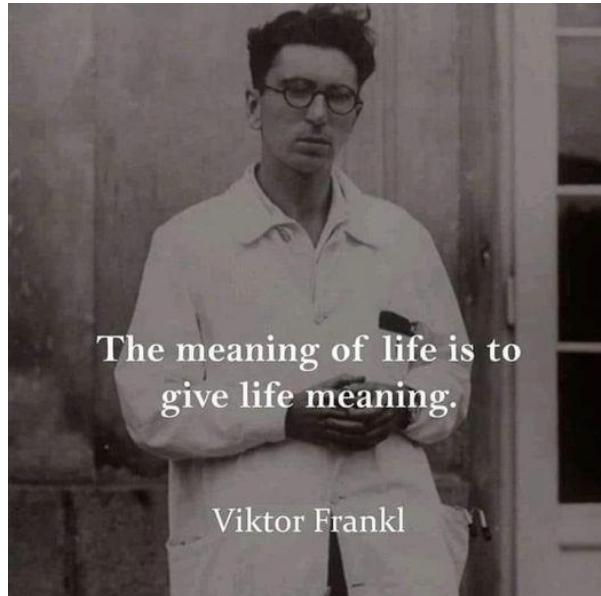


Adventures with Viktor Frankl and Advances in Logotherapy (AEPP01)

Chapter 4: What are the three values (pathways) for meaning in life?

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A Recap of Chapter 3

The 3 basic tenets of Logotherapy are the three cornerstones for the entire structure of a spiritually oriented therapy; they can also be considered the fountainhead from which all good things in life flows.

Chapter 4 focuses on the 3 pathways to finding meaning in life according to Viktor Frankl (please see [this video](#)).

These 3 pathways always work because they are based on the spiritual dimension within the parameters of the 3 basic tenets of Logotherapy.

Chapter 4 is a chapter of recovery, redemption, and renewal by finding how to endow your life with meaning by serving others and appreciating life with moral courage and faith in God. It can be a turning point in your life by taking a further step from the WHY of meaning to the HOW of meaning.

Abstract

This chapter explains **how to live a balanced meaningful life** by cultivating and mobilizing all 7 major domains of meaning. Traditionally, psychologists focus on work and family but in reality people need to find meaning even when they are no longer able to work or who no longer have family. That is why you need to experience meaning from at least 7 major domains: Work, Relationships, Lifelong Learning, Leisure Activities, Spirituality & Religion, Community Involvement, and Suffering. You need to cultivate meaning in all 7 domains so that when one or two domains are no longer available, other domains can compensate. You need to be flexible and adopt a holistic approach towards life by trying to meet all your needs as a bio-psycho-social-spiritual being. The real power of meaning is that it is always available in some form in every situation, and it has the power to transform your life.

Introduction

According to Frankl (1946/1985) the three Basic Values or Pathways to Meaning are:

1. **Creative value:** giving something to the world through creative works.
2. **Experiential value:** receiving something from the world through appreciation and gratitude.
3. **Attitudinal value:** taking a heroic stand towards suffering and fate.

It is important to know that these three values are interrelated. You cannot embrace one without the others, because they are all essential aspects of a spiritually oriented, meaning-centered life.

The first important question I have for you is: ***What is the one verb to describe what the world needs the most today?***

May I suggest that the most important verb is "serving"? Yes, serving others or serving the greater good can make all the differences in your life – it can liberate you from all your inner demons and all the egotistic traps of money, fame, and power; it can also replace your self-handicapping attitudes and fill your heart and soul with peace, joy, and meaning.

This is not an empty promise. This chapter can indeed transform your life only if you put the wisdom and skills you have learned with your head into daily practice.



Here are more famous quotes on the relationship between serving and living a meaningful life.

- **Pablo Picasso:** “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.”
- **Mahatma Gandhi:** “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”
- **Martin Luther King, Jr.:** “Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.”
- **Mother Teresa:** “Give your hands to serve, and your hearts to love.”
- **Earl Nightingale:** “Our rewards in life will always be in direct ratio to our service.”
- **Leo Tolstoy:** “Joy can only be real if people look upon their life as a service and have a definite object in life outside themselves and their personal happiness.”

I have no illusions that not everyone will nod their heads to the above inspirational statements. I can hear a chorus of dissenting voices to such idealism. Recently, one of my rich relatives told me bluntly: “The most powerful language is not love, but money. Everyone understands the power of money. People are willing to betray and kill each other for money. If you have lots of money, you can get anything you want to make yourself happy. You can even make the devil work for you.”

I fully understand the power of money. For most ordinary people, money, or the lack of it, is the problem. You become homeless if you have no money to pay rent. You go to bed hungry each day if you have no money to buy food. In many countries, you watch your loved ones die, if you have no money to get them the needed medical procedures. To solve their financial crises, some decent people may even sell their body and dignity in order to stay alive.

In my long life living through wealth and poverty, I know firsthand how painful it could be to sell one's children in order to feed the family, or how destructive it could be to sell one's soul to the devil in order to get rich through illegal means.

I have learned that it is better to try creative and honest ways to stay alive rather than through illegal means. I have also learned over and over again that God can meet all my needs and He can make a way when there is no way, and His way make streams in the dessert (Isaiah 43:19).

Remember Jesus' temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11)? After forty days and nights without food, Satan came to entice him. His answer was: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

Ultimately, our choices determine our destiny. Whether we use our opportunities and talents for good or evil can hinge on one moment's fateful choice: (a) to yield to the temptations of wealth, fame, and sexual fantasies; or (b) to embark on a journey of positive transformation by faith.

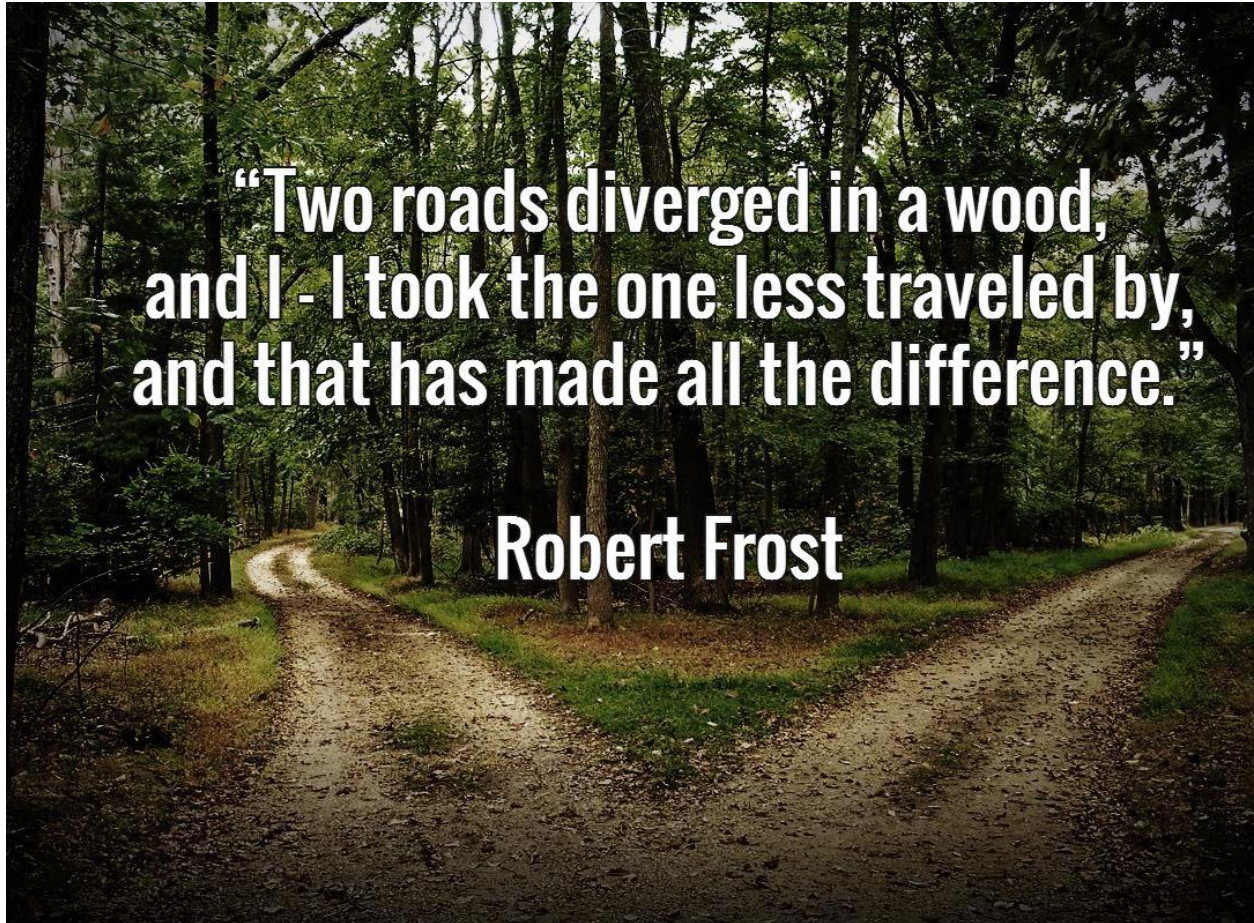
Often, what seems to be a matter of happenstance, misfortune, or fate can be traced back to one's upbringing, character, and core values. Some miseries and troubles could have been avoided and one's life could have turned out very differently had one made a wise decision at a crucial juncture in life.

We all have been confronted with life-changing choices such as to be or not to be, to confess my mistake or cover it up with a lie, to get drunk again or stay sober, to get divorced or to improve my marriage, to quit my job or make the best of it. All through life, we are confronted with daily choices. Each choice may take us in a different direction, until we cross the point of no return.

The human tragedy is that one moment of pleasure can lead to a lifetime of regrets or pain. We all have made bad choices during times of youthful indiscretion, sexual exploits, or lapse of moral judgement under peer pressure. We all have experienced the painful consequences of violating our own conscience and the unbearable burden of shame, guilt, and fear of being exposed.

"I wish that I hadn't gotten drunk so I wouldn't have gotten pregnant in the first week of university life", "I wish that I hadn't tried opioids at the party." "I wish that I had never done sexting to my ex-boyfriend." I have heard so many regrets from my students and clients. That is why I really hope that all students can learn some existential wisdom or life intelligence during high school or college (Wong, 2012a).

Here is a widely cited quote from Robert Frost. Yes, choice has consequences especially at a crossroads. Generally speaking, we are all confronted with either (a) the well trodden road of pursuing a happy life based on money, fame, and power or (b) the less travelled path. Scott Peck's (1978) *The Road Less Travelled* make the same point.



Consistent with his belief that meaning can only be found according to some universal values (i.e., not arbitrarily created according to one's whims or egotistic desires), here, Frankl (1946/1985) proposes that the best choice is the less trodden path based on three spiritual values in order for people to experience a fulfilling meaningful life.

Surprisingly, these three pathways are not only supported by research but resonate with people's personal experiences.

When one feels confused and lost, these three pathways function like the North Star that shows us both the direction and the practical tips to get back on the right track to search for meaning.

With a meaning mindset (Wong, 2012b), one can see that life is full of wonders, goodness, and beauty; there are magical moments and mysteries waiting to be discovered and experienced even in a Nazi concentration camp.

- From moments of awe in watching a sunrise or sunset to the sacred encounters with God behind a veil of mystery.
- From the treasured memories of a distant past to the exciting hope of fulfilling one's dream.
- From the joy of serendipitous discoveries to the ecstasy of a hard-earned major breakthroughs.

I can go on and on regarding Frankl's adventures, and my own life experiences. I hope that this chapter can help you experience the same magic of searching for meaning.

Creative Value

“ The more one forgets himself —by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. Self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence. ”

– Viktor Frankl



The first choice you must make is: Do you want to work just for the paycheck or for something that makes the best use of your talents and creativity? Do you want to follow your heart or follow the well-trodden path? Do you want to live a comfortable life, or strive to make a difference in the world? Steve Job used to ask himself similar questions:



For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been 'No' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

(Steve Jobs)

This line of self-examination is related to the meaning of work and one's calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Since work constitutes a large part of adult life, we really need to understand how to discover one's mission in life. One may go through different stages of life with very different ideas what one really wants to do with one's life, and what kind of work makes the best use of one's passion and gifts.

Remember the parable of finding a pearl of great value? "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:45-46). To find your calling is like finding something worth giving up everything and worth dying for.

A calling from God or from the demand of life usually benefit more than the individual. According to Wong and colleagues (2017), good work is usually beneficial at three levels: to the individual, organization, and society. To make this happen, good work depends on attitude more than aptitude.

A star performer with a bad attitude may not be good for anyone. I have seen enough of such gifted but toxic individuals, which can pollute the entire workplace. I can also recall meeting exceptional workers in every occupation. They may be a waiter, a salesclerk, a nurse, or a teacher. They not only derive satisfaction from good work but benefit their organization with happy clients or students. More importantly, all the little good things they do with great love can restore people's hope in humanity and make the world a better place.

What makes these good workers stand out are the following 3 practices that imbue their lives with meaning and deep satisfaction:

Whatever they do, they do it with all their heart and soul.

They are willing to go the extra mile to provide the best service they can, not just for their own satisfaction, but also for their clients or their team. They also seek to improve themselves daily so that they can offer more efficient service, achieve a higher level of excellence, and pay better attention to each individual client or each student.

They enjoy their work even when they are very busy, things do not go well, or the pay is not very good.

There are always good days and bad days at work. But even when they have a bad day, such as having a few nasty customers, or getting reprimanded for mistakes made by others, they are still able to maintain a positive attitude and a sense of joy in their work. Sometimes, they enjoy their work, even when their compensation is not very good. I remember that I once chose to accept a job that paid less than half of what I was getting at that time but demanded double the amount of work! I took that job because I felt God was leading me to a different direction.

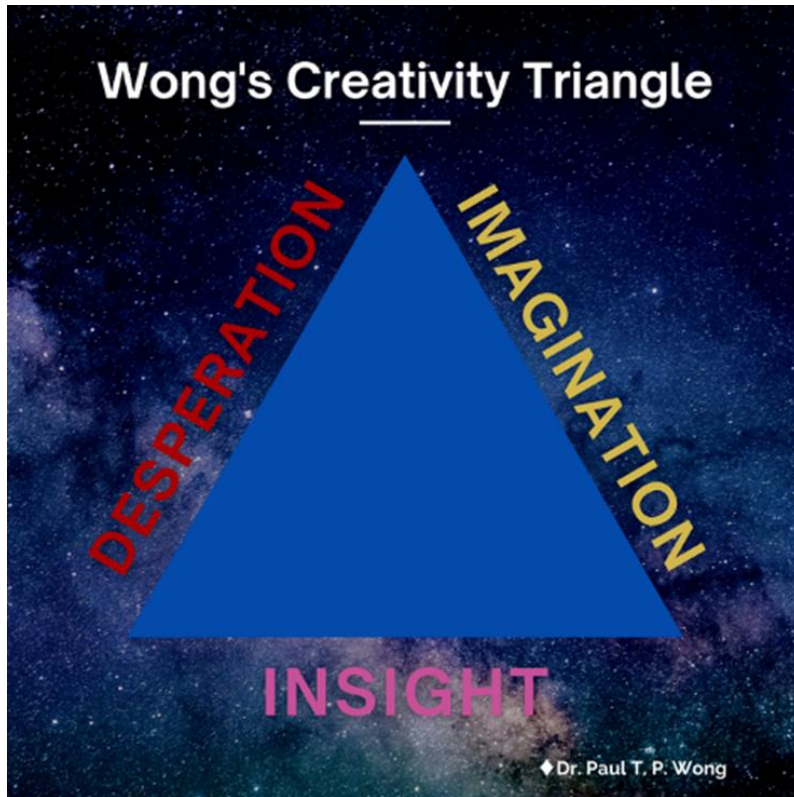
They find their juice of creativity flowing in times of desperation.

In contrast to Barbara Frederickson's (2004) *Broaden and Built Theory*, which posits that positive emotions contribute to creativity, my own research and observation indicates that times of frustration and desperation may be more important for major inventions. My *Deep-and-Wide Theory* has been well supported by research (Wong & Worth 2017). Both Plato and Aristotle have been quoted as saying that necessity is the mother of invention.

My theory fills the missing link by showing that frustration and desperation can eventually result in a major breakthrough. Most major scientific and medical discoveries result from perseverance through many failures and the desperate need for a solution.

It is worth noting that the *Broaden and Built Theory* and my *Deep-and-Wide Theory* actually complement each other. Even in times of desperation, when people are both frustrated and exhausted, a sense of humor, taking a little break for some fun, or switching to another easier project for a little while, can contribute to the eventual breakthrough.

This is captured by my creativity triangle which will be fully explained in the next Module on Integrative Meaning Therapy.



According to Homer-Dixon (2000), the challenge for the 21st century is not the shortage of resources but the “ingenuity gap.” That is why future leaders and workers need to rise to the challenge by dreaming impossible dreams and finding solutions to meet society’s greatest needs.

I want to conclude this segment by pointing out that desperation can either lead to heroic inventions with enduring benefits to humanity or reckless actions with destructive consequences. It all hinges on whether one has the moral character to respond with ingenuity and resourcefulness.

Experiential Value

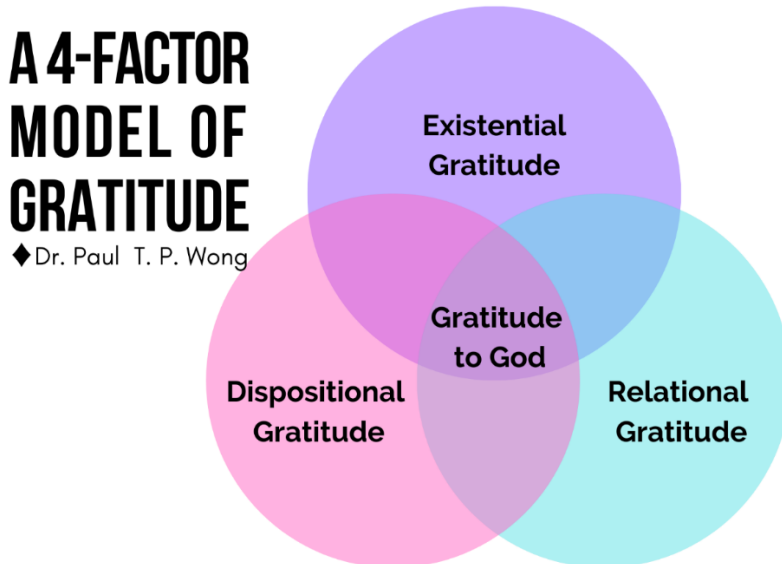
Experiential value is needed for every domain of life, including work. The choice confronting us each day is that we can react to people with either complaint or complement, accusation or appreciation. Likewise, we can wake up each morning with thanksgiving and optimistic anticipation, or with a dark and grumpy mood and the pessimistic expectation that something bad is going to happen.

Dr. Robert Emmons, the world foremost authority on gratitude, wrote: “Living gratefully begins with affirming the good and recognizing its sources. It is the understanding that life owes me nothing and all the good I have is a gift, accompanied by an awareness that nothing can be taken for granted.” (— Emmons, 2016)

The importance of gratitude is amplified in the following quotes:

1. **Marcus Tullius Cicero:** “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.”
2. **Voltaire:** “Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.”
3. **Albert Schweitzer:** “Train yourself never to put off the word or action for the expression of gratitude.”
4. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** “In ordinary life, we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.”
5. **1 Thessalonians 5:18:** "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Gratitude to God is either implicitly acknowledged or explicitly advocated in most of the above quotes. It is likely that Gratitude to God may be the source of other types of appreciation and gratitude as depicted in the next graph.



- 1) **Gratitude to God** is the origin and root of all gratitude.
- 2) **Existential gratitude** refers to feeling grateful for life in its totality—both good and bad.
- 3) **Relational gratitude** refers to the good manner of saying "Thank you" and the repaying of kindness to others.
- 4) **Dispositional gratitude** refers to the habit or tendency to be appreciative and thankful.

Existential gratitude (Harris et al., 2023; Jans-Beken & Wong, 2019) is perhaps the most pervasive kind of gratitude permeating every aspect of human existence, from traumas to peak experiences. More importantly, existential gratitude originates from one's basic attitude of thankfulness toward the Creator God or Mother Nature.

Existential gratitude encompasses both (a) giving thanks to “three good things” or positive events, a popular positive psychology intervention developed by Martin Seligman (SIU School of Medicine, n.d.); and (b) the lesser-known exercise of giving thanks for “three bad things” during negative circumstances, and intervention developed by Paul Wong (2020).

In view of the above, gratitude or an appreciative attitude is an important virtue associated with happiness, wellbeing, meaning, and resilience. Conversely, ingratitude or an unappreciative attitude is “the most abominable of sins” according to Saint Ignatius.



From my personal experience, those who have caused me the greatest harms and sorrows are not my enemies, but my Christian friends whom I had invested a great deal of loving care and support. There are only two possible interpretations: One possibility is that these individuals tried to free themselves from the burden of favors which they could not repay. Unconsciously, they attack my character or spread rumours about me, hoping this will set them free from unpaid debts. Another possibility is that they have never been taught that gratitude towards people grows naturally from gratitude to God.

In fact, experiential value focuses on relationships—relating to other people, to life itself, and to the source of everything. We can find meaning and joy through appreciating the gift of life and all the people that make our life possible. We are even grateful towards all the setbacks,

attacks, and human evils, because there are the necessary crucibles to purify us and make us stronger and wiser.

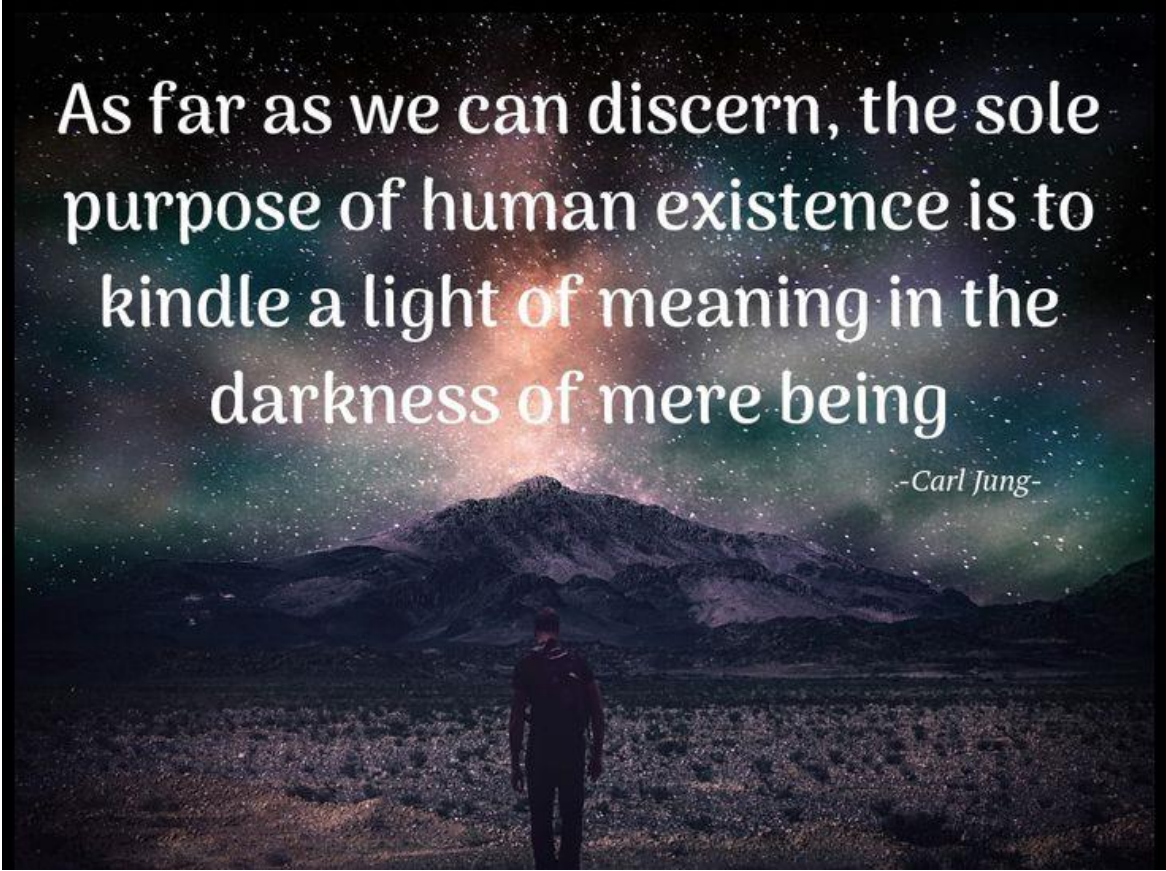
Living or working together, some conflicts and misunderstanding are unavoidable because we all have different ways of doing things and have different opinions about various issues. Experiential value teaches us to focus on the good qualities of other people and appreciate the little things that reveal their kindness. We can always find something good in others if we are less critical and more appreciative. I would like to end this segment with the following quote for your reflection.



Attitudinal Value

Attitudinal value refers to finding meaning in times of suffering. Most people may not realize that creative value and experiential value cannot be realized in circumstances of unbearable suffering, such as in concentration camps, without exercising the defiant power of the human spirit to transcend all the negative experiences (Frankl, 1946/1985; Wong, 2015).

To develop this value, we need to learn (a) how to revise our worldview to accommodate the dark side of human existence, (b) how to embrace and endure suffering, (c) how to transform suffering in to triumph, and (d) how to kindle a light in darkness in ourselves and in others as expressed by the following quote from Carl Jung.



As far as we can discern, the sole
purpose of human existence is to
kindle a light of meaning in the
darkness of mere being

-Carl Jung-

On the surface of any big city in democratic and developed countries, we see all kinds of entertainment and attractions trying to vie for our attention. We see people busy shopping, eating, working, and pursuing their dreams of happiness and success. Evidence of human progress is everywhere.

But beneath the surface, can we see the seedy dark underbelly of our society? Who can see the private hell of the quiet desperation of ordinary people? Who can understand the horrors of evil and the intensity of pain in the plush boardrooms and the luxurious bedrooms? Who can fathom the heart of darkness and the depth of human depravity? That is why we need attitudinal value to see the light and be the light when we are going through hell.

Conclusion

Forsyth (2003) summarizes Frankl's three values very succinctly: "Work, love and suffering are seen then as the three basic ways of actualizing meaning in a self-transcending way and for Frankl this is a conclusion based on phenomenological analysis rather than moral or philosophical principles" (p. 231).

These three values of finding meaning are instrumental values. The creative value refers to the personal responsibility of serving the greater good. The experiential value refers to appreciating the truth, kindness, and beauty in the world in which we live in based on Buddhist mindfulness teaching and the meaning mindset (Wong, 2012b). The attitudinal value refers to finding positive ways to overcome and transcend suffering; this value is also advocated by Stoicism and Taoism among other philosophies and theologies.

In other words, these three time-proven values show us how to discover meaning in our daily lives and how to be transformed into fully functioning human beings.

In contrast to the cognitive behavioral focus of positive psychology, Viktor Frankl's spiritual approach emphasizes being rather than doing, process rather than outcome.

It is also worth noting that positive psychology represents the Western liberal idealism that is confident that all the personal and social ills will fade away when we focus on strengths-enhancing and happiness-inducing activities to promote flourishing. Logotherapy, on the other hand, represents the Judeo-Christian idealism that is confident in the realization of a better world through an increase in personal responsibility, brotherly love, and service to others. This idealism, however, is tempered the realism that came from Frankl's personal experiences of the horrors of the Holocaust. Yet, he is full of gratitude for all the opportunities for growth and transformation as illustrated by the following quote.

◆ Dr. Paul T. P. Wong

DURING MY DARKEST HOURS,
I've discovered the light through:

- 1) Experiencing God's grace.
- 2) Accepting the gift of suffering.
- 3) Expressing gratitude for the benefits of suffering.
- 4) Discovering new revelations about the future.

Research on meaning, PTSD, grieving, cancer survival, & religious conversion has supported the above points.

It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.
-Aristotle Onassis-

As Lao Tzu said thousands of years ago: “The greatest gift you have to give is that your own transformation.” I hope that Chapter 4 further illuminates the steps of self-transformation as you practice these three values.

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