No Therapy is Complete without Logotherapy

When Viktor Frankl created logotherapy he said that he was standing on the shoulders of a giant (Freud), and added that this was a vantage point from which he could see farther. He wanted to acknowledge the contributions of psychoanalysis while pointing out its limitations.

Thus Frankl noted that no therapy is complete without logotherapy. Other theories had something to offer but they were not enough. For example, physical drives and instincts sometimes urge people towards socially unacceptable behavior. Ego mediates in the conflict between the desires of the id and the dictates of society.

However, there is more to being human than instinctual urgesת and there is more to healing than making psychological adjustments. Conscience according to Frankl is not a function of superego but the internal consciousness of responsibility.

Similarly the humanistic approach contains many truths. Internal integration between the warring parts within us is essential to mental health. But Frankl takes this a step further, emphasizing that the key to inner harmony is the autonomous self that stands behind everything we do. Rogers highlighted the positive instructional value in negative emotions. Emotions signal that something is in need of attention. But Frankl focused on the meaning of the message that emotions convey and how they spur us to action. Why am I feeling this way? What do these feelings say about me? What must I do about it?

How does the therapist see the client? Here too Frankl went deeper and farther. Psychoanalysis has the client lying on the couch speaking things he would rather not say. Logotherapy has the client sitting upright facing the therapist and hearing things he would rather not hear. Yes, it can be cathartic to express everything that is on one’s mind and allowing it to flow without holding back. But is the client hearing what life has to say *to him*? Sitting face to face, the client faces himself. And he questions himself.

Carl Rogers proposed three necessary and sufficient conditions for change: congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding. You must be a genuine person, not a blank screen. You must regard the client as a person of unconditional worth. You must aim to understand the client and accurately reflect his feelings.

Frankl agreed that we must not stand in judgment and that we have to create trust and make a space for genuine communication. Yet while these conditions are a necessary first step towards bringing out the person’s inherent impulse for good it does not end there. If his perspective reflects a distortion of reality, we challenge him. And if empathy means siding with the client against the unfairness of life the client will never find the kind of peace that is found through discovering how life is actually provoking us to become our authentic selves.

In short, psychoanalysis was problem-centered, it focused on the physical level and the therapist was absent. Humanistic psychology was client-centered, it focused on the emotional level and the therapist was neutral. Logotherapy is meaning-centered, it focuses on the spiritual level and the therapist is actively involved in seeking meaning.

But what about cognitive-behavioral approaches? What about existentialism? Don’t these approaches take into account more than the theories of the past? Yes, they certainly do. But if the person changes his thought patterns without changing the deeper origin of the negative self-talk, it will come back again.

As for existentialist theory, it is absolutely true that life is fundamentally irrational and is not self-evidently just and fair. Despite this Frankl insisted that life really does have meaning because the meaning is not found inside the limited rational mind but beyond it.

Therefore, no therapy is complete without logotherapy because no therapy is complete without relating to the uniquely human in man, which includes our ability to reflect on our lives, evaluate and make meaningful choices. It is not enough to solve problems or to soothe or to cope. There is a need for greater clarity of who we are, who we want to be and how life is guiding us. The goal is to have mastery over one’s life.