental containers for expressions of existential experiences. I prefer to avoid the use of "spiritual" here because this word opens a box full of religious, or dogmatic issues we do not want to interfere at this point. I will come back to this issue at a later stage of this contribution. Nominal Socratic dialogue aims at a conscious expression of the unconscious inner dialogue between the psycho-social reactions and the features of the present reality in which our client actually and experientially lives, looking for an attitude that allows the confirmation of a previously expressed, unconditional "Yes, I do!" toward life. This moment of an unconditional "Yes, I do" is what we are looking for! Existential Analysis is looking for Ariadne's thread of positive, affirmative information from the life of the client, to help this individual to restore the existential- psycho-neuro-immunological (EPNEI) constitution which allows the next step. For us, Logo-therapists, this is the step-by-step assistance in remobilizing the capacity to actively participate in social activities that contribute to co-humane dignity. What we need to teach our clients is, that the original flexibility of the meaning-Gestalt means that a person can re-establish himself/herself without ever losing one's proper identity. Here I use the wording "Basic -ID". I am not using the word "Self" for good reasons. Self is who we are to become, only completed after we have left the psycho-physical dimension behind when we have passed away. Until that moment, our Self is about to change, without losing identity. Here the issues of freedom and response-ability come into play. From what Frankl taught in his famous



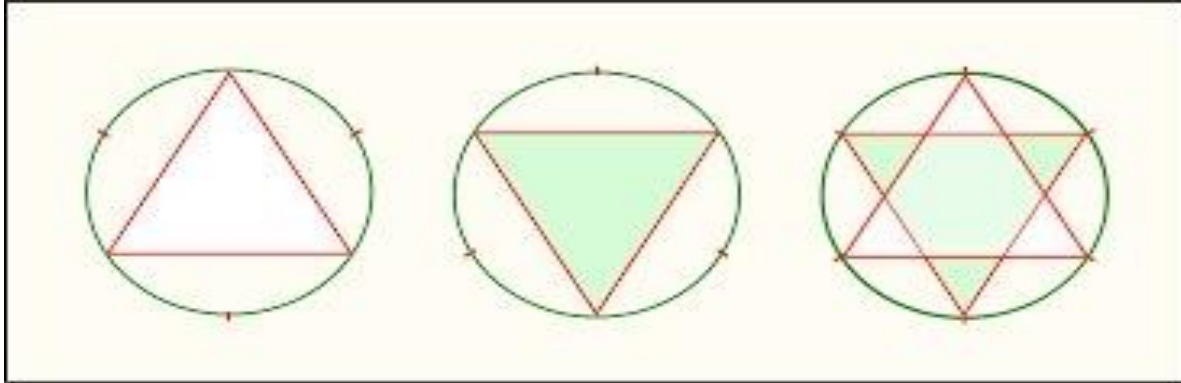
1946-1949 lectures for the University of Vienna concerning the unconditional human being, the Self is unconditional, is “who knocks at the door”, the Self remains unharmed, and – because the unconditional nature of Self-, the Self is not transient. For many clients the benefit of not yet having completed their expedition towards Self is a great blessing, helping them to not give up on their own lives. Arguments ad hominem always also are the individual arguments for a tragic optimism.

### 1.2. Existential Analysis, an effort to reach out to the spiritual person.

At this point, it would be helpful to now pick up a blank sheet of paper, a pencil, an eraser and write down six nouns that just pop up in your mind. In other words, using the psychoanalytical technique of free association, however, in a little different way. There are restrictions to the allowed nouns. First of all, they do not refer to things one can have or to those one does not have. After the six nouns have landed on the blank sheet, the next step is to make a hierarchy by marking the three most important nouns with an “x”. We now have three “x”-marked nouns, and three un-marked ones. From the “x”-marked ones, only one is the most important. This one becomes the double “x”. We now turn to the still unmarked ones, and mark the most complex or difficult one with a “-“. After this has been accomplished, one can start writing one sentence, beginning with “I”, putting in all the items in the hierarchical order. The sentence occurring is now scrutinized; how does it run? Does it contain all the items? If it is incomplete, which one of the items does not fit? One may now use the eraser, getting back to the 6 items and exchanging the one not fitting for a different one. Rewriting the sentence is what then may follow. If it runs smoothly, we may have found Ariadne`s thread. Because that is what Existential Analysis is about, finding the thread of our original memory of a most meaningful complex relationship with life, vice versa.

The seven issues statement, beginning with “I” as the seventh one, we just found represents, within the framework of the current situation and its questions that need to be answered, what Frankl calls “Ausdruck personaler Existenz”. It represents the expression of personal existence; not the psychological dimension but the expression of the encounter between the Self you are and the requirements of the situation you are currently facing. It represents- at least indirectly- the visible Self in action. Remember the hierarchy in the six nouns! One with a double “X”, being the most important, and two with only one “X”, being more important than the two left unmarked, and even more important than the one marked “-“. “If we put the found issues into their obvious relationship, we will find two triangles. One pointing upwards, one pointing downwards. The upwards pointing contains the “X” marked at the basis and the “XX” at the top. The downwards pointing contains the two unmarked nouns at the basis, and the “-“, at the top. If we now put these triangles together, a star appears. And, since it is you who found the points, and said “I”, you may put a “P” for “person” in the center of the star.

Whatever you do, whatever you experience, wherever you are, such a constellation accompanies your life. It is you, saying “Yes, I do” despite the situation, or the condition. It is you, whose name is written in the star that appears when we put the triangles into place. What we find here is the individualized version of what Frankl called “Arguments for a Tragic Optimism”. It is here that you will have found what speaks for you because it contains the current answer to a current problem that can only be solved by your commitment, even when it will take its toll on you. It looks like this is who you can be when you are at your best, don’t you agree?”.



xx

xx

P

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“Wow! What you have written down is called “Arguments for a Tragic Optimism”. It is you, managing effectively and meaningfully your reality, although it may have been a long time ago that you actually did this. It is a very strong memory, functioning like a lifeline, or a guide on the road of your very personal experiences and actions because it also explains your attitude towards reality and what needed to be changed. Do you remember when this occasion occurred? Where were you? What did you do? How did you feel having gone through this experience? You see, here, (pointing at the point of the equivalent of hope) you give a reason for your input (pointing at the point of the equivalent of suffering), and in spite of the reality (pointing at the point of the equivalent of transience) you found the courage to persevere (pointing at the point of the equivalent of faith), although it was clear to you (pointing at the point of guilt) that we are at least humans, not perfect, though aware of our greatest talent ( pointing at the point representing the equivalent of love) which allows and invites, and enables us to undertake the next step (pointing at the point of the equivalent of suffering) where we commit ourselves again. Maybe we can identify those points in your present situation, would that not be a good start for change?”

### 1.3. Dynamics of Existence, on being this unique person.

The dynamics of existence can only be started from the positive triangle's upper value. This one represents the unconditional "Yes, I do" to life<sup>8</sup>. "Yes, I do, thanks to and in spite of everything and everybody", as Frankl taught us. Before I mentioned it to be the oceanic experience, personally being embedded within life, life itself being embedded within you, depending on you being honest and true.

In reality, we see something that needs to be changed, improved, solved for the sake of a better situation, another person. We mark things left incomplete, undone, done but failed, or even worse, forsaken and not corrected. We get involved, and by changing the findings (presented values, not our "possession" or "conviction", nor our "beliefs") towards a difference, adding ourselves.

We can only deal with such issues from the unconditional Self, or, as many people will now recognize, from unconditional love. Because we cannot live with clean hands, we need to start from the most important force from the row of six, the one completed by the seventh, me as a person. Maybe we even remember words from Viktor Frankl from his "Recollections". In the depth of his fateful and unchangeable misery, at the brink of collapsing, the love for his wife and the promise they made each other in Theresienstadt, came to his rescue. Love feeds hope, despite suffering. If this would not be true, how then would a woman carry and give birth? Each puts her life on the scales for the sake of her child. Suffering does not need to be an inflicted fate! It may result from unconditional love. The tragedy is that we, modern people, tend to overlook this or even forget or ignore its truth. Hope feeds confidence or faith, despite transience, weakness, incompleteness, or even imminent death. Life is transient being. If we had no faith in what we do, why even begin doing it? Transience is reminding us of what needs to be completed, what

needs to be accomplished because we invested our love, our ability to self-distance while leaving our ego behind, our ability to self-transcend because of the other, and persevered by the force of our hope, the force that comes from participating wholeheartedly into the venture of existence. Existence being the meaningful personal answer to the hardships of day-to-day reality. Faith or confidence feeding the perception of what is left to do, ignored but in need to be done, what needs our renewed involvement. Guilt, what a human owes life within a given situation, is like suffering – not necessarily negative, however belonging to the tragic character of reality. Faith reinforces love, despite incompleteness, despite us not being able to the final answer to life's questions of changing reality into the home of mankind as a whole. I hope that you noticed that the circle of therapeutic energy turns right hand, it goes with time. The other way around, we will have the neurotic circle, the one that draws energy and drains love, health, humanness. This is why the row of six, put into one sentence, is of vital interest. It helps us, therapists, counselors, supporting friends, teachers, pastoral – and medical caregivers to find Ariadne's thread, be critical where necessary, and design our strategy for effective assistance towards healing, health, meaning, and dignity.

#### 1.4 Arguments pro humano humanitas.

With the help of an individual nominal Socratic dialogue, we have reached the momentum of the individual's active listening into the inner dialogue that was blocked by the hurt ego looking for our assistance of getting out of the maze. The solution is in the attitude<sup>9</sup>. The noticeable harmony of the existential dynamics may cause a deeply hidden positive emotion to emerge. Rediscovering who one used to be in affirming life while being affirmed as a Self by life, is a great healing moment<sup>10</sup>. At that particular moment, the contact between client and therapist changes too. Existential Analysis turns into a personalized version of Logotherapy. The

purpose of an Existential Analysis is to help people retrieving their very personal "yes, I do" towards life. The purpose of a Logotherapy is to help people finding the courage to face their present life in changing their attitude and actions towards dignity in being who they are.

“Psychotherapy cannot rest content with making a human capable of enjoying pleasure or of doing a day’s work; it must also make him/her capable of bearing suffering, in a very definite sense. This statement does not deserve augur’s laugh, nor does it merit that fashionable catchword of modern Western psychology, ‘Escapism’. True escapism means evading reality, and it consists precisely in fleeing from reality and from the predestined necessity of suffering, and from the possibility of filling that suffering with meaning. It is the neurotic above all who lacks the courage to suffer; he/she refuses to dare to suffer. He/she will not be helped by that imperative, *sapere aude* (dare to know), which represents the on-sided, superficial conception of *homo sapiens*; he/she needs that other imperative, *pari aude* (dare to suffer), which corresponds to the conception of *homo patiens*, the human who suffers meaningfully, who fills his/her suffering with meaning.<sup>11</sup>”. Even in our present predicaments, where the slogan “everything is possible but no commitment” appears to destine the order of the day, affecting fatefully the lives of so many people, including the lives of the next generations, both steps- Existential Analysis as well as a customized Logotherapy- are necessary to help individuals requiring therapeutic assistance, psychiatric help, psychological counseling or pastoral care, that live is a human challenge to be fulfilled and a task to be performed in order to – in the end, at the zenith of completion – help shaping reality into our shared humane future, a habitat created out of meaning and filled with dignity.

This is why Psychotherapy without a preceding Existential Analysis is not just short-selling the client, but also damaging the essence of what Psychotherapy is supposed to stand for.

Ariadne's thread is to begin where the unconditional "Yes, I do" began, it is the lifeline for a meaningful, healthy life, that is: "in dignity". Being someone the one who is responsible for his/her acts and free for the requirements of life itself. The very goal of Existential Analysis for our client/patient is "gnôthi seauton", know thyself.

And for us, therapists, coaches, caregivers, Existential Analysis helps us to find the momentum for the start of what is called a Logotherapy.

Thank you for your attention.

<sup>1</sup> V. E. Frankl *Das Menschenbild der Seelenheilkunde, Kritik des dynamischen Psychologismus*, Stuttgart, 1957, p. 53 "It goes without saying; whenever we speak of Existential Analysis, we do not mean the word "Analysis" in its ordinary meaning, but in the sense of "Explication of actual Existence", and every kind of such an explication occurs by means of the medium of biography. Because during the course of someone's life it shows like unrolling a carpet, who this person actually is. That is where and how we best learn who this person is in relation to his/her reality as well as in relation to his/her meaningful possibilities: Life is always already a kind of "Self-explication of personal being". Also see: V. E. Frankl in: A. Batthyani, Viktor E. Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness, A challenge to Psychotherapy and Philosophy*, Marquette Studies in Philosophy No. 60, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 2010, p. 81-93. V. E. Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen, Einführung in Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse*, München 2007, p. 215 „Existential Analysis is not just the explication of ontic Existence, it also is the ontological explication of what Existence itself stands for. In this respect, Existential Analysis is the effort of an Anthropology of Psychotherapy, an anthropology which precedes all Psychotherapy, not just Logotherapy". For

non-German students of Frankl's work, the most excellent translation which James M. Dubois, "Viktor E. Frankl, On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders", New York, 2004, on p. 229 provided will be helpful to understand the efforts of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> V. E. Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen, Einführung in Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse*, München 1987, p. 55, where Frankl asks "As what did the Existential Analysis, the general Existential Analysis, defined the human? As a being, who is responsible for his being and ought.". In the current essay this definition is the starting point, and I endeavor to show a method to apply EA as a personalized EA.

<sup>3</sup> V. E. Frankl, *Der leidende Mensch, Anthropologische Grundlagen der Psychotherapie*, Bern, 1984 -2018, p. 199-216 contains the very core of Frankl's work; looking for the person in spite of problems and/or disorders.

<sup>4</sup> I speak of "a Logotherapy", because any Logotherapy is personalized customized for a particular client, dependant, as we will see, on the outcome of his/her unconditional "Yes, I do" towards life (and therefore also towards oneself). The words of Hillel "If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not me, who will? IF not now, when then?" encompass the purpose and goals of LTEA.

<sup>5</sup> V. E. Frankl, *Trotzdem hat das Leben einen Sinn, Argumente für einen tragischen Optimismus*, Lecture, 1983

<sup>6</sup> V. E. Frankl, *Das Menschenbild der Seelenheilkunde, Kritik des dynamischen Psychologismus*, Stuttgart, 1957, page 46 ff. where Frankl warns against any form of Ppsychologism. Any form of Psychologism reduces human being into something lesser than. This is also called Homunculism. The little mannequin, who is considered and expected to be less than he ought to and could be, or "nothing else but". This format did not occur in the



concentration camps during the Holocaust. It was designed decades earlier by researchers and philosophers in their offices, in the universities (op. cit. p.48). Modern, so-called evidence-based psychology offers results that give us the impression of being a universal definition of what a human being is. Frankl warns, saying “Homunculism is able to make history. We know it already did (op.cit. p. 46). Frankl is not opposed to empirical research! Even when the noetic dimension, the one this article de facto speaks of, cannot be proven by common psychological research methods, the “Arguments for a tragic optimism” explains the complex unity of a person’s life through decisions and acts, experiences and memories towards change for a different reality than the one inducing human action. Here it is that the noetic expresses the Self in action, in terms of “individually expressing the Self within the consecutive reality of Existence”.

<sup>7</sup> V. E. Frankl, *der leidende Mensch, Anthropologische Grundlagen der Psychotherapie*, Bern, 1982, cf. A. Batthyani, E. Lukas, in: *Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse Heute, eine Standortbestimmung*, Innsbruck, 2020, p. 96 ff. Socratic dialogue as a phenomenological method aims to find out for what or whom a client lived his/her life in terms of his/her “being with the other”, i.e. his/her unconditional love. Despite diagnosed disorder, presented misery, feelings of worthlessness and inner emptiness, desperation, etc , the Socratic dialogue aims to find out if and about what the healthy core, the spiritual commitment is concerned. I took the “nominal” Socratic dialogue, because it is the attitude towards life and perceived Self in terms of (unconscious) commitment is where the healing energy is hidden. That is also why Existential Analysis is a methodological issue, preceding any psychotherapy.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. V. E. Frankl in: Viktor E. Frankl, *The feeling of Meaninglessness*”, op. Cit. P. 206-207, where it reads: “Meaning is unconditional. At the outset, we spoke of the meaning of love and the meaning of life. Love is certainly one way to meaning; but it is not the only way. In other

words, it is in no way a sine qua non, an indispensable prerequisite of finding meaning in life”. This is why I use the “Yes, I do” towards life- phrase.

<sup>9</sup> V. E. Frankl, *der leidende Mensch*, op.cit., p 204 “The actualization of attitudinal values presupposes- if the attitude would be an effort – both suffering and the ability to suffer”. A Logotherapy in its specific aim is to mobilize the ability to suffer (from unavoidable problems, conditions, circumstances, disorders).

<sup>10</sup> V. E. Frankl, *der leidende Mensch*, op. cit., p. 200, 241, the copernical turn-around in the mindset of the client.

<sup>11</sup> Free from V. E. Frankl, *The feeling of Meaninglessness*, edited. A. Batthyani, op.cit. , p. 187-188. I took the freedom of changing the noun “man” into “human” and to change the pronoun “his” into “his/her”, being sure that Frankl was a highly sensible person when it came to respecting other people’s personhood.

[This Essay contains 5.838 words]

**The Frankl Cure for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:  
Why Self-Transcendence is the Key to Mental Health and Flourishing**

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**Abstract**

Viktor Frankl has the best answer to the mental health crisis during COVID-19, and we ignore him at our own peril. His dialectical and paradoxical self-transcendence (ST) model emphasizes that we can find our true self only by letting go of the old one. He defines meaning in terms of ST and propose that meaning is the key to mental health and flourishing. My remembrance of Frankl revolves on his three aspects of ST: (1) ST is an awe-inspiring way of life, (2) ST is at the heart of therapies, and (3) ST represents a new paradigm for wellbeing research.

Keywords: Viktor Frankl, logotherapy, meaning therapy, self-transcendence, awe, existential positive psychology, suffering, resilience

## The Frankl Cure for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

### Why Self-Transcendence is the Key to Mental Health and Flourishing

Looking back, I owe Viktor Frankl such a great debt of gratitude that I do not even know how to start recounting his impact on my life and career in psychology. His writing is like an inexhaustible gold mine; the deeper I dig, the more I discover.

What really connects us is our similar experiences in suffering. Frankl was the product of German occupation, Nazi concentration camps, and discrimination against Jews; and I am the product of Japanese occupation, the Chinese civil war, Hong Kong refugee status, and discrimination against Asians in North America.

It was inevitable that my research on how to reduce suffering led me to Frankl's classic *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946/1985). This is why both of us have come to the same conclusion that our best self comes from our worst self and worst circumstances – a heresy to most positive psychologists and most Americans, but a truth consistent with the ancient wisdom of Taoism.

After more than 3 decades of studying Viktor Frankl, my professional judgement is that Dr. Frankl has the best answer to the mental health crisis during COVID-19 and we ignore him only at our own peril. Most people merely recognize him for his bestseller *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1946/1985), but very few understand his wisdom that we can find our true self only by letting go the old one. His dialectical and paradoxical self-transcendence model reminds us of Taoism.

In a nutshell, his self-transcendence model of mental health has two parts. First, his optimistic worldview in human potential (responsible freedom, the will to meaning, and the intrinsic meaning of life) transcends his tragic worldview of life (death, pain, and guilt); this mixture of positive and negative beliefs results in the invincible Tragic Optimism, which enables

us to dream the impossible dreams (Frankl, 1985; Leung et al., in press). His central concept, “the will to meaning”, is a spiritual act of volition to direct one’s life toward a transcendental goal in order to rise above the evitable suffering and death (Frankl, 1988).

Second, his meaning triad (creative, experiential, and attitudinal values) transcends the neurotic triad (aggression, addiction, and depression), resulting in meaningful living in spite of the potential for mental illness in a cruel and meaningless world. In other words, it is impossible to have meaning and happiness without death and suffering just as we cannot have light without darkness. Thus, his Yin-Yang framework of self-transcendence is the key to mental health and flourishing (Wong, 2021a).

I did not discover the essence of Frankl’s logotherapy by chance; it is the result of more than three decades of engagement with Frankl’s work. In my remembrance of Frankl, I just want to highlight three aspects of self-transcendence: (1) It is a lifestyle of a soul set on fire; (2) it is the heart of all effective therapeutic modalities; and (3) it is the ground-breaking insight into flourishing based on self-transcendence.

#### Self-Transcendence is an Awe-Inspiring Way of Life

In 1996, when I was working on my first edited volume of *The Human Quest for Meaning* (Wong & Fry, 1998), I took a chance and made a cold call to Viktor Frankl in Vienna. I did not expect to get any answer because he was an international “Rockstar” with his *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1946/1985), which sold over 16 million copies globally. To my surprise, he returned my phone call almost immediately with a strong voice. He apologized that he was too old to contribute a forward to my book and suggested a number of prominent logotherapists; all of them eventually contributed to my book.

He listened with great interest to my meaning research and my integrative meaning therapy; but what impressed me most was his passion for spreading the message that people cannot become fully human without discovering their transcending self and dedication to serve the greater good.

Later that year I was able to present my paper on meaning therapy during the 1st Congress of the World Council for psychotherapy (WCP), which took place in 1996, Vienna. I hoped to meet him in person, but for some unexpected personal reason, I was not able to attend the Conversation Hour with Viktor Frankl. However, my wife and I were able to visit his resident at Mariannegasse 1, 8th District, Vienna.

From my brief encounter with Frankl over the telephone, I could sense his unwavering passion to restore the soul in psychology (Wong, 2021b), just one year before his death. From my personal experience as an 84-year-old man, I know that it must have been exhausting for a 91-year-old Frankl to talk to me over the barriers of distance and different accents for more than half an hour. I was awe-struck and deeply loved by a soul on fire for logotherapy.

From my reading of his writing, and from my interaction with him, it is abundantly clear to me that according to Frankl, self-transcendence is neither a unique positive emotion to be pursued (Keltner & Haidt, 2003), nor a conceptual form to be expanded (Reed, 2003). It is basically a spiritual awakening that moves one's heart and soul so deeply that leading to the reorientation of one's life purpose and a fundamental change in one's life (Wong, 2016a, 2017a).

More specifically, Frankl believed that self-transcendence is a primary motivation characterized by (a) a shift in focus from the self to others, (b) a shift in values from extrinsic motivation, such as materialism, to intrinsic motivation (the activity itself is the reward), (c) an increase in moral concern of doing what is right, and (d) the emotion of awe that contributes to

life transformation and which inspires others (Wong, 2017b). My recent research on the four-factor measurement of self-transcendence (Wong, Arslan et al., in press) shows that a re-orientation of focus and value remains the dominant factor after several factorial studies, but the emotion of awe did not emerge as a unique factor.

Recent self-transcendence research tends to focus on the emotion of awe experienced during cognitive accommodation of something vast and unusual (Keltner & Haidt, 2003) without any reference to Frankl and his ST perspective of awe (Allen, 2018).

For Frankl, awe is not just an emotional response due to something so spectacular that it cannot be assimilated by our existing belief and knowledge structures. It is more like the following quotes from Anagarika Govinda: “The feeling of awe and sense of wonder arises from the recognition of the deep mystery that surrounds us everywhere, and this feeling deepens as our knowledge grows.”

In other words, Frankl’s self-transcendence model provides a much broader and deeper way to experience awe as a lifestyle, as shown in Figure 1.

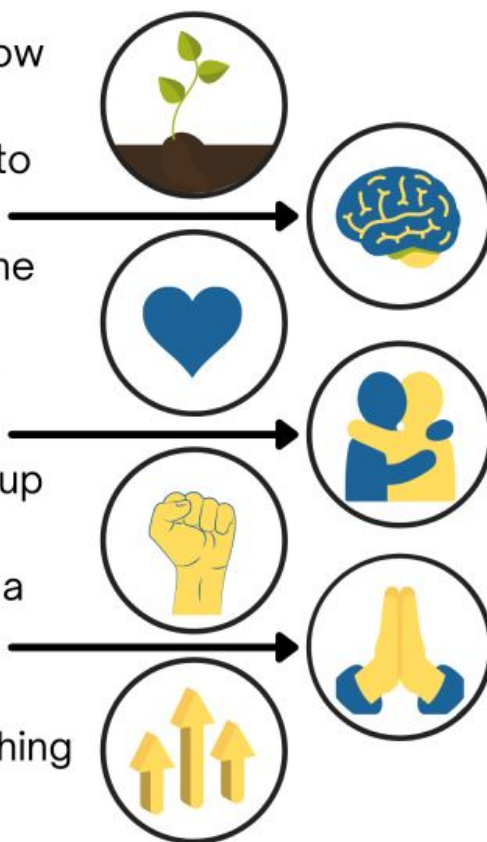
Figure 1

The Seven Ways to Boost Awe and Wellbeing Based on the Self-Transcendence Model of Flourishing

## 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).



◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

The above figure shows that a self-transcendent life naturally involves two kinds of emotion of awe. The first kind of awe comes from our appreciation of all small wonders and deep mystery of everyday life even in mundane circumstances – a baby in her mother’s arm, a tiny wildflower in a rock, or the smile of a wrinkled and toothless old man. This emotion of awe involves a mixture of feelings when marveling at human resilience, and a deep sadness toward



suffering and death; this calm-based awe is like the sparkling still water that runs deep with dark undercurrents.

The second kind of awe arises from our encounters with something so spectacular, not only the vastness and beauty in nature that it takes our breaths away and transports us to a transcendental realm, but also in moral excellence or sacredness that moves our heart and soul deeply that it evokes emulation (Kristjánsson, 2017).

There is already some evidence that meaning is involved in dispositional awe (Zhao et al., 2019), which can be better understood as the kind of awe as an inseparable aspect of living a meaningful or self-transcendental life. The neural basis of dispositional awe (Guan et al., 2019) supports Frankl's broader perspective of awe; he was awe-struck by both the beautiful sunset and remarkable kindness and courage shown in some inmates which enlarged his heart and soul rather than his mind.

#### Self-transcendence is at the Heart of all Therapies

Frankl (1949/1986) considered logotherapy as an adjunct to all modalities of psychotherapy and as a medical ministry to medical practice because how to cope with suffering and death is a timeless and universal existential theme. In other words, how to transcend suffering and death is a transdiagnostic approach to health. That is why I have argued that integrative meaning therapy represents the future of psychotherapy (Wong, 2020a).

Joseph Fabry (Wikipedia, 2021) carried on the mission of Frankl in North America as founder of the Institute of Logotherapy in Berkeley, California (Noetic Films, 2020). He became my mentor in logotherapy. In July 1995, I sent him the first draft of my chapter on Meaning-centered therapy (Wong, 1998a); and he replied immediately and wrote: "I read it with mounting enthusiasm and relish every page."

This letter began a 3-year friendship and mentorship through exchange of letters and phone calls. During this period, he shared with me what Frankl believed deeply and what caused the fragmentation in the logotherapy movement. My publications in the Forum for Logotherapy (Wong, 1997, 1998b, 1999) reflects his mentorship.

The highlight of this relationship was my visit to his home near Berkeley in August 1998 (see Figure 2). Over the dinner table and a long walk after dinner, we discussed a wide range of things related to the future of logotherapy. He was excited about me organizing the Festival of Meaning in Toronto and editing a special issue of the Forum of Logotherapy, focusing on meaning research. He assured me that Dr. Barnes, the person appointed by him as the President of Institute of Logotherapy in Texas, would not object to his suggestion.

Figure 2

Meeting Between Joseph Fabry and Paul Wong in August 1998



Unbeknownst to him, his enthusiasm in promoting me turned out to my downfall after his death. In May 1999, shortly after his death, problems arose between me and some members of

the Institute of Logotherapy (Wong, 2017c). This misfortune turned out to be a blessing in disguise because it gave me the free hand to develop integrative meaning therapy (Wong, 2009a, 2016a, 2016b) and launch the International Network on Personal Meaning ([www.meaning.ca](http://www.meaning.ca)) which organizes Biennial International Meaning Conferences and founded the International Journal of Existential Positive Psychology (IJEPP). I believe that Frankl would be pleased that I did not disappoint him by becoming an international ambassador for logotherapy (my two encyclopedia entries).

#### Self-Transcendence Represents a New Paradigm of Wellbeing Research

“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

Frankl’s greatest contribution to wellbeing research was his discovery that self-transcendence is the most promising path for us to become our best true self through overcoming all internal and external obstacles and all the destructive forces.

This represents a paradigm shift which simultaneously restored the human soul and spirituality to the center stage of psychology and elevated the search for meaning as the most important primary motivation capable of healing the broken hearted, the wounded ego, and empowering human beings to flourish in the face of suffering and death.

In one bold stroke, Frankl succeeded in integrating the best wisdom from the East and the West, and clinical psychology with positive psychology. Thus, Frankl, along with William James and Abraham Maslow, deserve the credit as the grandparents of existential positive psychology—an emerging wave for the 21st century.

To both Frankl and Maslow, self-transcendence represents the highest values. Maslow (1971) has provided a comprehensive definition:

“Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos.” (p. 269).

The main difference is that Maslow began with self-actualization and discovered in his old age that self-actualization could be realized without moving to the highest stage of self-transcendence. In contrast, due to his more difficult circumstances, Frankl advocated that we need to begin with self-transcendence at our life goal, and self-actualization and happiness will ensue as a result.

In addition, Frankl has successfully resolved several existential issues. For example, for the ontological dilemma of staying the same vs. making changes for a better future, Frankl argues for taking the risk of moving forward with the risks of uncertainty and possible failure because life is not about maintaining the status quo or homeostasis, but about embracing the necessary tension and risks of growing. It is the process of striving that makes us fully alive. His logic is that human beings are an open system in a complex evolving society, where the only constant is change. That is why we need to have the courage to embrace change in order to move forward. It is consistent with the Chinese saying: when we paddle upstream, not moving forward is going backward. Progress always involves a struggle and overcoming risks and setbacks. Based on Frankl's teaching and my own lifelong research (Wong, 2019b), the following summarizes the main three insights of existential positive psychology (PP 2.0):

1. True positivity is the ability to see the light in the darkness. Cultivating the resilient mindset (Wong, 2020) and the attitude of tragic optimism (Leung, 2019; Wong, 2001) allows one to see the bright side of the worst situation and suffering as a blessing in disguise (Jans-Beken & Wong, 2019). This ability needs to be awakened and stretched. Such effort is worth it because it results in sustainable positive mental health even during the worst circumstances.
2. True success is to embrace the dark side and turn it into the foundation for achieving one's highest value. The next step is to strive towards one's dream made up of one's highest ideals. This will involve coping with the difficulties and failures by developing the necessary resources according the deep and wide hypothesis (Wong & Worth, 2017) following the resource-congruence model of effective coping (Wong et al., 2006). With problems that are beyond human control, the most congruent ways of coping are religious coping and meaning-focused coping.
3. The good life is a balancing act of navigating between opposite forces in each situation. This would require practicing the dual-system model (Wong, 2012) or the Yin-Yang dialectic to maintain a dynamic balance between two opposite forces. Sustainable mature happiness can be achieved through the practical wisdom and the successful managing of the opponent process of Yin-Yang (Wong, 2021a; Wong & Bowers, 2018).

In terms of application, the following 12 rules for mental health and flourishing are based on Frankl's 4 Triads and his deep insight into human nature. To the extent that his timeless classic appeals to all people, Frankl's rules may be the most promising way to achieving healing and flourishing relative to any other bundle of 12 rules, such as Peterson's 12 rules for life (2018):

1. We all have the freedom and responsibility for our life and wellbeing.
2. We all have the free will to pursue meaning rather than power or pleasure.
3. Life has intrinsic value and meaning because of its potential to grow and bear fruits.
4. Pain and suffering are an inevitable part of life.
5. All life ends in death.
6. We all feel guilty for our wrongdoings and broken relationships.
7. People often react to pain or frustration with aggression.
8. People often react to suffering with addiction.
9. Depression often results from people's inability to cope with harsh reality.
10. I can face the terrors of life with courage and faith.
11. I can create something of value for the greater good.
12. I appreciate my life and feel grateful for all the things that has happened to me.

### Conclusion

Viktor Frankl, one of the most influential and enduring psychotherapists, continues to speak to the 21st century. His paradoxical wisdom on suffering provides the foundation for PP 2.0 (Wong, 2009a, 2011, 2019). In a time of deadly pandemic, denial or avoidance is no longer an option. The new science of flourishing through embracing what we fear may be the most promising way to save a society riddled with the problems of addiction, suicide, and injustice (Williamson, 2020; Wong, Mayer et al., in press). We still have a lot of work ahead of us in implementing Frankl's grand vision.

I have presented existential positive psychology for years without getting much attention from the psychological establishment (Wong 2019, 2020c, 2021). Even my recent free book on

the Frankl cure (Wong, 2020b) has not received wide attention. This failure may be due to my own inadequacy or discrimination (2020d).

However, my recent invitation to Harvard's Human Flourishing program to do collaborative research on the new science of flourishing through self-transcendence provides the much-needed confirmation that this new approach to wellbeing research will become mainstream. Following Frankl's example, I will use my last breath to shout from the roof top:

Fear not and lift up your eyes!

It may be your darkest hour,

your most painful moment,

but a new dawn is near if you don't give up.

Yes, you can turn suffering into blessing,

if you keep on believing.

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