

Existential Well-Being Counseling



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Pictures: Monique van den Boogaard

One year course in an electronic learning environment

Everything is ONLINE (login password)

Powerful set of web-based tools for an array of activities. (Course management by Moodle)

Articles

Video's

Internet links

Discussion Forum

Reflection Forum

Chat-room

One year course in an electronic learning environment

Intense, personal
and encouraging
follow-up by the staff
and mentors

Only online contact

Staff members:

- Prof. Dr. Mia Leijssen
- Claude Missiaen

Mentors:

- Kurt Renders
- Chris Van de Veire
- Gerke Verthriest

Person-Centered/

Experiential/Existential therapists

One year course in an electronic learning environment

Admission: bachelor in human sciences

Selection on the basis of motivation and working context.

Participants from different backgrounds: psychotherapists, medical doctors, PHD in philosophy, business, magistrate, nursery...

The training leads to **University Leuven Certificate Counseling in Existential Well-Being.**

One year course in an electronic learning environment

Studying time: personal choice

- Basic program minimum weekly 5 hours
- Deepening program + weekly 5 hours
- Extension program + weekly 5 hours

Time efficiency: flexible course 'attendance'

No travel costs nor time

Flexible combination work/family/study

Strenghts e-learning

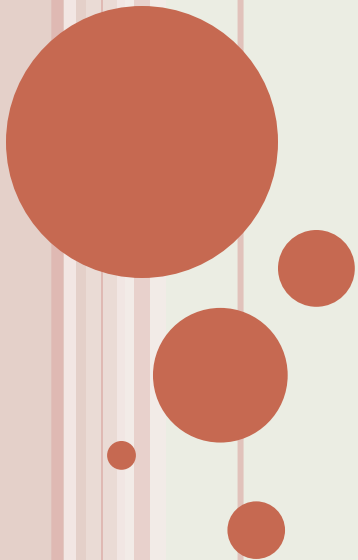
- Students have interval time to react on the forums. This provides more reflection time.
- Reactions are well-considered, ripe, personal and with great depth and a high degree of personal involvement, more in contact with what is really there. The e-learning environment is not like 'sending e-mails', it's more like 'writing letters'.
- Low threshold to post issues on the website. Delicate themes can more easily be discussed in an online environment.
- Students can open new discussion lines themselves, so they give their own colours to the training.
- High level of involvement in group process with high degree of interpersonal learning.

Weaknesses e-learning

- No direct face to face contact between participants and staff. It takes more time to develop a feeling of being connected with the group.
- No direct feedback about ones interventions. No direct interactions, except for the meetings in the chat-rooms.
- Worst case scenario: a participant may not be who he/she pretends he/she is.

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF EXISTENTIAL WELL-BEING COUNSELING

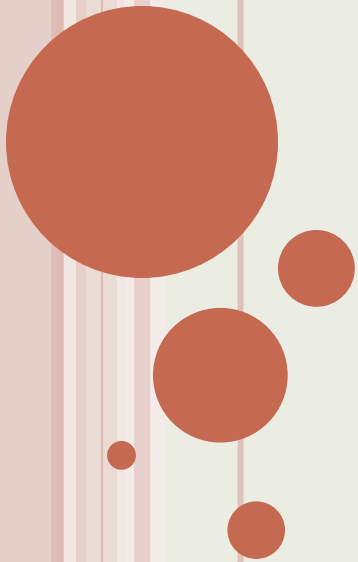
- 1. Complexity of Human existence:
physical, social, personal, spiritual.**
- 2. Existential well-being implies
sufficient attention for each
dimension, not too much, not too
little.**



**3. THE STARTING POINT IS EXPERIENTIAL:
FOCUSING ON THE BODILY FELT MEANING.**

**4. INTEGRATION OF DIVERSE
HUMANISTIC/EXPERIENTIAL THEORIES AND
SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS.**

**THIS RESULTS IN A VERY BROAD AND VARIED
OFFER OF TEXTS, ORDERED PER EXISTENTIAL
THEME.**

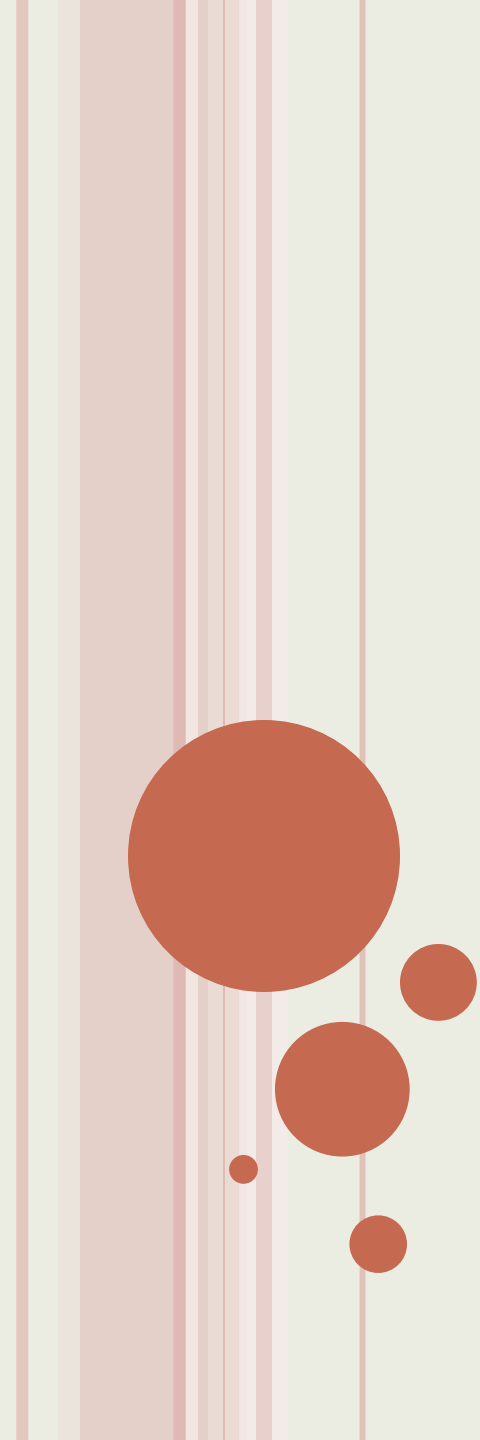


5. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY.

LEADS TO A PROCESS-ORIENTED APPROACH TO HUMAN STRENGTHS, TALENTS AND VIRTUES.

IT SHOULD NOT BE UNDERSTOOD AS A CALL TO IGNORE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE. BUT RATHER HOW POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES MAY BE INTERRELATED.

GENDLIN: *“EVERY BAD FEELING IS POTENTIAL ENERGY TOWARD A MORE RIGHT WAY OF BEING IF YOU GIVE IT SPACE TO MOVE TOWARD ITS RIGHTNESS.”*



6. COUNSELING ATTITUDES AND SKILLS FROM DIFFERENT THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES. FOUNDATIONS ARE FROM THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH: EMPATHY, AUTHENTICITY, ACCEPTANCE, APPRECIATION OF DIVERSITY.

7. DIVERSE FORMS OF EXPRESSION: LANGUAGE, IMAGINATION, ART, MUSIC, FILMS, NOVELS, CLIPS FROM THE INTERNET, HUMORISTIC SKETCHES...

8. THE QUALITY TEST LIES IN REAL LIFE, IN THE PRACTICE OF THESE PRINCIPLES IN DAILY LIFE AND WORK.

Structure of each module



- ✓ Experiential exercises
- ✓ Theories
- ✓ Reflection and interaction
- ✓ Development of strengths, qualities and virtues;
in counseling and in life
- ✓ Measurements and research
- ✓ Beauty and solace: poetry, film, music, art, sketches...

CONTENT OF THE COURSE / 8 MODULES

1. Existential Well-being. Quality of life.
Health, Curing and Healing.
2. Dimension of human existence.
Self image and World view.
3. Human development across the life span.
Existential themes in one's life story.
4. Meaning and values.
5. Existential challenges: anxiety, solitude, loss, grief,
sickness, death.
6. Conflicts, anger, power, freedom, boundaries.
7. Love. Different forms of connection and closeness.
Gender issues.
8. Treasures for life quality. Art of Living.

1. Existential Well-being. Quality of life, Health, Curing and Healing



BODY / PHYSICAL
SOUL / SPIRITUAL

“There is an inner wisdom in each person, based in a bodily-carried sense of personal truth. The bodily-held inner knowing becomes a meaningful resource we can use.” (Lucinda Gray)

FOCUSING ATTITUDE
FELT SENSE

HOPE

EXAMPLE OF PERSONAL GROWTH ACTIVITY

- Focus on a time you felt hopeful about your life. What was going on in your life that made you feel hopeful?
- What are your qualities or your resources that keep you going on in the face of stress and adversity?

Ward & Reuter (2011). *Strength-centered Counseling*. Sage, London.

Example of a Theory:

Authentic Happiness (Seligman, 2002)

Different routes

the **Pleasant Life**, having as many pleasures as possible and having the skills to amplify the pleasures.

the **Good Life**, knowing what your signature strengths are, and then recrafting your work, love, friendship, leisure and parenting to use those strengths to have more flow in life.

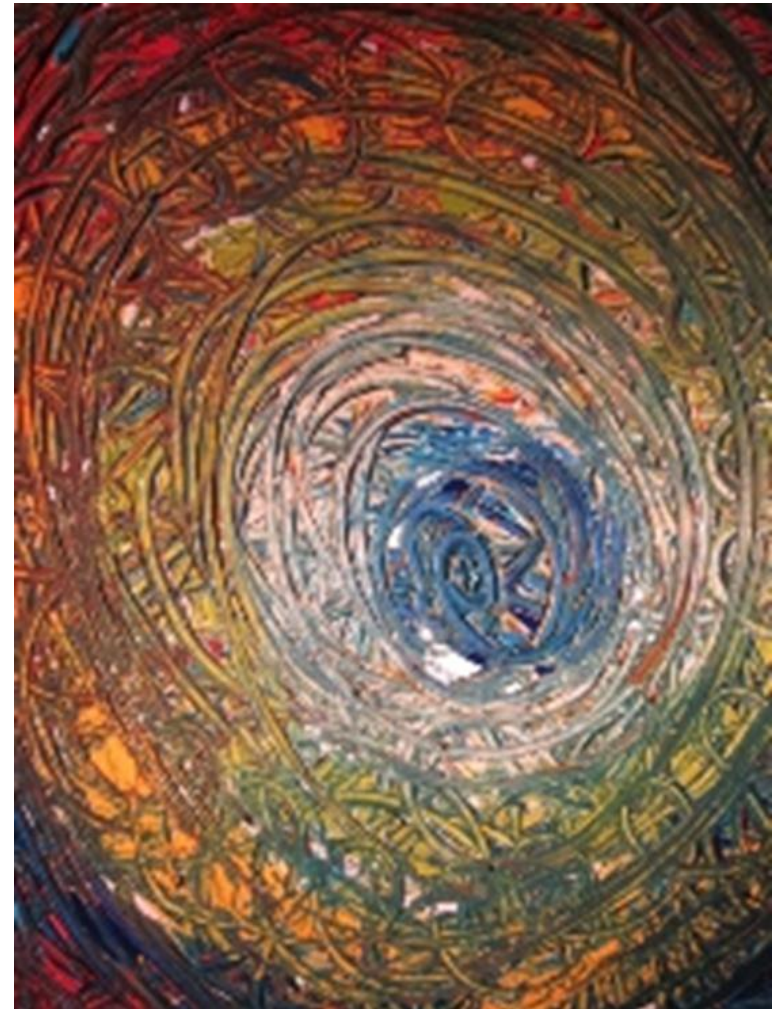
the **Meaningful Life**, using your signature strengths in the service of something that you believe is larger than you are.

2. The physical, social, psychological and spiritual dimension of human existence. Self image and World view.

EMPATHIC CURIOSITY

APPRECIATION/TOLERANCE
FOR AMBIVALENCE

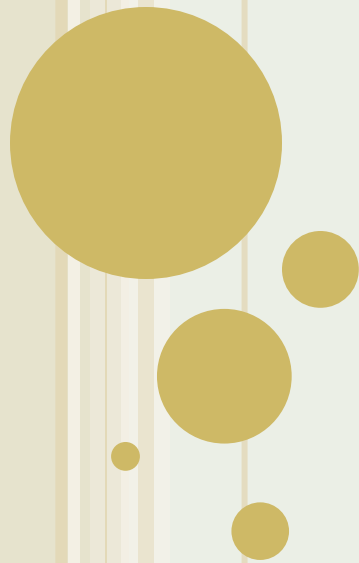
WISDOM / KNOWLEDGE



Experiential exercises

I will offer you a few questions so that you can capture a little bit of the salience of the dimensions in your life.

1. “I am...”



Experiential exercises

- **2. IN WHAT DO YOU INVEST YOUR TIME, ENERGY, MONEY ?**
- **3. ABOUT WHAT ARE YOU WORRYING IN YOUR LIFE ?**
- **4. WHAT GIVES YOU JOY, PLEASURE, HAPPINESS, PEACE, STRENGTH, COURAGE IN YOUR LIFE ?**
- **5. HOW CAN YOU MOTIVATE YOURSELF TO DO THE RIGHT THINGS ?**

Dimensions of human existence



- Physical
- Social
- Psychological
- Spiritual

Physical dimension





Social dimension





Psychological dimension

Spiritual dimension]



Dimensions of Human Existence

(Leijssen, 2007; van Deurzen, 2009)

	Physical Umwelt	Social Mitwelt	Psychological Eigenwelt	Spiritual Uberwelt
Deals with I AM ...	Body Material world Nature	Place in society Relations	Identity character traits Thinking and feeling	Soul Meaning Self-transcending ideals
Values ENERGY, time, money	Health Safety Comfort	Esteem, succes Connection	Autonomy Freedom Knowledge Authenticity	A better world, Consciousness of unity 'Being values'
Threats WORRIES	Pain, sickness Death Poverty	Rejection Loliness Guilt, shame	Confusion Doubt Imperfection	Meaninglessness Futility Evil
JOY Perenial philosophy	BEAUTY	GOODNESS	TRUTH	LOVE

HOMO EMPATHICUS

http://www.ted.com/talks/jeremy_rifkin_on_the_empathic_civilization.html

Empathic drive is build into our biology

Building an empathic society

3. Human development across the life span. Existential themes in client's Life story.



AUTHENTICITY
GENUINENESS
SELF-KNOWLEDGE

RESILIENCE
COURAGE
SELF-ESTEEM
SELF-CARE
FORGIVENESS

“The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent;

the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult;

the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise.”

Reflections on forgiveness.

A Note from Rabbi Michael Lerner.

4. Meaning and values.



MOTIVATION

GOALS

COMMITMENT

PASSION

ZEST

ENTHUSIASM

FLOW

WONDER, AWE

Viktor Frankl

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ElxGrlc_6g&NR=1

'The cup' (1999) film by Tibetan Buddhist lama Khyentse Norbu.

World Cup soccer fever sweeps into a remote Himalayan monastery and centuries-old traditions are threatened—the young monks will do just about anything to watch the final match. A true story Filmed on location at Chokling Monastery, India

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgErhy2TLUw>

5. Existential challenges: anxiety, solitude, loss, grief, sickness, death

EMOTIONS

ACCEPTANCE

PRESENCE



RESEARCH AND MEASUREMENTS

Mount et al. (2007). *Healing Connections: On Moving from Suffering to a Sense of Well-Being*. Life-threatening illness is an assault on the whole person: physical, psychological, social, and spiritual. It frequently presents caregiver and sufferer with a paradox suffering does not correlate with physical well-being alone. Drawing on a purposive sample of 21 participants, a phenomenological study was carried out to explore the relevance of the existential and spiritual domains to suffering, healing, and quality of life (QOL). The phenomenological method was used to achieve an in-depth description of both existential suffering, and conversely, the experience of integrity and wholeness, in persons with life-threatening illness; identify “inner life” and existential contributors to suffering and subjective well-being in advanced illness; and develop a narrative account of these QOL extremes. The importance of meaning-based adaptation to advanced illness was supported, as were Frankl’s sources of meaning and Yalom’s sources of existential anguish. Divergent themes characteristic of the two QOL extremes were identified. Four types of ‘healing connections’ involving a sense of bonding to Self, others, the phenomenal world, and ultimate meaning, respectively, were identified. They situated the participant in a context that was greater and more enduring than the self, thus leading to enhanced meaning and QOL.



*YOUR GRIEF FOR WHAT YOU'VE LOST LIFTS A MIRROR
UP TO WHERE YOU'RE BRAVELY WORKING.*

*EXPECTING THE WORST, YOU LOOK, YOU LOOK, AND
INSTEAD,
HERE'S THE JOYFUL FACE YOU'VE BEEN WANTING TO
SEE.*

*YOUR HAND OPENS AND CLOSES AND OPENS AND
CLOSES.
IF IT WERE ALWAYS A FIST OR ALWAYS STRETCHED
OPEN,
YOU WOULD BE PARALYZED.*

*YOUR DEEPEST PRESENCE IS IN EVERY SMALL
CONTRACTING
AND EXPANDING,
THE TWO AS BEAUTIFULLY BALANCED AND
COORDINATED
AS BIRDWINGS.*

BIRDWINGS. RUMI (1207-1273)

6. Conflicts, anger, power, freedom, boundaries.

CONFRONTATION
CONFLICT

FAIRNESS
INTEGRITY
LEADERSHIP
VIRTUE ETHICS



“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Marianne Williamson.

Nelson Mandela presidential inauguration speech (1994).

7. Love. Different forms of connection and closeness... Gender issues.



ATTACHMENT
DESIRES
ROMANTIC LOVE
FRIENDSHIP
KINDNESS
GENEROSITY
CARE
COMPASSION
ALTRUISM
RESPONSIBILITY

“The ability of human beings to form loving bonds is possibly one of their greatest strengths.”

(Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2002)



Love as the necessary condition for growth and healing = connection

- ❖ **Physical** dimension: being part of nature; respecting the body and its needs; love for the material dimension.
- ❖ **Social** dimension: authentic connection with others; genuine commitment to social tasks.
- ❖ **Psychological** dimension: connection with oneself; self-knowledge; self-love; rich inner life.
- ❖ **Spiritual** dimension: inspired by something that transcends the limited self; love is the whole being

GENDER

Mark Grungor 'The tale of two brains'.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XjUFYxSxDk>

Ecofeminism.

<http://www.ecofeminism.org/>

8 .Treasures for life quality. Art of living.

INTUITION

IMAGINATION

CREATIVITY

HUMOR

PLAYFULNESS

DISCIPLINE

GRATITUDE

TRANSCENDENCE



Nurturing creativity

Elizabeth Gilbert, the author of *Eat, Pray, Love*, her next fascination is: genius, and how we ruin it. She shares the radical idea that, instead of the rare person "being" a genius, all of us "have" a genius. It's one of the funny, personal and surprisingly moving TED talks.

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius.html



Inspiration from different traditions

- ✓ William James: '*The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature.*'
- ✓ **Sufi**: "Christian, Jew, Muslim, Shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river, each has a secret way of being with the mystery, unique and not to be judged." Mevlana
- ✓ **Christian Mystics**, such as St. John of the Cross '*Dark Nights of the Soul*'. Hildegarde van Bingen...
- ✓ **Buddhists**: The Four Noble Truths. Understanding suffering and self-healing. Thich Nhat Hanh...
- ✓ **Hindus**: Bhagavad Gita "Krishna shows love as an all-encompassing force. To love the Divine – which is everything in creation – includes loving the Divinity in oneself and in all other beings."
- ✓ **Taoism**. The way not to follow. Patricia de Martelaere.
- ✓ **Quakers** tradition. Focusing on the light.
<http://www.focusing.org/spirituality.html>
- ✓ Meditations from <http://www.grandmothersspeak.com>
- ✓ "The Seven Gifts of **Druidry**":
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=rKdoJjizN8#

EXISTENTIAL JUKEBOX

MUSICAL HOME PHARMACY

"Remember,
Information is not knowledge;
Knowledge is not Wisdom;
Wisdom is not truth;
Truth is not beauty;
Beauty is not love;
Love is not music;
Music is the best."
(Frank Zappa)

AVE MARIA. BEYONCE.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHE2vjcrNxE&feature=r
elated](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHE2vjcrNxE&feature=rrelated)

Course members' testimonies

- Years ago, studying was an obligation, often something like “couldn't care less”. Here, “learning” is mere pleasure. The material is very interesting and it gives you a broader view and more opportunities to apply existential understanding in your own life and also in your own counseling practice. Existential well-being in practice!!! I am enthusiastic about the mentors' open minds. A real “pearl”. (Jo Mattens)
- So far, I have enjoyed this training enormously, I have learned quite a lot and it has absolutely made me a richer person. As of day 1, I found it a privilege, a unique chance to be admitted to follow this training. It is simply a lovely gift that still gives me pleasure every day. (Annemie Vandermeulen)

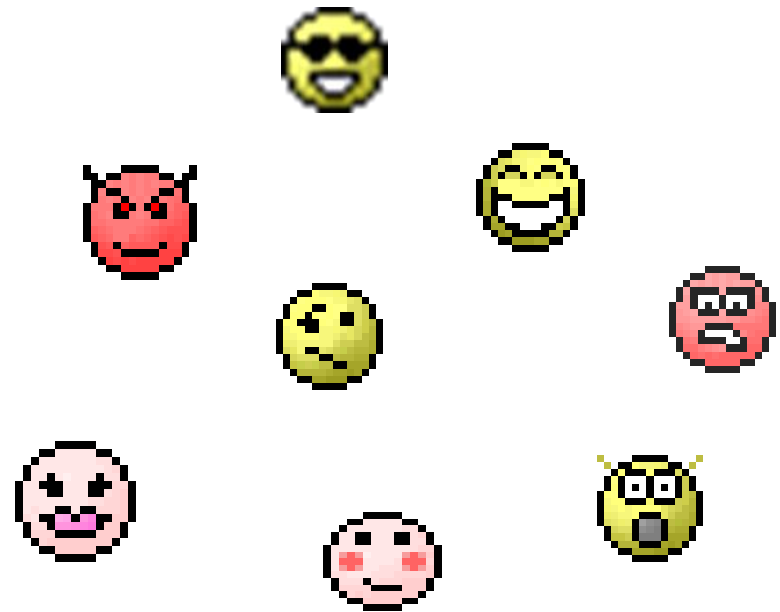
Course members' testimonies

- In our society's bustle and abundance, I feel this course is a permanent invitation to stick to the essentials or to return to these essentials. It is a great privilege, in that context, to be admitted to enjoy the mentors' beneficial, positive and supporting presence. I really feel this is making me a 'better' and more 'satisfied' person.
(Marijke Merckx)
- For anyone who is committed to his soul's care and that of his fellow-man, anyone who feels part of a larger whole, I can only recommend this course. The contents are absolutely useful in practice and the mentors guide you perfectly. Even though this is an online training, which feels a bit uncomfortable at the beginning, I would gladly do it over. (Nicky Demoitié)

References

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- van Deurzen, E., Blackmore, C., & Tantam, D. (2006) Distance and Intimacy in Internet Psychotherapy Training. *International Journal of Psychotherapy*, special edition, Vol. 10, No. 2.
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Thank you



www.existentieelwelzijn.be

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