

***Meaning-Seeking,  
Self-Transcendence, & Well-Being***

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# Overview

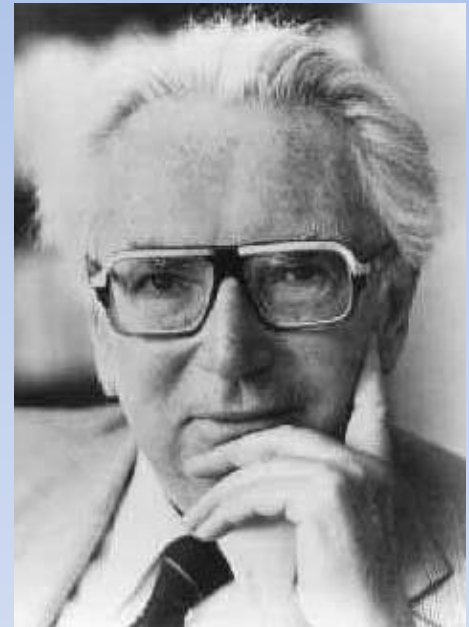
- Viktor Frankl and life education
- Spiritual dimension of human beings
- The will to meaning as a primary human dimension
- Self-transcendence as a universal value
- Three levels of self-transcendence: Ultimate, Situational, & Calling

# Two Challenges for Life Education

- 1. Fear of Death** – This existential anxiety has driven people to do all sorts of destructive things. According to Yalom, it is also responsible for various kinds of mental and emotional disorders. The challenge is how to transform fear of death into love of life and the good death.
- 2. Egotistic Tendencies** – One of the aims of life education is to change selfishness into a state of selflessness through self-transcendence.

# Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

- Frankl has much to offer to Life Education
- Healing needs to occur at the spiritual level.
- Needs to address questions of suffering and death
- Meaning can be found in the most horrible situations.
- Needs to awaken the defiant human spirit
- For more information, visit [www.meaning.ca](http://www.meaning.ca)



# Frankl and Life Education

1. The spiritual nature of human beings
2. The intrinsic meaning and value of every life
3. The intrinsic meaning and value of suffering
4. The freedom of choice and defiant human spirit
5. The primary motivation for meaning and self-transcendence
6. The presence of meaning in all situations

# Life Education and Suicide Prevention

- The best prevention of youth suicide is life education.
- When students learn the intrinsic value of life, the spiritual values of faith, hope and love, and the defiant spirit of heroism, they are more likely able to survive the competitive pressures and rather bleak future.

# Meaning and Suicide Prevention

- Having reasons for living or leading a meaningful life is inherently incompatible with taking one's own life.
- There is a compelling reason on both logical and empirical grounds why meaning-therapy is ideally suited for preventing suicides.

# Meaning and Well-Being

- Overwhelming evidence of the benefits of meaning
- Increases in happiness, positive affect, productivity, creativity, better relationships, better physical health, resilience
- Decreases in depression, anxiety, illnesses, anger, fear, etc.
- Meaning is healthier than happiness
- Wong's (2012) *Human Quest for Meaning*



# Noetic Dimension

- The dimension of the human spirit
- It is the healthy core or “medicine chest” of logotherapy.
- It contains uniquely human attributes, such as: will to meaning, ideals, creativity, faith, love, conscience, self-detachment, self-transcendence, humor, goal-striving, and taking on commitments & responsibilities.

# Two Approaches to Meaning

## **Mechanistic**

- Associative meaning
- Rational explanation
- Intellectual understanding
- Modernist paradigm
- Scientism
- Self-actualization
- A means to happiness
- Subjectively created

## **Spiritual**

- Existential meaning
- Transcendental explanation
- Experiential understanding
- Postmodernist paradigm
- Science and arts
- Self-transcendence
- An end in itself
- Based on objective values

# Meaning vs. Values

1. The two concepts are closely related
2. Meaning is subjective and can vary from moment to moment
3. Value is more objective & enduring, acquired through culture and social leaning.
4. Frankl points out the danger of creating subjective meaning without any concern for values
5. Meaning needs to be guided by time-tested universal values
6. Meaning-seeking for self-transcendence is based on our spiritual values of compassion, conscience, and serving others

# Key Attributes of Spirituality

- **Freedom of will:** Not only freedom from some negative condition but also freedom to something rewarding
- **Will to meaning:** Striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force
- **Meaning of life:** One can always discover meaning in life regardless of life's circumstances

# The Will to Meaning

- It is the primary motivation for living.
- Everyone needs to find the true meaning of one's own life.
- Will to meaning is essential for resilience and well-being to the extent that it means one's capacity to live in spite of pain & suffering
- Will to meaning = seeking self-transcendence

# The Usefulness of the Self-Transcendence Construct

1. A conceptual framework for both theistic and non-theistic spirituality
2. A spiritual vision for the future of humanity
3. Emphasizing the spiritual values of selfless love and serving the common good

# Self-Transcendence according to Frankl

“[Self-transcendence] denotes the fact that being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. 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.”

(Frankl, 1985, p. 133)

# Self-Transcendence according to the Buddha

“A man struggling for existence will naturally look for something of value. There are two ways of looking...if he looks in the right direction, he recognizes the true nature of sickness, old age, and death, and then he searches for meaning in that which transcends all human suffering. In my life of pleasures, I seem to be looking in the wrong way.”

(Shakyamuni Buddha, 1966, p. 8)

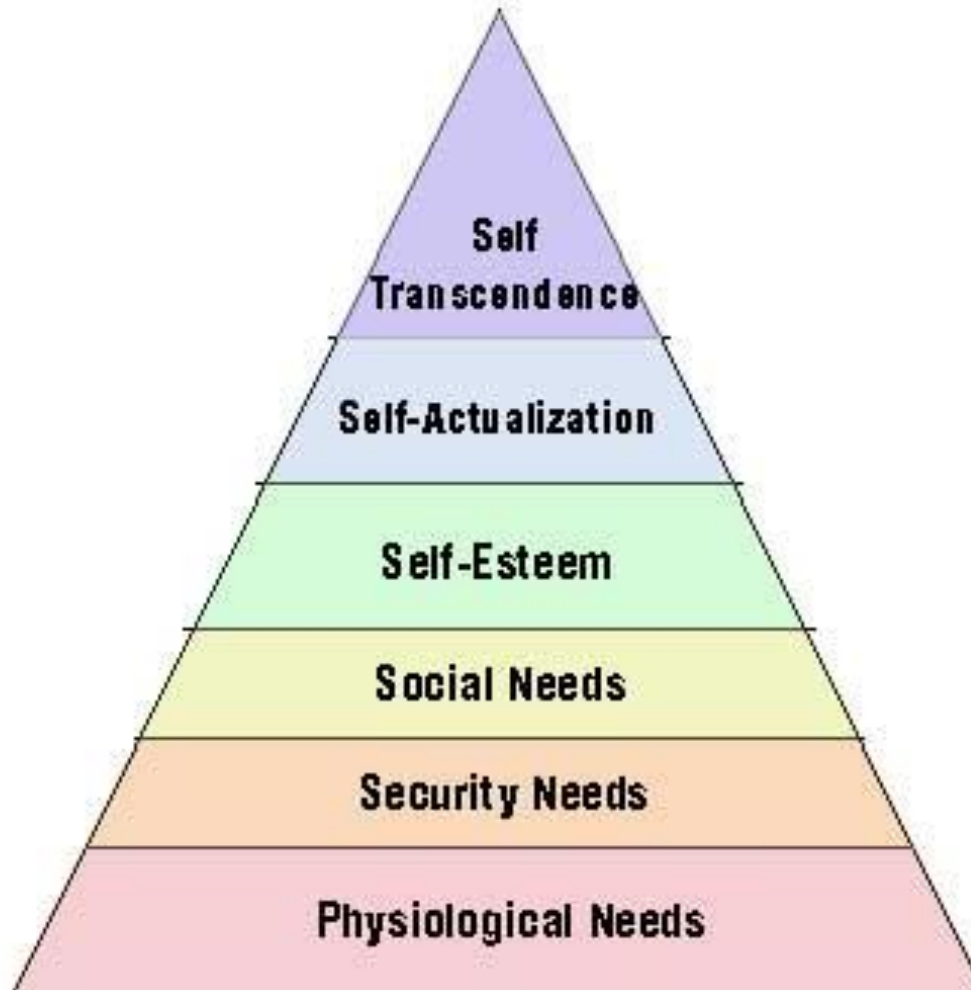


# Self-Transcendence according to Jesus

“And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.’”

(Luke 9: 23-24, NASB)

# Maslow's Revised Need Hierarchy



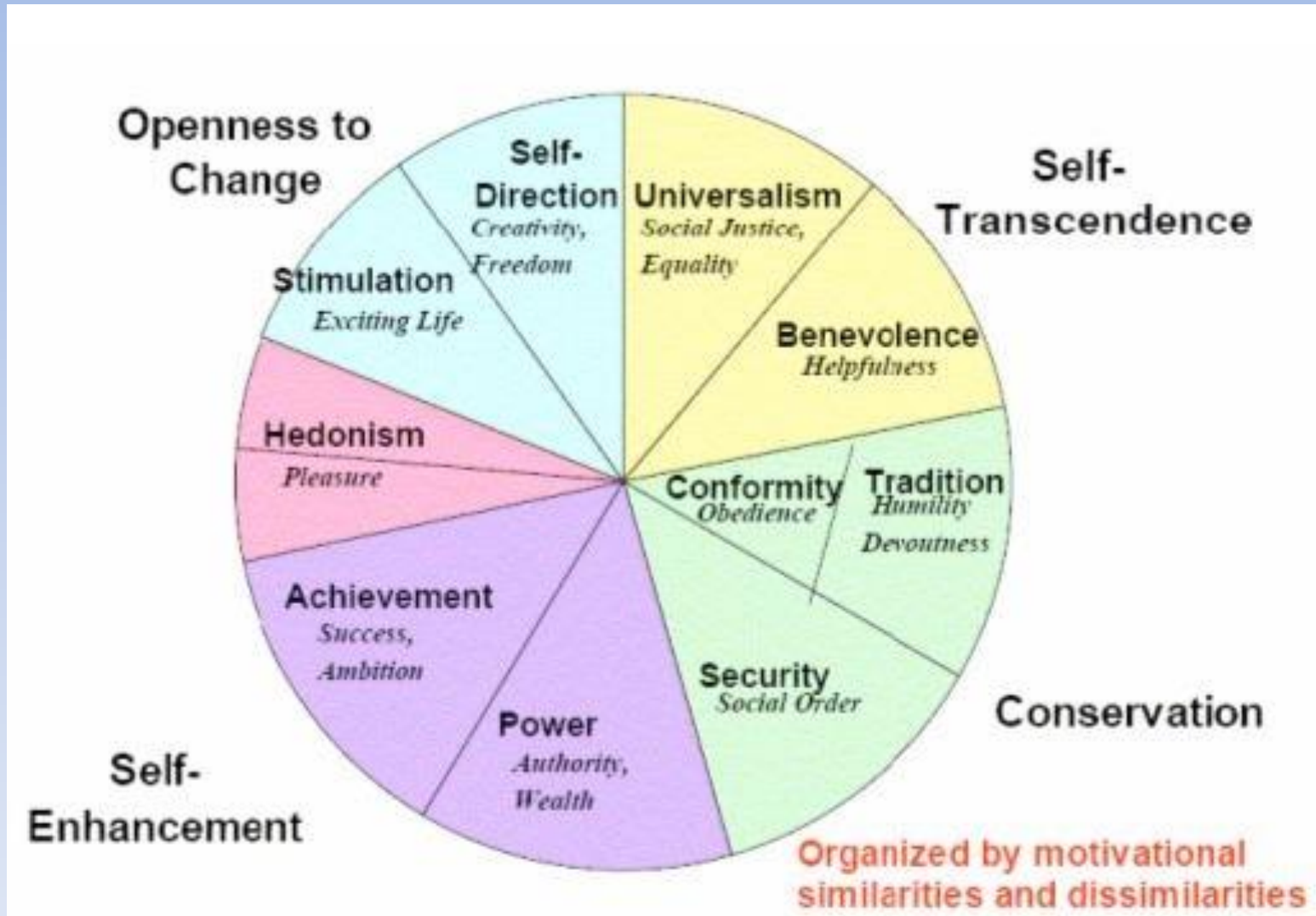
**Maslow's Modified Hierarchy Of Needs Including Spiritual Needs**

# A Short Life of Universal Moral Values

(Kinnier et al, 2000)

1. Commitment to something greater than oneself (**self-transcendence or spirituality**)
2. Self-respect (Personal responsibility & conscience)
3. Respect for others (The Golden Rule, common humanity)
4. Caring for living things & environment (Ecology)

# Schwartz's Model of Universal Values



# Freedom & Responsibility

- Logotherapy emphasizes the responsible & meaningful use of freedom.
- Human existence can only be understood in terms of responsibility.
- The will to meaning is based on a sense of responsibility.
- Responsibility means meeting the demand quality of every situation.

# Meaning of Life

- Life has meaning under all circumstances. It is our responsibility to respond to life's demands.
- Each person must discover the meaning potential of each situation.
- The ultimate meaning lies in its pursuit.
- The situational meaning can be experienced through three avenues of value (creative, experiential, attitudinal)

# Three Levels of Self-Transcendence

1. Seeking ultimate meaning
  2. Seeking situational meaning
  3. Seeking one's calling
- All three levels of self-transcendence are based on intrinsic motivation.
  - We need all three levels to become a fully functioning human.

# Level 1: Seeking Ultimate Meaning

- To reach beyond our physical limitations
- It is beyond our comprehension
- We can only gain a glimpse of the invisible glory of the transcendental realm
- For non-theistic seekers, seeking ultimate meaning means seeking the ultimate ideals of goodness, truth, and beauty



# Adaptive Function of Religious Beliefs

- There is a huge literature on the adaptive benefits of religious beliefs and spiritual practices (e.g., Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Pargament, 1997)
- Provides a framework to make sense of the big questions
- Faith community develops around each religion
- Religious beliefs & practices lead to positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2002)

# The Role of Faith & Spirituality in Health

- Prayer contributes to healing and recovery
- Faith enhances quality of life, hope, and happiness
- Religious beliefs affect medical decisions
- Spiritual beliefs facilitate death acceptance
- Coping with chronic pain, disability and terminal illnesses
- Addressing existential issues
- Making it an integral part of holistic care

# Empirical Findings on the Benefits of Faith

- Greater longevity
- Higher quality-of-life score
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer cardiovascular problems
- Fewer cases of depression & anxiety
- Better immune functioning
- Faster recovery from surgery
- Healthy life style

# Level 2: Seeking Situational Meaning

- To reach beyond our mental and situational constraints and connect with our spiritual values.
- This involves being mindful of the present moment with an attitude of openness, curiosity, and compassion.

# Definition of Mindfulness

- According to Dr. Dan Siegel, mindfulness may be defined by the acronym OCEAN.

**O** = Openness

**C** = Compassion

**E** = Empathy

**A** = Attention/Attentiveness

**N** = Nonjudgment

# Definition of a Meaningful Moment

- 1. It is deeply felt** – It touches your emotions in a deep and lasting way. More than a fleeting feeling, it reaches your innermost being.
- 2. It is deeply processed** – It involves deeper layers of meaning beyond the factual and superficial.
- 3. It is enlightening** – It provides a solution to some puzzling problems or leads to some new discovery.
- 4. It is transforming** – It enriches your life, changes your life's direction or restores a sense of purpose and passion to your life.

# Adaptive Benefits of Mindfulness & Self-Transcendence

1. Mindfulness is based on self-detachment & self-transcendence.
2. It provides a space between us and painful experiences.
3. It avoids our habitual dependence on negative thinking.
4. It allows us to connect with spiritual values.

# Level 3: Seeking One's Calling

- To reach beyond self-actualization and pursue a higher purpose for the greater good
- It involves engagement and striving to achieve a concrete meaning in life
- It involves a life goal of contributing something of value to others
- It often has a transcendental origin



# The Concept of Calling

- Based on one's interest & talents
- Based on the demand and need of the situation
- Based on the felt responsibility to serve the common good
- Based on a sense of calling from the transcendental realm

# The Intrinsic Meaning & Value of Every Life

- Frankl (1985, 1986) often appealed to the intrinsic value of life in order to rescue patients from their suicidal ideation
- Terminal cases or victims of paralysis
- Suffering as a rare opportunity for human achievement

# Affirmation of the Intrinsic Value of Life

1. Everyone has the image of God or the Buddha nature.
2. Everyone is singular.
3. Everyone can make a unique contribution.
4. Everyone has the potential to grow spiritually.
5. Everyone matters to someone.

# Adaptive Types of Reminiscence

- **Instrumental reminiscence** - Remembering an incidence or a moment when they were able to overcome a difficulty or resolve a problem
- **Integrative reminiscence** – Remembering cases in which they were able to achieve reconciliation with an alienated loved one or gain a spiritual insight about an unresolved issue
- Both types were beneficial to the elderly (Wong & Watt, 1991)
- Recalling such memories at the end of each day may also have the same adaptive function

# Spiritual Needs of the Elderly

- Existential issues – Suffering, alienation, death
- Need for self-transcendence & hope beyond death
- Life review – Resolving past guilt and regret
- Spiritual care – Need for consolation, human connection, and a sense of meaning & purpose

# Conclusion

- Viktor Frankl's unique approach to meaning and spirituality contributes to both suicide prevention and authentic happiness.
- One can experience the spiritual value of self-transcendence at three levels.
- It provides a positive vision for life education and society.
- It can serve as a practical guideline for daily living.