We will now be talking about life tasks and community feeling. In the video explaining the core tenants we discussed how Adlerian theory is a field theory. The individual must face challenges as they navigate their way through life. Adler viewed some of these exogenous factors as being inevitable human challenges or, situations which we must all face. He called these universal challenges “life tasks” and he identified three such tasks: the social task, the love task, and the work task. On this topic Adler said, “the three ties in which human beings are bound set the three problems of life, but none of these problems can be solved separately.” Each of them demands a successful approach to the other two. The reason for this is that he identified social interest or community feeling as being a necessary requirement in the successful resolution of each life task.

So lets begin with the task of work. For most of us life requires that we work, and if we don’t than we have to do something else. We have to find a way to feed and sustain ourselves. For children the work task consists of school. For adults it includes occupation. And the work task is also salient when you retire. We may want to know why people do what they do. Sometimes it’s selected based on ideals, for example: “I’m doing God’s work” or “I want to help people.” Others may idolize someone and want to follow in their role model’s footsteps. There are personal traits that go along with choice. For example: “I cannot sit behind a desk all day.” Leadership is another sub-task. How do they seek it, and how do they manage it. Labor relations are also important. Consider negotiations at work. Finally there’s the subtask of leisure. How do you spend your free time?

Adler took this further and addressed the finite amount of recourses on our planet, and said that it is our society’s challenge in negotiating how to use those resources. Also, that your job has some usefulness to the greater good of society. That through this you can achieve some feeling of worth to society, which is how you move through the feeling of inferiority. If you’re helping to advance society, Adler believed that it would give you a sense of personal satisfaction and contribution.

Next is the social task. To quote Adler, “we have always to recon with others. To adapt ourselves to others, and to interest ourselves in them. This problem is best solved by friendship, social feeling and cooperation.

For the task of friendship there are two primary dimensions. First is the concept of belonging. We want to be a part of something and transcend ourselves. We want to be a part of our religion, our community, we want to root for the cubs. In a certain sense, it gives us a sense of identity by knowing what we belong to.

The other dimension is the transactional task. This consists of the actual interactions that take place between ourselves and others and the relationships that we build.

Third is the love task. The love task was Adler’s answer to the individual’s stance on the other sex, and toward procreation. It includes sex role definition, which answers the question: “what does it mean to be a man?” or “what does it mean to be a woman?” There are cultural or personal convictions to answer this question. A culture may expect certain behaviors based on one’s gender, but an individual may have differing or more specific expectations.
The second subtask is Sex Role Identification. So, if this is what it means to be a woman, how close do I come to fulfilling that definition?

The third is the stance taken on dating, courtship, marriage, and family. Dreikurs said in one sentence “love is ‘I want you.’” You could love someone and not want to marry them, or you could not love someone but stay with them because they love you and you get your needs met through the relationship.

So following Adler’s initial presentation of the life tasks, other Adlerians have presented additional life tasks. So, since life tasks are large universal challenges of life they encompass the major hurdles that we strive to overcome. When asked how many life tasks exist, Harold Mosak responded “into how many slices can you cut a pie?”

Some Adlerians adhere to Adler’s original three, while others identify with 5 tasks and yet others 7. I will go on to present Rudolph Dreikurs and Harold Mosak’s additional two tasks, the task of self and the spiritual or existential task.

The task of self focuses on answering the question “Who am I?” This task was influenced by William James who asserted that for each of us the self can be both subject and object. There is an “I” and “myself” therefor we focus on how the “I” relates to the “me.” Your self-concept can change over time, and we will look for what you centrally do and for character traits. Value formation is also an important part of this process.

Finally, there is the spiritual or existential task. Now this task is broader than a religious task, as not everyone defines him or herself as being religious. In the task the first question asks, “does the person believe that there is a god, or is there no god?” if the person believes that there is a god than what is god like? And how does the person relate to god? How does god relate to the person? How does one pray? Is prayer efficacious?

If one does not believe in god, than what gives meaning to life? For example, ethical principles may give meaning to life, so how does one develop those ethical principles? In addition, nobody observes all religious practices, so everyone makes choices. And since there are choices than there is the opportunity to sin. If you do sin, than what do you do about it? Most churches make some permission for sinners. Since there is choice than there is opportunity to feel guilty. Is there a soul? If there is, than what happens to it upon death of the body? In addition, there are also ontological issues such as “what is the nature of being?” and “are people born good?” Both Adler and Victor Frankl agree that we give life meaning. That it doesn’t come from the outside, but rather that it comes from within us.

So, the answer to the problems proposed through the life tasks is that of social interest or community feeling. Now, this is a very difficult subject to lecture upon and discuss. Adler was vague in his description of Gemeinschaftsgefühl, and there is no direct translation from German into to English. The best translation is that of “Community Feeling,” but Americans have often called it “Social Interest.” Adler first used the term “Gemeinschaftsgefühl” in 1918 and then 10 years later he added the concept of “social interest” which he specifically noted as a separate concept from “Gemeinschaftsgefühl.” The two terms have generally been used synonymously, however Heinz Onsbocker made an effort to clarify and differentiate between the two concepts. Adler described “community feeling” or “Gemeinschaftsgefühl” as a “cosmic feeling. A
reflection of the coherence of everything that lives is cosmic in us, and which gives us the ability to empathize with things that lie outside of the body.” Not only did community feeling relate to the here and now, but also what could potentially be in the future. The term “community feeling” sounded too metaphysical in a scientific and objective field at that time, so “social feeling” was used instead. “Social interest” was later introduced. Social interest and community feeling share the element of searching outside of oneself toward the community. However, the process differs: community feeling is a somewhat inactive state of mind, whereas social interest is a “motivating, activating, guiding behavior in a certain direction.” Adler associated social interest with activity, and cooperation. Adler never explicitly described the relationship of the two concepts to each other, but once provided a clarification at a lecture and stated that “Social interest is the action line of community feeling.” Since we have to recon with one another, Adler believed that we can achieve more together through cooperation than we could on our own. This provided a general direction for the solution of the life tasks that we just talked about. And Adlerian’s work to encourage our clients to consider the satisfaction that they may feel through working with rather than against.

So, in this video we were able to discuss Adler’s original three life tasks [Social task, Love task, and Work task], the two additional life tasks of the self and the Existential task [Spiritual or Existential task], and we were able to discuss the understanding of the term Gemeinschaftsgefühl or Community Feeling, as well as the concept of social interest.