

Editorial Note:

Elisabeth Lukas on occasion of the conferment ceremony of her honorary professorship delivered the following speech on May 18, 2014 at the Billroth Library of the Vienna Medical Society during the 2014 “The Future of Logotherapy II” Congress in Vienna.

Acceptance Speech (Honorary Professorship, bestowed from the University Institute of Psychoanalysis, Moscow)

Elisabeth Lukas

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My dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

After more than seven decades of experience in life, I dare say that life is full of surprises. But not only good ones, I must admit. Sometimes, life surprises us with unexpected blows of fate and rough provocations. Often, though, and not always we give life the credit it deserves for it, it surprises us with fascinating offers and totally unexpected gifts.

The fact that I stand here today is one of these gifts. I have given lectures, seminars, workshops, etc. at 53 universities, but never at the University of Moscow. My books have been published in 17 languages, but none of them in Russian. That the fame of my humble work in the area of logotherapy has reached Russia is truly a big surprise life granted me.

If I may, I would like to add the following to the subject of “Life’s Surprises”: one should keep an open mind for them well into old age. It is known that fear of the new and the unusual, among others, is a sign of a neurotic existence. What we are used to, the familiar and the everyday things suggest some security, which in fact never exists. We are able to navigate the familiar, what we are used to and think to known, and thus believe to be able to master life. However, the more we tend to trust in the manageability of the known, the more shocking are experiences of abrupt changes and new situations. To stay open for the changes of time, which also require letting go and changing direction will, provide more flexibility to react to the surprises of life, when they hit us in the face.

One of the many supportive strategies of logotherapy is that it trains us preventively not to freeze or to feel completely overwhelmed when faced with life’s surprises, but to tackle them with a degree of serenity. Where do I get this from? Well, Frankl’s philosophy enters so intensely into the full spectrum of human existence that the more we penetrate into it, the more we start to engage with all possible surprises of life. In our realm of thought we already start to move along tracks, for which the future alone can build these tracks and switches. If, for example, we study Frankl’s assertions about the tragic triad in life, we definitely encounter our own suffering, our own guilt, our own death, so that in our imagination there is hardly a rift between what we have suffered and what we are still to suffer. Or if we study the Franklian triad of values, we experience a happy balance between creative accomplishments, the bliss of love, the pride of courage, and again the gap between what was and what is yet to come shrinks. “Everything we see is harvest, even if it is still in the fields, or maybe already stored in the barn.” This is just to cite one of Frankl’s famous parables. Logotherapy indeed is able to equip us for the process of continuous harvest, come what may, to enable us to deal with pain as well as to foster the boundless estimation of grace.

So today I stand before all of you, before the audience but in a special way before those who have invited me to this beautiful celebration, trying to express my thanks and appreciation. At my age, of course, I am well aware of the passing nature of all worldly splendors, I know that possessions, power, prestige, and honor are extremely relative and quickly go up in smoke. But this celebration today is very special for me because it is tied

to people that mean a lot to me. To be precise, I must first thank my writings and second, my students, for the honor of being here. Without my writings and without my loyal and talented former students, such as Prof. Batthyany, nobody in Moscow would ever have noticed me. But to whom do I owe my writings, and to whom do I owe my students?

I owe my literary activity to Prof. Frankl, who in 1978 urged me to write a book about my experiences of the practical applications of logotherapy. Personally, I would not have had the confidence to write the book, but my first work emerged due to his insistence and literally because of my esteem for him. The ice was broken... How did I get my wonderful students? These I owe to my husband, who in 1985 took the initiative to smoothen the difficult path for the foundation of our Institute of Logotherapy in southern Germany, in Fürstentfeldbruck near Munich. I myself did not have the confidence to head a scientific institute with an outpatient psychotherapy clinic, but he had faith in me, and so a place of training was established, in cooperation, where over the years more than a thousand experts graduated in logotherapy. This is why today I wish to dedicate this tribute to me to Prof. Frankl and to my husband. They both have contributed decisively to my entire personal evolution. Both were like beacons in a stormy sea for me, making sure that my boat of life did not capsize, sink or get lost somewhere in the dark.

I am extremely sorry that my husband is now in hospital and cannot be with us. But I feel him close in thought, and as if he were on my side as he has always been. I just want to share with you one of his innumerable small gestures: When I lectured in the US or Canada, my husband was given the rare opportunity to fly an aircraft. He held an American pilot license and fuel back then was much more affordable there than in Germany. But he, the passionate pilot, remained by my side in the auditorium. Prof. Frankl wrote famous essays on spiritual “being with” (Bei-Sein), “to be with the things that interest us” (Bei-den Dingen-unseres-Interesses-sein), “being with the people we love” (Bei-den-Menschen-unserer-Liebe-sein) a “being-with”, which certainly longs for a physical expression, but does not depend on physical presence per se, so I can well imagine that he is right now present among us.

Based on the understanding of the importance of encouragement at the right time, I personally would like to encourage the officials of the University of Moscow not to be

irritated by any obstacles or psychological countercurrents and to continue the teaching task that has been started to integrate Frankl's thought into their curriculum. It will be of much benefit to them and their students.

I guess I am not mistaken when I say that in recent decades there have been many changes in Russia. People are moving on from a troubled past. In Central Europe, too, there have been massive changes. The Greek phrase "panta rhei" (everything is in flow) holds a deep truth. Frankl's phrase "every age has its neuroses and every age needs its therapy" is also very true. Throughout my life alone, I have been able to observe a great variety of stages this country has gone through. I would like to briefly describe, what I have experienced, even though I can only refer to the situation in my own country:

.) First, there was postwar poverty. I was only a child and we had – like most – barely enough to live. There were no toys, no winter heating, etc. I remember my grandfather crossing Vienna with a backpack to reach the potato fields north of the Danube River because of a rumor that there were potatoes for sale there. When he came back at night, tired and with an empty backpack because he had come too late, I heard my mother cry. And yet, I experienced that part of my life with a profound sense of security. We were together; everybody helped each other, and values still existed.

.) Then came the growing prosperity of the 1950s, and with it, great joy. I have never again perceived so much joy in my social circles. I was in high school and I was happy. One could buy a book, afford a new dress, and... oh God... get a bicycle. It was like an intoxication and it ended like one.

.) The economic miracle ("*Wirtschaftswunder*") of the 1960s overwhelmed us and let all traditional values crumble. The wave of sexual debauchery flooded us, authorities were toppled, and people went beside themselves. Suddenly everyone wanted to be his or her true self, no matter at whose expense. All this happened while I was at University and I was pulled in by the trends of this rebellious period. If I had not met Prof. Frankl, who knows what psychological labyrinth I would have lost myself in.

.) Well, economic wellbeing expanded and joy faded away. A new generation grew up in the late 1970s. The "no-future-generation" as they called themselves sarcastically. Their

label was “*Null Bock auf Nichts*” (“I can’t be bothered about anything”). Since I was already familiar with logotherapy, I recognized the symptoms of the “existential vacuum”, which took hold of people and swallowed them alive. There were cars and housing for all, there was enough work, there were all kinds of liberties people could wish for, there were opportunities for adventurous travel, and...depression, suicide, freaky young people, drug addicts, and crimes of meaningless violence and destruction increased. I already worked as a psychologist and through my patients I got to know unnecessary self-inflicted suffering and pain that affected them and those around them, a result of their own discontent, displeasure, boredom, indifference and selfishness. From the known saying: “*primum vivere, deinde philosophari*” (first food, then philosophy) I learned: after too much food, there is no more moral. Frankl had already predicted, prophetically, even before World War II, when there was no idea of luxury and excessive pleasures, that it is not good for the psyche of man when he is too well off outwardly and materialistically

.) Progress moved on worldwide, and at a dizzying pace. With electronic computing and globalization a new era dawned. Suddenly everything was connected via networks and the world’s problems began rattling the prosperity of the pampered nations. The end of the previous millennium brought the realization that resources started to dwindle. Work and money started to become scarce. But as little as many people in my country had appreciated their prosperity, as little they were and are ready to do without it. Their mentality began to develop into the direction of our current society. People work hard to maintain a high standard of living, but stress charges a high price. Mobbing, envy, competitive infighting, panic attacks, physical exhaustion, burnout and symptoms of strain are psychological issues of the day. To this add the addiction to drifting off in front of the screen, which is allowed to progressively absorb the soul of the viewer. Economic crisis, energy crisis, and crisis in the family are today’s positions. Amidst all this there is an immense yearning for tranquility, peace, and wellbeing, for a simple life instead of constant struggles in the workplace, and in the complicated relationships of human interaction as we see them all around us. I myself am past the stress now. I no longer work. I have been living in a happy marriage for 44 years, and have a good relationship with our children. But I feel a great degree of compassion for the younger people.

The spiritual question is present in all the stages I have listed above. It raises its head in poverty and wealth alike, in need and in abundance. If one observes carefully the development of the processes I described, we can see a trend that Frankl had already sensed for some time and explained with the increasing loss of tradition and instinct in mankind; i.e., that in our digital age we are left alone more and more in our search for answers to our spiritual questions. It has become disturbingly difficult to simply form an opinion that makes sense in any way. Does it make sense to grow genetically modified wheat? Does it make sense to entrust children to life partners of the same gender? Does it make sense to give loans to foreign companies? Does it make sense to enter personal information on the Internet? Every day, we are presented with an endless questionnaire, which no individual can answer objectively or reasonably, because the pro- and counter-arguments appear to be in balance. The media are the opinion makers. Depending on economical, political or religious positions, they bombard the individual with selective pseudo-arguments, for which a person has barely any defenses. Each TV “spot” tells of a hidden “meaning” of the actions of its protagonists and great strength of character– or even better – continence is required, in order to escape these subtle manipulations. It is possible that this situation varies in Russia or in other continents. However, there, too, the stage is set more and more by the gripping attempt of each individual to find meaning in life in the light of its manifold contradictions and influences and to shape one’s own actions in a meaningful way. According to psychological studies, we are currently living a “renaissance of the question of meaning”, because meaning has become so doubtful, almost fragile.

So what can Viktor Frankl offer us, whose teachings have been at the tracks of this phenomenon of meaning for almost a hundred years already, in the light of these extreme transformations of the Post-Modern era? As you can see, I am reversing the theme of the conference a little bit. I am not worried about the “Future of Logotherapy”. Logotherapy will constantly gain in importance, but the “future itself” gives reason to worries, so I would like to pursue the question, what perspectives logotherapy has prepared for us for the future? Well, I will tell you: In the building of Frankl’s teaching, there are profound aspects of hope that are highly relevant. Let me mention four of them, because they appear particularly important to me.

First, the aspect of conscience – the human “organ of sense”: Although terribly slowly, it is being refined with the progress of culture. We are beings with such a short life to live, so we do not get this impression. But Frankl, with his broad vision, observed that beyond the pathologies of each respective Zeitgeist, there are and have been throughout history, so to speak, mutations of sentiment on a grand scale, that push into a positive direction. He made it evident with the example of slavery, which was once considered legal but is now proscribed worldwide. Similarly, today different thoughts and opinions emerge around the globe and especially among the young. Supported by the means of modern communication, making everything infinitely more transparent than before, more and more nations rise against dictatorship, corruption, terror and tyranny. Unfortunately, these mass protests rarely occur without the employment of arms, which is certainly not consistent with a collective revolution of awareness. Anyway, it is a glimmer of hope on the horizon that brutal tyrants find it increasingly hard to gag their subjects and rob them, because the resistance and self-confidence of nations grow, enabling them to struggle for freedom, self-determination and the safeguard of their human rights.

Joseph Fabry, a longtime friend of Prof. Frankl, once commented on a discussion in which Frankl described conscience not only as the most intimate pathfinder of the individual, but also as a tool of human evolution. Frankl believed – and I quote, “In a society tolerating and proclaiming cannibalism, only the man with a highly developed conscience could muster the strength to oppose the commonly used standards which had also been imposed on him. Obeying his conscience in this regard– a conscience that dared to reject cannibalism – made him a rebel. He might have lost his life; but he had awakened the conscience of others. I believe that this is the way human evolution progresses...”.

This is an excellent example because it does not imply that he, who was not a cannibal, attacked or exterminated his partners, who still were. The “rebel” in Frankl’s picture is a pacifist; he refuses to harm human dignity and if necessary, abides by the consequences. If today the increase of protests of nations against prevailing injustices, against the impoverishment of many and the enrichment beyond measure of a few and similar things would go hand in hand with the amazing accomplishments of peaceful resistance by conviction, indeed a progress of humaneness would be within reach.

The **second** aspect of hope I am detecting is the widespread longing for a break from the daily turmoil. Twenty years ago already, the slogan “to be ripe for the island” produced a smile, but also a remarkable echo. Since then, the dream of a “time off”, if at all affordable, is alive in the heads of many people, as long as one can afford it. Not always is the urge to escape the impetus for it. A feeling of wanting to leave the infamous “hamster wheel” has formed, that there should be an opportunity to escape the constant sensory overload and to live a simpler life with more awareness and authenticity. Although this is frequently not feasible, a vision forms in that regard in the hearts of many people, a strong vision, which could become increasingly more fertile in its intensity.

Prof. Frankl once argued on a radio show, and here I quote, that “...man should learn again to go into the desert for a while, for a weekend perhaps, – and there are deserts nearby, they are everywhere; be it a hike to a mountain hut, be it a secluded bay on a shore. There at least one can finish thinking one’s own thoughts...,” so Frankl, who already in his youth was identified as a “thinker who thinks things through” (Zu-Ende-Denker).

Yes, our thoughts – Consider this: there are not only two kinds of feelings: the purely basic feelings of hunger, fear, anger, greed, etc., and the specifically human feelings of sense of value, friendship, enthusiasm, artistic or scientific fascination, etc., as described by Frankl in his book: “*Der unbewusste Gott*” (“The Unconscious God”). There are also two ways of thought: the cortical performance of comprehension connected to intelligence, memory, logical thinking, etc., and in turn the specifically human plain of insight, acceptance, and wisdom, where those things which go beyond mere physiology, such as grasp of meaning have their place.

Frankl was right, of course: only in silence, in a withdrawal of stimulation, i.e. in our personal “desert” are we able to think something to the end in peace; can we feel what we really want or must do, can we clearly see what “makes sense just now”, what can receive our wholehearted Yes. However, most people are no longer used to this way of thinking.

I would like to give you a simple example. I wrote my first ten books still on my typewriter. This was tiring because every page had to be typed several times, from draft to final text. As it was very difficult to correct mistakes on the typewriter, it was necessary to

develop the ability to formulate entire paragraphs in one's head and to write them down print-ready in one throw. The following principle prevailed: "think first – then act" – in my example, think through a phrase first and then write it down. When computers arrived, it became incomparably more convenient, and no one could do without word processing nowadays. But the principle changed. As you can correct, change, delete, and conceptualize again, today the principle is: "act first act – then think", in this example, write a half-baked phrase and then correct or delete it. When writing a book this may not be that serious, but in life, "act first – then think" is not at all a principle I recommended, because a poor thought-process can no longer be corrected and could easily become a boomerang.

In life today's generation, too, should stick to, or rather return to "think first – then act" and this will be much easier if there is a general habit of making excursions into the private desert, where one can think in silence and "think things through"; where we encounter our true inner self; where we can hear the spiritual calling of the hour. This regenerative step into the desert, however, requires a sacrifice: self-restraint and humility. Those who fill their free time with events and entertainment, shopping, surfing, talking on the phone and other pastimes, will have the same experience as those who stuff their homes with things they do not need: they drown in the clutter. Clearing things out, slowing down and a new frugality would be the liberating elements, which would place the innermost longings of the human being, at least in our Western society – i.e. longings completely different from those the constant propaganda promises to fulfill – within our reach. Let us hope for a new culture of reflection – it could help to change the face of the earth for the better.

The computer leads us to **another** aspect of hope, crystallizing, despite all prophecies of doom from the turmoil of our time. Mankind has created a third brain. In addition to its archaic brainstem, with its automatic and homeostatic regulation of performance, and its amazingly integrative associative layer, the neo-cortex, homo sapiens now also has high-performance computers available, capable to deliver almost instantly information extracted from huge data files, which human analyzing and research alone could never have been able to produce. Aside from this, the information provided by the computer is not affected by emotions and assumptions, as is the case in the process of human thought.

Of course everything can be abused, as bad experiences with the Internet have shown. How wise was Frankl, when he stated, that things never depend on a certain technology but on the spirit in which they are handled. But apart from any abuse, the “third brain” opens opportunities we never guessed at to access the real secrets of being, which surround and include us, and to get to know and better understand reality.

Anyone who has worked therapeutically with those seeking advice knows how much depends on an adequate assessment of reality. Not only does misjudgment of reality dramatically impair the lives of psychotically ill patients. Patients with neurotic disturbances also suffer from unrealistic fears and imaginary drowning of one’s self. Even people that can be considered psychologically healthy, sometimes act against their realistic situation, by getting into debt, which they cannot afford, eating foods that are harmful to them, or hastily agreeing to do things they cannot face. Failure to accept reality is a process of self-punishment, which usually has bad consequences, both in big and in small things. Historians, for example, have demonstrated that both world wars of the previous century started by mere flawed assessment of reality and not just among those in charge inside the political machinery, but also among the broad population. The more ideologies are set, the more they slip away from reality.

The “third brain” of humanity can, if used properly, help to assess reality correctly. With its help, a vehicle could be landed on Mars – just to mention one detail among millions. To achieve such a success, immense precision and the analysis of many physical relations were necessary. The slightest error, for example in the calculation of the trajectory, would have ruined the whole project. Anyhow, the computers cannot determine whether it makes any sense at all to land on Mars. But when we, humans beings, believe something makes sense, they might be able to inform us whether it is possible or not and how.

We started with the problem that due to the complexity of our time it has become more difficult to distinguish between what makes sense and what does not. But nobody can take this task from us; it remains the responsibility par excellence of the human being. However, faced with these difficulties, more and more sophisticated machines are able to provide detailed information for the feasibility of our plans, for the prediction of the consequences of our actions, for the realistic effects of grave interventions in nature and so on. They can

be placed at the service of the search for and the finding of meaning, as they filter out illusions and join ideals with feasibility. The condition is that they are “put to service”, i.e., they serve, and that humans control them and not the other way around. This needs to be worked on and I believe it is the biggest task for the youth of our days: to turn computers on and off, to use them for meaning-oriented purposes without succumbing to them and their seductions. If they succeed, we will be able to conquer fabulously promising options for the future with the help of our “third brain”.

I still want to address a **fourth** aspect of hope, the controversial topic of globalization, which stirs the minds and certainly cannot be turned back. To the contrary, everything in this world starts to mix and everything that happens has effects on everything else. Single nations can no longer “cook their own soup”; other nations throw alien ingredients into their pot, if they like it or not. We can complain about it, rage against it, but we know from psychotherapy that counter-positions per se are not constructive. Constructivism can always be found in a creative acceptance, in this case: an acceptance of the world worth to be lived in. Frankl’s saying, that “the world is not healthy, but it can be healed”, is still and especially valid in our days. What then could contribute to healing in this age of unstoppable and unavoidable moving closer together?

Let’s think about this: Why is there so much friction between neighbors near and far? The answer is: because they are so different. Different races, different world views, different parties, different desires and worries, different capacities, different age-old adjustments to different environments ...endless differences...how, then, can they possibly understand each other? Nevertheless, they share in a great, a splendid common denominator, and we truly owe it to Prof. Frankl: that we do not just have a clue, but the weight of his decisive words: each human being of every nation is a spiritual, noëtic person. This is the only fundamental bond between us all. This is what unites us: the spiritual, and with it, freedom, responsibility, creative potential, and boundless and inalienable personal dignity.

Although it sounds astonishing, it is just this phenomenon of globalization that might become helpful when we consider the common ground. . From the understand that our well-being and suffering are united, that nobody can get out any more of looming disasters, such as climate threats, and that in the future we will either all be well or all be miserable,

there is a chance for a single credo to arise in unison, roughly equivalent to what Frankl had already claimed decades ago: *a monanthropism*. faith in our common humanity we are all part of. A faith, which would be able to bridge all the differences, which today confuse us so desperately.

As one of the first students of Frankl, allow me to say, then, what Frankl would most likely have offered to man on his path of search for meaning at the beginning of the 21st Century. He would, I should think, say: “Get up! Rise against the permanent causation of suffering that surrounds you; open your subtle sense for true values and fight for tolerance and mutual respect – but renounce counter-aggression and any other angry fighting”. Frankl taught us that bad means desecrate the best cause. In his forcefully moving play “Synchronization in Buchenwald” he has left us a calling: “We do no longer want to pay injustice with injustice, reply to hatred with hatred, and to power with power! The chain – the chain...must finally be broken!”, a heritage that could not be more convincing.

He would continue like this: “Be frugal. Do not get lured by the siren calls of consumerism and take a little break in your personal desert. Listen to the voice of transcendence!” He has advised us, in a time when then 10 commandments seem to lose their validity, to observe the 10,000 rules hiding in the 10,000 situations in our complicated lives. But, how can anyone perceive 10,000 rules? It is simple, they manifest themselves to us in silence, piece by piece, but not as strict commands from “above”, but as loving whispers of the truest friend we have: our conscience.

Frankl probably would continue by saying: “Meanwhile, you have accumulated an amazing technical repertoire, which provides you with enormous opportunities, but be careful with it! Any technological feature needs to be controlled by something meta-technical, so as not to turn against its own inventors”. Frankl elucidated, based on psychotherapeutic techniques, that even art and wisdom are not enough, if they are not paired with the human aspect; the human aspect, which gives technology its adequate place and sets its limits.

And a final assumption: Frankl would say, “Don’t ever forget, you are the being that always decides. Decides, what you will be in the next moment. You, due to your spiritual facilities, are the active collaborator of your fate. United in one mankind, you are the active

contributor to human history. With your actions you are writing in a book of history from which nothing can be erased, not the glorious and not the awful, but which still has an unknown number of pages, white, blank pages, which at the end will testify on your behalf. Turn this into a communal epic worthy of you.” I remember an anecdote Frankl used to tell about some students who were not talking to each other, until the day their bus got stuck in the mud. Suddenly, they were working shoulder to shoulder to free the bus, and any disagreements between them vanished. Frankl emphasized that there was nothing as placating as a common meaningful task. Therefore he would probably close with these words: “Take these children as an example! There are enough treasures in the world that can be released from the mud with joined forces. Work with confidence, shoulder to shoulder, each person with its own talents so that the “tragic optimism”, which I have upheld all *my* life, will in *your* lives gradually turn to ‘a justified optimism’”.

One cannot express it more beautifully than Prof. Frankl, let us thank him for his inspiration and example. And I thank you for listening.