

Adventures with Viktor Frankl and Advances in Logotherapy

(AEPP01) Chapter 6: The Hidden Power of Self-transcendence

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Chapter 5 Recap

The last chapter emphasized the real power of meaning, which is integrative and transformative. Meaning is capable of integrative various domains of meaning in an adaptive and balanced manner. It is also capable of integrating the bright and dark sides within each domain, thus fundamentally transforming the dark side of human existence. The following figure is a summary of the different aspects of the power of meaning.

What is the Real Power of Meaning?

To anyone who thinks that they can craft their own meaningful work or meaningful life painlessly: think again! That is because life happens – a mean new boss can throw a monkey wrench into your work, and a sudden reversal of fortune may completely change your life trajectory.



For instance, COVID-19 has claimed millions of lives and fundamentally disrupted countless other lives and their best-laid career plans. Random terrorist attacks can destroy many happy families and create heart-wrenching tragedies for survivors. All of one's dreams can instantly become a nightmare with the prognosis of terminal cancer. Where is your power of meaning in such tragic circumstances?

I want to show you that the real power of meaning lies in transforming the deepest Hell into the highest Heaven.

Here are the life-changing potentials of meaning that can make you undefeatable:

1. When terrible things happen, you will naturally ask "Why" and seek an answer.
2. When you reach the end of the rope, you will be more willing to accept a lifeline from God.
3. When you are confused about all the disinformation and counterfeits, you will need the existential wisdom to discern the true meaning of the situation beneath the surface.
4. When you are torn by conflicting values and loyalties, you will realize the need to remain true to your core values and beliefs.
5. When you are betrayed or abandoned, you will learn the power of forgiveness and agape love.
6. When you hit rock bottom, you will need to fight with all that is within you for every step, and hang on to the wavering faith to make the impossible possible
7. When suffering becomes unbearable or the situation becomes intolerable, you will need to summon up your courage and faith to endure it because of life's inherent value and meaning.
8. When you are in your darkest hours, you can see the brightest stars by faith and you can be the light by rekindling the light of meaning in your life and in others around you.

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Abstract

As we wrap up Frankl's theory of self-transcendence, Chapter 6 finally reveals the narrative arc of Viktor Frankl's story on the hidden power of self-transcendence. This chapter helps resolve 3 conflicts that have puzzled meaning seekers for a long time:

- (1) How can one be liberated from all their shackles and enemies in order to become what they were meant to be?
- (2) How can one find the best path when all the well trodden paths have led to either dead ends or disasters? The spiritual intelligence to understand the best path is the path of self-transcendence.
- (3) How can one be transformed into a phoenix after going through suffering and death?

The key to resolving the above existential puzzles lies in four spiritual principles of transformation from sinking one's roots into the soil of suffering and rising as a flourishing tree with an abundance of good fruits.

In terms of applications, self-transcendence is needed for every stage of development, but it is most needed during old age, terminal illness, or the rock-bottom phenomenon for drug addicts. This chapter will end with examples of practicing self-transcendence in nursing and leadership.

Introduction

The more clients I see, the more I am convinced that most of the psychological disorders can be attributed to spiritual and existential issues as Viktor Frankl (1949/1986) hypothesized long ago.

In a materialistic and consumerist culture with ego at the center and Mammon as the God. Most people manipulate others as objects for selfish gains, and no longer treat each other with respect and compassion as fellow human beings.

I suggest that are like fish without water – we need to get back to God and the transcendental values of faith, hope, and love (Wong, 2023a).

Here is an illustrative case study based on several of my clients to demonstrate the spiritual power of meaning. Mrs. Young is a hard-working single mom with a depressed teenage son. She has referred her son, Jimmy, to a family doctor, a psychiatrist, and even a hospital's emergency service, but nothing has worked. In desperation, she takes her Jimmy to me.

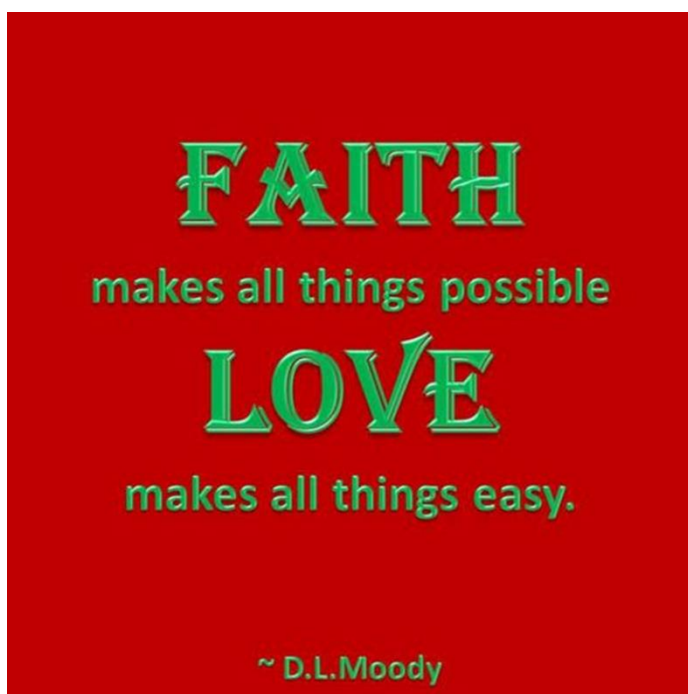
After a few sessions, it becomes very clear to me that Jimmy is not a case of mental illness, but a victim of being kind and sensitive person in a broken world. Firstly, he is being suffocated to death by his mother's smothering love. Secondly, he is "gaslighted" by his mom who wants to gain complete control over him. She would make him feel useless and that he cannot do anything right without her approval. Thirdly, Jimmy is also angry with his mom for not allowing his father to visit him frequently. Finally, he feels lonely and helpless in a private school, which stresses science and mathematics while he is only good and interested in arts.

When Jimmy's frustration and anger reaches a breaking point, he would temporarily lose control and explode in violent outburst. During an episode of temper tantrum, he would destroy anything in sight, let out a primal scream, hurt himself, and curse the day he was born.

It takes a while before Mrs. Young finally realizes that she is the main source of Jimmy's misery. Her love for Jimmy, while intended for his good, actually only served her emotions; her

gaslighting of Jimmy stems from her fear of losing him. It has never dawned on her that all she needs to do is to let Jimmy be himself, and not use Jimmy as a bargaining chip to squeeze out more money from his dad. She also realizes the need to allow Jimmy to go back to his neighborhood public school, where he can have friends and no longer feels like a failure. Finally, realizes that she needs to go back to her church with Jimmy and to stop her self-handicapping manipulations to meet her own needs.

As a result of these changes, Jimmy becomes he feels happy that he can be himself: a quiet, kind, and sensitive boy. More importantly, he feels comfortable talking to his mom, and he can pray to God for his issue that he wants privacy. Now that his life is more meaningful and hopeful, he is happy and calm without any medication. All I have done is to help both mother and son discover their basic need for meaning, love, and faith. (For more illustrative cases, see Wong & Laird, 2022).



Two Different Kinds of Happiness

In previous chapters, I have already alluded to the two alternative ways of finding happiness and fulfilment. In this chapter, we need to go deeper to discover what lies beneath these two different human experiences.



First of all, ask yourself this question: Do you need more of the positive psychology of happiness; or do you need a different kind of happiness which can shine in the darkest hours? The difference may surprise you.


In simple terms, the former works well in normal or positive circumstances. It is like a *magnifying glass*, which can magnify whatever is already good. In technical terms, it is a “predictor” or “mediator” of happiness and wellbeing.

In contrast, the latter works best in negative circumstances. It is like a *magic glass* because it can either make things worse or make things better depending on side of the glass you use. In technical terms, it is a “buffer” or “moderator” between suffering and wellbeing.

Do you choose positive illusion or a more realistic attitude? The narrative arc of existential positive psychology, developed by Viktor Frankl and me, is that you can rise from the ashes like a phoenix through the hidden power of self-transcendence

What is Self-Transcendence?

At this point, you may wonder Frankl preferred to use the construct of *self-transcendence* to represent the more widely used word *meaning*.



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

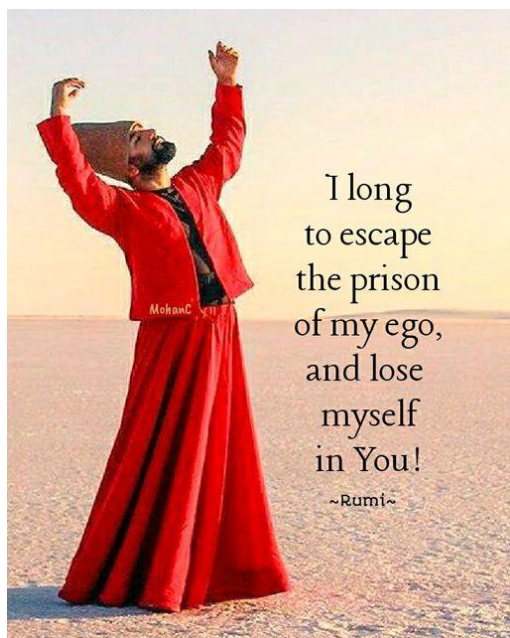
(Viktor E. Frankl)

izquotes.com

The main reason is that to most meaning researchers, especially in the positive psychology circle, focus on cognitive-behavioural aspects of meaning. However, Frankl see things from a spiritual perspective. In his book on *The Unconscious God* (Frankl, 1949/1985), he talks about the spiritual unconscious because he considered God as part of the unconscious, related to the will to meaning or self-transcendence.

The spiritual dimension represents the most important aspect of personhood. The will to self-transcendence as defined by the above quote, is responsible for allowing us to become fully functioning human beings (see this video of Frankl on why [Self-Actualization is not the Goal](#)). But you may question, “According to Maslow, isn’t self-transcendence based on self-actualization?”

The following image illustrates the spiritual yearning for self-transcendence that comes from a wounded heart and an awakened soul as articulated in Frankl’s book, *The Unconscious God*. This image captures Frankl’s psychology of depths and heights.



Contrast between Maslow and Frankl

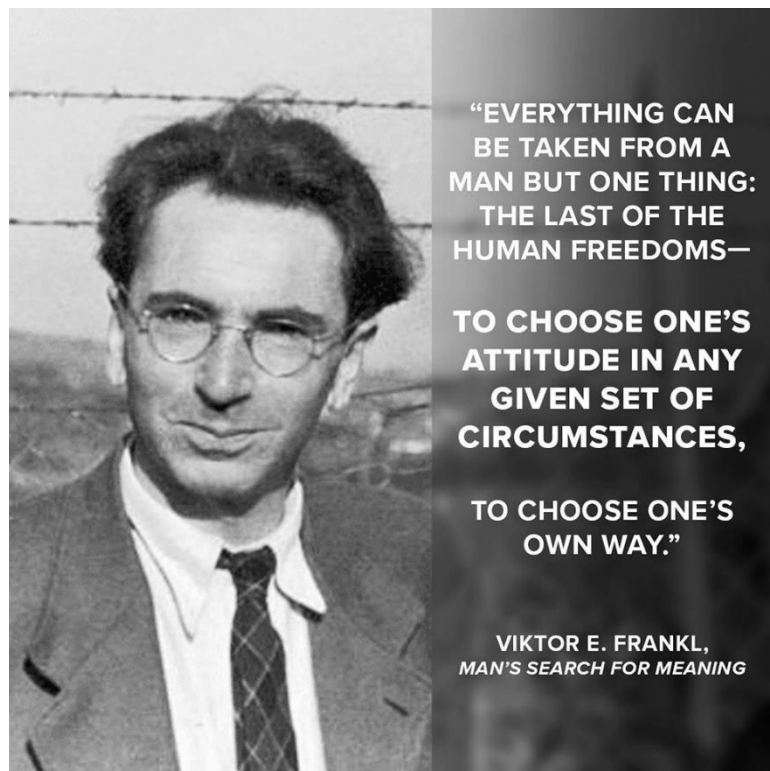
You may also wonder about the difference between Maslow and Frankl regarding self-transcendence. Pytell (2020) has an interesting discussion on this controversy. Frankl (1966) wrote that “self-actualization is not man’s ultimate destination, not even his primary intention. Self-actualization, if made an end in itself, contradicts the self-transcending quality of human existence.” However, Frankl also acknowledges that it is similar to Maslow’s because “self-actualization can be best carried out by commitment to an important task greater than one’s self.”

Maslow, in his commentary on Frankl’s article, attempted to reconcile the differences by suggesting the tension might be caused more by linguistic rather than theoretical differences. Basically, he agreed with Frankl that man’s highest concern is his will to meaning, but it could be called self-actualization or self-transcendence.

In addition, both agree that self-actualization can be best carried out by devoting one’s life towards some task greater or more important than the self. Both also agree that the farther reaches of human consciousness involve spiritual or transpersonal dimension defined by divine and sacred connectiveness.

But for me, the main difference may be cultural rather than linguistic. American culture tends to more positive and individualistic than older cultures (Ericksen, 2023; Kitayama, 2023); American people tend to be perceived by other cultures as fun-loving children (Contributors of Quora, 2023). That is because people in older cultures are more acquainted with human suffering and the ravages of wars; they are more conscious of the reality that life is a constant struggle.

Anyone familiar with Frankl’s psychobiography (Krasovska & Mayer, 2021) knows that the cultural context shaped his view of the world. It is perfectly natural for him to invest all his life and energy towards the reduction of human suffering.



For myself, as a war baby growing up through Japanese occupation and China's civil war, I am also obsessed with the problem with how to find meaning and happiness in a world full of evil and suffering. (For more on my view of suffering, please view this video of my talk at Harvard's Human Flourishing Program).

Therefore, it is understandable why Maslow and Kaufmann focus on the human potential for creativity, happiness, and personal growth, while Frankl and I focus on the human potential for resilience, finding meaning in suffering, and transforming suffering into sustainable wellbeing.

Kaufman's Revision of Maslow's Model

It is easy to understand Maslow or the revised theory of Maslow by Scott Barry Kaufman (2020), but Frankl's theory of self-transcendence is more difficult because it does not begin with the individual at the center. To Frankl, all self-psychology, including self-actualization, is doomed to failure because self-psychology assumes that human beings are free to achieve whatever they want with creativity and effort.

Kaufman's sailboat metaphor as depicted below is an improvement over Maslow's pyramid model because it incorporates some negative elements, such as the risks of having leaks in the boat and stormy days. But overall, it still suffers from the same positive biases as Maslow's model because in reality, many people are not able to meet their basic needs for security, connection, and self-esteem. I personally know many people who grew up in war-torn countries, lived in dire poverty, or survived abusive parents during childhood. I also know adults who have lost everything and become homeless. Are these individual, deprived of the foundation of security beyond hope for personal growth and flourishing?

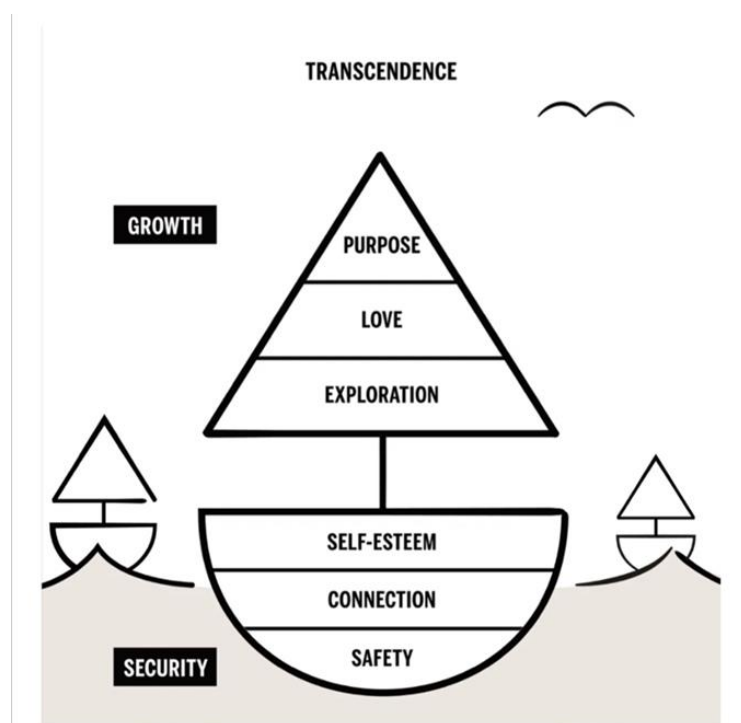
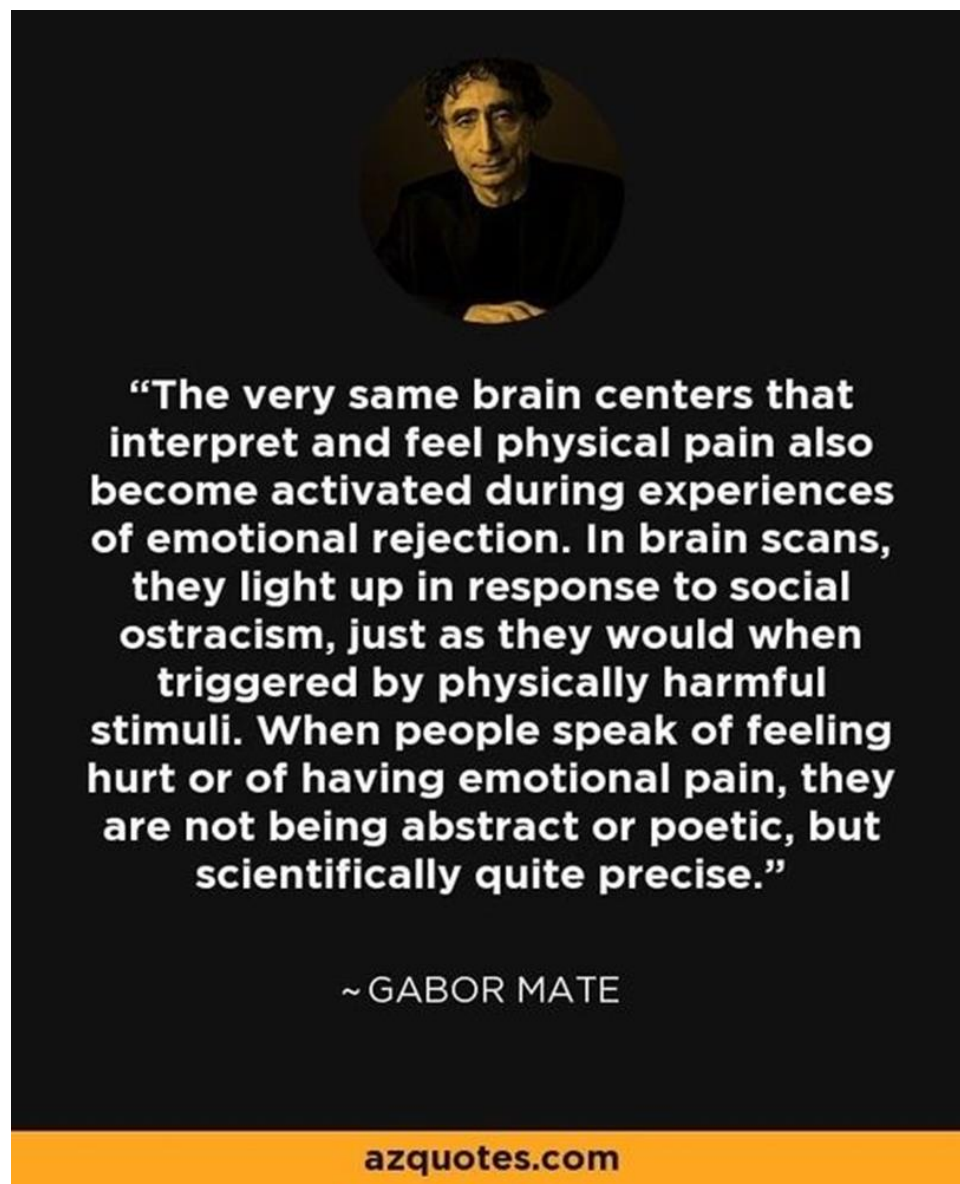


Illustration by [Andy Ogden](#)

The Need to Incorporate the Dark Side of Life

Theoretically, the psychology of wellbeing is incomplete without including both the Yin and Yang halves. Practically, it may be more helpful to be equipped with the existential positive psychology of suffering because in reality, no one can be completely free from physical and psychological pain, as articulated by the following quote from Dr. Gabor Mate.



If we are honest with ourselves, who has not suffered the anguish and despair of losing something or someone we love? Who can be free from feelings of guilt and shame? Who has not cheated on one's spouse, even if only mentally? Who does not have an internal civil war between good and evil, as depicted by Apostle Paul in Romans Chapter 7? Who has not suffered from some psychological disorder, whether it is OCD, PTSD, addiction, depression or anxiety?

YOU CANNOT RUN AWAY FROM ANY OF FOLLOWING COMMON FEELINGS OF GUILT.



- 1) Some moral transgression
- 2) Feeling like an impostor
- 3) Failing to keep my promises
- 4) Hurting my loved ones
- 5) Failing to live up to my potential.

They call for repentance, forgiveness, and a fresh new start.

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If we have ruled out physiological etiology, we can benefit from a spiritual-existential solution to heal our troubled conscience, broken hearts, anguished minds or broken relationships. (Wong & Laird. 2023). The main message of Chapter 6 is one of hope for positive transformation.

The Hidden Power of Self-transcendence

The hidden spiritual power of self-transcendence, according to Frankl and me, can be summarized in the following three points. I use the word spiritual to describe these 3 points, because they are all related in some way to the basic tenets of logotherapy, and they are manifest some spiritual virtues or transcendental values, such as such as compassion, conscience, and existential wisdom.

The Spiritual Freedom to Become What one is Meant to Be

Deep down, most people want to be liberated from whatever that torments them rather than just being happy. This is because that they know that outwardly they may be confident, successful and enjoying life, but inwardly they are struggling with their dark secrets, painful memories, self-handicapping habits, or whatever problems that make their life unbearable, such as lovesickness or loneliness. They have to resort to alcohol, drugs, and partying to numb their pain and find a temporary escape from their problems.

Abut 10 years ago, when I was fighting for my life and having to endure all kinds of painful procedures at Toronto's North York General Hospital, I posted the following message during my recovery after surgery:

“What kind of good life can one experience, while confined in a hospital bed, suffering from all sorts of discomforts and pain?”

I am sorry that it is not the kind of good life described by Marty Seligman & Co. It is not based on positive feelings, engagement, achievement, or any creature comfort. I felt that the world has abandoned me in a dark pit with people who were moaning and groaning.

While surrounded by sick people groaning in pain or crying for help in the public ward, I discovered a spiritual or transcendent kind of good life, based on the wisdom of understanding the finitude of life, the humility of letting go, the enlightenment of the need for repentance and forgiveness, and the spirit of loving-kindness to all, and bearing fruit of righteousness.

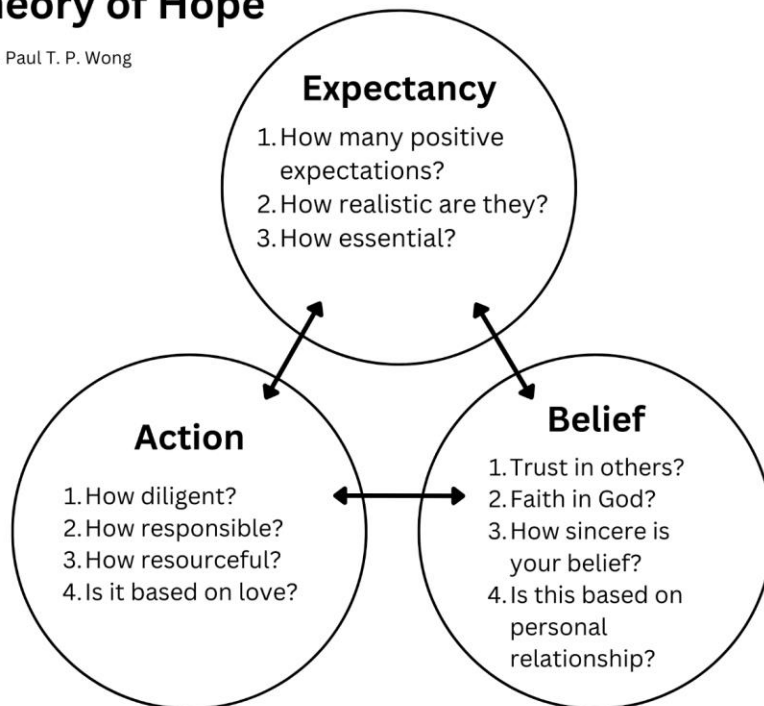
I am surprised that Positive Psychology knows so little about the kind of good life described in James 3:13-17, and experienced by those who have to cope with suffering and dying 24/7.”

Yes, life is full of evil and problems, but it is also full of mysteries, opportunities, and wonders. Yes, one can always rise above the pain and suffering, and become what they are meant to be – connected with God and living an abundant life of joy and peace.

While I was confined in Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto several months ago, I gained a deeper understanding of a faith-based hope as depicted in the following graph from Wong (2023b).

Wong's Expectancy-Action-Belief Theory of Hope

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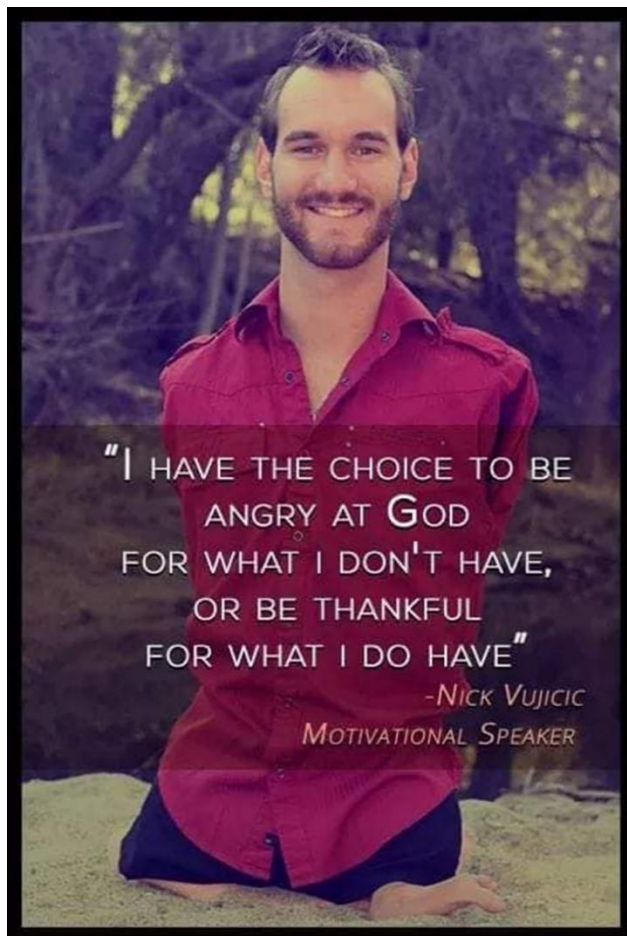
This is a complete framework that is applicable to the whole spectrum of human experience.

Indeed, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Furthermore, “now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (Hebrew 11:1). When we have a faith-based dynamic hope, we finally can have the spiritual liberty to become what we are meant to be – to be free. To be free is to be authentic and serve the greater good.

Frankl (1946/1984) asserted that we can always have the spiritual freedom to choose our attitude and say Yes to life no matter what.

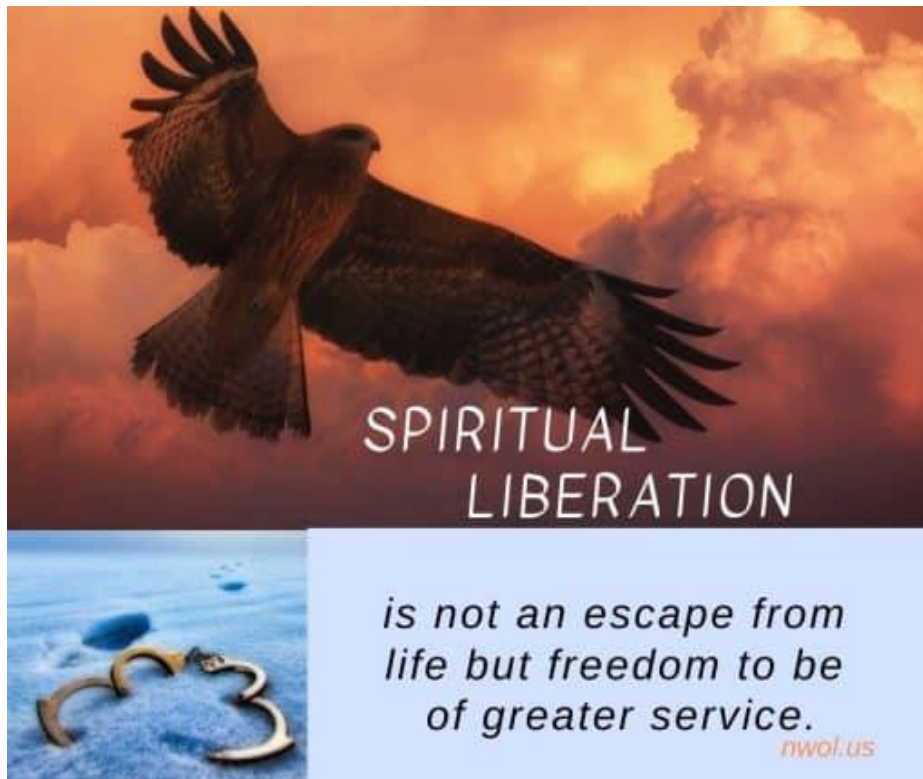
“The last of the human freedoms: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you become the plaything to circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity...” (p. 75)

Yes, we can always have the spiritual freedom to choose the positive attitude of being grateful and making the best of whatever little time we have to make a difference in the world, as described by Nick Vujicic.



The Spiritual Intelligence to Choose the Best Possible Paths

In a democratic society, most people are free to choose their own paths among many alternatives. For most people, their purpose is to make a lot of money so that they can live a comfortable life and do whatever they want. We have already discussed happiness trap of worshipping Mammon, because our soul is hungry for something that cannot be met by materials things or worldly pleasures.



As St. Augustine of Hippo wrote in his *Confessions*: "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." As spiritual beings, we can never be satisfied until we have found our higher purpose of serving the greater good.

I have imagined myself sailing on the open seas in search of my dreams as the adventure of my life. In my idealistic and heroic vision, I heard the triumphant voice declaring "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." (Invictus, William Ernest Henley)

But in somber and more realistic moments, I see my little sailboat adrift in a vast and unpredictable ocean, facing the dangers of storms, sharks, and running out of water and food supplies. In those moments, I would naturally pray for God's protection and look to the North Star for guidance. In other words, my hero's journey depends on faith in God that gives me protect and assurance that my adventure will be secure and triumphant. Wong (2016) proposed that:

"The way to become your best self is, paradoxically, to become more selfless. I want to make the case that, in a world of cut-throat competition, the best strategy to survive and prosper for individuals and societies is to give our best in serving each other. In psychological terms, this way of life is called self- transcendence (ST)."

In the same paper, I proposed the following practical tips to pursue self-transcendence:

- You need to lose yourself in order to find yourself.
- It is more blessed to give than to receive.
- Do not ask what you can get from life, but ask what you can give to life.
- You must be willing to deny yourself in order to serve something greater than yourself.

In addition, Haidt (2012) argues that ST provides the path of experiencing ecstasy and awe similar to religious conversion, and is different from the mundanity of everyday living. In other words, the best possible path allows us to fulfill our spiritual destiny and experience something deeper and more fulfilling than worldly success and happiness.

What do you do when you discover that the luxury ship is about to collide with an iceberg while the passengers are still dining and dancing? Do you have a moral obligation to shout and warn them of the impending disaster? Or do you let the good times roll because you don't want to be a party pooper?

Lu Xun's short story, *The Iron House*, tells a similar story. Do you shout to wake up the people inside the iron house that has no ventilation? Or do you let them die in their sweet dreams? Like Lu Xun, I could not help but proclaim an inconvenient truth, because I would be guilty of keeping silent when I know that people are dancing and laughing their way to a deadly trap.

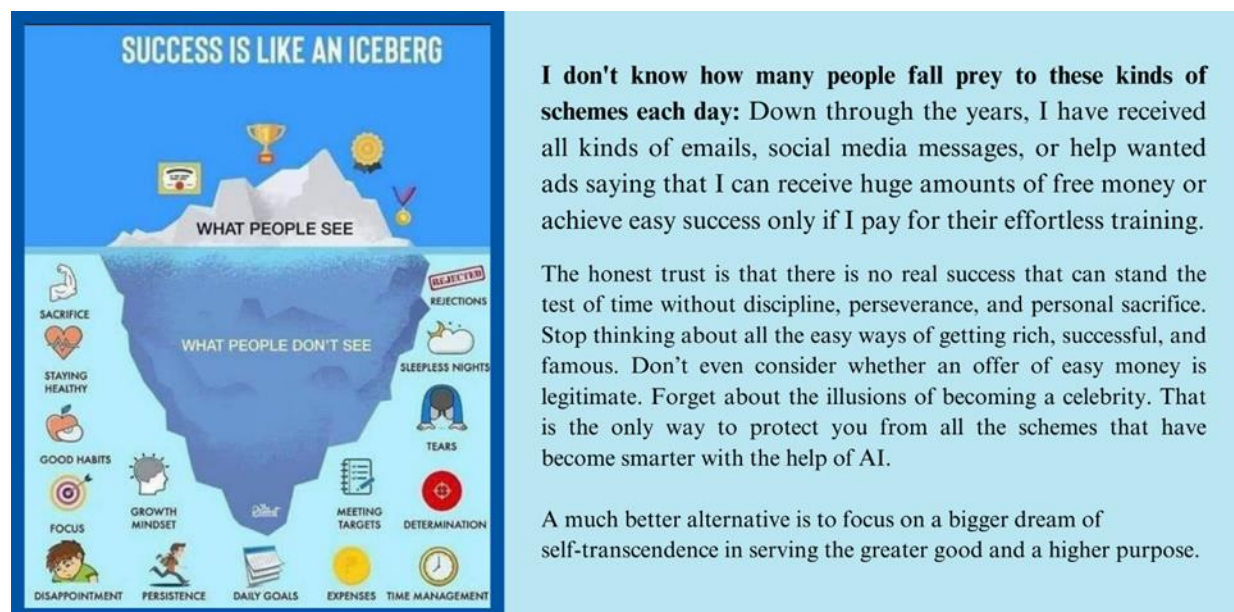
It is tragic that very few people have the existential wisdom of Dostoyevsky.

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“It is better to be unhappy and know the worst, than to be happy in a fool's paradise.”
– Fyodor Dostoyevsky

That is why I consider myself a weeping prophet like Jeremiah. I feel a moral obligation to shout out from the rooftop that people need to discover the self-transcending goal of making a difference. I recall that when I was about 7 or 8 years old, I already dreamed of being a sage like Confucius, and at the age of 25, my ambition was to be a prophet for the end age.

In today's materialistic culture, it has been difficult to have my voice heard among all the voices promising people instant gratification and easy success. The following figure gives the reasons for my concern. You may also want to see [this video](#) about Frankl talking about love and faith with Robert Schuller (see Editors of Wikipedia, 2023).



The Spiritual Power to Transform Hell into Heaven

This last point is most important for my assertion that self-transcendence is the best possible path for flourishing. It proclaims that no matter what life throws at you, or however hard your fate may be, or no matter how hopeless your circumstance, there is a ray of hope – with God, nothing is impossible.

This may sound unscientific, but I am going to prove that this is both scientifically and spiritually sound. We still do not have a critical mass of empirical support because very few people are willing to risk their research career to test this unpopular approach as I have done throughout my life. But I believe that the history is on the side of EPP.

Recently, flourishing has been under criticism (VanderWeele, 2023). To me, the missing link is suffering – how to turn suffering into flourishing through self-transcendence. I have published extensively on my EPP as advocated by Frankl and me (Wong, 2020; Wong, Mayer et al., 2021), but I continue to be lone voice in the wildness in a culture dominated by the positive psychology of happiness.

I believe that one day, the stone that was rejected by the buildings will become the cornerstone for the psychology of sustainable flourishing. The positive psychology of suffering (Wong et al., 2023) has already discovered the benefits of suffering as shown in the following figure. Our lives will be much better if we learn how to benefit from suffering. No wonder Frankl always considers transforming suffering into triumph as the greatest human achievement.

Here are 5 great benefits of suffering that can turn our suffering into flourishing:

1. **It is protective** - warns us against potential dangers.
2. **It is diagnostic** - shows us the cause or source of our suffering.
3. **It is curative** - guides us to make amends and repair what is broken.
4. **It is transformative** - awakens our needs for redemption and transforming what is bad into good.
5. **It is generative** - enables us to be fruitful and make the world a better place for our children.

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I propose that the most fitting metaphor for our new paradigm of flourishing through suffering is a huge tree with deep roots. This model incorporates Frankl's psychology of depths and heights.

According to Carl Jung, "No tree can grow to Heaven unless it's roots reach down to Hell." Hell may refer to one's darkest recesses of guilt, shame and fear, or one's worst ordeals of going through unimaginable traumas. In short, one's roots need to sink deep into the fertile dark soils of suffering so one draws strength and nourishment for growth. Thus, suffering is the necessary precondition for personal growth and flourishing.

Deep roots can also be interpreted as spiritual roots in God himself, or the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ. By embracing the suffering of Christ and dying with Him, we will

experience rebirth. When we die with Christ, we will also rise with Christ, and share the hope of glory (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

When we are rooted in God and nourished by His living water, we will grow and flourish as described in Psalm 1. We will become a tall tree with branches spreading wide and high, reaching towards heavens and casting a big shadow for people to take refuge from the scorching sun.



"And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Psalms 1:3 (KJV)

King James Bible Online.org

The following image illustrates the result of spiritually-oriented flourishing. First, by sinking our roots into the soil of suffering, we actually reduce our worst suffering through meaning transformation and creativity (Wong & Worth, 2017). The deeper our roots, the tallest the tree will grow, achieving our highest ideal of glorifying God and serving the common good by producing fruits that can feed many people. In the process of suffering and growing, our ego is crucified on the cross and we become selfless.

By comparing this dynamic complex model with Maslow's pyramid model of Kaufman's revised model, you will begin to see the differences between a self-transcendence based on self-actualization and a self-transcendence based on dying to oneself. The next section will illustrate the usefulness of Frankl and Wong's self-transcendence model in nursing and leadership.



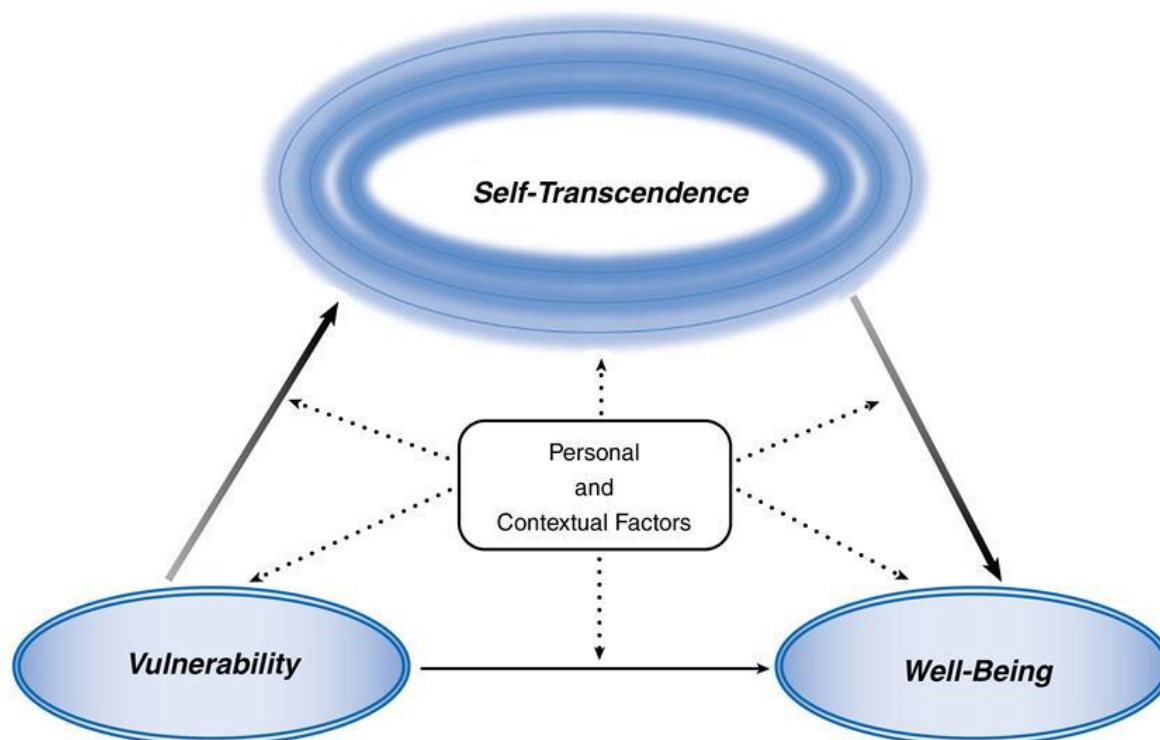
This is the model based on the teachings of Jesus and Buddha. This is the path of all the individuals who have given the lives to achieve the impossible for humanity such as Gandhi and Mother Teresa. The world needs more people who follow the path of selflessness.

Practical Applications of the Self-transcendence Model

There are at least two areas where the self-transcendence model has some success and acceptance: nursing and servant leadership. Hopefully, this model can also be influential for global democracy (Martin, 2018) and the fight against climate change (Passmore & Howell, 2014).

The Self-Transcendence Theory for Nursing

According to Reed's (2008) model of Self-transcendence, self-transcendence is the moderator between vulnerability and wellbeing, which is supported by my recent research on the buffering effect of self-transcendence (Wong, Arslan et al., 2021). The following diagram is from Reed (2008).



Reed defined this process as the “Inherent, gradual, non-linear developmental process, resulting in increased awareness of dimensions greater than the self and expansions of personal boundaries within intrapersonal, interpersonal, transpersonal, and temporal domains.” (McCarthy et al., 2013, p. 179).

More specifically, when individuals are confronted with their human vulnerability or mortality, they need to capitalize on their capacity for self-transcendence to see beyond present limitations in the self and environment, resulting in increased wellbeing. Like Frankl and Carl Rogers, Reed (2009) had a very high view of the enduring human potential for wellbeing in spite of internal and external barriers.

During my long hospital stays, I personally observed how nurses are overwhelmed by increasing case loads, physical and emotional stress, difficult or abusive patients, and the lack of respect and recognition by doctors and hospital administrators. In addition, they also had to deal with interpersonal conflicts in the hospital and their own family issues. They are always torn between the need to get things done quickly and the need to pay enough attention to each patient's needs. Nurses need to go deeper and higher in order to keep their own sanity and wellbeing while providing the best care for their patients. Such existential wisdom from nurses can be a dose of sunshine for many patients, as illustrated by the Korean drama *Daily Dose of Sunshine* (Park & Kim, 2023).

The self-transcendence model is also very helpful to palliative care patients (Wong & Yu, 2021) and cancer patients (Wong, 2018). After my recent accident of falling on my face, I became more aware that every step may be my last step in this world; I literally need to pray during every second for strength and protection. Thus, based on both my personal experiences and all my research on successful aging and EPP, I can say with confidence that patients can experience existential wellbeing through self-transcendence (Wong et al., under review).

The Self-Transcendence Model of Leadership and Management

I am pleasantly surprised the servant leadership has become a new buzzword (Dunn, 2023; Hogle, 2022). Several years ago, I had to argued long and hard with one of the editors of a book for introducing the servant leadership model as needed for a virtuous organization (Wong et al., 2016).

What has transpired in the last few years? The pandemic is a causal factor, followed by mass resignation, the quiet resignation and the trend of working at home. All these changes call for a different approach towards leadership and management. The traditional command-and-control style of leadership is no longer effective. Working with people in different cultures in the global village also calls for servant leadership, because the West is no longer the only country in the driver's seat. In my recent paper (Wong et al., 2022), I wrote:

“We conclude that in today's climate, servant leadership represents the highest ideal for moral and selfless leadership for the greater good; therefore, even though it is difficult to implement, society is still better served when we aim at this ideal for leadership and good work.”

This style of leadership is most difficult to implement. From my 60 years experience of practicing it, I discovered that many people take advantage of my approach. Some even feel that they can do whatever they want and have no fear of consequences of ignoring my instructions.

I am still trying to figure out how to practice humility, compassion, and self-sacrifice without losing their respect. Is it because familiarity breeds contempt (Norton et al., 2007)? Is it also possible that one's practice of downplaying the hierarchy gives subordinate the wrong idea that they are one's equal in responsibility and legitimate authority?

In hindsight, I still believe that the practice of servant leadership can reduce the abuse of power and unnecessary conflicts at the workplace; at the same time, it adds a human touch of empathy and kindness. All things being equal, leading with heart and soul (Kullar, 2022) is still a much better approach to increase engagement and reduce work stress (Wong, 2022).

Conclusion

This has been long journey, showing you the inner workings of self-transcendence. Chapter 6 can be summed up in the following four spiritual principles of personal transformation:

1. As a seed, we need to die to ourselves in order to rise again and grow (John 12:24).
2. As a farmer, we need to have the existential wisdom to choose to sow in the fertile soil of suffering in order to yield an abundant harvest (Matthew,13:1-8).

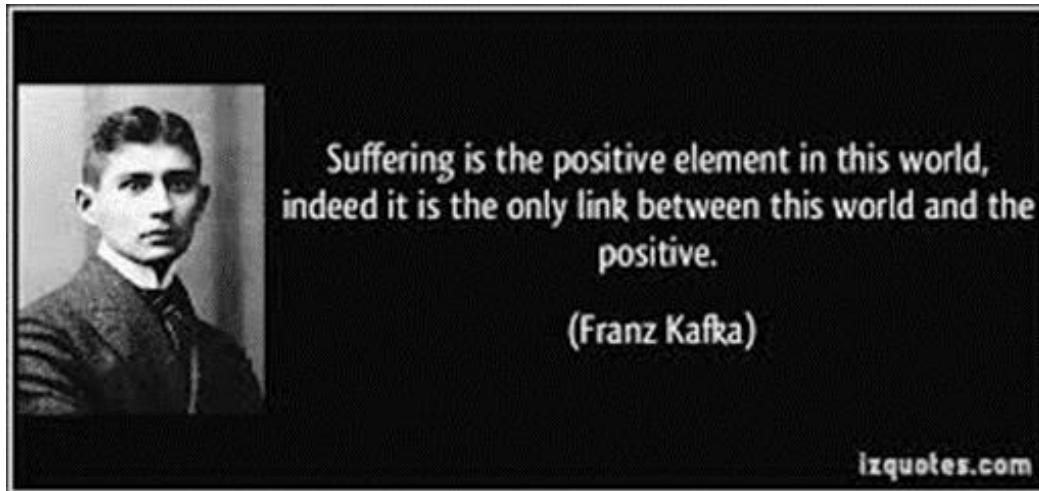
3. As a soldier, we need to be willing to endure hardships and make the ultimate sacrifice for something greater than one's own life (2 Timothy 2:3-4).
4. As an athlete, we need to put behind all distractions and entanglements in order to strive forward and upward to our highest calling (Philippians 3: 13-14).

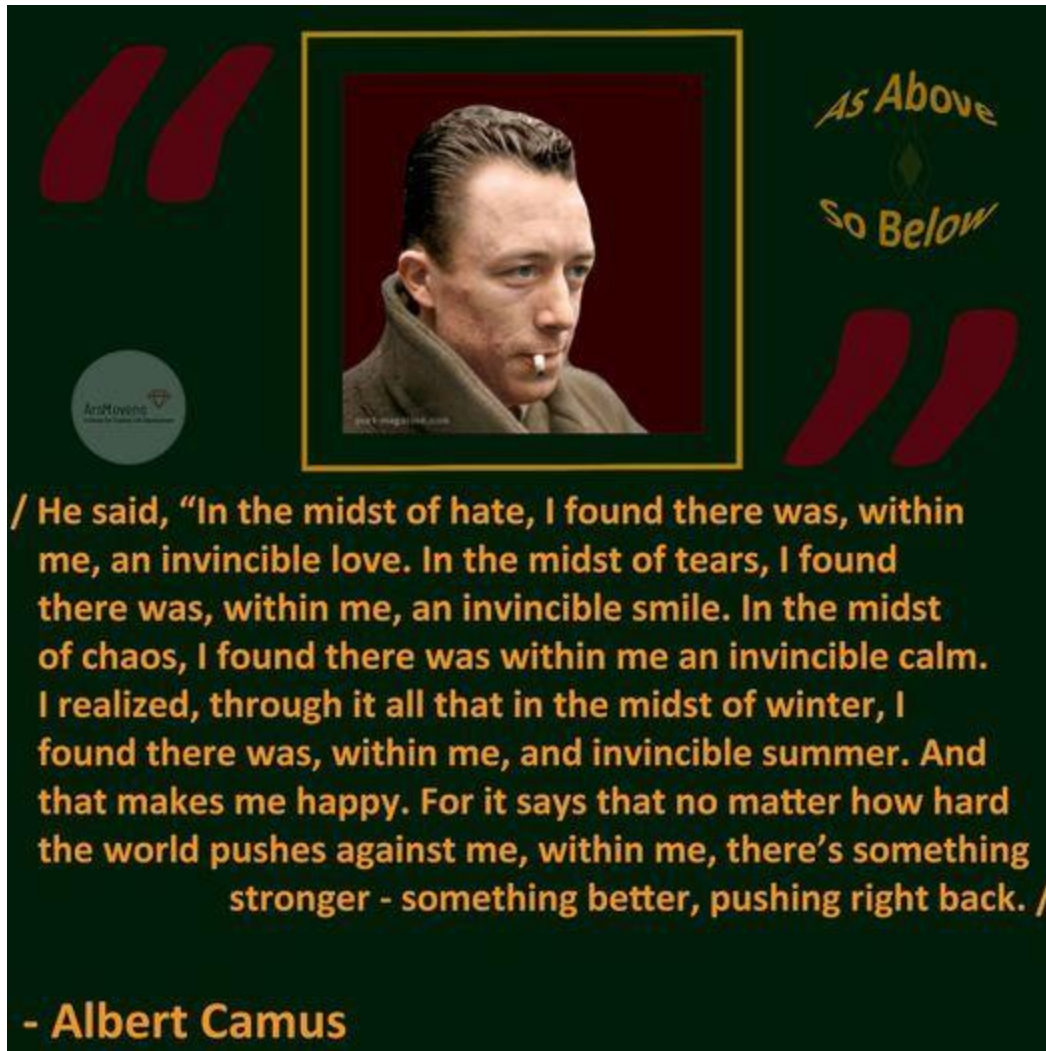
These spiritual principles are taught in every major religion. I am most familiar with Christianity; therefore, I am able cite from the Bible to support these principles of transformation, which are the secrets behind the power of self-transcendence.

Existential positive psychology (EPP) also does research on these spiritual principles of sustainable flourishing (Wong, 2023c; Wong et al., 2023), but we need more people to apply them to their own lives and work.

Some people have asked me: Why don't you call it Positive Existential Psychology? I have already explained it elsewhere (Wong, 2021). Here is simple answer: both Frankl and I are primarily interested in how to help people achieve mental health and a meaningful life (Wong, 2020) because we both know from our personal and clinical experiences that the positive psychology of happiness and wellbeing cannot be fully realized without (a) addressing the dark side of human existence, and (b) awakening the spiritual dimension in us (Wong & Laird, in press).

The following Kafka quote clearly states that suffering is the missing link for true positivity in a meaningless and chaotic world. The Camus quotes highlights the undefeatable spiritual power hidden inside all of us.





I want to end this chapter with an encouraging case. A few years ago, a client asked me, “Why do I have more misfortunes than all my friends?”

I suggested to him that he could reframe his question as “Why am I blessed with more opportunities to become a better and stronger person?”

After some reflection, his face lit up because he realized that there was hope of becoming transformed and made whole through suffering.

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