

## SESSION #9 -

# Man's Search for Meaning- Meaning-Making, Narrative, Ideology and Extremism:

In this session, we will continue to connect the session content to self-narratives and how the stories we tell about our experiences with the world give our lived experience meaning and purpose. Meaning and purpose are crucial to effective reintegration and a healthy, stable lifestyle. We are now ready to transition into the final and third phase of the **CTRL+ALT+DEL-HATE** method, to **DEL-HATE** where we take the awareness and skills we've advanced and transition toward long-lasting personal empowerment, commitment to nonviolence, and recognize that we all have a role to play in overcoming and combating the hate and extremism that is tearing at the fabric of our communities and country. We will revisit and discuss how extremists offer meaning and purpose to their recruits, and understand how imperative it is, whether we are confronting gang violence, racism, violent radicalization or any other social issue, to create ways of life that can offer alternative meaning-making based on compassion, tolerance and principles antithetical to hate and extremism. This session's objectives are to:

- **Connect the course content and written narrative exercises to the search for meaning and purpose.**
- **Learn how written narratives, journaling and reflecting on meaning can be healthy tools to process anxiety and remain steadfast in positive lifestyles.**
- **Identify why meaning and purpose are important for everyone and how extremist narratives and ideology offer meaning, particularly to those that are lacking purpose and significance.**

Throughout this course, we have referenced the quote of Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl, "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 freedom." However, the background to the quote is a perfect example of transformation and self-awareness derived from painful experience. We are now going to read/discuss a bit about his life to show how Frankl came to realize that even in suffering, we can be reborn, elevated in our spiritual connection to self and society.

### VICTOR FRANKL: MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Victor Frankl was a young aspiring psychologist living in Austria when Hitler occupied the country. Just before the United States entered World War II, Frankl received an invitation to come to the American consulate in Vienna to pick up an immigration visa. He'd been invited to the U.S. to study. It could have rescued him from the Nazis, but he also would have had to leave his family behind with the threat of extermination in a concentration camp.

Frankl hesitated. He had doubts but had to make a decision. One day, shortly thereafter, he noticed a piece of marble laying on a table at home. His father informed him that he had discovered it at a synagogue the German Nazis had burned down. It was a piece of a sculptured 'Ten Commandments.' Frankl wanted to know which commandment the section

## VICTOR FRANKL: MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING (CONT.)

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The Frankl family all ended up at concentration camps and, while most of his relatives perished, Victor survived. He eventually made it to America where he was able to formulate his therapy (logotherapy), a form of psychotherapy that argues that human experience cannot bypass suffering, that the primary human drive is not the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, but the pursuit of purpose, meaning and significance. As a consequence of his decision to act on higher principles, to pause before he jumped at his own self-seeking opportunity to escape the Nazis, millions have benefited from his book *Man's Search for Meaning*.

A key takeaway from his life is an identification that we can control our reaction to suffering and difficult circumstances. The Jews in the concentration camps were able to find meaning even under persecution and in humiliation. As Frankl explained beautifully, **Elaborate on the difference between masculinity in general and toxic masculinity? Does it make sense to you?**

### FOR DISCUSSION:

**CAN SUFFERING INDUCE A SEARCH FOR DEEPER MEANING AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN ABOUT THE ABILITY TO TAKE AWAY A MAN'S FREEDOM?**

**CAN WE LOSE PHYSICAL FREEDOM BUT FIND FREEDOM ON THE INSIDE? CAN WE BE PHYSICALLY FREE BUT LOSE OUR INTERNAL MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL FREEDOM?**

**HOW SO?**

**WHAT DOES A SEARCH FOR MEANING MEAN TO YOU?**

**REFER TO THE INFORMATION WE'VE LEARNED IN THIS COURSE.**

According to Frankl, there are 3 ways in which we discover meaning in our life: creativity, experiences, and change of attitudes. Answer the questions associated with each of the meaning-making components in the boxes below. Explore your connection to meaning and higher purpose by writing down the areas in which you currently find or would like to find meaning. Perhaps they are things you've pointed out in your narrative.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CREATIVITY:</b></p> <p>In what ways do you/will you give to your work, good deeds, art, music, writing, invention, helping others, sponsored events, voluntary work, charities, hobbies, and/or interests? How do you desire to show up in the world and in your relationships?</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>EXPERIENCES:</b></p> <p>In what ways do you receive from the world—whether it be nature, music, art, theatre, concerts, galleries, museums, literature, outdoor activities, mindfulness, being with others, and spirituality? How about beauty? What does it mean to you and how do you benefit from it?</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHANGE OF ATTITUDE:</b></p> <p>How are you sensing a need to challenge existing attitudes, change the way you think about life situations, or see a different perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Is there another way of looking at things?</b></li> <li>• <b>What's the bigger picture?</b></li> <li>• <b>How might someone else see your experience or hear your story and what advice might they give you for how to find your meaning and purpose?</b></li> </ul> <p>As a result of experiencing this course, how has your personal purpose shifted in relationship to your definition of purpose prior to it... if at all?</p>	

Throughout this course, we've been learning new prosocial skills, writing out our own stories and all while thinking a lot about the way the Ctrl+Alt+Del-Hate method can prevent us from falling into the negativity trap related to violent radicalization. We hope that you took a lot from it and that we raised your awareness and concern for the current state of affairs in society. We hope one of the key takeaways is the realization that written narratives, journaling and reflecting on meaning can be healthy tools to process anxiety and remain steadfast in positive lifestyles. We hope that some of the lessons are useful, and even more so that the skills and knowledge can be put to practice, so that you can find meaning and purpose in your past, present and future experiences.

## **MEANING-MAKING AND (NON)VIOLENT RADICALIZATION**

We have discussed a lot about narratives and have emphasized the idea that we live “storied” lives, that as we experience life we ascribe meaning through stories, stories about ourselves and others that we arrive at through social, cultural and historical conversations, through what we absorb in the media and online and in our surroundings. We imprint these narratives on our own consciousness. In that sense, our stories do not merely represent us or mirror lived events – they constitute us; they shape our lives, our relationships, our interests, our behavior and actions.

Today our society is fracturing. Hate, division and tribalism are tearing us apart and with the COVID-19 pandemic, social, political, economic decline, injustice and conflict, we are all essentially confronted with a choice as to how we will shift our attitudes and change our direction. We all have a choice to make about whether we want to be part of the problem or part of the solution, and with all the complications, trials and traumas we face, there are many positive nonviolent causes and issues that we can direct our energy toward addressing and being a part of. In short, we all have the potential inside of ourselves to find freedom in the space between stimulus and response and to alter course by working to Delete Hate (Del-Hate). Thereby, we can find new meaning, new sense of self and new purpose so that the personal story we end up telling and living is one of transformation and contribution to the cause of Deleting hate from our own lives and others.

Yet, as we have seen we are hardwired to pay attention to, learn from and use negative information far more than positive information. Do you remember negativity bias? It is easy to get overcome by anxiety and negativity and, as we have discussed, recruiters and extremists play off the negativity, uncertainty and worry to call to violent radicalization as a solution to our problems. However, violent radicalization is not something done to people, it is something produced by active participants, attempting to make sense of themselves and their world. Extremists offer meaning and significance through the projection of internal hate and anger. The solution is to change our outlook and lead happier, more meaningful and fulfilling lives by moving our focus away from the negative towards a more balanced perspective.

**FOR DISCUSSION:**

**REVISIT THE FOLLOWING CHART ON THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS THAT PREVENT ANTI-SOCIAL RADICALIZATION.**

**HOW ARE THEY APPLICABLE TO REORIENTING RADICALIZATION FOR THE GOOD?  
HOW ARE THEY RELATED TO THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE COVERED IN THE COURSE?**

**HOW ARE THEY, APART FROM BEING RELATED TO RADICALIZATION, APPLICABLE TO REHABILITATION, REINTEGRATION AND WORKING TOWARD TAKING THE ENERGY, COMMITMENT AND PASSION FOR NEGATIVE LIFESTYLES AND REORIENTING THEM, OR TURNING THEM IN A POSITIVE PROSOCIAL DIRECTION?**

	Protective Factor	May Result In An Individual
<b>Individual Factors</b>	Having self-esteem	Being confident in ones own views and less likely to be influenced by others.
	Having strong ties in the community	Feeling one is a member of a community and has someplace to turn when facing difficulties.
	Having a nuanced understanding of religion and ideology	Being less accepting of religious or ideological interpretations that are simplistic or dogmatic.
<b>Contextual Factors</b>	Parental involvement in an individual's life	Feeling one's family is present, cares and is ready to help in times of difficulty.
	Exposure to nonviolent belief systems and narratives	Being able to identify a range of alternatives to violent belief systems and narratives.
	A diversity of nonviolent outlets for addressing grievances	Feeling one's grievances are acknowledged and respected as well as believing in the possibility of their being resolved in a lawful manner.
	Societal inclusion and integration	Feeling one's group is a valued member of society and is treated fairly.
	Resources to address trauma and mental health issues	Feeling that help is available when facing cognitive and emotional difficulties.

## CONCLUSION

As we now prepare for the final session (and hopefully to continue working with you as you prepare for your future successes), we must stress one crucial principle: **You cannot heal and grow, overcome trauma, biases and anger if you do not learn to be compassionate and loving to yourself.** And, in order to become compassionate and loving towards yourself, you have to get to know yourself. This requires the search for meaning and purpose we have aimed at discovering by constantly exploring our narratives. We need allies in the fight to Del-Hate and we hope you may become a soldier and force for good in those efforts, but at the end of the day you cannot love another if you do not love yourself. Recall this principle as you work on the assignment between now and next session.

## ASSIGNMENT

Write a one-to-five-page statement on how you perceive the threat posed by radicalization and extremism to yourself, those around you and society at large and what the best methods might be to counter extremism and Del-Hate in your own life and others. In the event you have not finalized your narrative, complete it for submission at the final session.