

Exercises of Logotherapy

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The concept of meaning can be demonstrated by some elementary developmental psychology: The newborn infant enters a bewildering world in which he is totally insecure. He understands none of the stimuli which impinge upon him, and they are therefore all threatening. He perceives a loud crack, a flash of light, and a rapid repetitive ping, and cries helplessly because he cannot connect them, and therefore cannot see meaning in them. The child of six has learned to perceive this pattern as a summer thunder shower; he no longer cries but may feel uneasy because he understands little of the nature of these stimuli. The adolescent has gained some understanding of them but may still be anxious because he cannot control these forces. Not, of course, that the adult can: he has simply learned to protect himself from harm, and his anxiety has been reduced. He perceives the relationship of these stimuli as one with which he can cope. He has succeeded in his search for meaning in the pattern.

As the individual develops from infancy, he gradually perceives more relationships and thus meanings. His natural tendency is to try and fit more relationships into larger and larger relationships in an effort to comprehend the totality of nature. In this task, however,

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he is doomed to ultimate failure: No matter how intelligent he is and how educated he becomes, he arrives at a point beyond which his comprehension is inadequate to grasp the meaning of the total picture. Thus he has an unsatisfied need which creates "existential anxiety," resulting from his inability to deal with the ultimate meaning of existence. This anxiety can be reduced only by a "leap of faith," to use Kierkegaard's term, in assuming an unknown design—what Fabry calls "an awareness that, in spite of apparent chaos, there is order in the universe" (2) and what Frankl calls "suprameaning" (MS, p. 187).

Many persons can tolerate the ambiguity caused by failure to make this leap of faith in ultimate meaning, and they may even function efficiently in adjusting to life problems; but they will still have existential anxiety, because their fundamental need to find meaning in life will be only partly met. If they are emotionally suited to living in this state of ambiguity, they can still find personal meaning in a world of chaos which they perceive as a product of chance. But for most people, this is difficult or even impossible; as a result, they may be frustrated, insecure, and anxious.

A Framework of Meaning

When a person has formed a framework of meaning (and everyone does this to a certain degree), he finds his own identity—a place for himself as Somebody—within this framework. If he has not found an adequate and personally satisfying position on the broader questions of universal meanings, he will have difficulty in establishing this personal identity, for he will have an inadequate foundation for it. And even if he has answered for himself the broader questions, he may still find it hard to place himself in a meaningful position as Somebody in the scheme of things as he sees them.

This is where the logotherapist can help. He cannot find meanings for his client, for no one can do this for another, but he can guide the searcher in the avenues of exploration, encourage him during periods of discouragement, and point out hope when the quest seems fruitless.

The successful application of logotherapy will elicit an awareness of a job to be done, a challenge that makes the struggle worthwhile.

Logotherapy assumes that there is design and purpose in the universe and that man is more than a passive mechanism responding to the environment through conditioning. It assumes that human life has an ultimate though unprovable meaning in which each individual shares. The individual has an obligation as well as the privilege to search for his own unique destiny and thus to fulfill his personal need to find a meaning in life. Logotherapy denies the mechanistic view of man which reduces him, in the final analysis, to *nothing but* a machine.

Logotherapy's view of man leads to another assumption: that man, as a spiritual being, is free to make choices which are not mechanistically determined. This view contrasts with determinism, which is a corollary of mechanism. Logotherapy does not deny that limits of choice are set by heredity and environment, but it asserts that within these prescribed limits every person has an area of freedom to choose the attitude which he will take toward the preconditions. Thus man is a spiritual being because he is free; only man can freely choose his own attitudes.

Without these two assumptions—the existence of ultimate meaning and the freedom to choose one's own attitudes toward set conditions—there is little motivation to search for meaning in one's personal life. The search for meaning is still possible even without these assumptions, but it becomes a matter of "going it alone" in a strictly mechanistic universe. The logotherapist must guide the client in establishing his own philosophy, even if the latter has no idea what a philosophy is. The thinking of the client must reflect his own initiative and not the stereotypes of society, and certainly not those of the therapist; therefore, treatment must primarily motivate the client to become conscious of what he really believes about life.

The word *therapy*, however, does not imply that the client is necessarily mentally ill. Frankl considers the existential vacuum to be a human condition. Only when it combines with clinical symptoms does it become what he calls a *noögenic* neurosis, which research has shown to be present in perhaps 20 percent of a typical clinical population (3). Logotherapy is therefore applicable to a broad spectrum of problems, only a portion of which involve mental illness. Frankl feels that therapy of the mentally ill should be restricted to a psychiatric setting, while counseling of all others may properly be conducted by

Logoanalysis, like logotherapy, helps the individual systematically explore all human values for the particular areas where he can find maximum personal meaning.

Logotherapy stimulates the individual to explore each of the three types of values—creative, experiential, and attitudinal—to find his own personal meanings. Here every logotherapist must develop specifics, because Frankl leaves the system intentionally generic in this respect. However, logotherapists who come, as I do, from a background of experimental psychology are likely to desire some standardization of specifics. Admittedly, these will be subject to continuous experimentation and modification, but procedures that prove effective in some cases can be recorded and maintained until better ones are found. A given case will usually respond well to some of these but not to others; and since there is no way to determine this in advance, a number of them must be tried out with each individual. Each therapist will develop empirically his own set of procedures. This is a professionally healthy situation, as from these divergent approaches a common foundation of sound technique will eventually come that works better than any of the individual approaches alone.

Frankl may have had this point in mind when in his address at the first of his annual seminars in logotherapy at United States International University in San Diego, he said, "Logotherapy is not a closed system but open to both the cooperation of other scientifically established approaches and to its own evolution. As I see it, logotherapy is still in the process of development. Logotherapy does not exist as yet, but you will create it. I have only laid the groundwork."

In line with this aim I am offering my own methods of inducing the exploration of values, in the expectation that some methods will prove useful to other logotherapists, and that some may suggest other original variations helpful in particular cases. All these devices induce the client to think through all possible values in each of the three value areas and to adopt the ones which can have meaning for him. A selection of those devices which have so far proved useful to this therapist is presented below. Many others are used (1), and new ones are constantly being added. They are called "exercises" in that they require specific acts or mental responses which elicit associations in the various value areas, and thereby furnish practice in perceiving meanings in each of these areas.

a variety of helping professions. It is for this form of counseling that I have suggested the term *logoanalysis*, to imply applicability to the broader spectrum (1).

Logoanalysis

The first step of logoanalysis is to help the client to expand his conscious awareness and to stimulate his creative imagination, so he can evaluate himself and his potentials within as large a totality as he is able to conceive. The goal of logoanalysis is to open vistas that enable the client to see new solutions to problems and open up new avenues to meaning, in place of the feeling of hopelessness. The search for meaning is seen as the hunt for the thousands of pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. There always will be many parts missing—the failures, conflicts, and troubles with which the client is faced. In some cases, he may be able to find some of the missing pieces, but some he may never find, which may lead him to conclude that his life is meaningless and not worth living. The logoanalyst must lead him to shift his attention from the holes in the picture to its over-all design with all its shapes and colors.

Logoanalysis must guide the client to evaluate himself realistically in honest self-appraisal of where he stands and wishes to stand in the totality of his life. He is encouraged to make an inventory of his assets and hopes, his liabilities and shortcomings. I have devised six lists that are used throughout the analysis:

1. Life-long aims, ambitions, goals, and interests going back as far as the client can remember, including those he no longer considers important,
2. The strong points of personality, physical and environmental circumstances, "good luck"
3. The weak points of personality, failures, "bad luck"
4. Specific problems that cause his conflicts
5. Future hopes (this list may overlap with the first list above but emphasizes the future while list 1 includes past ambitions)
6. Future plans, immediate and long-range

During the course of the analysis the client is encouraged to add to and subtract from these lists as he changes his self-appraisal. Eventually he is asked to summarize his progress.

Creative Values

1. A sense of personal identity.
 - a. If you had to identify yourself in *one* sentence, what would you say of yourself? Write five sentences that would identify you, starting with one which would furnish the best identity, then the second best, and so forth.
 - b. Write, in order of importance, five sentences which you *wish* you could truthfully write to identify yourself.
 - c. What keeps you from becoming the person you would like to be?
2. Three wishes.
 - a. If you had three wishes, what would they be? Write them in order of importance.
 - b. What basic human need does each wish satisfy?
 - c. By what possible means can you fulfill each of these needs?
3. The meaning of life in one word.
 - a. Select one word which best expresses the meaning you would *like* life to have. (Examples: A wife said, "husband," an actor, "applause," a student, "wealth.")
 - b. Name the value which lies behind the word you choose. (The wife might say, love or security or companionship; the actor, popularity, fame, or bringing happiness to others; the student, security, fun, or independence.)
 - c. Think of possible activities which could fulfill this value.
4. Writing your own epitaph.
 - a. Write the epitaph which you would prefer for yourself. (Example: Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "Home is the hunter, home from the hills; the sailor home from the sea.")
 - b. What life value underlies this epitaph?
 - c. What activities could help you to fulfill this value?
5. Analyzing the most important meaning in your life.
 - a. If a murderer offered to let you live provided you could give him one good reason why you *should* live, what reason would you have?
 - b. What life meaning underlies this reason?
 - c. What can you do to fulfill this meaning?

Experiential Values

In art, examine some paintings, sculpture, or photographs; listen to music—rock, folk, or opera; read a poem, story, biographical sketch, or play. Then, record the meaning each suggests to you. Similarly, in science, visit a laboratory, museum, or planetarium; and arrange to look through a telescope, microscope, fluoroscope, and the like. Then record the meaning each suggests to you.

Attitudinal Values: Facing Unalterable Circumstances

Think back over your life to some unalterable circumstance, and record how you handled it. Did you adopt an attitude that there was a meaning and purpose in the event even though this could not be demonstrated? As you now look back, what possible purpose could have been present?

These are merely samples of the exercises used in each of the three basic value areas. The client is led to understand that they have no magic in themselves but are only devices to stimulate thinking. From this thinking, it is hoped, will grow an awareness of a set of meanings which is uniquely his own, and which can furnish a new sense of direction and purpose in life.

Commitment

One step in logoanalysis remains to be discussed. In many respects it is the most important and certainly the hardest. It is the final step the client has to take when his system of values has come into focus—commitment.

Commitment is a matter of motivation. It is the complete dedication of a person's total being—his energies, his mental and emotional resources—to the fulfillment of the meanings he has found. Like many other aspects of motivation, it is difficult to analyze, and therefore difficult to accomplish by objective techniques. I have no exercises for it. The exercises for exploration of human values are basically exercises in perception, which have been intensively studied by several generations of psychologists and are much better understood as a process.

If we postulate the will to meaning as man's basic motivating force, it should follow that, as a person perceives attainable meanings, he should be motivated to achieve them. In practice, however, he may perceive such meanings, yet show much resistance to committing himself to their achievement.

A basic reason for this failure in commitment usually is a lack of self-confidence. Perceived meanings lose their strength when the person feels insecure and inadequate. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to his level of self-confidence and strengthen his self-concept. Because this takes time, gaining self-confidence cannot be postponed until the client is ready to commit himself to a course of action; self-confidence should be a featured part of logoanalysis from the beginning. I have used for this purpose an exercise called "Act as if . . ." a continuing procedure that runs simultaneously with the other exercises. It requires the client to do that which he fears most—to imagine that he is the self-confident person he would like to be and to set aside regular periods during which he acts as he thinks this adequate person would act. In time he gets to feel as he acts, and then he is no longer acting.

Acting-as-if is a good preparation for commitment, but there is no direct means of establishing it. It is up to the ingenuity of the counselor to stimulate commitment in interaction with his client. The basis for this stimulation is the quality of the relationship between the two—what the existentialist calls the encounter.

When a client has found meanings and genuinely committed himself to attaining them, the work of the logotherapist is done. But the work of the client has only begun. Its completion will require the rest of his life. Finding meaning is never a homeostatic mechanism which can be satisfied once and for all and which thereafter leaves the individual complacent, unmotivated, and inactive. The will to meaning is, rather, a dynamic mechanism which never reaches completion. Its satisfaction consists not in the finished task, but in the experience of progress toward its attainment.

This is the state in which the successful application of logotherapy—or logoanalysis—will bid the client goodbye. He is now on the road. It is up to him to complete the journey.

References

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