

**Essential Logotherapy**  
An Introduction to the work of Viktor Frankl

**Course Notes**

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# An Overview of Logotherapy

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## Logotherapy

Welcome to Logotherapy. This course will introduce you to the major concepts of Viktor Frankl's psychotherapy, which might well be named "meaning centred" therapy. You will be introduced to the concept that there are three tiers in Logotherapy.

First, it is a philosophy of life. Every therapeutic intervention begins by making assumptions about the human being. Logotherapy begins by providing a philosophy of life which provides the basis for a theory of psychology and finally a theory of psychotherapy. The skills of logotherapy are not simply applied by the therapist in working with clients but are part of a personal approach to life.

To begin the journey access the first reading in this short course.

### Reading 1 About Life, Meaning and Logotherapy.

Before proceeding access Reading 1 from *Finding new meaning in Life*.

There are a number of logotherapy lessons that result from this reading. The first is that every life has meaning and that meaning is unique, and everyone has a deep desire to find it. Finally there is choice, all of us can choose to take meaning-filled paths in life, or not.

While the paragraph above encapsulates much of logotherapy it can seem simplistic. It perhaps raises more questions than it answers. Maybe it is raised questions for you as you read and so before going on download our first worksheet and look at your own capacity for meaning in life as it is today right now.

### Worksheet 1. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Source, Strack, K, M. (2007).)

Before proceeding complete Worksheet 1.

First download the Word version of the Worksheet so that you can respond on that worksheet

If you are working in a group take time to share this with the group before you go on. If you are working online send the responses to your supervisor by uploading them to the LMS

How did you fare? If you scored 70 that's not only unusual it's actually problematic. Because question 9 needs to be reversed scored so even if you are feeling ecstatic today about life and life's purpose your maximum score could only be 64. However, it's a little more complex than that.

The questions have been organised to measure two scales: (1) Presence of Meaning (how much respondents feel their lives have meaning), and (2) Search for Meaning (how much respondents strive to find meaning and understanding in their lives). It is an instrument under development and although it has been tested with good results it should not be taken as an absolute. However, it might be worthwhile to add up your score. To do this take items 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9, always remembering that nine is actually reversed scored, and add those together. This is the presence of meaning scale. If you are absolutely ecstatic today about your meaning in life your maximum score would be 29. Then take items 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10. This is the search for

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meaning and if you are really looking seriously for meaning in your life right now your maximum score would be 35. Be comforted by the fact that it's highly unlikely that anyone schools the maximum. Searching for meaning is a healthy option. On the other hand feeling that you have found that somewhat nebulous Nirvana and know exactly what life's meaning is for you would not only be highly unusual but might also change instantly with only one event – remember lessons 2 and 4 from your reading just now? Life can be quite accidental and our capacity to respond and turn tragedy into triumph is called on quite often.

A deeper self-analysis, from Crumbaugh and Henrion (1988) is on worksheet 2. Take time to record your responses to this set of questions before continuing.

### Worksheet 2. Part B of the Purpose in Life Scale

Before proceeding complete Worksheet 2.

First download the Word version of the Worksheet so that you can respond on that worksheet

If you are working in a group take time to share this with the group before you go on.

If you are working online send the responses to your supervisor by uploading them to the LMS.

There is no one meaning of life for a person. For each person it differs and each person must discover it for themselves. The meaning of life is often fluid, and often in need of readjustment to the current circumstance. This is termed the “meaning of the moment” in Logotherapy. For much of the time it is obvious. We must get home from work because the kids need to be fed. I must get to work because I need to pay the rent. However, at a deeper level we sometimes just wonder what this day to day existence all means. We are not alone.

*We have all experienced the need at one time or another to find answers to these basic questions: "What is the meaning of my life? What should I live for?"  
For example*

**Prof. Irvin Yalom** who taught psychiatry at Stanford University, wrote that:  
*“Failure to find a satisfactory answer to these vital questions, might lead one to existential despair and even to contemplate suicide.”*

**Albert Camus** (1913-1960), the French writer and philosopher, expressed a similar idea:

*“I have seen many people die, because life, for them was not worth living. From this, I conclude that the question of life's meaning is the most urgent question of all.”*

**Leo Tolstoy** (1828-1910) also grappled with that question when he realized that the moral foundations of his life had been shattered. In his autobiographical book *My Confession*, he writes:

*“Five years ago, a strange state of mind began to grow upon me: I had moments of perplexity, of a stoppage of life, as it were, as if I did not know how I was to live, what I was to do...”*

*I felt that the ground on which I stood was crumbling, that there was nothing for me to stand on, that what I had been living for, was nothing, and that I had no reason for going on living ... The truth was, that life was meaningless. Every*

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*day of my existence, every step in it, brought me nearer to the precipice, and I saw clearly that there was nothing but ruin."*

*In fact, at age fifty, Tolstoy was considering the possibility of committing suicide. He recounts this episode in these terms:*

*"The question, which in my fiftieth year had led me to consider suicide, was the simplest of all questions, lying in the soul of every man, from the undeveloped child to the wisest sage: "What will come from what I am doing now and may do tomorrow. What will come of my whole life?" Otherwise expressed: "Why should I live? Why should I wish for anything? Why should I do anything?" In other words: "Is there any meaning in my life which will not be destroyed by the inevitable death awaiting me?"*

*Tolstoy tells us that a special event then took place in his life which enabled him to find a new meaning to his life.*

Having exhausted the limits of his own mind, Tolstoy came to realize that there was something greater than his thinking could comprehend. In other words his meaning had to be found beyond himself. This is akin to logotherapy's belief in "ultimate meaning". According to logotherapy "ultimate meaning" exists but is far too complex for ordinary human beings to properly understand. Ultimate meaning refers to the meaning that we cannot necessarily grasp intellectually, but can nevertheless be sensed, or tapped into on some level. For some it is of a religious nature, for others of a spiritual or metaphysical nature.

Whether we have religious faith or whether we simply regard ourselves as nothing more than a piece of sand in the whole of the universe, Logotherapy suggests that what we have done will remain forever somehow cemented in the cosmos and in existence itself. What we do is important because we are all questioned by life and it is each of us who must respond to those questions. Our response remains forever. What we see and understand from our viewpoint is severely limited. As an interlude to explore this concept access the video resource below:

## Video 1 Stunning Views

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/gsakfnmbdbose3z/STUNNING%20VIEWS%20-%20From%20Earth%20to%20Universe%20and%20back%20again.mp4?dl=0>

Welcome back! We find meaning in our own framework of existence, realising that what we perceive is only a part of the whole, and can only ever be a part of the whole.

**Carl Gustav Jung** (1875-1961) stated that this existential dilemma has become quite common in our days. Meaninglessness, he wrote, should be considered as a form of illness:

*Absence of meaning in life, plays a crucial role in the etiology of neurosis. A neurosis must be understood, ultimately, as the suffering of a soul, which has not discovered its meaning. About a third of my cases are not suffering from any clinically definable neurosis, but from the senselessness and aimlessness of their lives.*

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*This new type of neurosis cannot be attributed to such causes as repressed sexual drives (as Sigmund Freud might have described it), a frustrated yearning for power (as Alfred Adler might have diagnosed it) or some external changing conditions of living. It is mainly caused by the absence of purpose and meaning in life and it manifests itself in boredom, indifference, inner emptiness, apathy, a lack of goal orientation, despondence, a feeling of meaninglessness and dissatisfaction with life.*

*Viktor Frankl invented the term “Logotherapy” himself. In the Greek logos is often translated as “word”. However, its meaning was much deeper than that. There is no suitable and reasonably easy English word to translate the concept. In the Greek logos really referred to concepts rather than being a single word. It referred to concepts such as language, talk, conversation and story; but also to principles such as thought, reason, and even meaning and wisdom.*

*Frankl coined the term “existential analysis” to describe the work he wanted to do with Logotherapy. He did not regard it as a stand-alone therapy. In fact Frankl was a medical doctor and psychiatrist first and foremost. However, he was also convinced that medicine, by working with the body to a large extent and psychology, working and with the mind or psyche was not addressing the full extent of what it means to be a human being.*

*The existential approach is first and foremost philosophical. It is concerned with understanding of the person’s situation in the world and with the clarification of how an individual constructs meaning in his or her life. It focuses on the relation of an individual with their own mortality, their personal identity, their social relationships, their understanding of the natural world and their spirituality – what they in their deepest heart believe to be important.*

*The existential approach regards human nature as open ended, flexible, and capable of an enormous range of experience. In this approach the assumption is that we each have the potential to create our lives with our wide range of free attitudes and behaviours.*

*It is important to understand that existential analysis, another name for Logotherapy, is not intended to be religiously based. Frankl intended it to be a secular therapy. However, it does challenge both therapist and client to think deeply about life and its purpose. What was meant or intended for **your** life? In what do you find meaning?*

*(Source Abrahmi, L.M. Arizona Institute of Logotherapy)*

## **The Principles of Logotherapy**

Every therapy is founded on some axioms, that is foundations or assumptions that might be disputed and may not be able to be proved. For instance Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) might be defined as “a type of psychotherapeutic treatment that helps people learn how to identify and change destructive or disturbing thought patterns.” This is not complete, but already can be disputed – we can ask “who defines whether particular thought patterns are destructive?” for instance.

Logotherapy is founded on three basic principles:

- Every life has meaning

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- Our greatest desire is to find meaning in life
- We have choices we can make to find that meaning.

Unlike some existential approaches, logotherapy believes that meaning is there, always, in every life circumstance. It can always be found.

Meaning can be found everywhere, in the smallest of life's activities. We find meaning in:

- What we do or create. This is our gift, what we give to the world. For many it is our work or career, our family or our business.
- Our experience of the world. This is this world's gift to us. It can be the beauty of nature itself, the wonder of music or art created by another. At its deepest level it is found in the love and understanding of our relationship with another.
- The attitude we take to unavoidable circumstance. We cannot determine what life brings to us, but we can always determine our attitude to that circumstance.

Many therapies look inwards. The task is to help you quell anxiety, overcome grief and so on. The posture of Logotherapy is always outwards, towards a task to fulfil or another to be loved or a stance to take in unavoidable situations. It is often about looking at circumstance through a different lens for instance:

- Work is not a daily grind but a contribution to society, as well as a way to support my family.
- A loving relationship is not about what I receive but about the welfare and satisfaction of the other.
- One can find meaning in even the most unbearable suffering. One always has the ability to choose an attitude, and with that he or she can transform tragedy into triumph.

The rocks of life are often unavoidable. Much of good fortune is what I have been spared from facing in my life. Frankl believed that psychiatrists might well spend more time to study the ordinary person in the street because most people seem to know instinctively how to respond to life's challenges. Therapy is required for those who have hit a rock of life and fail to recover.

Now it is time to have a brief overview of Logotherapy. Take time to watch the video presentation.

## **Video 2 – Logotherapy – A Pathway to mental stability**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/cr9vl8lzxwhoxxu/Essential%20Logotherapy%20Course.mp4?dl=0>

## **About Viktor Frankl**

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) was a medical doctor, a psychiatrist and a survivor of the holocaust and the concentration camps of World War II.

He had drafted his seminal work, *The Doctor and the Soul* before being sent to Auschwitz. He believed that both medicine and psychology addressed only limited dimensions of the human being. He always believed the whole person must be treated.

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His psychiatric credo maintained that even behind the tragedy of brain damage or severe mental disability, the human person, the essence of the human, remained. Frankl held that all psychotherapy must be underpinned by a philosophy of the human being and life itself. He founded the Third Viennese School of psychotherapy, Logotherapy, on these principles.

Logotherapy is the third Viennese school of Psychotherapy, founded by Viktor Frankl (1905-1997).

Logotherapy addresses the deepest of human needs, to find meaning in life itself. It is not given, but it must be found by each person. As you have already seen the founding principles of Logotherapy are:

- Life always has meaning, at all times, even under the most difficult of circumstances.
- The greatest human desire is to find that meaning, which is unique to each individual.
- The human being always has a choice, to take a decision that leads to meaningful living.

Logotherapy is an adjunct to virtually all other psychotherapies, providing the foundation of living a meaningful life, so that presenting symptoms do not recur.

Viktor Frankl accepted the tenets of Freud (the First Viennese school, psychoanalysis), that human beings do seek for pleasurable experiences and avoid painful ones (The will to pleasure) and that much information resided and was repressed into the subconscious. In fact his first published papers followed Freudian teachings.

Frankl was also a member the second Viennese school (Alfred Adler's individual psychology) which focussed on the human desire to self-development and progressing to find a place as a member of society. (The will to power). This development could be inhibited by the inferiority complex.

These schools of Psychoanalysis and Individual Psychology laid the foundations for much of modern psychology. Frankl was expelled from the Adlerian school because he challenged Adler's ideas as incomplete, maintaining that the deepest human motivation was to come to terms with life itself, to live in a way that has meaning.

Watch as Frankl tells his own story of the development of Logotherapy, the third Viennese school of psychotherapy.

## **Video 3 Frankl on the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/7za05hycujriq94/Viktor%20Frankl%20Opel.wmv?dl=0>

Many of Frankl's insights have been integrated, often only partially and without attribution, into more recent therapeutic approaches, but few approaches attempt to outline a philosophy of life encompassing what it means to be human.

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Logotherapy maintains that, within the limits his psychiatric credo, the essence of the human being which Frankl called the *geistig* (often translated in English as the human spirit) is always capable of choosing, of taking a stand towards being the person we wish to be in a particular circumstance.

**“Life does not guarantee happiness, it offers meaning”** Frankl states. Hence suffering is accepted as part of life, as are guilt and death. All are unavoidable and the attitude the person takes to them is the most important issue.

The skill of the logotherapist is to help clients discover these truths about meaningful living. A logotherapist walks with, and sometimes challenges, clients as they determine meaningful directions in life.

Logotherapists come from all walks of life, as Logotherapy is first and foremost about what you believe about life itself. So we have trained logotherapists who are psychologists, medical practitioners, nurses, funeral directors, wedding celebrants, even accountants and company executives.

What is next? It is time to revisit your second worksheet, **Worksheet 2. Part B of the Purpose in Life Scale**. Before you finish this short course I invite you to revisit that. Would you now change anything in your responses? If so, what? Has your attitude to life itself changed, even a little?

To complete this short course, please download and fill out the Student Evaluation. This is optional but your opinion will help us improve this course.

## Student Evaluation

First download the Word version of the Evaluation so that you can respond on that page.

Send the responses to Lifechange Therapies by uploading them to the LMS.

## Where to from here?

Please email [paul@lifechange.net.au](mailto:paul@lifechange.net.au) to receive your course completion certificate. He will refund \$50 of your course fee if you choose to enrol in the Advanced Course.

There are a number of options if this short course has whetted your appetite to find out more.

1. For a more in-depth study of Logotherapy enrol in Unit 1 of the **Advanced Course**. Go to the website [www.lifechange.net.au](http://www.lifechange.net.au) and under the courses menu choose which option is best for you – Unit 1 only, all four Units immediately or a monthly subscription for the whole course.
2. Join the **Viktor Frankl Institute Australia**. You will be invited to join their Facebook members page, to take part free of charge in three PD days each year and receive two copies annually of the Logotherapy Journal. To join go to [www.vfia.org](http://www.vfia.org)
3. Take another Short Course – four parts, one hour per week, offered by the **Viktor Frankl Institute of America** and hosted by Frankl's grandson Alex Vesely. Alex has brought together a range of video material on Frankl and his teaching. During the course he provides

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some of his own insights on his grandfather and hosts a tour of the Viktor Frankl Zentrum in Vienna.

To begin, request the link to the Australian version of the course by emailing [paul@lifechange.net.au](mailto:paul@lifechange.net.au) . Once on their site, you register and pay **their course fee (US \$60)**. **NOTE this course is provided free of charge for students in Advanced Course Unit 2.** Do not enrol if you are intending to complete the Advanced Course.

4. To access counselling with a logotherapeutic approach, go back to [www.lifechange.net.au](http://www.lifechange.net.au) choose your preferred therapist and book a counselling session.

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