

Journey of Personal Development (Part 3): Transcend Yourself

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Congratulations for coming to the last installment of this 3-part series. If Part (1) **Know Yourself** serves as the foundation of personal development; Part (2) **Heal Yourself** functions as restoration of areas of brokenness in your life, then (3) **Transcend Yourself** is the practice of constructing a meaningful life.

Personal development is a process

It is a process that begins with self-reflection, goes through a stage of self-determination, and ends with self-transcendence. In this installment, we learn a new way of looking at life through the lens of self-transcendence. This lesson provides a new blueprint for building a better future.

But you may ask: why “transcend yourself?” Why not “actualize yourself?” In this lecture, I will explain why self-actualization depends on self-transcendence, and how one may achieve self-transcendence as a noble ultimate value for one’s life. If we can understand and practice the wisdom of self-transcendence, we will find a solution to most of our predicaments.

Self-reflection

Socrates says: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Self-reflection is the key to awakening us from everyday busyness or misguided ambition. Life is short and time passes by quickly. If you don’t spend time to discover who you really are and what kind of life you really want, in your dying days, you may regret that you have never lived.

It is worth repeating that the most valuable investment one can make in life is to discover one’s real self and true purpose in life. Central to this self-discovery is to answer this important existential question: “What am I living for?” or “What am I striving for?” Your answer to this question will, to a large extent, determine the direction and destiny of your life.

Self-determination

We were born, we live and then we die, without any exception. However, some live happy and productive lives, where others waste their lives in misery. What makes the difference? You may be surprised to learn that it is not so much due to different environments as due to different choices people make. More than anything else, the worldviews and core values we choose can determine how we spend our lives on earth, regardless of circumstances.

Our free will and self-determination can be either our greatest blessing or worst curse. Yes, we have no control over our fate, but we do have control over our destiny. Our capacity for self-determination will enable us to transcend all the determining forces in life. The biggest tragedy in life is that some people let their parents, society, or fears dictate how they will live their lives. Life is worth living, only when we

choose to live in a way that is consistent with our core values and natural talents in response to a unique calling.

Self-transcendence

What kind of future we construct determines how we feel about life and how we actually live. Both Abram Maslow and Viktor Frankl have come to the conclusion that self-transcendence represents the highest level of personal development. Dr. Frankl is more explicit in pointing out the self-transcendence represents our spiritual nature as well as our deepest yearning – we can discover lasting happiness and deep satisfaction only when we step out of small selves and serve a higher purpose or greater good. Our spiritual core consists of our innate quest for meaning and self-transcendence. It is our spiritual dimension that separates us from all other creatures and makes us truly human.

Major theories of personal development

Ancient theories

Ancient Greeks and Chinese emphasized the self-cultivation of virtues. Unlike the present day focus on subjective feelings of happiness, ancient theories focus on the objective conditions of virtues. While Confucius emphasizes social virtues necessary for social harmony and world peace, Aristotle focuses on individual happiness based on cultivating virtues and excellence. The purpose of life is to achieve eudaimonia (happiness or flourishing) -- the ultimate value of life.

Humanistic theories

Both Carl Rogers and Abram Maslow stress the innate human potentials for self-actualization. Rogers emphasizes unconditional acceptance as essential for self-actualization, while Maslow emphasizes the fulfillment of all levels of basic needs.

Positive psychology approach

Positive psychology, as championed by Martin Seligman, stresses scientific research. His PERMA model is the most influential model of well-being. Positive personal development depends on the cultivation of positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning and achievement.

Meaning-centered approach

Viktor Frankl is the most influential proponent of this approach to personal development. As described earlier, self-transcendence is the essence of Frankl's theory. The will to meaning is the search for self-transcendence. Frankl points out the crucial differences between a success-happiness dimension and the meaning-virtue dimension with respect to personal development.

While acknowledging that feelings of meaning are subjective, Frankl also warns us of the danger of meaning-making in a subjective, arbitrary way, because one may make false meanings that are harmful to ourselves and others. Therefore, he proposes that we can experience meaning in life, when our

decisions are directed towards three objective, enduring values: Creative value, experiential value and attitudinal value.

According to all the above theories, value matters. It is imperative that we choose the values that liberate and enrich us, not the values that destroy us. In this lesson I propose that self-transcendence represents the best possible value for both well-being and resilience. It will also illustrate how the practice of self-transcendence will liberate us from self-made prisons and empower us to build a fulfilling and productive life. The Meaning Manifesto at the end of this article describes a life motivated by self-transcendence.

How to achieve self-transcendence in life?

Frankl's meaning triangle

- (1) Creative value – We make a unique contribution to the world through creative work. We transcend ourselves through giving our best to others.
- (2) Experiential value – We experience the beauty, truth, goodness and love through openness and mindfulness. We transcend ourselves through receiving and appreciating the wonders of life, such as music, nature and loving relationships.
- (3) Attitudinal value -- We take a courageous stand towards whatever life throws at us. We transcend our limiting circumstances and emotions through asserting the freedom of our defiant human spirit.

Frankl's three levels of self-transcendence

- (1) Seeking ultimate meaning – to reach beyond our physical and intellectual limitation and gain a glimpse of the invisible wonders of the transcendental realm.
- (2) Seeking situational meaning –being mindful of the meaning potential of the present moment with an attitude of openness, curiosity, and compassion.
- (3) Seeking one's calling – To reach beyond self-actualization and pursue a higher purpose for the greater good. This involves engagement and striving to achieve a concrete meaning in life, a life goal of contributing something of value to others.

At all three levels, we are motivated by the intrinsic need for spiritual meanings. If we can cultivate these three levels of transcendence, we will develop a spiritual lifestyle that is good and healthy for individuals and society.

Wong's PURE model of meaning

Based on Frankl's conceptual model and positive psychology research, Wong's PURE model identifies Purpose, Understanding, Responsibility and Enjoyment as the practical ways to achievement self-transcendence in everyday life. Purpose needs to be guided by self-transcendence and enduring values.

Understanding includes embracing the paradoxes and ambiguities of life. Responsibility challenges us to do the right thing in all situations. Enjoyment represents the positive outcome of enjoying a fulfilling life.

This lecture will also explain Wong's ABCDE model of resilience and meaning-mindset as the best protection against the trials and tribulations of life.

Take-home message

- Meaning is all we have in coping with the predicaments of life.
- Self-transcendence offers us the best ultimate value in life.

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Life is much more than the everyday busyness of making a living or striving for personal success. Life is much more than a constant struggle of coping with the harsh reality by fighting or escaping. Life can be lived at a deeper level and on a higher plane by adopting a **meaning mindset** as your basic life orientation.

Your life has intrinsic meaning and value because you have a unique purpose to fulfill. You are endowed with the capacity for **freedom** and **responsibility** to choose a life of meaning and significance. Don't settle for anything less. No matter how confusing and bleak your situation, there is always beauty, truth, and meaning to be discovered; but you need to cultivate a **mindful** attitude and learn to transcend self-centredness.

Don't always ask what you can get from life, but ask what life demands of you. May you be awakened to your sense of responsibility and the call to **self-transcendence**. You become fully human only when you devote your life to serving a higher purpose and the common good.

Let your inner goodness and **conscience** be your guide; let **compassion** be your motive and may you see the world and yourself through the lens of **meaning and virtue**. You will experience transformation and authentic happiness when you practice meaningful living. Now, go forward with courage and integrity and pursue your ideals against all odds with the **defiant human spirit**.

Exercises

1. Give a personal example of practicing the creative, experiential or attitudinal value.
2. Test yourself on the Perceived Personal Meaning Scale.
3. Do you understand the paradox that we have to step out of ourselves in order to fulfill ourselves?
4. What is holding you back from pursuing your dreams and ideals?
5. What are your core values? Where do they come from?
6. How does your worldview (beliefs about the world, people and God) affect your life?
7. What difference does your faith or spirituality make in your life?
8. Have you ever experienced the benefit of spirituality in coping with adversity or loss?
9. In what ways can spirituality make you a better person?
10. In what ways can self-reflection develop your spirituality?

