

Prof. Paul T. P. Wong Answers the Call of Life to Love

Ho Lok Sang

Prof. Martin Seligman's book on Authentic Happiness is well known. Indeed, happiness can only be experienced by each individual firsthand. From this perspective happiness can only be authentic. The life journey of each individual, likewise, has to be authentic or it will not be meaningful. Prof. Paul Wong's life journey is inspiring and educational not only because it is an authentic journey to triumph, but also because it is exceptionally truthful and earnest.

I got to know Prof. Paul Wong from ResearchGate. It all began on Oct 31, 2019 when I got a message from Paul: "Love to learn about your research." I told him I was working on life education and mental capital and suggested that he take a look at my Psychology and Economics of Happiness (Routledge), and Human Spirituality and Happiness 2nd edition from Amazon. He wrote back and proposed to review my book Human Spirituality and Happiness for the International Journal of Wellbeing. Then we exchanged some of our writings. I was overjoyed discovering that there is so much that we share between the two of us. I had been invited to edit a special topic in Frontiers on Psychology on self-transcendence. I felt I was not qualified and lack the network to invite authors and reviewers, So I proposed to Paul to lead the project. He responded quickly, and soon assembled a team of leading scholars in positive psychology to launch a call for papers on the topic "A New Science of Suffering, Existential Intelligence, and the New Behavioral Economics of Happiness: Towards a General Theory of Wellbeing."

Paul was born in Tianjin in 1937, the year when imperialist Japan escalated its invasion on China which it had already started quietly in 1931 into an all-out war. I was born in 1950 after the war. Paul has endured a lot of suffering during the war, which continues to hurt through his life, as Dr. Lilian Wong so graphically explained. I certainly have my own share of suffering, but being lucky enough not to have endured the scourge of war, my share of suffering can hardly compare with that of Paul. But like Paul, I see the silver lining behind suffering.

Many years ago I had written about "Suffering" as part of my own reflections on life. A short piece, written in 1991, was collected in my book Tiandijian (天地間, which literally means Between Heaven and Earth). That short piece appears now as the first

article under the heading “Growing Up”(成長篇) in the book. I shall now translate it into English:

“Life is indeed full of suffering.

“Sometimes one wonders what is the point of all this suffering.

“Nevertheless, since suffering is unavoidable for humans, suffering has become our common language and that of all sentient beings. If the world were free of suffering, there would be no point in caring for others. A caring mind, compassion, love, understanding, empathy, would all disappear in human vocabulary.

“I am not sure if I would love to live in such a world.

“I do not believe there ever lived a human being who had never gone through suffering. If such a human being did exist, he must be the world’s most lonely person, because it would be impossible for him to understand other people and care for other people.

“This is what I am totally certain: exactly because suffering is unavoidable humans can realize that we are in the same boat. So we need to help one another and work together to build a better future for mankind.”

Professor Wong has a strong sense of mission to build a better future for all of us. As Lilian Wong noted, Paul’s motto is: “My happiness is to bring meaning and happiness to the suffering people.” This is Paul’s way of self-actualization. This is also Paul’s life purpose and his way of finding meaning.

Paul has proposed **Seven Principles of Life Intelligence or Spiritual Laws of the Best Possible Life**. They are:

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 and value life.
6. Fear (God) and obey boundaries.
7. Love others as yourself.

In Chapter 15 of my book *Psychology and Economic of Happiness* I wrote:

“[P]ersonal development is a process of gradually **accepting life as it is**, in its entirety, and unleashing the potential within us. The interesting thing is that we do not really need to wait till we have finally unleashed all the potential within us to become happy. The process itself is most fulfilling. This comes from personal experience as well as the observation that many people who honestly and earnestly embrace personal development as a life goal suddenly become much more cheerful. Seeing ourselves gradually overcoming barriers, both physical and mental, is fulfilling. Like a chick breaking the eggshell breathing the first breath of air from the outside, the joy is immense.

Prof. Paul Wong’s life is testimony to how accepting life as it is and treasuring what we still have despite all the misfortune that one has gone through produces miracles. Once we realize that this is the **ONLY** way we should live, we would make the wise choices that will lead to a life of immense fulfilment.

My view on gratitude is slightly different from Prof. Wong’s. I think it may be asking too much to ask someone who sees no end to the continuing suffering to be grateful. I used to tell my students in my course *Understanding Life and Happiness* that there are unfortunate people who do not have the chance to choose to be happy. Many people today suffer from war and hunger, lack of clean water, domestic violence and abuse, and die before they can find happiness. The Buddha told his disciples that there are four kinds of people in the world. There are those who are born in darkness, live in darkness, and die in darkness; there are those who are born in darkness, find light in life, and die in light; and there are those who are born in light, choose a life of darkness, and die in darkness; finally there are those who are born in light, choose a life of light, and find solace and peace when they leave this world. Those of us who have been spared the fate of having to face war and hunger and violence should indeed be grateful, and we owe it to ourselves to choose happiness. Yet we should remember that there are billions of people in this world who see no end to their suffering.

Prof. Paul Wong is a devout Christian. His calling is deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus, who I revere and consider to be my spiritual teacher as much as I consider the Buddha to be my spiritual teacher. Like Prof. Wong, I was exposed to Christian teachings from an early age: I attended an Anglican primary school and a Roman Catholic secondary school. I was deeply touched by the teachings of Jesus. I used to go to the school chapel and pray. I prayed to ask God to give me wisdom. Today I still cherish the Christian songs that I learnt in my primary school.

But I was never baptized. I continued to question some basic tenets of Christian churches, particularly the teachings about original sin and the almighty God. I cannot accept the teaching that we inherit a sin from Adam and Eve. I believe each person must be responsible for his own life. I also cannot accept that Jesus had to be crucified in order for us to get atonement from the sins that we have committed.

Today I am a Buddhist but I continue to be a follower of Jesus. I do not see any clash between Buddha's teachings and those of Jesus. I consider God and Life as synonyms. God's Laws are no different from the Laws of Life. I am excited to have the honor to work with Paul as a co-editor for the topic: A New Science of Suffering, the Wisdom of the Soul, and the New Behavioral Economics of Happiness: Towards a General Theory of Well-being. The concept of "soul" does not exist in Buddhist teachings, because the Buddha advises his disciples to focus only on right living. Right living is nicely summarized in the Eightfold Path that consists of: right perspective, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right samadhi ('meditative absorption or union'; alternatively, equanimous meditative awareness). But I do find the word soul useful. Indeed, I have used the word soul multiple times in *Human Spirituality and Happiness: A Manual for the Pursuit of Enduring Happiness*. Chapter V: the Essence of Spirituality from A to Z begins with Compassion:

When the tears of love flow,
The soul lives.

In a footnote to this I cited St. Matthews 5:43 to 5:45, in which Jesus taught us to love indiscriminately just as God does: "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

In another paper Prof. Wong calls the seven principles listed above Seven Principles of Self Transcendence.¹ In that paper, Prof. Wong explains how he first developed his ABCDE strategy of overcoming traumas, then added the last two principles "to provide the universal motivation for benevolence or compassion and to prevent people from doing harm to themselves or others." ABCDE now becomes ABCDEF + Love. Indeed, love is the universal motivation and the greatest motivation. Love is what makes living meaningful.

Prof. Wong advises us to believe in creating a better future with help from Providence. I have written many poems in praise of Life, because Life offers boundless opportunities to create a better future. Let me share with readers this poem of mine:

¹ <http://www.drpaullwong.com/the-best-possible-life-in-a-troubled-world/>

Zhen zhong (May 11, 2002, revised July 28, 2002) **珍重**

If there are two words
I have to tell anyone,
They would be zhen zhong.
Zhen is to treasure Life like the rarest treasure.
Zhong is to take Life like the most important thing ever known.

要是我只得兩個字
可告訴別人,
這兩個字必就是珍重。
珍就是視生命如世間奇珍異寶,
重就是視生命如重中之重。

Treasure Life,
Take Life like the most important thing ever known,
For that is really what we only have.
Can we rely on anything
Other than Life itself
To achieve our dreams?

視生命如重中之重,
因為生命已是我們擁有的一切。
除了生命,
我們實在別無倚靠。
沒有生命, 一切夢想只能是空想。
So zhen zhong my friend,
Bon voyage my friend.
Let the tears run,
The tears of loss, the tears of love,
No more in vain.

I am glad to see Prof. Wong's additions to ABCDE. It shows that he keeps thinking about the subject all the time. In number 7 Love, he explicitly advises that we love others and ourselves without distinction. This is an important element of self-transcendence. In

number 6 “F”, he asks us to be humble and obey God’s laws. To me, the laws of Life will always prevail. If humans do silly things and self-destroy, God is not there to make good things that we have done wrong. We all have to face the consequences of what we have done. There is no escape from the laws of life, which we all need to humbly learn and observe. I am saddened to see arrogant people of the world ignore or forget Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. On that occasion, Jesus said: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God. Under L in my *The Essence of Spirituality from A to Z*, I wrote:

Humility Breeds Wisdom

Humility breeds wisdom,
 For only the humble will learn through life.
 Only the humble will see the riches that Life offers.
 This is what Jesus means
 When he says Blessed are the Poor in Spirit.

Saddened by the arrogance of many politicians, in dismay I had written a poem on Jesus of Nazareth, which ends with the following lines:

Jesus tells us blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
 We tell people we are full of righteousness.
 What is he?
 What are we?

Prof. Paul T.P.Wong lives what he believes. He has earned the love and ardent support from Lilian and from far beyond. I pray that his message to the world will be heard, and that a better tomorrow awaits.