

CALL FOR LOGOTHERAPY AS A UNIFYING AGENT IN A DIVERSE WORLD

Rachel Bolaji Asagba

Logotherapy views human beings as unique creations – what is meaningful for one person may not be meaningful to another person. But, our individual differences are just fragments of our common identity, which is our humanness. Logotherapy emphasizes that our humanness is preserved and unifies us as human beings regardless of our individual differences.

What matters in logotherapy is the kind of responses or choices we make in life. We are constantly bombarded by many “alternative possibilities” that comprise both meaningful and meaningless ones. At times we do not see any alternative at all or see just one because of the situation in which we might find ourselves at that particular time. This is the reason why Lukas developed a five-stage process for sensitization training for meaning,^{7, p.79-84; 9, p.168-170} which other logotherapists have adapted.^{10,11}



It is widely accepted that the choices we make in life affect many other lives, not only our own – people around us, and those far away from us, whom we might or might not be able to see sooner or later in our lives. Furthermore, we now live in a global village created by many highly sophisticated technologies used in our various interactions. These technologies allow change to be more accelerated than ever before in all aspects of human society. This affects the conventional concept of family. It also affects institutions such as neighborhoods, schools, institutes, local and international organizations, and corporations.^{1,2} All of us are part of this change, and that is the reason why each of us should make a conscious contribution to these changes by the kind of choices we make. It is important that we make a responsible decision in any situation we find ourselves. We must see life as asking us at all times – questions that we must answer. The kind of answer we give to life's questions is very relevant in logotherapy.

For instance, one may find that as one question comes, another one follows. This is why the Meaning of the Moment is important in logotherapy. Each of life's questions is to be answered in a timely and responsible manner before it becomes the past, because it cannot be repeated – each moment is

gone forever into the past. Graber describes how Frankl refers to the sands of an hourglass as an illustration.^{5, p.88-89} The sands of time do not flow upward, but downward through the narrow passage of the individual's present life. Moment by moment, the future (represented by the sand in the top part of the hourglass) becomes the past (represented by the sand in the bottom part of the hourglass) as it passes through the "here and now" of the present (represented by the narrow connecting neck between the top and the bottom of the hourglass) to be stored in the past.

Frankl believed that logotherapists should live logotherapy. They should be able to put into practice what they say to their clients/patients. In other words, logotherapists must be role models to people around them. This means that logotherapy has to be lived by the logotherapist in his or her family, neighborhood, workplace, institutions, nation, as well as internationally as we now live in a global village. In that way, logotherapy can be a unifying agent despite all our differences in languages and nationalities. Logotherapy can raise the consciousness that we are all here today as one body, one extended family, and one community.¹

One result of globalization is there are diverse areas of specialization in different professions. However, many people remain restricted to their narrow area of profession alone. The result is that many people demonstrate a deep lack of knowledge of other professions, even those that are closely related to their own. This leads them to regard other professions as inferior or to dismiss them as needless professions. This is a common area of conflict among different professionals, including health care providers. Frankl realized that things are not the same as they were in the centuries past.⁴ We are in an era where we have to go beyond our professional ideologies. For instance, a medical doctor has to go beyond the role of medicine:

Patients are constantly coming to us with problems such as what is the meaning of their lives. It is not that we doctors attempt to carry philosophy over into medicine, although we are often accused of doing so; the patients themselves bring us philosophical problems. The individual doctor, confronted with such problems, may well be driven into a corner. But medicine, and psychiatry in particular, has thereby been compelled to cope with a new field.

The doctor can still make things easy for himself if he wishes. He can, for instance, take refuge in psychology by pretending that the spiritual distress of a human being who is looking for a meaning to his existence is nothing but a pathological symptom.^{4, p.xv-xvi}

The same thing is applicable to all professions, medical and non-medical.

In other words, we have the possibility to see beyond ourselves (self-centeredness, selfishness) to become more compassionate, conscientious, and willing to help one another as a team. Therefore, logotherapy can bring us together as a team working for the common good of the clients/patients. Logotherapy calls health care providers to adopt in their practice a patient-centered approach to health care service delivery. It calls practitioners of non-medical professions such as politicians also to adopt a people-centered approach.

Lukas has discussed logotherapy as an agent of reconciliation. She noted three important areas:

- 1) among academic disciplines
- 2) among various nations
- 3) among various religions ^{8, p.20}

Furthermore, logotherapy can unify both academic and non-academic staff by eliminating suspicion among different professions. Through the utilization of the principles of logotherapy, both can come to see their roles as complimentary rather than competitive. This can enable them to take a united stance instead of adversarial stance to each other.

Likewise, all nations of the world can use the principles of logotherapy to promote cordial relations, despite their greatly varied and divergent languages and cultures. Though this might sound impossible to achieve, it is possible if nations take other nations into consideration through cooperation and collaboration as logotherapy principles promote. It is even possible to envision peace among nations when logotherapy's principles are embraced by sufficient numbers.

This does not start with some other person; it starts with you and me. We should look inward to assess ourselves. Through ourselves, we can see many opportunities of what to do to give love to the world. This can start with ourselves and our families, then continue with our neighbors, co-workers, and carry on to the nations through workshops, seminars, and conferences. We can work with the United Nations in order to make logotherapy globally relevant.⁶ When different nations come together, one nation can engage another nation with the principles of logotherapy. That is, self-transcendence can be promoted across different nations in this manner.

These same principles of logotherapy can be applied across religion. Logotherapy is a unifying agent.³ Its openness to many types of religion (such as Islam, Christianity, African traditional religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and other forms of religion) is possible because it does not concern itself with specific religion but with the spiritual dimension of human beings.

Logotherapy is a unifying agent. This is because all the principles of logotherapy emphasize our humanness, which makes us different from animals and plants. This implies that these human commonalities should help us promote unity, peace, and love within nations and across international boundaries. Therefore, it is recommended that we promote logotherapy principles in our family, neighborhood, schools, work places, institutions, organizations, nations, and the international community through international organizations such as the United Nations.

Rachel B. Asagba, Ph.D. [rbasagba@gmail.com] *Diplomate in Logotherapy, is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, and a Consultant and Managing Director at Medical Counseling and Referral Center outside of the University. She holds a BA in Psychology from the College of Mount Saint Vincent, Bronx, New York, USA, and a Ph.D. in Religion and Belief System at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. Dr. Asagba is a recipient of the Austria Academic Exchange Fellowship grant (1990-1992) and a recipient of a scholarship award from the Viktor Frankl Institute, Vienna, Austria (2007). She completed a three-year training (1989-1992) in logotherapy in Austria. The author would like to thank Robert Hutzell, Ph.D., for his suggestions regarding earlier versions of this paper.*

References

1. Asagba, R. B. (2011, June). *Finding meaning in life in a changing world*. Paper presented at the 18th World Congress on Logotherapy, Dallas, TX.
2. Asagba, R. B. (2011, July). *Viktor Frankl's logotherapy and life history: Relevance for managing psychotrauma, conflict resolution, and reconciliation*. Paper presented at the Fourth Regional Conference & Training on Psychotrauma, Nairobi, Kenya.
3. Asagba, R. B. (2013, June). *Logotherapy as a unifying agent in a diverse world*. Paper presented at the Nineteenth World Congress on Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy, Dallas, TX.
4. Frankl, V. E. (1986). *The doctor and the soul: From psychotherapy to logotherapy*. NY: Vintage Books.

5. Graber, A. V. (2004). *Viktor Frankl's logotherapy: Method of choice in ecumenical pastoral psychology* (2nd ed.). Lima, Ohio: Wyndham Hall Press.
6. Kalayjian, A., & Hutzell, R. (1996, September). Approaches to development and peace. Presented at *The United Nations: Facing the challenges of a changing world*. Discussion group conducted at the 49th DPI/NGO Conference for Non-governmental Organizations. UN Headquarters, NY.
7. Lukas, E. (1984). Human dignity and psychotherapy: Mergence through logotherapy. *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, 7, 67-84.
8. Lukas, E. (1989). From self-actualization to global responsibility: Search for the sacred, necessary and orderliness. In W. Finck, M. D. Finck, & L. Larson (Eds.), *Pursuit of meaning: The road to self-esteem and social conscience – Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Logotherapy* (pp. 9-31). Berkley: Institute of Logotherapy Press.
9. Lukas, E. (2000). *Logotherapy textbook: Meaning centered psychology* (T. Brugger, Trans.). Toronto: Liberty Press. (original work published 1998)
10. Wimberly, C. (2010). Intervention with an at risk student. *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, 33, 10-17.
11. Wimberly, C. (2011). Application of Lukas' five-step intervention model. *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, 34, 76-83.