# What Makes Us Happy? A Symposium

**Perhaps no Jewish thinker has influenced modern psychology as much as Viktor Frankl, a Viennese psychiatrist, neurologist and Holocaust survivor who founded the branch of existentialism known as logotherapy, a meaning-focused approach to therapy. Based on the concept logos, the Greek word for meaning, logotherapy provides a therapeutic framework and vocabulary for addressing meaningful and authentic living; it encourages us to see people and situations not as they are but rather as they could be.**

**According to logotherapy, life is intrinsically and unconditionally meaningful in all circumstances, even the most challenging ones. Every moment in human existence holds a call for meaning, each situation in life is an opportunity to discern meaning. Frankl’s inspiring personal experience as a prisoner in the Nazi concentration camps is a living testimony to the defiant human spirit in face of the most extreme dehumanizing conditions. In the darkness of oppression and physical and psychological deprivation, Frankl experienced in himself and identified in others an inner spark--a force by which he was able to rise above suffering and despair and choose to take a stand, to embrace and fulfill human potential. That choice imbues life with meaning.**

**Frankl refers to the uniquely human freedom of will not as freedom from conditions, but as the freedom to take a stand. The freedom to choose an attitude in response to inevitable life challenges generates optimism, future rather than past orientation and a triumphant rather than a victim mentality; it’s an opportunity for moral growth, courage and strength in the face of the fragility and finitude of life. In this sense, we are shaped by the choices we make. However, Frankl warns that “freedom threatens to degenerate into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibleness.”**

**The notion of self-transcendence--extending our existence beyond our individual selves--is one of the core elements in logotherapy. It refers to the unique human ability to rise above and beyond oneself by serving a higher purpose (such as family, devotion to faith, community or commitment to contribute to the greater good). According to Frankl, transcending the self enables individuals to uncover their full potential as humans: “The more one forgets himself--by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love--the more human he is, and the more he actualizes himself.”**

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# http://www.momentmag.com/makes-us-happy-symposium/