

Psychology of Stress, Health, and Well-Being

Professor Doctor Dilwar Hussain

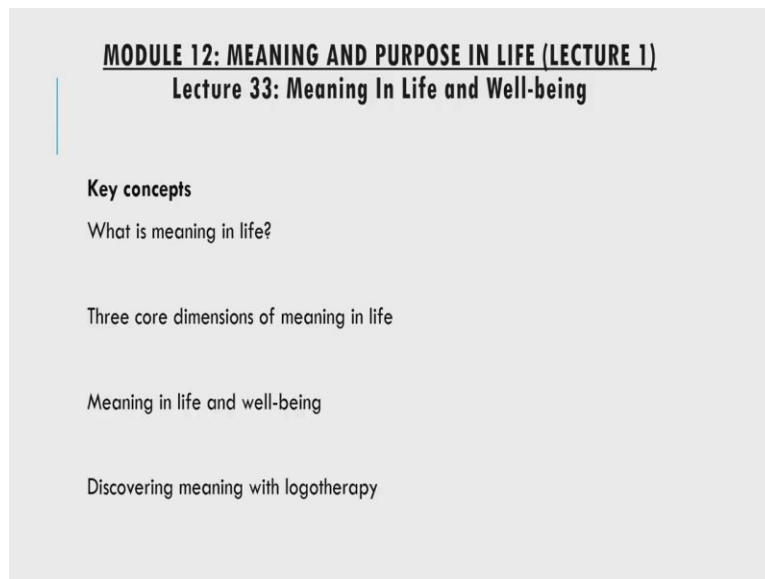
Department of Social Science

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Lecture number 33

Meaning in Life and Well-Being

(Refer Slide Time: 0:30)



MODULE 12: MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE (LECTURE 1)
Lecture 33: Meaning In Life and Well-being

Key concepts

- What is meaning in life?
- Three core dimensions of meaning in life
- Meaning in life and well-being
- Discovering meaning with logotherapy

Hello friends now I welcome you to the lecture number 33 and module number 12. And this is the last module and the first lecture of module 12. And overall it is lecture number 33. So today's topic is meaning in life and well-being. So we will discuss about this concept in detail before that just briefly let me give summarize the last lecture that is lecture number 32.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:11)

MODULE 12: MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE (LECTURE 1)
Lecture 33: Meaning In Life and Well-being

Key concepts

- What is meaning in life?
- Three core dimensions of meaning in life
- Meaning in life and well-being
- Discovering meaning with logotherapy

So, in the previous lecture, we spoke about the concept of self-determination theory and how it relates to well-being and motivation. So we've started talking about specific Eudaimonic well-being concepts in the previous few lectures, concepts that go beyond just emotions, emotional well-being, and happiness. And there are other conceptions that are more tied to long-term and future-oriented aspirations, which are also very essential concepts of well-being and are related to one other. So, in the previous lecture, we discussed the concept of self-determination theory, which is essentially a motivational theory. It also looks at motivation and well-being through the lens of basic psychological needs. According to this theory, there are three universal psychological needs: the need for competence, the need for relatedness, and the need for autonomy. And meeting these needs makes it easier to be motivated, especially when it comes to intrinsic motivation and wellbeing. When these needs are not met, our overall well-being suffers, and we are unable to enjoy our lives and perform correctly or in a positive manner. So, according to this idea, there are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation refers to when we engage in an activity just for the inherent satisfaction it brings us. As a result, there is an intrinsic sense of fulfillment, interest, and enjoyment when performing a task. So you complete a work or an activity just for the satisfaction and innate joy that you derive from it. Intrinsic motivation is a term used to describe a type of motivation that originates from within you. You don't expect a different outcome from the outside. Extrinsic

motivation, on the other hand, refers to the types of motivation or activities that we engage in in order to achieve certain external outcomes such as reward, incentive, and so on. As a result, we've covered the various sorts of extrinsic motivation. So it's not just one category, and we've explored the several types of extrinsic motivation in this context, including external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration. Because identification and integration are more internalized forms of extrinsic motivation, they are extremely near to intrinsic motivation. And by using, supporting, or meeting those basic psychological needs, this internalized type of extrinsic motivation and other intrinsic motivation can be fostered or facilitated. So these are some of the topics we discussed in the previous lesson. Today, we'll discuss another essential Eudaimonic concept: meaning in life. So, another crucial concept for our well-being and well-being in our lives is meaning and purpose. This isn't only about emotional well-being; it's also about well-being that is more long-term stable and gives you a sense of purpose in life. So the important themes we'll talk about today are: what is life's meaning, three core dimensions of life's meaning, meaning in life and how it relates to well-being, and how can we uncover life's meaning. So these are some of the ideas we'll talk about today.

(Refer Slide Time: 5:08)

Meaning of Life Vs Meaning In Life

It is important to distinguish between "meaning of life" from "meaning in life".

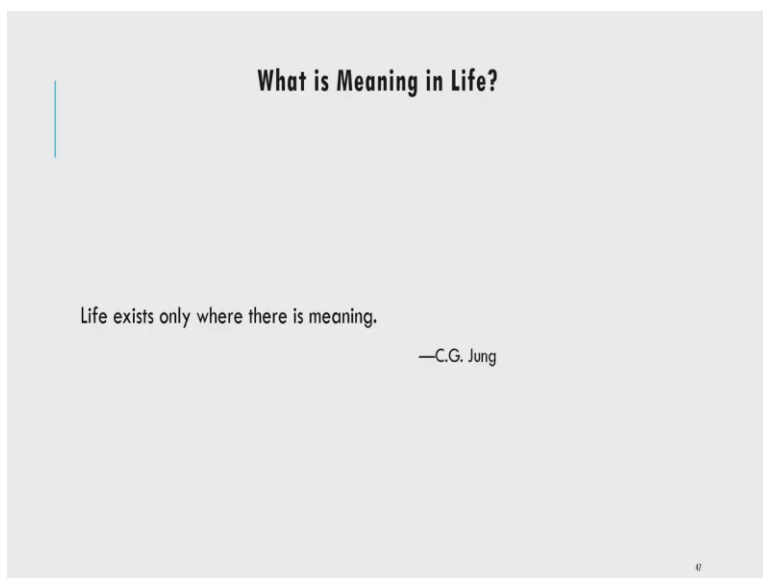
Meaning of life: It is more a philosophical quest to find answer to metaphysical questions such as why life and universe exists? What is its purpose?

Such questions can not be investigated by scientific methodology and hence not in the domain of psychological inquiry.

Meaning in life: It is more about subjective experiences of human beings and asks what makes them experience meaningfulness in their lives. Psychologists are more interested in this concept.

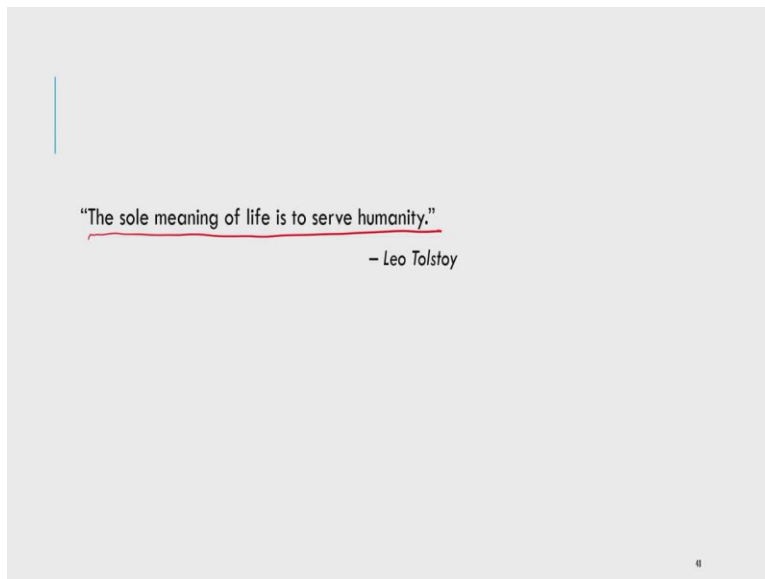
So there are two key concepts that we need to comprehend, one of which is called meaning of life against meaning in life. They are frequently used interchangeably. However, when it comes to the concept of meaning of life, we're talking about a metaphysical issue. Why does life and the cosmos exist, is a philosophical question. What is the point of it? As a result, because they are essentially metaphysical concerns, they are difficult to study experimentally. And we don't have the means to provide an acceptable solution to this inquiry. What is the meaning of this universe? What is the overarching meaning of life and how do they exist here? these questions are mainly discussed by theologians, philosophers and metaphysicians. As a result, there aren't psychologists who are directly interested in these kind of topics because they can't be investigated using scientific methods. The second phrase, which we shall address today, is the concept of meaning in life. meaning in life is more about subjective human experiences. And how those subjective experiences become relevant in people's lives. How do people look back on their lives? What experiences have they had that have made their life meaningful? And what happens when people find meaning in their lives? So these are some of the things that people think about or develop in their heads. And, like other related psychological notions, they may be studied. As a result, psychologists are more interested in the concept of meaning in life, and how people develop this sense of meaning, coherence, and comprehension of their life purpose, as well as the outcomes. As a result, this is a crucial idea that psychologists are interested in. We'll also delve into the literature surrounding this topic.

(Refer Slide Time: 7:26)



So what is meaning in life? Meaning in life, like happiness, can have many diverse connotations, and different people have different ideas about what is meaning in life. So, let's look at some of the philosophical and psychological definitions of meaning in life that have been presented. So, according to Carl Jung, one of the greatest psychologists and a member of the psychodynamic tradition, life exists only where there is a meaning. As a result, he believes that life's existence is inextricably linked to its meaning. We cannot divorce the existence of life from the meaning of life in any way. As a result, they are intertwined ideas.

(Refer Slide Time: 8:16)



The sole meaning of life, according to Leo Tolstoy, is to serve humanity; nevertheless, another view given by another individual is that the sole meaning of existence is to serve humanity.

(Refer Slide Time: 8:29)

"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."

— Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl, a key figure in the study of meaning in life, said that the meaning of life differs from man to man, day to day, and hour to hour. So, the meaning of life is a dynamic concept that varies through time and from person to person. What matters, then, is not the general meaning of life, but the individual meaning of a person's life at each given time. So he's stating that the meaning of life is a fluid concept that can alter throughout time. So what matters is what meaning may be assigned to a person's life at any given time, which is more relevant since it will influence that person.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:29)

Both psychologists and philosophers emphasized meaning in life as crucial dimension of human life.

Many psychological scholars have posited that all humans strive toward meaning in terms of need to understand the world, to know our place in it, and to have purposes and goals (e.g., Frank & Frank, 1991; Frankl, 1963; Klinger, 1977; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Yalom, 1980).

Philosophers such as Descartes and Camus have suggested that humans have a fundamental motive to make sense of their experiences.

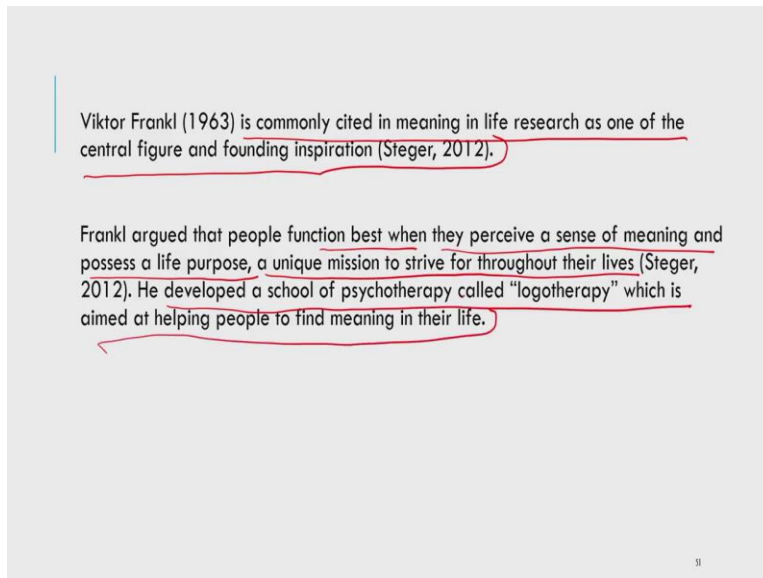
Frankl (1978) even proposed that seeking meaning is crucial not only to well-being but also to survival.

39

As a result, both psychologists and philosophers highlight the importance of meaning in one's life. So, if you look at the various literature in philosophy and psychology, you'll notice that everyone emphasizes the importance of meaning in life. And it is undoubtedly one of the most unique human concepts that people are interested in the meaning of their lives. What is the purpose of their existence? What is the best way to make sense of their lives? This is part of our mental progress, and we seek to make sense of everything. As a result, life's meaning is inextricably linked to one of the few, if not the only, ideas of human life. Many psychologists and psychological academics believe that all humans strive for meaning in life in terms of understanding the world, knowing our role in it, and having a purpose and goals. As a result, life's meaning can be represented in a variety of ways. It could be a desire to comprehend the world in order to understand our place in it and to have a sense of purpose and direction. As a result, numerous conceptualizations and perspectives may exist. We'll also examine several more definitions. Humans, according to philosophers such as Descartes and Camus, have a fundamental motivation to make meaning of their experiences. As a result, many philosophers and psychologists suggest that it is one of the underlying impulses within all human beings. To make meaning of their lives and the events that have occurred in their lives. Our minds are constantly striving to make sense of things. That is essentially how we make sense of our lives and experiences. Viktor Frankl even went so far as to say that seeking meaning is essential not only for well-being but even for survival. So, searching for meaning in life is crucial not just for

improving one's well-being, but also for ensuring one's survival. So, from Frankl's conceptualization, we'll see how it is, and we'll go over it in more depth at the end of this lecture.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:38)



As a result, one of the primary figures and main inspirations in meaning in life study is Viktor Frankl. He was a holocaust survivor and one of the first people to devote his life to the study of meaning in life. He also developed a psychotherapy called logotherapy, which is focused at helping people find meaning in their lives. As a result, we'll learn more about it.

But he is a central character who serves as an inspiration for all other academics doing research in purpose in life. People perform best, according to Frankl, when they experience a sense of meaning and are given a life purpose, a distinct goal to pursue throughout their lives. And so, according to Frankl, Viktor Frankl, human functioning is also linked to life meaning.

So individuals work best when they have a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, when they have a specific mission in life, which enhances human functioning. As a result, that is also a component of human well-being. As a result, he developed logotherapy, a type of psychotherapy geared at assisting people in finding meaning in their lives. As a result, we'll delve deeper into logotherapy.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:07)

Definition Of Meaning In Life

Despite consensus regarding the importance of meaning in life, definitions and operationalizations of meaning in life have varied across theoretical and empirical works (Steger, 2009).

Researchers have defined meaning in life in diverse ways. For example-

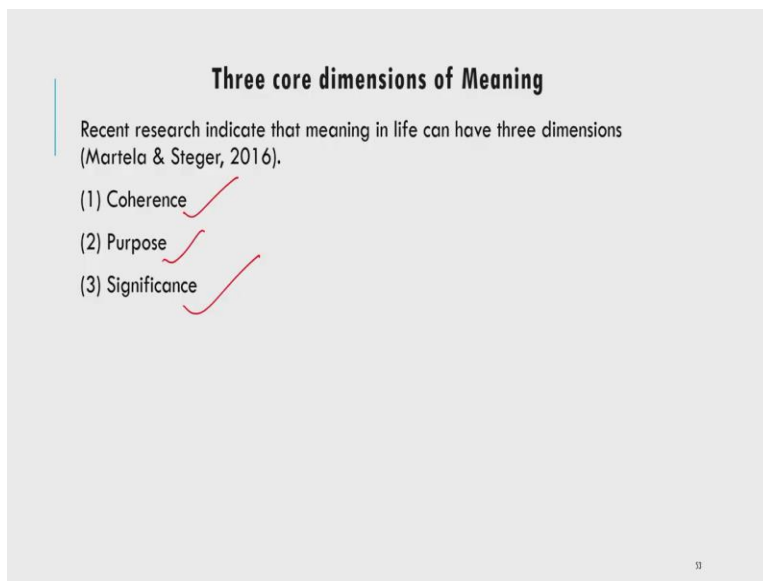
- ✓ meaning is making sense of life (Battista & Almond, 1973),
- ✓ meaning in primarily nurtured by goal-directed behavior (Klinger, 1977; Ryff & Singer, 1998);
- ✓ meaning is linked to transcendent or spiritual concerns (Emmons, 2003; Mascarro, Rosen, & Morey, 2004; Reker, 2000);
- ✓ meaning comes from a sense of self-worth, efficacy, self-justification, and purpose (Baumeister, 1991).

32

So, let's look at some of the definitions of life's meaning. There are numerous definitions in the literature. As a result, we'll go over some of the most important definitions. So, despite the fact that there is agreement on the value of meaning in life, everyone agrees that meaningful living plays a critical part in human existence and lives. However, definitions and operationalizations of how to measure it, as well as other factors, appear to differ from one researcher to the next. So, we'll have a look at some of these definitions. For example, a few researchers defined meaning in life in terms of making sense of life, and they simply defined it. Making sense of life is all about figuring out how to make sense of your own life. What is your perspective on life? How would you describe your life? Another definition is that goal-directed activity is the primary source of meaning. As a result, finding meaning in life is linked with setting a goal and working toward that goal. A meaning, according to another definition, is tied to transcendent or spiritual concerns. Some people believe that the primary meaning of existence is to explore transcendent dimensions or spiritual dimensions that exist beyond this commonplace materialistic existence; a genuine meaning of life, according to those definitions, is to pursue those transcendent dimensions. Meaning, according to another definition, is derived from a sense of self-worth, efficacy, self-justification, and purpose. When you have a sense of self-worth, or in other words, a healthy sense of self-esteem, your life becomes more meaningful.

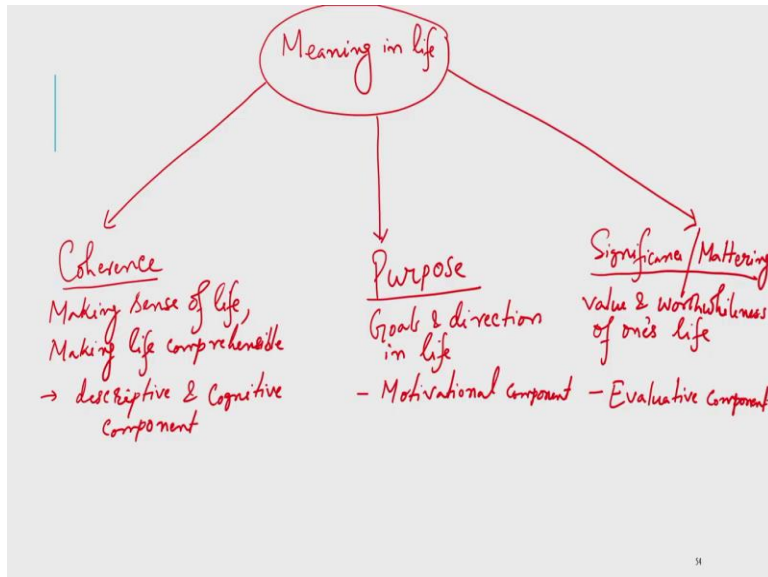
You have a sense of efficacy or that you were able to have a difference in whatever you were doing; you have a purpose; all of these things provide you with a sense of meaning. So, while these are distinct definitions, the majority of them discuss a few fundamental themes that are central to the concept of meaning in life.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:25)



So there are three main dimensions to the central issues. So, if you look at all of these definitions, you'll notice that they're all talking about three essential elements of meaning in life. As a result, meaning in life might have three distinct dimensions or be defined from three distinct perspectives. One of the ways to look for meaning in life is to look for coherence. Coherence is defined as the ability to comprehend or understand something in order to make sense of it. Second is the sense of purpose. Here, you set goals, you have a direction, and you endeavor to achieve those goals. There is meaning that gives your life purpose. The final factor is significance. What does it mean to examine your life in this way? Is it a worthwhile existence? Do you consider your life to be valuable because you are making a significant contributions? This will provide you with a sense of meaning. So, now that we've covered the three most significant qualities of life, let's dig deeper into each of them.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:33)



If we look for meaning in life, we will notice that it has three aspects. One is coherence, which is concerned with making meaning of life and making it understandable. As a result, this is a descriptive and cognitive component of life's meaning. So coherence is one component or dimension of meaning in life, which is concerned with how you make sense of your life. How do you describe your life? Is it comprehensible? Do you notice patterns and sense a connection between what you're doing and what's going on around you? So this is more about how do you describe your life, and while there has a cognitive component, it is more about the descriptive part of life's meaning.

So this is more about how do you describe your life, and while there has a cognitive component, it is more about the descriptive part of life's meaning. Purpose is the second component or dimension of life's meaning. Setting goals and direction in your life is a major part of finding your life's purpose. So, purpose is about what sort of goals you set in your life and whether or not you are able to reach those goals and those kinds of things in the direction you are headed. Like a result, you get a sense of purpose, as if I had something to accomplish in my life. This is mostly a motivational aspect of life meaning. This is when the motivation comes in. The motivational component simply implies that it encourages you to establish and achieve goals. As a result, it energises you and compels you to take specific actions. As a result, it is referred to as a motivational component of life meaning.

The third aspect of life's meaning is called significance. It's also known as "mattering" by some. Is your life significant? It's all about value and worthiness in one's life, whether it's significance or mattering. It is an evaluative aspect of life's meaning. So, how do you measure your life in terms of how worthy it is, how useful it is, in terms of your view that determines whether it is a significant life or not, according to your perception? So, in a nutshell, it's an evaluation component: how do you assess the significance of your life? What difference does it make in terms of how much? What is the worthiness of your work?

So these are the things you should consider. As a result, meaning in life can be thought of as coherence or making sense of life. It can be seen of as having a purpose in life, achieving those goals, and having a sense of direction in life. It can also be thought of as the value and worthiness of one's life. All of these things, including the amount of significance and how it matters. So there's one that's descriptive, one that's motivating, and one that's evaluative. So let's take a closer look at these three dimensions.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:04)

Coherence as meaning in life

- Life is coherent when one is able to understand patterns in it to make the wholeness comprehensible (Martela & Steger, 2016).
- It is about 'the feeling that one's experiences or life itself makes sense' (Heintzelman & King, 2014b, p. 154).
- It is about making sense of one's life, to make it comprehensible and coherent.
- It is the cognitive component of meaning in life, which is about 'making sense of one's experiences in life' (Reker & Wong, 1988, p. 220).

Some researchers made an assumption that humans have an inherent need to make sense of their environment, and we experience distress in situations where meaning is disrupted, stimulating our innate capacity to construct meaning to become activated (Heine et al., 2006).

35

As a result, coherence as a component of life's meaning: coherence is the first component. So life is coherent when one is able to recognize patterns in it in order to comprehend its whole. So you

can identify patterns and understand how all of these patterns fit together to form a whole picture. So, once you've figured out how to make sense of everything, your life will have a greater feeling of coherence. So the first component is about coherence; it's about the feeling that one has when one's experiences or life as a whole make sense. So once you have this feeling that my life has a structure and a sense of comprehension, you know what to do. And I'm able to comprehend what's going on around me. The perception of coherence is then extremely great. So it's all about making sense of one's life in order to make it understandable and coherent. Coherence, comprehensibility These are terms that are very similar. So this is the cognitive side of life meaning, which is essentially a descriptive feature of life meaning. It's all about making sense of one's life experiences. As previously said, this is a descriptive and cognitive aspect of life. Some researchers believe that individuals have an innate desire to make sense of the world. And, in circumstances where meaning is disrupted, we have experienced distress, motivating our intrinsic capacity to generate meaning to become activated. Many researchers have done so, and it is also our nature to strive to make meaning of our lives. From time to time, whatever happens in our lives, whatever happens in our lives, we want it to make sense. When anything terrible or wonderful occurs, we try to understand why it is occurring by asking why. What is going on in my life? Or why is it happening in someone else's life? So we strive to answer this why question in order to make our lives more rational and understandable. As a result, all human beings have a natural inclination to strengthen their sense of coherence, and when we are unable to experience this sense of coherence, we suffer more distress and negative emotions.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:27)

Purpose as meaning in life

In many cases purpose has been used synonymously with meaning (e.g. Reker & Peacock, 1981). However, more specifically, purpose is a dimension of meaning and refers to specifically to having direction and future-oriented goals in life (Martela & Steger, 2016).

Victor Frankl specifically used purpose to connote meaning in life.

Some definitions include-

purpose in life is about having 'goals in life and a sense of directedness.' (Ryff, 1989, p. 1072)

'a sense of core goals, direction in life, and enthusiasm regarding the future' (George & Park, 2013, p. 371).

54

The third component is purpose as a source of meaning in one's life. In numerous occasions, the words "purpose" and "meaning" have been interchanged. People use purpose in life as a synonym for meaning in life in a variety of contexts. However, we are attempting to comprehend meaning in life in a broader framework, in which we are conceiving purpose in life as one component of meaning in life, and meaning in life may have other components in addition to purpose. Purpose, on the other hand, is a dimension of meaning that refers to having a sense of direction and a future-oriented objective in life. When we talk about purpose in life, we're referring to some sort of future orientation, such as creating goals and achieving those goals, as well as having a sense of direction in life. These are the concepts that are explicitly associated with the concept of purpose in life. As I previously stated, we have already explored some of Viktor Frankl's concepts. Viktor Frankl uses the word "purpose" to connote meaning in life. He placed more importance on a sense of purpose to define meaning in life. Some definitions in this manner include that meaning in life is equated with purpose in life, for example, purpose in life is about having goals and a sense of directedness. As a result, having goals and a sense of direction is one approach to establish purpose. There is a sense that I am heading in the right way and will arrive somewhere. It's about having a clear sense of purpose in life and being excited about the future. As a result, it is a motivating component that is focused on the future.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:09)

Despite some differences in definition, researchers on purpose in life seem to agree that "it is essentially about some future-oriented aims and goals that give direction to life. These overarching goals then lend significance to one's present actions" (Martela & Steger, 2016, p. 534).

This is the motivational component of the meaning.

9

Despite some differences in definitions, studies on purpose in life appear to agree that it is mostly about certain long-term goals and objectives that provide life direction. So, in a nutshell, it's all about planning for the future and making objectives that give you a sense of direction in your life. The relevance of one's current actions is then lent by these overall aspirations. As a result, when you have a long-term objective, your current actions become more important since you are working toward it. And this is a motivating aspect of the meaning because it encourages you to work toward a goal, whatever that objective may be.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:54)

Significance/mattering as meaning in life

Significance has been understood to be about the worthwhileness and value of one's life (Martela & Steger, 2016). Some researchers such as George & Park (2014) used the term "mattering" for this aspect of meaning.

Significance or mattering is mostly defined as a value-laden evaluation of one's life as a whole regarding how important, worthwhile, and inherently valuable it feels (George & Park, 2014).

To experience mattering is to feel that one's life has some profound and lasting importance (Baumeister, 1991). An individual with a low sense of mattering may feel that his/her existence carries little significance and that one's nonexistence would make no impact on the world.

This aspect of meaning received less empirical attention as compared to other as it is more speculative and philosophical.

38

As we've seen, the third component is significance or importance. It has long been assumed that significance refers to the worth and value of one's life. It's all about how you see your life. Is it a life worth living? Is it a worthwhile existence? What is it about your view that determines whether your life has a high sense of significance or not? This part of life's significance is referred to by some researchers as "mattering." As a result, significance and mattering essentially mean the same thing. As a result, significance or importance is usually characterized as a value-laden assessment of one's existence. So, how do you measure your life in terms of its significance? So that's how it came out of that assessment? In terms of how significant, worthwhile, and essentially valuable life feels as a whole. How do you feel about your current situation? So, based on that assessment, you'll be able to tell whether your life is significant or not. To feel as if one's life matters or has lasting significance is to feel as if one's existence has some significant and lasting value. So if you have that feeling, you have a strong sense of significance in your life. A person with a low sense of mattering may believe that his or her existence is unimportant and that being nonexistent would have little impact on the world.

People who have a poor sense of significance or mattering typically believe that their lives are unimportant and that their existence is meaningless. That is the significant concept. If you look at the empirical literature on meaning in life, this dimension received less attention than the others.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:54)

Mattering is more connected bigger existential question whether human life has any inherent value in the larger scheme of things?

It is possible that many cases of depression and suicide may be connected to low sense of mattering or significance.

However, on a positive note, most people do not go through life with the sense that their lives do not matter; neither do they continuously question whether their lives matter. Rather, most people assume their lives matter (Baumeister, 1991). In fact things and close people in our life give us a sense of specialness and uniqueness and permanence (George & Park, 2014).

39

This aspect's specific relevance or importance could be linked to a greater existential debate about life's fundamental meaning in the grand scheme of things. It could also be linked to several other philosophical ideas. It's also probable that many occurrences of depression and suicide are linked to a sense of insignificance or meaninglessness. It's possible that a lot of people are depressed and have suicidal thoughts because they consider their lives to be of lesser significance, they do not believe they have any inherent value or meaning. So it's most likely their field, and whether or not I exist won't make a difference. As a result, individuals lack a sense of worth or value in their lives. As a result, many cases of sadness and suicide ideation could be linked to a lack of significance, which could have detrimental emotional implications. However, research typically indicates that most people do not go through life with the impression that their lives are unimportant. Most people do not believe that their lives are unimportant. In general, we do not consciously consider that my life is of lesser significance. We also don't ask ourselves whether our lives are meaningful or not on a regular basis. So whether my existence is significant or matters or not is not actually part of most people's conscious thoughts. For the most part, we assume that our lives are important. Simply being and interacting with the people around us, as well as our connections, transactions, things we do, and activities we engage in, gives you the impression that your life matters. It might not be very high in terms of a low, or it might be anything in terms of intensity or perception that varies from person to person. However, most individuals believe their lives to be significant, at least in the sense that I

am involved in a variety of activities and am in contact with a large number of people. And my life has a significant impact on the lives of many others. As a result, all of these things instantly offer you a sense of significance in your life. So, in general, most people don't question it? As a result, this is a good thing. As a result, the majority of people believe their lives are important. Indeed, whatever we do, what we have, and the people around us offer us a sense of specialness, uniqueness, and permanence. This provides you an idea of the importance of your life; at the very least, you play a vital part in the lives of many individuals close to you, such as your parents, friends, family members, and communities. So, on a more positive note, most individuals do not regard their lives as unimportant or worthless. For other people, it may become too much a part of their conscious thinking, resulting in sadness and other negative repercussions.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:43)

A sense of significance or mattering may be particularly adaptive during the crisis or traumatic situation (George & Park, 2016) .

Trauma literature indicate that people often do not consider traumatic events as pointless or without significance while coping with (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004). people often look for a sense of significance and positive value in the event in order to better cope with it (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998).

Literature also suggests that maintaining a sense of mattering or even positive illusions such as exaggerated sense of control and optimism facilitate coping and mental health (Korn, Sharot, Walter, Heekeren, & Dolan, 2014; Taylor & Armor, 1996; Taylor & Brown, 1988).

As a result, a sense of meaning or significance may be especially adaptive during a crisis or painful event. This particular component may play a critical role in any life crisis or stressful scenario. Because, according to a large body of trauma literature, people do not always regard a traumatic incident as meaningless or insignificant when coping with it. In order to cope better with an event, people typically look for a feeling of significance and positive value in it. It also has a sense of significance for them. What relevance does this occurrence have in my life? So

that could be linked to not only making sense, but also a sense of significance. Even in the midst of a stressful or crisis situation, you can see meaning or even a sense of worth. It assists you in becoming more resilient and overcoming your difficulties. So, if you have a high sense of significance in your life, coping with trauma and crisis in life is an important factor. It will assist you in coming out of it and dealing with your life's problem in a lot more effective manner. At least, that's what the trauma literature says. Maintaining a sense of significance or even positive illusions such as optimism can be helpful. As a result, I'm trying to keep a sense of significance in my life, that it's worthwhile and valuable. Even good illusions, such as a sense of control and optimism, aid in coping and help people adjust and adapt to catastrophic and life-changing events.

(Refer Slide Time: 34:15)

Separating Coherence, Purpose and Significance

“Coherence is value-neutral and **descriptive** whereas purpose and significance are inherently **evaluative and normative**. Coherence is about describing the world as it appears to the individual, while significance and purpose aim to find value in the world in the present, as well as in the world that might arise from the pursuit of one's purpose....Human effort to find coherence is thus an attempt to create accurate mental models of the world to facilitate predictability and consistency. Human effort to find significance and purpose, in turn, is an attempt to find justification for one's actions, an enduring foundation for self-worth, and worthwhile pursuits and ways of living that extend into the future” (Martela & Steger, 2016, p 536).

11

So, separating coherence, purpose, and significance: these are three key concepts that represent three distinct facets of life's meaning. And, as we've already mentioned, they're distinct in some ways, either in terms of conceptions or in terms of how they make life meaningful. So, let's look at how they differ from one another conceptually. As previously stated, coherence is primarily a value-neutral and descriptive component. Because you're not looking at life through the lens of specific values, you're just trying to make sense of it and attempting to express or explain your life. So it's more of a descriptive component as you're trying to figure out what's going on and

how you view your life and experiences. As a result, it is a descriptive and value-neutral component. Whereas purpose and significance are primarily evaluative and normative, you make some evaluations of your life in purpose and significance. Then, all of a sudden, these are the results of specific evaluations you've conducted. In terms of what kind of objective I should set for myself in order to determine whether my life is meaningful or not. As a result, there is an element of evaluation. Coherence is about describing the world as it appears to the individual. How would you define your world based on your subjective perspective, whereas the significance and purpose dimensions try to find values in the existing world as well as the world that may come as a result of pursuing one's mission. As a result, human efforts to find coherence are accompanied by an endeavor to construct realistic mental models. Coherence refers to the process of constructing mental models of our reality in order to describe it. It also aids predictability and consistency by making your life more predictable while also attempting to make it more consistent. The search for meaning and purpose is an attempt to find justification for one's activities as well as a long-term foundation for self-worth, worthy interests, and ways of life that may be continued into the future. While significance and purpose are primarily concerned with establishing justifications for whatever acts you are taking, they are also concerned with evaluating your life and those things. As a result, there are some conceptual distinctions between these three essential components of life meaning.

(Refer Slide Time: 36:54)

Inter-relationship between Comprehension, Purpose, And Significance

The dimensions of comprehension, purpose, and mattering are distinct but closely related constructs and constitute overall meaning in life (George & Park, 2016).

The experiencing of comprehension, purpose, and mattering may mutually influence one another (Steger, 2012) in a way that low level of one may lead to low levels in other and high level of one may lead to high levels in other (George & Park, 2016). For example, a low sense of comprehension dimension would make it difficult to experience a sense of direction and purpose which in turn may make it difficult to experience a sense of significance or mattering. Similarly, a high sense of significance will make it easier to experience a life as making sense and having a direction.

Despite the fact that they are conceptually distinct concepts, they provide a sense of meaning in life. There is also a tight interconnection between them. As we've seen, the dimensions of comprehending goal and mattering or significance are distinct. They are, nevertheless, extremely closely connected constructs that, when combined, provide you with a sense of meaning in your life. However, they are two distinct but closely related constructs. What is the connection between them? The experiences of comprehension, purpose, and mattering may impact one another in such a way that a low level in one may lead to a low level in another, and a high level in one may lead to a high level in another. As a result, all of these have an effect on one another. For example, if your sense of coherence or comprehension is low, you will be unable to make sense of your life. It will be difficult to feel a sense of direction and purpose if you do not make sense of your life. You cannot have correct direction in your life if you do not make sense of your life. As a result, the coherence component will have an impact on life's purpose. Similarly, the significance of your life or matter will be influenced by this, because if you do not have a sense of direction and comprehension of your existence, you will not be able to perceive it as significant. As a result, these dimensions can impact one other's experiences. For example, a lower experience in one dimension may lead to a lower experience in another dimension, and vice versa.

(Refer Slide Time: 38:35)

Meaning in Life and Well-being

Frankl (1963) argued that humans are characterized by a "will to meaning," an innate drive to find meaning and significance in their lives, and that failure to achieve meaning results in psychological distress.

Research has supported this relationship between lack of meaning and psychological distress. For example, having less meaning in life has been associated with-

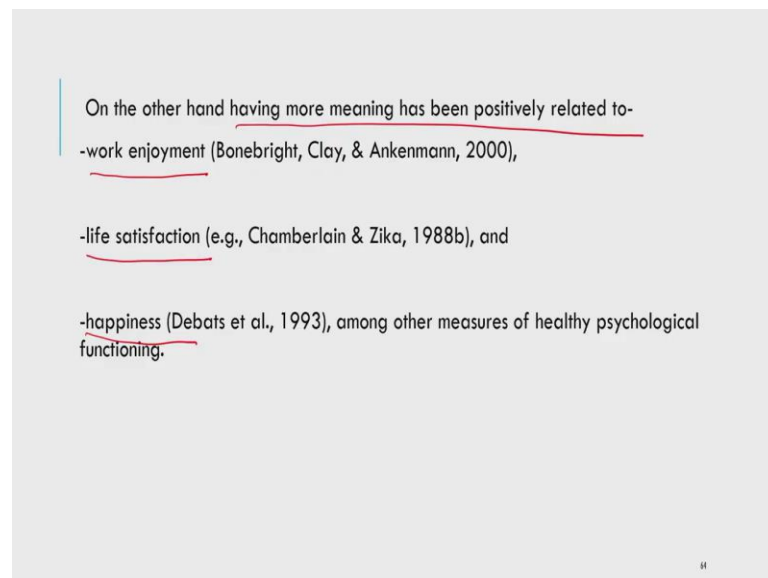
-greater need for therapy (Battista & Almond, 1973),

-depression and anxiety (e.g., Debats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993), and

-suicidal ideation and substance abuse (e.g., Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986), as well as other forms of distress.

What is the relationship between meaning in life and well-being? Humans, according to Viktor Frankl, are defined by their desire to find meaning and significance in their lives. And the inability to find meaning in one's life leads to psychological distress. According to Viktor Frankl, there is an underlying drive of will to find meaning. As a result, humans are continuously seeking to make sense of their lives and find meaning in them; it is an innate urge, and without it, they will experience psychological distress and a lack of well-being. This link between a lack of meaning and psychological distress has been widely validated by research. For example, having less purpose in one's life has been linked to a higher need for therapy, as well as sadness, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and substance addiction, all of which are signs of diminished well-being. So, in terms of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and substance misuse, a lack of well-being is linked to all of these negative characteristics of well-being.

(Refer Slide Time: 39:40)



Having more meaning in life, on the other hand, has been positively associated to, and people who have more meaning in life generally report that they love their work, are more happy with their lives, are happier, and have many other psychological markers of functioning and other

things. As a result, the majority of the literature indicates that there is a positive association between life meaning and markers of well-being.

(Refer Slide Time: 40:12)

According to George & Park (2016), each dimensions of meaning in life may be associated with well-being in specific ways.

Comprehension and well-being: High comprehension may be related to better well-being through the following ways or mechanisms-

Minimizing uncertainty: Uncertainty in life may be detrimental to well-being. A higher sense of comprehension minimizes the sense of uncertainty by providing a better sense of understanding of life on a day-to-day basis.

Greater sense of clarity: Higher sense of comprehension may lead to greater clarity in making choices, decision making and smooth navigation in life.

Better ability to make sense and cope with life crisis: higher comprehension may facilitate making sense of life crisis and traumas and deal with them.

45

Each component of well-being, have an impact on well-being in their own manner. For example, some of the mechanisms may link the comprehension or coherence dimension of well-being to improved well-being. For example, having a good sense of comprehension reduces the amount of uncertainty in your life. If you can make meaning out of things, your life is definitely more certain; there is more pattern and predictability in your existence. As a result, life's unpredictability may be harmful to one's well-being. So if you feel like your life is in a state of flux and you're not sure where it's going or what you're doing. Then it's apparent that it's bad for your well-being. By delivering a stronger sense of understanding of your life on a daily basis, sense of comprehension, on the other hand, minimizes this uncertainty and promotes your well-being. The comprehending dimension of life's meaning also provides you with a stronger sense of clarity in your life. As a result, lowering ambiguity is linked to having more clarity. As a result, a heightened sense of comprehension may lead to increased clarity in decision-making and smoother life navigation. As a result, it reduces uncertainty, increases clarity, and fosters a greater ability to make sense of and cope with life crises. When you are able to make sense of a crisis in your life, it is much easier to deal with and manage with the traumas and crises in your

life. When you don't understand why anything is occurring in your life, it's more distressing than when everything makes sense. Why is this occurring to me has a purpose and reason. You'll automatically come to terms with it and be able to get out of it. As a result, it may also assist you in coping with life's crises and traumas.

(Refer Slide Time: 42:16)

Purpose and well-being

Higher purpose may impact well-being through the following:

Greater day-to-day pursuit of valued goals: Pursuit and commitment to valued goals associated with purpose can lead to higher well-being

Greater positive emotions: identifying and making progress towards achieving those goals are associated with increase in positive emotions.

Greater concordance between pursued goals and core values: Higher purpose is generally associated with pursuing goals that are congruent with inner core values and identity. Such goal pursuits enhances well-being.

66

The dimension of purpose of life may be linked to well-being in a unique way. Purpose in life, for example, may lead to increased day-to-day pursuit of important goals. So, if you have a greater purpose in life, it is essentially about setting value goals and attempting to achieve them. And achieving those objectives boosts your well-being. As a result, pursuing and committing to worthwhile goals with a sense of purpose can lead to increased wellbeing.

We all realize if you have valuable, meaningful goals and are capable of achieving them by working toward them. It will instantly offer you a greater sense of well-being and a greater sense of purpose in life. It is primarily by selecting and progressing toward achieving those goals that are related with an increase in good emotions that it might lead to higher positive feeling.

When you know you have certain varied goals and are on track to achieve them, your positive emotions increase. It also leads to a better fit between pursued goals and core values. As a result, pursuing goals that are consistent with one's inner core values and identity is commonly associated with greater purpose. People who have a higher purpose in life always adopt goals that are in line with their inner values. And the values that provide you with a feeling of self-identity and meaning in your life. As a result, when you naturally pursue those goals, you will experience an improvement in your sense of well-being.

(Refer Slide Time: 43:53)

Significance/mattering and well-being

Mattering may be related to well-being in the following ways-

Buffered death (or existential) anxiety: Research indicates that higher self-esteem or a sense of significance may diminish death/existential anxiety (Greenberg et al., 1986, 2008).

Greater equanimity and security in the face of threat or crisis: Higher mattering may protect people from life crisis and threatening situations by providing resources (such as self-esteem, optimism) to maintain equanimity and cope at the face of adversity.

17

The significance comes next. What is the relationship between it and well-being? In the following ways, significance or mattering might be linked to wellbeing. One is that it acts as a shield against death or existential worry. When you believe your life is worthwhile, you will feel less fearful of death. Because you will have a greater self-esteem, you will not be as concerned about mortality or existential distress. People with poor self-esteem are also more terrified of death and other existential fears, according to study. According to research, increased self-esteem or a sense of significance can help people cope with death and existential distress. Because your life is more value when you have a stronger sense of significance, you are less concerned about mortality and what occurs after death. So it's likely that you're only concerned with your current life since it's important to you. You don't seem to be worried about death or what will happen to you. As a result, more of it leads to more equanimity and security in the face of danger and catastrophe. When you feel important in your life, you have a greater self-esteem, a healthier self-esteem. As a result, you will have a more stable and equanimity in your life, and you will not be as overwhelmed by your difficulties. As a result, higher mattering may safeguard people from life crises and dangerous situations by offering resources like increased self-esteem and optimism. This helps you cope with adversity and retain equanimity. So these are some of the ways that significance and importance are linked to happiness.

(Refer Slide Time: 45:39)

Where Does Meaning Come From?

From the discussion of dimensions of meaning in life, it can be surmised that, meaning in life should arise from comprehending one's existence, identifying and achieving valued goals, feeling significant and fulfilled by life, or combinations of these three.

Beyond this, several ideas have been forwarded regarding the elements essential to finding meaning in life. We will look specifically at the ideas of Victor Frankl.

11

So, while each component of meaning, such as coherence, purpose, and significance, may be linked to well-being in their own unique ways, total meaning in life is also linked to greater wellbeing. So, let's get to the bottom of the last big question: where does meaning come from? Or, to put it another way, how do we boost our feeling of meaning in our lives? So one thing is that enhancing your sense of coherence or making sense of your life or making your life more purposeful or creating valuable goals and achieving those goals or experiencing your life is significant can boost your feeling of meaning in life. As a result, these three critical dimensions provide you with a sense of meaning in life. Obviously, we have grasped the gist of it. Let us now look at some of the more essential specific ways through which we can improve life's meaning. We'll focus on Victor Frankl's thesis and how he talked about meaning in life, as well as how we may use those concepts to make our lives more meaningful.

(Refer Slide Time: 46:48)

Discovering Meaning and Logotherapy

Victor Frankl was an Austrian Neurologist and Psychiatrist. He is a Holocaust survivor and founder of logotherapy (healing through meaning)- a meaning centered school of psychotherapy.

The basic principles of logotherapy include-

- (1) Life has meaning under all circumstances, even the most miserable ones.
- (2) Our main motivation for living is our will to find meaning in life.
- (3) Humanity has the freedom of attitudinal choice, even in situations of unchangeable affliction (Frankl, 1959).

11

So, finding meaning and logotherapy; Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist who survived the Nazi Holocaust. As a result, he and his family, including his wife, father, and brother, were all imprisoned and deported to a Nazi concentration camp. And we're all familiar with the history of Nazi concentration camps and the kind of unfathomable suffering that detainees undergo at the hands of Nazi concentration committees. As a result, he was imprisoned in one of the Nazi concentration camps, as well as being transferred from one concentration camp to another, and his family members were also detained. So, from his own experiences in this Nazi concentration camp and how he had to strive and deal with all the awful miseries of life, as well as what he witnessed in the lives of other inmates. From those experiences, he established a therapy or a special orientation or theory in psychology called logotherapy, whose primary aim was to assist individuals find meaning in life after he returned or survived those concentration camps, when we came out of those concentration camps. Because he could see how in those concentration camps, purpose in life is so crucial. As a result of his experiences in the concentration camps, he came to this conclusion. So, one of the fundamental concepts of logotherapy is that life has meaning in all circumstances, including the most depressing ones. So, even in the most trying of circumstances, human life has meaning. You can discover meaning in your life in every condition. So this is one of the fundamental concepts. Our desire to find meaning in life is the second driving force behind our existence.

One of the main motivations of human life is to find meaning in life, which is known as the will to meaning. The third important concept is that humanity, even in the face of unchanging sufferings, has the freedom to choose its attitude. What kind of interpretation do you do with the freedom of attitude that all human beings have? What attitude you have toward your life's specific circumstances, even the most difficult ones. You have the freedom to choose. What is the best way to think about it? What kind of mindset should I adopt? What attitude should I adopt? This is the last freedom of human beings. No one has the power to take it away. Outside, you could be imprisoned and subjected to a variety of terrible sufferings. But what is your attitude on the situation? This is your last and most precious freedom, which no one can ever take away from you. As a result, humanity has the ability to choose its attitude. So, these are the basic concepts of logotherapy.

(Refer Slide Time: 49:54)

According to Frankl, we can discover this meaning in life in three different ways (Hatt, 1965):

- (1) by creating a work or doing a deed such as painting a picture or making music or any other achievement of tasks. For Frankl, his passion for writing book on psychotherapy and helping people gave meaning and will to survive
- (2) by experiencing something such as natural beauty or encountering someone such as loved one. It may include connections with spouse, family, friends, God or sacred. For Frankl, memories of his wife and connection to God helped him to survive and find meaning in the concentration camp.

11

So, according to Frankl, there are three methods to find meaning in life. There are three main approaches we might use to find purpose in our lives. One way is to create a work or do a deed. One way is to engage in creative endeavors, such as making something in life or working. As a result, humans can derive meaning from both doing and generating work, such as painting a

picture, making music, or completing any other task. As a result, meaning can be derived from the work we do or the behaviors we take in our daily lives. It could be painting, music, or completing a task or completing a task from the work that we do. Frankl's love for creating books on psychotherapy has given him meaning and given him the desire to live. So, while in the concentration camp, he developed a desire to write about his experiences and assist others in developing psychotherapy to find purpose. As a result of his commitment or passion, he found meaning in his life and was able to survive in the concentration camps. As a result of his commitment or passion, he found meaning in his life and was able to survive in the concentration camps. The second essential way we can derive meaning is by witnessing something like natural beauty. We can derive meaning from specific encounters. We can derive meaning in our lives by observing natural beauty, or by meeting someone special, such as a loved one, or by interacting with the people around us. It could be a relationship with a spouse, family, friends, God, or something sacred. Whenever you develop a connection with someone else, whether it's your spouse, family, friends, or something sacred like God or something else. All of this gives you a sense of meaning in your life. Frankl's memories of his wife and connection to God aid him in surviving and finding meaning at the concentration camp. Frankl had no idea that within a year or two, all of his family members who had been arrested and sent to concentration camps had died. So, while in the concentration camp, he constantly visualizes and remembers that when he returns, he wants to reconnect with his wife and family members and his connection with God gave him a sense of meaning in his life. Unfortunately, all of his relatives died in the concentration camp, which he learned about afterwards.

(Refer Slide Time: 52:47)

Man's Search for meaning

(3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering. We have the potential to make meaningful choices and attitudes even at the face of unbearable and unavoidable sufferings and adversity. In the concentration camps, Frankl observed that some people would give up and soon die, whereas others bore their suffering with courage and grace as they had some meaning to their life. In this direction Frankl (1959) said-

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances".

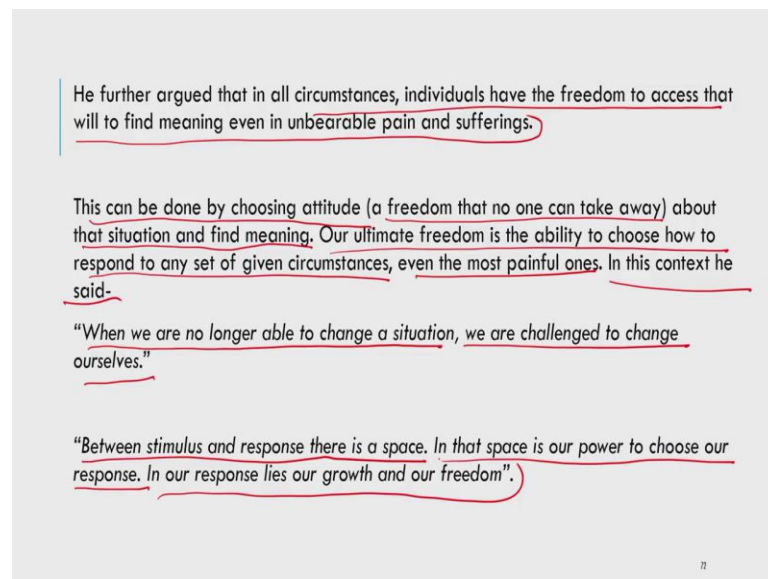
Frankl believed that suffering is a part of life and life has meaning in all circumstances, even the most miserable ones. We only need to reflect and find.

71

The third factor is our attitude toward unbearable sufferings. Finding meaning is also linked to how you approach things. He claimed that even in the face of overwhelming, unavoidable suffering and hardship, we have the ability to make important choices and attitudes. Human beings have the ultimate freedom of choice in how they respond to situations that they can't change or that they can't avoid, such as severe, unavoidable afflictions and adversities of life over which they have no control. However, one thing you can control is your attitude and the type of interpretation you use. In the concentration camp, for example, Frankl saw that some people gave up and died soon after. Many people who are imprisoned simply give up and die or commit suicide. Others, on the other hand, survived their pain with courage and grace, primarily because their lives had meaning. They wanted to do something when they were alive, which is why they wanted to survive since their lives had some meaning. Those people did survive, according to his observation, and their sense of meaning helped them to survive even the most unimaginable pain, such as a Nazi concentration camp. As a result, Frankl stated that a man's entire life can be taken away from him. However, one of the last remaining human freedoms, the ability to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, cannot be taken away. What attitude would you have if you were in a Nazi concentration camp with no freedom, severe hardship, or extreme adversity? Many inmates have the ability to make important and valuable decisions, and they can choose to view things in a way that gives life meaning and allows them to live. Frankl believes that suffering is a natural part of existence, and that life has meaning in

all circumstances, including the most difficult. Suffering is an inevitable part of existence, and even through suffering, we may discover meaning in life, as his entire life demonstrates. And he wrote about all of his experiences in a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*, which you may read. It's a very lovely book to read. In that book, he has encapsulated all of his experiences and concepts. *Man's Search for Meaning* is the title of the book. It can be found on Amazon and in other bookstores.

(Refer Slide Time: 55:35)



He further argued that in all circumstances, individuals have the freedom to access that will to find meaning even in unbearable pain and sufferings.

This can be done by choosing attitude (a freedom that no one can take away) about that situation and find meaning. Our ultimate freedom is the ability to choose how to respond to any set of given circumstances, even the most painful ones. In this context he said-

"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom".

7

As a result, he went on to say that people have the freedom to access their way to seek meaning in any situation. So, if you have the appropriate mindset, you can always discover that ultimate freedom in how you approach even the most difficult situations. And you can make sense of it and cope with it. This can be accomplished by adopting a positive mindset, as we have already seen a freedom that no one can take away from that situation. The ability to choose how to respond to any set of circumstances, even the most painful ones, is our ultimate freedom. When we are no longer able to change the situation, we are forced to change ourselves, according to Frankl. When we are unable to change the situation for any reason, one thing we can do is change ourselves, specifically our outlook and attitude toward the situation. We can come out of it and make meaningful existence out of it if we do it in the right path. He also stated that there is a space between stimuli and response. So, whenever something happens in the outside world, it

is a stimulus, and we respond to it basically in the same way, depending on the nature of the stimulus. So, in most cases, we are interacting to stimuli in an unconscious fashion, a stimulus and an automatic reaction. According to Frankl, there is a space between stimulus and reaction that we rarely see and use. And it is in that space that we find our freedom. That is, what attitude you take towards that stimuli. If you can use the space between stimulus and response to your advantage, you will have the ability to choose your response. Our progress and freedom are dependent on how we respond. Your response to a stimulus, and how you respond to it, will define your life's growth and outcome. As a result, it is more comparable to the ABC theory, which we discussed in coping mental approaches of coping. There is a B factor, which is belief, between an event and its consequences. What would the implications be based on how you think about those events? So he's saying that the space between stimulus and response is our freedom and our ability to choose? What are your thoughts on the subject? And how you grow, as well as the freedom and experiences you have in life, will be determined by this.

(Refer Slide Time: 57:57)

He further argued that in all circumstances, individuals have the freedom to access that will to find meaning even in unbearable pain and sufferings.

This can be done by choosing attitude (a freedom that no one can take away) about that situation and find meaning. Our ultimate freedom is the ability to choose how to respond to any set of given circumstances, even the most painful ones. In this context he said-

"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom".

7

Furthermore, Frankl stated that people might find meaning in their lives by finding the distinctive roles that they must perform in their lives. Many times, our unique roles that we must

perform in our lives provide us with a feeling of meaning. Frankl also believed that seeking meaning even in the face of suffering could be a way to alleviate human suffering. He claimed that when suffering finds meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice, it ceases to be suffering in some sense. So, in general, when we discover meaning in our suffering, it becomes less painful or, at the very least, it does not become unbearable. Why am I going through this? If you find meaning in others who are suffering, your suffering will no longer be suffering; for example, we often sacrifice our lives and suffer as a result. When we regard it as a sacrifice, though, our suffering diminishes or disappears. Frankl likes to use one example in this context. For example, a man sought counseling with Frankl after his wife died, and he was suffering from severe depression. Frankl encouraged him to imagine what would have occurred if he had died first and his wife had been forced to grieve for him. So he simply asked this question. Imagine if you had died first and your wife had to go through all of this or if you had died first and your wife had to go through all of this. Instead, you were kind of playing that part and sacrificing yourself, and your wife was kind of saved from the pain because she died before you. Frankl was able to help this old man realize that his purpose was to save his wife the agony of losing him suddenly. The man was able to see that his own suffering saved his wife from having to go through the same thing, which allowed him to feel better.

(Refer Slide Time: 60:19)

Frankl notes that meaning in life differs from person to person and from situation to situation. Hence he asserts that there is not a general meaning in life for all of humanity but rather an idiosyncratic meaning that varies at any given moment (Frankl, 1959).

As a result, Frankl observes that the meaning of life varies from person to person and context to context. It is not a constant, and it can alter from moment to moment in your own life. As a result, he claims that life does not have a universal meaning for all humanity, but rather an individual meaning that changes from moment to moment. As a result, we can't talk about a universal meaning that everyone must pursue. It is about a person's life, and it can alter from moment to moment within that person's life. So, right now, what is it that you require to make sense? What does your life mean to you? That is extremely significant. So there are some thoughts on life's meaning, and the next lesson will be the final lecture of module 12 as well as the final lecture of this course. With that, I'll conclude today's lecture. Thank you very much.