

The International Forum  
for  
**LOGOTHERAPY**  
Journal of Search for Meaning

SEEDS OF RECONCILIATION IN LOGOTHERAPY: AN OVERVIEW OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL-HERMENEUTIC INVESTIGATION <i>Edward Marshall &amp; Maria (Ungar) Marshall</i>	1-6
SPIRITUALITY IN SUPERVISION: THE NOOS AND COUNSELOR EDUCATION <i>Curtis Garner &amp; Kay Webb</i>	7-11
SOME HYPOTHESES ABOUT USING THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR IN THE SEARCH FOR MEANING <i>Gerald L. Finch</i>	12-15
ON INTERPRETING TERMS USED IN LOGOTHERAPY AND EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS <i>Timo Purjo</i>	16-20
SELF-DISCOVERY, UNIQUENESS, AND THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION'S STRENGTHSFINDER 2.0® <i>Michael A. Pitts</i>	21-24
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEANING AND PROFESSIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG NURSING STUDENTS <i>Henry D. Mason</i>	25-31
IN NIGERIA: CALL FOR LOGOTHERAPY-RELEVANT COURSES ON DEATH ISSUES <i>Rachel B. Asagba</i>	32-34
MEANING IN LIFE AND SUFFERING FROM CRISIS EXPERIENCES IN A SAMPLE OF GRADUATE LEVEL COUNSELING STUDENTS IN THE US <i>Lorraine M. Dinkel</i>	35-40
ADVANCING LOGOTHERAPY AS A SCIENCE: A RESEARCH IMPERATIVE – PART TWO <i>Stefan E. Schuilenberg &amp; Ivonne A. Flórez</i>	41-50
INTRODUCING NEW DIPLOMATES IN LOGOTHERAPY <i>Kevin M. Griffith</i>	51
<i>Henry D. Mason</i>	52
<i>Reza Pishyar</i>	53
<i>Marylyn Hodkinson</i>	54
BOOK REVIEW: LOGOTHERAPY REVISITED: REVIEW OF THE TENETS OF VIKTOR FRANKL'S LOGOTHERAPY <i>Reviewer: Michael R. Winters</i>	55-56
A MEASURE OF INTEREST TO LOGOTHERAPY RESEARCHERS: PERSONAL GROWTH INITIATIVE SCALE <i>Ivonne A. Flórez</i>	57-58
INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS	59
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION	60

## **IN NIGERIA: CALL FOR LOGOTHERAPY-RELEVANT COURSES ON DEATH ISSUES**

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The Tragic Triad was explained by Frankl as one of the important concepts of logotherapy. The three words that constitute the Tragic Triad are suffering, guilt, and death. The experiences these words convey are part of life as long as one lives here on earth.<sup>2,3,5</sup>

The way an individual views these three words impacts his/her finding meaning in life. An important question here is this: Does the individual feel positive or negative about them?

When I first read Frankl's books, I found it very difficult to see any meaning in the Tragic Triad, and I used to wonder about the terms: suffering, guilt, and death. They did not make sense to me until later years of experience with Frankl's works when I came to realize how important the three terms are in logotherapy. It took me a long time to see those three terms as an important part that makes logotherapy unique. That experience served as a motivation for writing this paper so that other people might more clearly recognize the importance of these terms.

Frankl made it known that the concept of the Tragic Triad and the three terms – suffering, guilt, and death – are part of life's challenges that one cannot avoid. But, how, where, when? – Nobody can tell. Even medical personnel can only estimate when patients are likely to die; they cannot be certain.

No person can escape death. This is applicable also to suffering and guilt. There is no house one goes to that does not have individuals who have experienced guilt and suffering.

In my experience, the "death" element of the Tragic Triad is a rare topic to discuss in Nigeria. Further, Alao, in an earlier publication in a Nigerian Psychology journal, commented "we have seen accidents resulting in death, we have seen people dying around us, some of us have been deeply touched by death yet, the discussion of death, most of the time is avoided by majority of us. We deal with death realistically when we write wills or take life insurance. We also deal with death related issues when we discuss suicide, capital punishment and euthanasia. Death appears to be an unavoidable issue in everyday living."<sup>1, p.131-132</sup> Indeed, many people's attitudes toward death are such that they do not want to talk about death; they always wish it



away – it can only happen to someone else, not to them. In fact, many individuals find it very difficult to purchase life insurance or to write a will even at the point of death. The problem reaches to the extent that there is not yet any course of study on death in higher institutions across Nigeria.

Grabler demonstrated her experience with death and gave some cases.<sup>4</sup> Her book may be very relevant to death education for both professionals and non-professionals in Nigeria.

Frankl made it known that death is very important to meaning in life.<sup>2</sup> He emphasized several ideas about death. Without it everything in life could be postponed indefinitely. Knowing that one will die someday can motivate the individual not to postpone everything indefinitely. It can motivate the individual to review their life and access those meaningful events that have been stored rather than destroyed. Frankl emphasized that those events remain stored in history forever.

The reason why logotherapists allow clients to examine their pasts through exercises is to enable them to remember and access the meaning that is stored. Accessing the past allows examination of those things that the individual has not only achieved but also that he/she has experienced (most especially, other persons who have contributed in the individual's life).

The important memories in our past are capable of bringing joy to the present. As a result, fear of death is reduced, knowing that one has done valuable deeds and met people who are very important to their lives.

Therefore, Lukas comments that:

Logotherapy, once again relies on its "optimism of the past" and points out that nothing can take away the valuable things we have done and which are irretrievably anchored in our past. Every task we have fulfilled, every happy experience, every suffering courageously borne, every guilt redeemed in a mature manner – all these things have become part of the eternity of the past, the essence of our being, the quality of our life, our identity. None of this can be taken away from us, even long after we have returned to dust... But what is past still remains as it was; its "no longer being known" cannot wipe it out. Frankl wrote: "Thinking of something cannot make it happen; by the same token, no longer thinking of something cannot destroy it." It remains.

Whether the level of its quality makes any difference, is a question that we can only answer through faith. But our deep longing for salvation and our existentially rooted search for meaning indicates that *what* has remained of each of us in our past *does* matter.<sup>6, p.95</sup>

I propose that relevant courses that cover these issues should be introduced into the higher education curriculum in countries like Nigeria. Because the implications of the issues that are raised above are pervasive, relevant courses are recommended to all individuals.

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