

Welcome to:



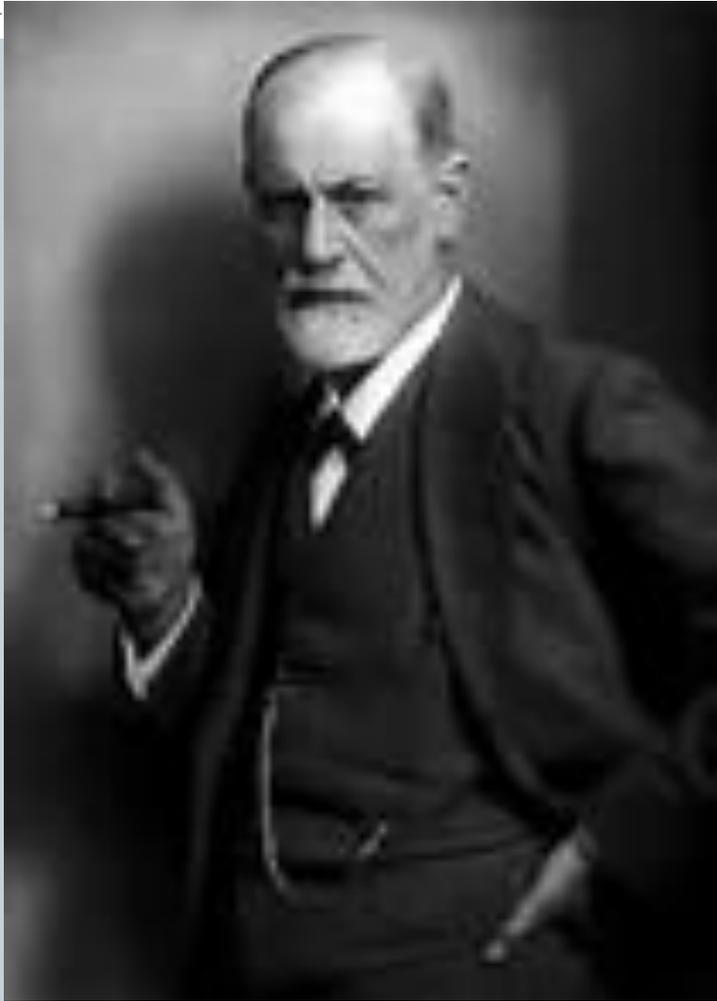
Wisdom from
the Holocaust
– Victor Frankl
and the search
for meaning

A context to this talk



- The search for meaning predates the Holocaust
- Context – millions of people uprooted during and after both world wars
- Mass mortality focused attention on what really mattered in human existence.
- Developing growth of behavioural psychology
- A focus on the psychology of ageing and finding meaning and purpose in later life
- Growth of different branches of psychotherapy. particularly in Vienna
- Modern day context –
 - millions of people still uprooted facing uncertain futures
 - Do we live in an era of existential angst ?

Where were the Freudians ?



- With an older person the Freudians were in some difficulty - the Oedipus complex is not the priority in older age

And C.G. Jung



- ‘We cannot live in the afternoon of life according to the programme of life’s morning - for what was great in life’s morning – money making, social existence, family and posterity will be little at evening – whoever carries into the afternoon the law of the morning will pay for it with damage to his soul’

Rogers – the ‘fully functioning person’



- An increasingly existential lifestyle – living each moment fully – not distorting the moment to fit personality or self-concept but allowing personality and self-concept to emanate from the experience.

And Paul Tournier



Acceptance of one's life has nothing to do with resignation; it does not mean running away from the struggle. On the contrary, it means accepting it as it comes, with all the handicaps of heredity, of suffering, of psychological complexes and injustices

Paul Tournier – the ‘essential reality’



A paradox – in old age we may feel more affinity with the struggles of our younger years than with the material comforts of the present – because we had something to live for then...

Early influences



- Kierkegaard: ‘Don’t despair at wanting to become your authentic self’
- The Talmud: ‘He who saves but one soul is to be regarded as one who saves the whole world’.
- ‘Blessed be fate, believed in meaning’
- 1929 – Developing early thoughts on meaning of life – reaction to prevailing views

Some key approaches in pre-war psychotherapy



- Daseinsanalyse (Binswanger) influenced by Heidegger:
 - The theory of Daseinsanalysis is centered on the thought that the human Dasein. (Human existence) is open to any and all experience. That the phenomenological world is experienced freely in an undistorted way. This way, initially being absent from meaning, is the basis for analysis – focuses on what is obvious and immediately experienced
- Existenzanalyse - ‘being in the world)’ phenomenological and person-oriented psychotherapy, with the aim of leading the person to (mentally and emotionally) free experiences, to facilitate authentic decisions and to bring about a truly responsible way of dealing with life and the world.

Daseinsanalyse (Heidegger and Binswanger)



- Human existence needs to work towards authenticity (Eigentlichkeit)
- Risk of existential state of ‘fallen-ness’
- Most of our lives are lived in a state of inauthenticity
- Man is depersonalised into ‘das Man’
- The ordinary self is inauthentic - continuing critique of Nietzsche on the herd mentality of society
- Being authentic requires engagement with oneself
- We must face a world we have not chosen
- Authenticity = Master Morality
- Result – Heidegger joined the National Socialists

The Will to Meaning – key messages



- Existenzanalyse and Daseinsanalyse
- Daseinanalyse = being, logotherapy = meaning
- Logotherapy – treatment of attitude towards unchangeable fate
- ‘More powerful than fate is the courage that bears it’
Auschwitz victim
- Listening is the key ingredient to therapeutic help
- Daseinsanalyse frees partners from ‘ontological deafness’
- Logotherapy goes beyond Daseinsanalyse because it deals with ‘logos’ as well as ‘ontos’
- Healing comes through exploring meaning

Beginnings of logotherapy



- Therapeutic tackling of the sickness of the century – the sense of meaninglessness (Torello)
- ‘Compassion that I felt towards the victims of psychotherapy – that rotten trade’
- ‘The fight against these depersonalising and dehumanising tendencies; which have their roots in the psychologism of psychotherapy, has been a bright red thread that runs throughout the fabric of my work’
- Behaviour Therapy pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for me in my struggle against psychoanalysis.
- Pioneer with Charlotte Buhler in the development of youth counselling and suicide prevention - given the competitive nature of the ‘matura’

Experience of Auschwitz



- Early victim of Nazi persecution
- Fellow inmate urged him to get over his pessimism
- Overcame typhus = self-transcendence and self-distancing confirmed the survival value of the 'will to meaning' - imagined himself giving a lecture
- Resolved to rewrite manuscript of text that was thrown onto the ground on arrival - the 'Doctor and the Soul'
- 40TH birthday present – a pencil
- Generous attitude to collective guilt

Pillars of logotherapy



- Optimistic about human nature
- Freedom of will –opposed to a deterministic view of human nature
- Contrast to reductionist approaches
- Leads to capacity for self detachment
- Leads to capacity for self-transcendence
- The will to meaning
- Focus on Meaning of Life and life review

Characteristics of Logotherapy



- 'If we take man as he is we make him worse, but if we take him as he should be we make him capable of becoming what he can be' (Goethe)
- Strong connection with Positive Psychology - a strengths based approach in contrast to ICD and DSMIV which have a problem focus.
- Focus on meaning of life
- Freedom of Will
- Will to meaning
- CBT and logotherapy have a similar value base
- Focus on life review

Existential therapy and logotherapy

- **Existential** psychotherapy is a philosophical method of **therapy** that operates on the belief that inner conflict within a person is due to that individual's confrontation with the givens of existence. These givens, as noted by Irvin D. Yalom, are: the inevitability of death, freedom and its attendant responsibility, existential isolation, and finally meaninglessness
- Logotherapy – specific therapy in cases of noogenic neurosis – for the patient caught up in despair over the apparent meaninglessness of life

Characteristics of logotherapy (cont)



- Overlap between positive psychology and logotherapy
- Acceptance of spirituality and need for meaning in life – but caution over the use of the word spirituality as it has a religious connotation
- Logotherapy is based on four pillars:
 - Freedom of will – opposed to principles based on determinism
 - Will to meaning
 - Meaning of life
 - Self-detachment – detaching oneself from self

About meaning



- ‘There is nothing in the world, I would venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning to ones life’

The relevance of the present moment



- ‘For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. |What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment

About suffering



- ‘If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete’

Influence on Peter Gilbert

What its all about...

All philosophies and religions speak of the spirit (Divine / Human?) as an “animating and life giving force (O.E.D.)”

Paul Davies:
The Goldilocks Enigma -
Why does the Universe exist as it does?

SPIRITUALITY:
“Provides an expression of an individual’s sense of humanity, gives meaning and direction” (MHF)

The need for both Individual and communal expression

**I AM HUMAN –
YOU ARE HUMAN
BUT WHAT IS HUMANITY?**

“Between the falling angel
and the rising ape”

- Terry Pratchett (from *Augustine*)

THE ETERNAL QUESTIONS

- Where do we come from?
- What are we doing here?
- What is the meaning in suffering, if any?
- Where do we go to when we die?

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING (Viktor Frankl)

Logotherapy in context...

(Peter Gilbert)

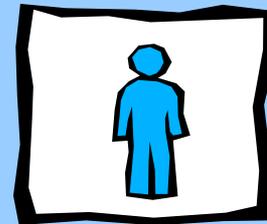
LOOKING AT THE WHOLE PERSON

Understanding hopes, fears and aspirations

Cognitive

Physical

Emotional



Psychological

Spiritual

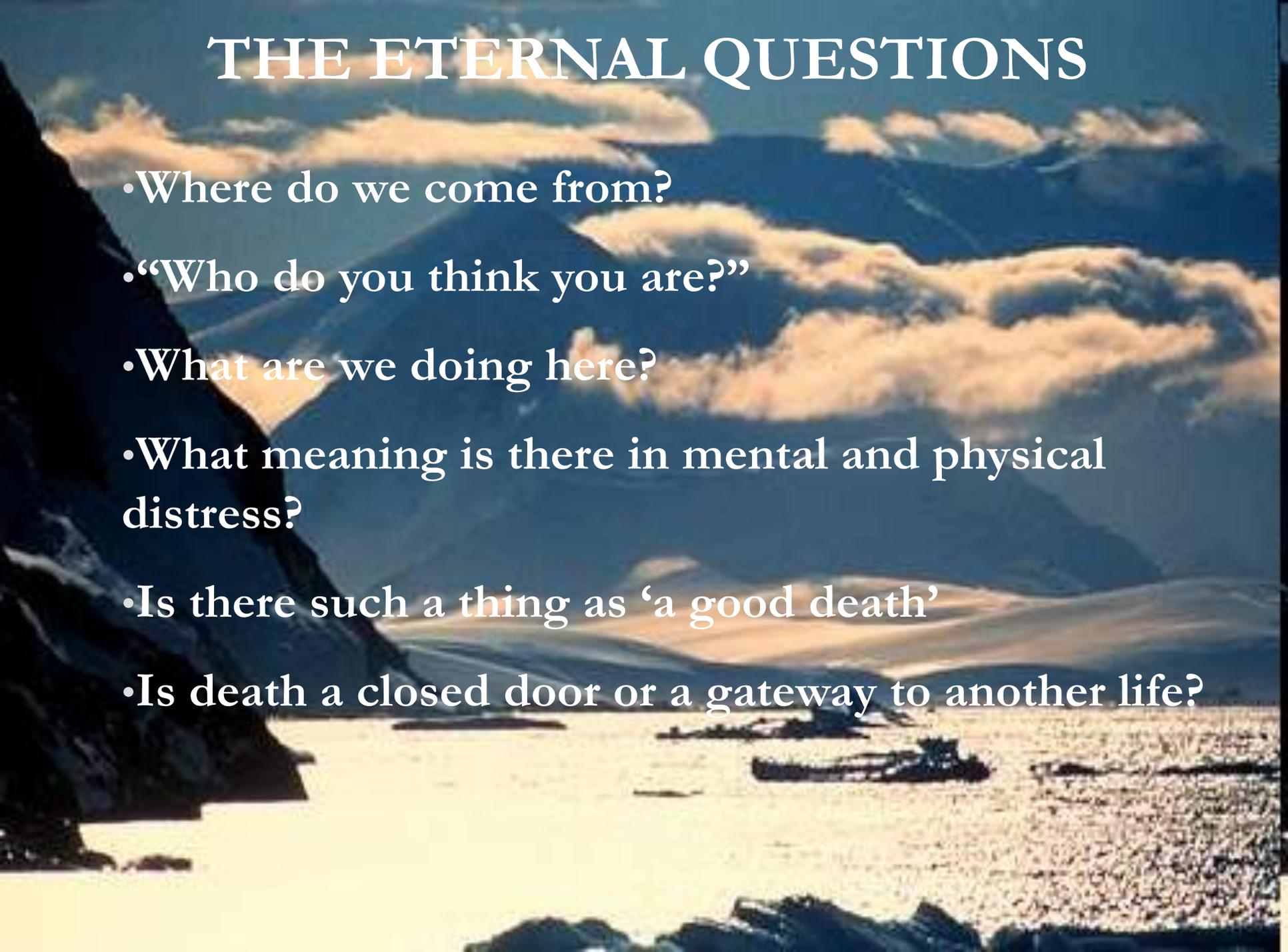
Creative

Understanding the past

What is transcendence ?

‘Man is oriented towards the world out there, and within this world he is interested in meanings to fulfil, and in other human beings...man actualises himself precisely to which he forgets himself, be it through serving a cause higher than himself, or loving a person other than himself. Truly, self-transcendence is the essence of human existence. (Victor Frankl)

THE ETERNAL QUESTIONS

A scenic landscape featuring a large body of water in the foreground, a small boat in the middle ground, and a range of mountains in the background under a sky with scattered clouds. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with soft lighting.

- Where do we come from?
- “Who do you think you are?”
- What are we doing here?
- What meaning is there in mental and physical distress?
- Is there such a thing as ‘a good death’?
- Is death a closed door or a gateway to another life?

Religion and Transcendence

- Religion involves beliefs, practices, and rituals related to the transcendent, where the transcendent is God, Allah, HaShem, or a Higher Power in Western religious traditions, or to Brahman, manifestations of Brahman, Buddha, Dao, or ultimate truth/reality in Eastern traditions. (Koenig et al. 2012, p. 45; original emphasis preserved)
- The transcendent is that which is outside of the self, and yet also within the self – and in Western traditions is called God, Allah, HaShem, or a Higher Power, and in Eastern traditions may be called Brahman, manifestations of Brahman, Buddha, Dao or ultimate truth/reality ... (Koenig, 1999)

Relevance for spiritual assessment



- *‘Is there anything which gives you a sense of meaning and purpose ? If so, tell me more about it...*
- *Do you have any sources of strength and hope ? If so, what are they ?*
- *If you have a religious faith, tell me more about how it might help or hinder you. Is there a Faith Community to which you belong or identify with ?*
- *Is prayer or meditation, or other spiritual practices helpful to you ?*
- *How do you feel about yourself ?*
- *What helps you most when you feel afraid ?*

Some issues in a spiritual assessment

- **Anger** - directed at God and/or other people
- **Guilt** - I did something wrong to deserve what I am going through
- **Bitterness** - a feeling that I have done nothing to deserve the negative feelings which I am experiencing
- **Regret** - I have not measured up to what God wanted of me
- **Doubt** - Is there really an afterlife ? Will I be 'saved' and have my place in heaven ?
- **Abandonment** - I feel abandoned not just by my friends and family but by God as well.
- **Hope** - are there any sources of hope in my life ? What might they be ?

The HOPE approach

- ▶ **Sources of hope, meaning, comfort, strength, peace, love and connection**
- ▶ **We have been discussing your support systems. I was wondering, what is there in your life that gives you internal support?**
- ▶ **What are your sources of hope, strength, comfort and peace?**
- ▶ **What do you hold on to during difficult times? What sustains you and keeps you going?**
- ▶ **For some people, their religious or spiritual beliefs act as a source of comfort and strength in dealing with life's ups and downs; is this true for you?**
- ▶ **If the answer is "Yes," go on to next questions. If the answer is "No," consider asking: Was it ever? If the answer is "Yes," ask: What changed?**





“Man (sic) is not destroyed by suffering, he is destroyed by suffering without meaning”

Viktor Frankl

SO, WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?!

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milieu

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THE SEARCH FOR MEANING (Viktor Frankl)

THE POWER OF LOVE

“For psychiatry to serve humanity well, the golden rule ‘Do to others as you would have them do to you’ is hard to beat. Doctor and patient are in complementary roles – both need the other. Indeed, at heart we are far more alike than we are different, and as we meet on the path of life, there is one medicine constantly at our disposal that even comes free. This is the power of love, lending hope, giving comfort and helping bring peace to the troubled mind.”

- Cook, C. Powell, A. and Sims, A. (Eds) (2009)
Spirituality and Psychiatry



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