
FROM THE EDITOR

Vienna revisited

I have just returned from the 2nd International Congress on Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, held in the beautiful and historic city of Vienna from May 15–18, 2014. The meeting was organized by the Frankl Institute of Vienna and was hosted by the young and energetic Professor Alexander Batthyany, Ph.D. The meeting drew over 400 logotherapists and devotees of Viktor Frankl, from over 30 countries. The papers and symposia were given in many different languages but, as I discovered, the language of Meaning appears to be universal, and Viktor Frankl's name was the same in every language represented. I had the honor of being invited to give the opening plenary lecture, as the theme of the Congress was "The Future of Logotherapy," and my work in Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy represented the first empirically based evidence, from rigorously conducted randomized controlled trials, of the powerful efficacy of a logotherapy oriented psychotherapy intervention. Dogma and Faith were being supplemented by scientific evidence, at last!

I did not know what to expect at a meeting of international practitioners of logotherapy. I must admit to being a bit intimidated at first. About a decade ago, I took the work of Viktor Frankl and, based on his writings, I naively cobbled together a structured eight session intervention for advanced cancer patients. I had heard of logotherapy (a form of psychotherapy Frankl had evolved based on "meaning") but had never met a logotherapy practitioner, and never studied or even explored logotherapy at any depth. I wasn't even sure that what I had put together would be considered logotherapy (I found out subsequently at this meeting that it was, in fact, logotherapy, but without the bells and whistles of specific logotherapeutic techniques like "de-reflection"). I was a bit intimidated at the prospect of presenting my usual talk on Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy, because typically I speak to practitioners in psycho-oncology and palliative care who know little or nothing about Frankl and his concepts of meaning and the sources of meaning. I usually explain Frankl's work, and even show some clips of Frankl describing his ideas.

There certainly was no need to use any of that material at this Congress on Logotherapy I concluded. So I focused instead on the therapy itself and its application to cancer, and especially on the randomized controlled trials and their results. I focused on the confirmatory science of what the attendees had been practicing for years based on Frankl's every written word and utterance.

The attendees were in fact from all parts of the world. Despite the fact that Frankl's work and the milestone publication of "Man's Search for Meaning" was over 50 years old, Frankl's presence was palpable. Every conversation, every sentence of every presentation (with the exception of mine, until minute 30 of a 60 minute presentation) was peppered with Frankl quotes, or the establishment of a connection to Frankl himself by mention of a meeting with Viktor, or studying with a student of Frankl's. Frankl would have wanted his work to move beyond a representation of himself, his compelling personal story, and his charismatic persona. He would want his work to move beyond him, and that is the true future of logotherapy, perhaps not fully achieved in this Congress, but certainly laid out as a goal.

Of course, part of why I accepted the invitation to speak at this Congress was to be able to visit Vienna again. As readers of *Palliative and Supportive Care* may recall, I wrote an editorial about the World Congress of Psycho-Oncology in Vienna in 2009 (Breitbart, 2009). I fell in love with the city during that trip, and was lucky enough to share the experience with close and dear friends and colleagues. I did make it back to the Café Diglas and had the "Strudel in Vienna." In fact, I must admit I had several portions of the apfel strudel over my stay. I again enjoyed the company of several colleagues who became closer friends than ever before. We navigated a very wet and rainy Vienna during this congress and enjoyed the lavish settings of several congress-related receptions at the Natural History Museum and then at the City Hall of Vienna.

Perhaps the most memorable aspect of the 2nd International Congress on logotherapy and Existential

Analysis was the fact that the meeting took place in the Vienna Medical Society Billroth Library Building, a magnificent monument to the history of medicine and psychiatry in Vienna. In fact, I gave my plenary lecture in the main lecture hall of the Vienna Medical Society, where I stood at the same podium that Freud, Adler, and Frankl had stood and lectured. The past, present, and future were all colliding in those moments when I stood to present my work. A final gift was the opportunity to meet Viktor Frankl's widow, 89 year old Eleonore Frankl. "Ely," as she is called, was very gracious and kind to me when we were introduced. She said a few kind things, but repeated one thing in particular several times over

and over again. "Please . . . take good care of yourself!" I suppose what she meant was that it was absolutely fine, and in fact imperative, that I had made sure to eat that extra portion of apfel strudel from Cafe Diglas. Perhaps Vienna will wait for me to visit again, soon.

REFERENCE

Breitbart, W. (2009). The Congress of Vienna. *Palliative and Supportive Care*, 7, 269–270.

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