

# Adventures with Viktor Frankl and Advances in Logotherapy (AEPP01)

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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### Abstract

This chapter introduces three approaches that are unique to Frankl's development of logotherapy, which will deepen our understanding of **the how of meaningful living**. Firstly, it is based on both the academic approach to theoretical development and his personal experience of surviving Nazi concentration camps and other soul-crushing devastations. Secondly, he restores the soul to psychology and locates the human search for meaning in the spiritual dimension of personhood. Finally, he discovers the self-transcendental passion as distinct from the self-enhancing passion that dominates mainstream psychology.

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Welcome to my course! Come to think of it, this may be the best thing you have ever done for yourself in recent years. Let me tell you why I think this way: first of all, in this course, you will hear the brutal truth that most of your suffering comes from self-sabotage and from your self-inflicted private hell. But this course will also show you how to be liberated from human-bondage. More importantly, you will learn the following skills which will make you a fully functioning human being:

- 1) You will find answers to your deepest existential questions about life and death.
- 2) You will learn how to understand and fulfill your full potential.
- 3) You will be equipped to cope with all the challenges of living in this digital and chaotic world.
- 4) Last but not the least, you will learn to live a meaningful and happy life according to the following spiritual principles: human beings need to live within an ethical boundary, a network of loving relationships, and a larger context involving Heaven, Earth, and the Creator. This is the ultimate meaning of life designed by God.

May you have an open and inquisitive mind in order to fully benefit from this course.

For a summary of the main ideas of Module 1 (AEPP01), please review this video of my [Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy World Congress Keynote](#). I have attached the PowerPoint for this keynote in Microsoft Teams.

This keynote highlights my new insights about Frankl and Logotherapy, which may help you more fully understand why we need him and his teachings now more than ever. Basically, there are two very different ways of understanding or experiencing meaning in life. One way is through thinking, philosophical analysis, or psychological research; this represents the "Ivory Tower" approach. The second way is very different: it is through struggling with hostile forces in the abyss of despair and accepting the crucible of suffering. To discover meaning in life this way is by kindling the light in the darkest hour so that we can restore hope and move forward. This was

how Frankl discovered his truths about meaning in life. This was how I first discovered Frankl and how I embarked on my lifelong quest for meaning through the valley of the shadow of death and through academic research (Wong, 2012).

The lessons you will study captures the essence of both approaches of searching for the Holy Grail of finding meaning and happiness – something we may all feel passionate about. The first thing that comes to mind is: what kind of passion enabled Frankl to survive and thrive in spite of the unimaginable suffering of the Holocaust?

### **The Passion of Frankl**

“Joy comes into our lives when we have something to do, someone to love, and something to hope for.” – Viktor E. Frankl

Why do we need Viktor Frankl today now more than ever? We may be living in one of the darkest chapters in world history, with the carnage of wars right before our eyes and the prospect of a world controlled by artificial intelligence (AI). In times like these, we need to heed the prophetic voice of Dr. Frankl. I have studied Frankl and Logotherapy for more than four decades, but I continue to discover hidden gems in his writings. Try asking yourself the following questions:

- What sustained Viktor E. Frankl during the darkest days of soul-destroying traumas?
- What motivated Frankl to tirelessly give lectures all over the world without any remuneration?
- What kind of passion set his soul on fire for something bigger than himself?
- What is the nature of this passion?

First of all, it cannot be understood in terms of the positive psychology of obsessive passion versus harmonious passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). In contrast, Frankl proposed that the real difference is between self-enhancing obsession and self-transcending obsession.

According to Frankl, the *Achievers' Paradox* means the more you focus on achieving success and greatness for your personal glory, the less likely you will succeed. From the video clip cited in Simmons (2023), Frankl said that “if you focus less on achievement for yourself and you focus on a cause larger than yourself, then the good things happen to you and the more you help others.”

The true nature of passion can also be seen in a business setting (Baldwin, 2021). Here is a lengthy quote from Baldwin:

For most people, passion is emotional and means a strong fondness, enthusiasm or love for something...But, it does not capture the true meaning of passion. Passion comes from the Latin root *pati-*, which does not mean strong feelings or a love for, but instead means suffering or enduring. Passion literally means a pain that demands attention or to be quenched. So those who are passionate realize they must be ready to suffer and to struggle to achieve and learn to persevere through it all. Perhaps the best example is the Passion of Christ, which to Christians is the story of Christ's arrest, trial and suffering, ending in the crucifixion.

To further understand the importance of having the right kind of passion, Wong (2018) proposes that passion and persistence are based on the moral courage to maintain human dignity and follow one's conscience; it is also essential to have unwavering faith in one's core values and calling. This *Four-Factor Model of True Grit* (courage, faith, passion, and persistence) are important for making a real difference in the world, regardless of one's occupation.

According to Frankl and me, true passion is always obsessive, costly, and seldom harmonious. It is something you cannot live without. A great pianist is obsessed with playing piano, which is far more important than anything else in life. A great scientist has the same kind of all-consuming passion in finding answers to his/her scientific research. In sum, supreme human achievements came from people who pursued self-transcendental passion, such as the historical Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, and Victor Frankl.

In contrast, the worst crimes and human tragedies are caused by individuals drunk with self-enhancing passion, whether it is passion for power, revenge, or fame. That is why part of the motivation for Frankl's work is to make sure that the world will never have another power-hungry Hitler or Stalin.

The world will be a better place if we teach people the dangers of self-enhancing passion and the blessings of self-transcending passion. Your personal life and your work can be transformed if you put into practice the lessons you will learn in this course. Whenever you feel that life is too hard, and you are too tired to go on, think about the power of self-transcending passion, the recurrent theme that runs throughout all Frankl's teachings.

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