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Santiago's Search for Meaning of Life in Paulo Coelho's

The Alchemist: A Psychological Approach

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Abstract

Everyone attempts to find a meaning in his life. Without a meaning, life will pass in vain. Paulo Coelho portrays his main character in *The Alchemist*, Santiago struggles to find a meaning in his life. The main aim behind this study is the analysis of the main character Santiago searching for a true meaning of life through the hardships and troubles he faces. The researcher clarifies this search for the meaning of life of Santiago in the light of the psychological approach which is Victor E. Frankl's Logotherapy concept. The results of this study show that Paul Coelho's main character Santiago passes three stages searching for meaning of life: creative value, experimental value and attitudinal value in his journey to sufferings. The conclusion of this study is that main character of *The Alchemist* gets a meaningful life and turns himself into a more and a better person.

Keywords: *The Alchemist*, Victor E. Frankl, Meaning of life, Logotherapy

Introduction

No one can live without asking himself this question: What on Earth Am I Here For? This is the foremost vital question we do an effort to answer it. There is an aim for everyone in this life. Frankl states that everyone in this world was born with his/her own purposes in life that are different from one to another (1988, p. 113). To create a valuable and meaningful life, one has required to find an aim. Meaning in life is a major human inclination, and although ^{there} is a variation in how this is approached, for example across different cultures, it is a universal process (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000). In fact, human beings are suggested to be the only kind to be motivated to piece together life events and experiences in order to make meaning (Emmons, 2005). This longing for meaning is an endeavour to create a sense of stability within our ever-changing existence (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Meaning is not only a basic human motivation, but it is “an important construct in the prevention of illness, the promotion of wellness and successful adaptation to life’s changing circumstances” (Reker, 2000, p. 39).

There are different theories that have discussed the idea of meaning in life. One of these ones is the theory of Logotherapy by Viktor Frankl.

Logotherapy is a beneficial doctrine found by famed Holocaust survivor and Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1905-1997). The term logotherapy comes from the Greek word “Logos”, which means “meaning”. It is considered to be the third school of Viennese psychotherapy, along with Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler’s individual psychology. Logotherapy is defined by the idea that individuals are motivated by a “will to meaning” as contrasting with the “will to pleasure” and “will to power” highlighted by Freud and Adler, respectively (Ameli & Dattilio, 2013; Langle & Sykes, 2006). He disagreed with Alfred Adler and individual psychology by suggesting that people do not only pursue to understand their existence of their own, but also to find a meaning to their life (Langle & Sykes, 2006). Frankl believed that our primary motivation as humans is our search for meaning (in contrast to Freud's theory that we are driven by our search for pleasure). Briefly, Frankl believes that psychoanalysis required a human element and that individual psychology ignored the question of meaning. To Frankl, these deficiencies of Viennese psychotherapy needed the creation of a new kind of psychotherapy, which is logotherapy. Accordingly, in logotherapy, a person is focused on the task of finding their meaning. Frankl found that it is this "meaning" - a sole purpose

unique to each individual - that is the key to a person's survival of life's most challenging circumstances and ultimate happiness.

Frankl believes that each human being has outstanding qualities that enable him to go beyond the norm, to have a free will (Frankl, 1988). He believes that “*logotherapy focuses on the search for the meaning of human existence*” (Frankl, 1958). The main idea of logotherapy is “that lack of meaning is the chief source of stress as well as anxiety, and logotherapy helps the patients to reach the meaning of life” (Faramarzi & Bavali, 2017). In other words, logotherapy is a type of psychotherapy that considers that absence of meaning causes mental health issues, so it tries to aid people find meaning to help solving their problems. Thus, Shantall (2002) recommends that humans should concentrate on adopting the idea that regards the pursuit of meaningful values as the criteria for fruitful living. An incapacity to do this could result a low sense of meaning in life. The purpose of Logotherapy is to improve people’s awareness of the distinctive meaning-centred chances that await them in the future.

Logotherapy based on three essential pillars: (1) freedom of will, (2) will to meaning, and (3) meaning in life.

Freedom of will

Logotherapy asserts that humans are ultimately free: they are spiritual beings who have been gifted with the freedom of will (Lukas, 1998). The concept, freedom of will, refers to the human capacity to choose how one will respond to life's inevitable challenges (Frankl, 1988). This concept is in direct opposition to the principle of determinism. Frankl (2000) strongly opposed the idea of determinism. In other words, he opposed the theorem that humans are merely the products of their instincts and/or environments. Rather, logotherapy asserts that humans are ultimately free to make the choices that shape their lives notwithstanding environmental influences and/or genetic predispositions (Frankl, 2000). Shantall (2003) clarifies that the freedom of will is not does not mean freedom from outer circumstances. Rather, it refers that humans can choose how to respond to the unescapable confrontations, which they may face in life. That is why, it encompasses a freedom towards responsibility and to choose one's attitude towards one's circumstances, whether it be a demanding environmental stressor or genetic predisposition. The freedom of will remains present under all life circumstances, even in the face of the most dismal

of life afflictions. In a word, it is very clear that “human beings have the ability to discover meaning even if it does not fall into the traditionally perceived realm of life success” (Frankl, 1978, p.29)

Will to meaning

Graber (2003) stated that the concept, will to meaning, involves the most basic of human motivations. Crumbaugh (1971) agrees that humans have an inherent will to search for and discover meaning in their lives. Shantall (2003) adds that humans have the desire to know the ultimate aim behind their existence. According to logotherapy, life is regarded as task and mission. Humans have the responsibility to satisfy their life tasks to discover meaning; the responsibility to discover their uniqueness in this world. This uniqueness, amongst others, enables humans to suffer with dignity by infusing all of life with meaning (Crumbaugh, 1973). According to Frankl (1962, 1988, 2000, 2006) the will to meaning gives the humans the chance to discover, realize and to struggle. Thus, all of life becomes a quest, as well as an opportunity, to search for, realise and discover meaning. This means that the unique human capacity to reach beyond the self; to reach beyond one’s own pain, suffering and circumstances to fulfil an important task, realise a significant

ideal and reach out to others or to a higher power (Frankl, 1966; Havenga-Coetzer, 2003).

Meaning in life

Logotherapy suggests that life is unreservedly imbued with the potential seeds of meaning (Frankl, 2010). In other words, all of life is unconditionally meaningful (Frankl, 2006). However, humans have the responsibility to discover and realise meaning; it is not a given. The discovery of meaning requires a healthy tension between who people are and ought to be. Subsequently, humans can make less meaningful choices, such a failing to establish a meaningful tension in life that may, amongst others, culminate in either a shallow or wasted life. The consequences of such choices are, nonetheless, also potentially meaningful (Frankl, 1988). The concept 'meaning in life' therefore indicates that meaning can be discovered even in the aftermath of less-meaningful choices and in the midst of the most stressful and dire of life circumstances (Frankl, 2010).

Lukas (2000) indicates that life itself does not necessarily provide the meaning that humans may be motivated to discover. Rather, life sets the stage, often under the guise of suffering, but also under favourable and psycho-social conditions, for humans

to search for and discover meaning (Lukas, 2000). However, with regards to suffering per se, Shantall (2002) and Wong (2009b) caution that meaning can only be discovered when such suffering is unavoidable. Frankl (2006) asserts that suffering for the sake of suffering is masochistic and not meaningful. However, the discovery of meaning can also become apparent in the absence of suffering, i.e. under more benign conditions (Crumbaugh, 1973).

Meaning can be discovered in three ways (Graber, 2003). These three avenues to meaning: Creativity values, experiential values and attitudinal values.

Life always has meaning. Life with no goal will not be a life. Therefore, it has a meaning in all situations whether they are good or bad ones. It is the instinct of our humanity that lead to search for a meaning in life which is one of its reality. Second is the ultimate desire of humans to find meaning. They try to find answers for central questions as “Why are we here?”, “How Should we Live”, “Is there something beyond just our existence...” All these questions revolve around the trials to find the meaning in life. Actually, logotherapy doesn't help in providing answers for such questions, but it gives the human the motivation to find answers to those philosophical questions.

Third is that human beings have freedom of choice. Human beings always have the ability to choose meaningful life which has an aim behind all its directions. Frankl's psychiatric ideology is the capacity of the human being to make a choice even in the time of tragedy, mental disability or brain damage. This means that logotherapy doesn't present a direct description for acquiring a meaning life, but to give the human the norm of the idea that each individual should have his own meaning which is different from the others.

Logotherapists have faith in the idea that a lack of meaning can lead to "emptiness, hopelessness, or despair", so they attempt to assist people find meaning "through 'creative values', 'experiential values', and 'attitudinal values'" (Ameli & Dattilio, 2013). The techniques used in logotherapy underline this mission.

Creative Value

First way to discover the meaning of life is to create work. Therefore, people discover the meaning of their life by doing something. Guttman explains that self-acceptance is the crucial key to discover the meaning in work life. When a person enters the work-life, he must open himself to a meaning. Only a person

who is willing to pay attention to himself and to the others could discover the meaning in work. A positive attitude by loving the jobs will improve the quality of life as well as the life of others (2008, p. 28).

Experiential Value

The second way of finding meaning in life is by or encountering someone or experiencing something. Frankl finds that love is the way for an individual to recognize and understand the existence of another human being (2008, p.136). Singer also states that love is a fundamental power which can inspire the meaning in life (1994, p. 2). People can find the meaning of life by encountering someone that makes him/her learn to find the meaning of life. Love is a power that can make people understand the aim behind their existence. Love is all about taking and giving something. By accepting love, someone will recognize his/her partner's uncovered skills and has abilities to reinforce those potential skills (Frankl, 2008: 136). Briefly, Guttman says that love is the significant things to be fulfilled in life. Without the presence of love, a person's life will be in a state of loneliness and emptiness (2008, p. 22).

Attitudinal Value toward Suffering

The last way towards suffering is the last way to value the meaning of life. According to logotherapy, every good and bad condition has a purpose. Even the worst condition, such as suffering, holds the meaning of life. Therefore, an attitudinal value can be defined as our attitude to accept a suffering state with full range of patience. In this condition, someone is challenged to change himself. He is challenged to change suffering into a victory by accepting his fate and change his attitude. As a result, he is able to see the meaning and wisdom of the suffering. (Frankl, 1998, p. 135).

One of the literary works that represents the discovering the meaningful life is *The Alchemist*, a novel that is written by Paulo Coelho. *The Alchemist* is a remarkable novel that first published in 1988. It is originally written in Portuguese. It was very famous to the extent that it has been translated into seventy one languages. The book has gone on to becoming an international bestseller. The book has number principles of living. The main character, Santiago reflected person who dare to follow a dream and concentrate on realizing it. Paulo Coelho reflected a man who represents the struggles to achieve their dreams .Paulo Coelho tells a meaningful story by simply description, *The Alchemist* tells a young Andalusia shepherd named Santiago in

his journey to Egypt, after having a recurring dream of finding treasure. He begins to have recurring dreams of hidden treasure where near the Pyramids of Egypt. He was met King of Salem who revealed the secret of his dreams, After Melchizedek revealed to him the concept of personal legend then explained Santiago's destiny, Santiago decided to travel to fulfill his Personal Legend, the journey to accomplished his greatest wish.

To analyze the novel *The Alchemist*, the writer uses the psychological approach. In this approach, the writer applies the concept of Meaning of Life which is proposed by Victor E. Frankl to analyze how the main character of *The Alchemist*, Santiago, values the meaning of life.

Literature Review

There are different studies that include the views and opinions of critics, scholars and novelists toward *The Alchemist*.

Octovida Wijayanti (2007) is one of many researchers that chose *The Alchemist* as their main source to conduct a study. In her study, Wijayanti studied the influence of the setting toward Santiago's characteristics. Thereby, she showed setting is important in giving influence to the characteristics of the

character because environment, such as a society's moral value, determines the development of the character (Wijayanti, 2007, p. 1).

Juninada Sari Puspa (2007) concern on Santiago's accomplishment of Self Actualization and what kind of self-actualization characteristics which is seen in Santiago so that it supports his accomplishment of self actualization.

Nawang Wulan (2010) exposed the hidden meaning behind the symbols in *The Alchemist* novel by Paulo Coelho the subjects that have been analyzed are three subjects, the relation between Narcissus stories as the novel prologue with Santiago's story, then second is to interpret the eleven main symbols of the novel, and last is to find the hidden message of the novel.

Nani Indrajani (2010) reveals that struggles of Santiago to find his real happiness that becomes his destiny and he has to pass through a long and complicated process, he always concentrates on his destiny until he finds what he is pursuing.

Manju Muraleedharan (2011) discusses the relation of three aspect of Santiago's spiritual journey. Expounds the direct

connection between the universe or the macrocosm and the individual soul or microcosm.

Analysis

The Alchemist is analyzed according to the psychological approach. In this approach, the writer applies the concept of Meaning of Life which is proposed by Victor E. Frankl to analyze how the main character of *The Alchemist*, Santiago, values the meaning of life. Santiago's meaning of life is divided into three discussions. These are Santiago's creative value, Santiago's experiential value and Santiago's attitudinal value.

Santiago's Creative value

To achieve the meaning of life, Santiago is trying to attain the first step of discovering meaning of life, which is by believing in his dream to be achieved. Coelho portrays the novel's protagonist as a young shepherd who sets out on a search for treasure after an encounter with a wise man named Melchizedek. Santiago learns from Melchizedek that each person has the chance to follow his or her dream or Personal Legend, and Santiago pursues his from Southern Spain to the Egyptian Pyramids and back. Along the way Santiago meets a number of characters who teach him about life and listening to his heart, "When anyone truly believes in something to achieve, the whole universe definitely helps them to

reach it” (Coelho, 1992, p. 21). By the end of the novel, Santiago is confident in himself and in the Soul of the World, which he believes looks out for him and connects all things.

The basic creative power of the Santiago is seeing and thinking different from other people perspectives. Santiago has unique thought manner. He always takes life lessons in every instance. He though positively and put himself in convenient position. His mindset always searches solutions in any problem. It made him motivated although faced many obstacles. The horizon was tinged with red, and suddenly the sun appeared. The boy thought back to that conversation with his father, and felt happy; he had already seen many castles and met many women (but none the equal of the one who awaited him several days hence). He owned a jacket, a book that he could trade for another and a flock of sheep. But, most important, he was able every day to live out his dream. If he were to tire of the Andalusia fields, he could sell his sheep and go to sea. By the time he had had enough of the sea, he would already have known other cities, other women, and other chances to be happy. I couldn't have found God in the seminary, he thought, as he looked at the sunrise. (Coelho, 1992, p.5) He developed ability to always seeing every moment, so he could interpret every moment as guidance of God. He must seeing

problem from different perspective in order to could learn from any moment. The creative type of Santiago that he is action oriented learner, he spent more attention to learn from the actions than the theory in seminary

Santiago's Experiential Value

Santiago values the meaning of life by encountering love and experiencing some tests in his life. Santiago's first test is getting up the bravery to tell his father that he wants to leave and travel the world. He knows that it will dissatisfy and perhaps even anger his father, but Santiago still asks. He even came away with his father's blessing.

An early hindrance was when Santiago was robbed. He had sold his sheep in order to finance his search for his Personal Legend, but soon after Santiago was robbed and lost his money. He recovered by getting a job with a crystal merchant. Within a year, he and the crystal merchant had become rich men.

Santiago then continued on his pursuit to find his Personal Legend. The next obstacle was learning that he must stay at the oasis, because the caravan refused to continue on to the pyramids. The caravan would stay put until it was safe to travel again. Unfortunately, the bands of robbers try to come into the

oasis. Santiago had a vision that they would attack, so the oasis was able to defend itself.

That is not the last time that Santiago had to deal with Arab marauders though. Santiago and the alchemist are both captured at one point. Santiago was only days away from reaching the pyramids that he had been so desperately seeking. Santiago once again was forced to give up all of his money. This time it was to save their lives.

Later, Santiago was digging for his treasure, and he was again accosted by robbers. They beat him until they discovered that Santiago had no money.

I might say that his final setback was discovering that the treasure he so desperately sought was back in his hometown. That's not a terrible setback though, because he got to go back home and got rich in the process.

Peak mystic experience appeared when the moments of found the treasure in abundance church. In this moment he really felt that the journey has intense excitement and high tension as well as those of relaxation, peacefulness, blissfulness and stillness. The peak mystic experience final goal Cleary received. Santiago felt that his meaning of journey more important than discovering

treasure. In his journey he found a lot value of life. He also found the meaning a universal language and most the important he found his beloved women Fatima.

Love has always been here, with us, inside us. When we love something, or someone, we always strive to become better for that thing or person. Whether it's a treasured item, family, friends, or that special person in your heart, they are the driving force of what makes us better. It's everywhere, such as the love of sports, or the love of art.

Santiago had a dream, and the love for his dream is what made him a better person, a person who came to understand the Soul of the World. In the beginning of the story, he started as a shepherd, and during his journey, he met someone who he fell in love with: Fatima. His love for her drove him to pursue his dreams, and in the end, when he finally reached his dreams, the only thing he could do now was return to his beloved.

“I'm coming, Fatima.” -Santiago

The story started with a boy who loved his life as a shepherd, and ends with him returning to the girl he loves.

Santiago's Attitudinal Value

Santiago experiences lots of sufferings to pursue the meaning of life. He has to suffer to find his way because any kind of enlightenment will not come without suffering. Coelho recognizes that risk and chance are important to find one's way. Suffering is always a great part for realizing the meaning of life. Santiago in searching for the value of life suffers a lot. But he finds that the fear of suffering is more important than suffering itself. Coelho summarizes the meaning of life in the process of suffering.

He will find number of obstacles to turning his dream into reality. As Paulo Coelho writes in his book *The Alchemist*, "We learn from childhood onward that everything we want to do is impossible" (Coelho, 1992). As we discover Coelho's character Santiago and his personal legend, four obstacles are presented that Santiago must overcome to realize his legend. These obstacles are the interference of love, the fear of failing, and the fear of realizing their dream, which can be used so as to personally connect your own life to the story.

Concerning the first obstacle of revealing the personal legend, Santiago has two dreams about a child telling him about a hidden treasure near the Pyramids of Egypt and he searches for the counsel of a gypsy woman to give reason to his dream. While

Santiago is unsatisfied when she tells him a simplistic answer, “There you will find a treasure that will make you a rich man,” (Coelho, 1992) but consider that he has actually taken an action to find his personal legend by searching for his dream. When asked, the woman tells Santiago that she can only interpret dreams and analyze them, but cannot describe how to bring them to reality. After this encounter, Santiago is faced by his own doubt or emotions thinking to himself, “Everyone seems to have a clear idea of how other people should lead their lives” (Coelho, 1992, p.80). However, after meeting the character Melchizedek, Santiago now discovers that he has a personal legend, in his mind defined as finding treasure in the desert by the Pyramids.

Secondly, the interference of love for Santiago is the second obstacle as it clear in the quotation, “We know what we want to do, but we are afraid of hurting those around us by abandoning everything in order to pursue our dream” (Coelho, 1992, p.90) As Santiago looks deeply into the eyes of his love, Fatima, knowing he can realize the Soul of the World, or love, he is now faced with his second obstacle, deciding to stay with the woman he loves or to follow the pathway of his personal legend. Firstly, Santiago believes that love is more valuable than his treasure and reminds himself that the married shepherds had difficulty

convincing their wives to go to distant fields as “love required them to stay with the people they loved. “Santiago believed that if he left for his dream that the love would be destroyed. His love, Fatima helped Santiago by telling him that “I want my husband to wander free as the wind that shapes the dunes. And, if I have to, I will accept the fact that he has become part of the clouds, and the animals, and the water of the desert” (Coelho, 1988, p.95).Moreover, his confrontation with the Alchemist reinforces his decision by telling him, “Remember that wherever your heart is, there you will find your treasure. You’ve got to find the treasure, so that everything you have learned along the way can make sense.” As a result, Santiago chooses to continue on his path. In a word, life had offered him, by fate or otherwise the ability to choose. The ability to choose is by far a welcoming feeling that we all share as human beings.

One of the most important obstacles Santiago faces is the fear of failure. To fear from failure is a human instinct. The fear of failure is best seen in the scene where Santiago is traveling with the Alchemist. The Alchemist tells the warriors that Santiago can make the wind whip up and Santiago fears that he does not know how to make the wind come. Tis is clear in this quotation: “Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering

itself. And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every second of the search is a second's encounter with God and with eternity.”(Coehlo, 1992, p.24) For this reason, Santiago fears failure but Santiago learns to talk and trust his heart and the wind comes, helping him overcome his fears about failing, unquestionably fueled by his inner recognition that the reward was worth the risk.

Fourth obstacle is the fear of realization. Santiago slowly climbing a sand dune that has taken him years to find. His supreme treasure is expectedly over the hill. As Santiago contemplates, he is presented with his last obstacle which is fear of realization. One could understand Santiago's fear should his treasure not be obvious. One could argue that if he fails to find his treasure, his purpose in life would have lost meaning. “Be aware if the place where you are brought to tears. That is where I am, and that's where your treasure is.” Santiago, by this point in his journey, has learned to persevere and continues digging. Even faced by the threat of his own life by men beating him thinking he has more gold than what is in his pockets, he believes in his personal legend and overcomes his fear that he may not find it. Ironically, it is his perseverance that allows him to discover that his actual treasure is located at his home in Andalusia.

The true treasure was the journey itself and the blood, sweat, tears and perseverance that were required to have a full understanding of who you are as a person. Through tests, trials on overcoming obstacles, and learning about oneself, the real treasure is living life which is under our noses every day, not the goal or dream that you may think. It may be hard to see but every obstacle in life that we overcome is a mark of experience. What we may fail to realize is that those moments where we succeed after obstacles or where we pick ourselves back up and try something again with the hope that we can do better on the second try may in fact be our treasures. So as you continue with your life, consider that it is human to desire things and possessions but that nothing can replace the journey.

The main character Santiago is from Andalusia Spain. A Shepherds son who lives a comfortable life with his parents, however, begins to question his existence. At the beginning of the novel Santiago while sleeping under a sycamore tree has a recurring dream that he needs to travel to Egypt to find his treasure. He cannot shake this prophecy and feels inclined to pursue this path. Dreams hold particular messages if we are open to receive them. The protagonist is tested with challenges that encouraged him to pursue his own path “personal legend” to

understand his soul. He was an Alchemist all along, and obstacles were placed in his life as to keep him faithful. This was all done for a divine reason, to uncover parts of himself in order to evolve. Omens, signs, and people were sent along his journey, I believe many of us can relate to Santiago when we are trying to figure out which direction to pursue.

Conclusion

The analysis of *The Alchemist* shows that the main character Santiago is a character that experiences a lot of situations and obstacles in life that ultimately makes him understand the value and meaning of life. The researcher finds that there are a lot of values that Santiago gets which match with Viktor Frankl's logotherapy concept, in terms of how to get the meaning of life. To value the meaning of life, Santiago deals with the three pathways to meaning; creative value, experiential value, and attitudinal value toward suffering. Santiago starts to get the meaning of life in creative value by trying to achieve the dream of finding the treasure. Through the trials to achieve the dream, Santiago learns that meaning of life.

Santiago gets his meaning of life in experiential value by experiencing something or encountering someone. Love is the

main point in this value. Santiago encounters love with Fatima. The story started with a boy who loved his life as a shepherd, and ends with him returning to the girl he loves.

Santiago also values the meaning of life through the attitude that she takes toward the suffering. He experiences a lot of sufferings in his life. It starts with a dream. Through these sufferings, Santiago learns how to accept every condition that happens in his life. What we may fail to realize is that those moments where we succeed after obstacles or where we pick ourselves back up and try something again with the hope that we can do better on the second try may in fact be our treasures.

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