



# Prioritizing Meaning as a Pathway to Meaning in Life and Well-Being

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## Abstract

Experiencing both positive emotions and meaning is fundamental to human flourishing. The present study aimed to build and expand upon recent attempts to assess prioritizing positivity, which involves habitual ways of incorporating positive emotions in daily life (Catalino et al. in *Emotion* 14(6): 1155–1161, 2014), by assessing the prioritization of meaning in daily life and its associations with well-being. Results from two studies, employing adult community samples ( $N=107$  and  $N=251$ ) demonstrated coherent, replicable factor structure and good internal reliability for the 12-item scale of prioritizing meaning. Prioritizing meaning was positively associated with life satisfaction, happiness, positive emotions, sense of coherence, gratitude and presence of meaning, beyond the effect of prioritizing positivity, thus demonstrating the possibility that prioritizing meaning makes a distinctive contribution to well-being. Process mediation models showed that prioritizing meaning is associated with the experience of meaning which in turn mediates the beneficial effects of prioritizing meaning on a variety of well-being indicators. Prioritizing meaning was also directly associated with well-being indicators underscoring its potential role in affecting well-being. Furthermore, prioritizing meaning was found to significantly mediate the effect of search for meaning on all indicators of well-being other than sense of coherence. The findings suggest the importance of prioritizing meaning and hold significant conceptual and practical implications for understanding processes of meaning making and their potential effects on individuals' well-being.

**Keywords** Meaning in life · Well-being · Prioritizing meaning · Hedonia · Eudaimonia

## 1 Introduction

The need to experience life as meaningful is fundamental to human nature (e.g. Baumeister 1991; Frankl 1963). Experiencing meaning is strongly and repeatedly associated with well-being and thriving (e.g. Ryff and Singer 1998; Scollon and King 2004). The present study explored a potentially significant way in which individuals incorporate meaning in their daily life by introducing the construct of *prioritizing meaning*. This built on and expanded

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upon recent attempts to assess prioritizing positivity, which involves habitual ways of incorporating positive emotions in daily life (Catalino, Algoe and Fredrickson 2014). This study had three overarching objectives: (a) to develop and validate a new measure for prioritizing meaning; (b) to explore its associations with well-being beyond the effects of prioritizing positivity, reflecting the two pathways to well-being, eudaimonic and hedonic respectively; and (c) to examine the relationship between prioritizing meaning and the presence of, and search for, meaning in life.

## 2 Complementary Pathways to Well-being: Prioritizing Happiness and Prioritizing Meaning

Empirical and philosophical literature examining well-being mostly refers to two basic forms (Friedman 2012; Ryan and Deci 2001; Ryff and Singer 1998; Ryff et al. 2004; Waterman 1993), both of which are fundamental to human flourishing. Hedonia involves pursuing happiness, positive affect, life satisfaction and reduced negative affect (Huta and Waterman 2014; Ryan et al. 2008). Eudaimonia supports the idea that well-being is achieved when individuals live in accordance with their “true selves,” which includes experiencing self-actualization, meaning, virtuous purpose and growth at the individual level (Ryan and Deci 2001; Ryff et al. 2004; Waterman 1993) as well as commitment to shared goals and values at the social level (Massimini and Delle Fave 2000).

These two types of well-being, hedonic and eudaimonic, convey two rather different or independent life-pursuits or goals, yet they are not mutually exclusive and each is essential in its own particular manner (Huta 2016). Overall, hedonia addresses more fundamental and immediate needs, while eudaimonia is considered a sort of “higher pleasure” (Seligman 2002) as it enables individuals to develop their potential and address values, virtue and vision (Huta 2016; Steger et al. 2011). Pursuing hedonia is generally related to personal well-being, whereas the pursuit of eudaimonia is associated with both personal well-being and caring that goes beyond self-interest (e.g., Huta and Ryan 2010; Peterson et al. 2005). For example, eudaimonia was found to be linked with generative behavior (see de St. Aubin 2013), which refers to a concern for fostering the development of society and future generations instead of being focused purely on one’s own personal welfare (Erikson 1950; McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992). Although distinct, both theoretically and empirically (e.g., Huta and Ryan 2010), they are considered to have complementary functions (Huta 2016). It was found that a combination of both eudaimonic and hedonic pursuits is linked to optimal functioning, as reflected in more complete and comprehensive well-being than results from either pursuit on its own (e.g., Huta and Ryan 2010; Peterson et al. 2005), as well as higher degrees of mental health (Keyes 2002).

Each of these complementary concepts includes individuals’ orientations or motives for actions, experiences, functioning, and behaviors or activities (Huta and Waterman 2014). Hedonic activities aim to produce positive affect and happiness for the individual in the present moment (Huta and Ryan 2010). However, research has shown that the understanding of the effects of the active pursuit of positive emotions, and therefore the hedonic life, is not as clear as expected (Ford and Mauss 2014). Various studies have suggested the paradoxical effect that the more individuals value happiness, the less likely they will be able to actually attain it (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson and Savino 2011; Schooler et al. 2003). This may be due to placing excessive value on happiness and setting unrealistically high standards for happiness that may cause fear of not measuring up to all these expectations (Ford

and Mauss 2014). Such an evaluative rather than engaged mindset involves constant personal monitoring that appears to impede enjoyment (see Vittersø et al. 2009).

Catalino et al. (2014) propose an alternative in their research. They suggest that prioritizing positivity is a more effective way to enhance well-being than over-emphasizing the pursuit of happiness. They explain that prioritizing positivity reflects, “the extent to which individuals seek out positivity by virtue of how they make decisions about how to organize their day-to-day lives” (Catalino et al. 2014; p. 1159). By making better choices regarding activities involving positive emotions, individuals maximize the likelihood of spontaneously experiencing positive emotions in day-to-day life. This approach builds on an emotional regulation strategy of situation selection in which individuals actively seek situations that will cause or prevent certain emotions (Gross and Thompson 2007). The research supports this, finding that prioritizing positivity has a positive correlation with positive emotions and life satisfaction as well as a negative correlation with negative emotions and depression (Catalino et al. 2014).

The present study applied the same rationale with regard to eudaimonia, which is largely guided by activities that are intrinsically meaningful (Ryan and Deci 2001) and in line with the individual’s personal values (Waterman 1993). Specifically, a measure to assess prioritizing meaning in daily life was constructed. It assesses the extent to which individuals intentionally seek out activities and contexts and make choices that are conducive to experiencing meaning. Research on prioritizing positivity (Catalino et al. 2014), a construct linked to hedonic well-being, has demonstrated that individuals who regularly prioritize positive emotions and experiences in their day-to-day lives may in fact be happier than those who do not. In light of the centrality of meaning to eudaimonia (e.g., McGregor and Little 1998; Ryan and Deci 2001; Ryff and Singer 1998; Seligman 2002), it was expected that prioritizing meaning in one’s choices and activities would make a unique contribution to well-being. The current research complements previous efforts by Catalino et al. (2014) and provides an initial examination of the association of prioritizing meaning with several aspects of well-being, while simultaneously proposing a measure to assess it. In keeping with the view that hedonia and eudaimonia are two complementary pathways to well-being, it was hypothesized that both prioritizing positivity and prioritizing meaning would be positively associated with well-being in a distinct yet complementary manner. In terms of the well-being outcomes explored, this study adopted an extended view beyond the commonly used indicators (positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction [cf. Huta and Ryan 2010]) and included additional variables (e.g., happiness) as well as some outcomes which are more directly related to eudaimonia such as sense of coherence, generativity and gratitude.

### 3 The Association Between Prioritizing Meaning and Meaning in Life (Presence and Search)

The abstract and multifaceted nature of the construct of meaning in life (MIL) poses a conceptual and empirical challenge (e.g., George and Park 2016; Martela and Steger 2016). Recent integrative conceptualization offers a conception of meaning in life that includes three central dimensions: comprehension, purpose, and mattering (George and Park 2016; Martela and Steger 2016; Steger 2012). Specifically meaning in life “may be defined as the extent to which one’s life is experienced as making sense, as being directed and motivated by valued goals, and as mattering in the world” referring to these three dimensions

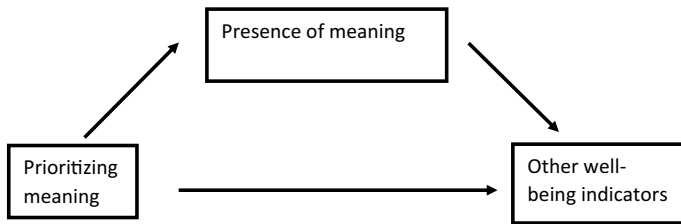
respectively (George and Park 2016; p. 2). Although these sub-constructs do facilitate a more nuanced conceptual understanding of the construct of meaning, little is known about the extent to which individuals actually incorporate meaning into their daily lives. Research exploring the specific sources or contents of individuals' meaning in life (e.g., Schnell 2009; Wong 1998) and the dynamics of day-to-day behaviors (e.g., Steger et al. 2008) reveal the need for better understanding individuals' engagement with the question of meaning in their lives.

For example, the most widely used measure for meaning in life, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al. 2006), is made up of two subscales: presence of meaning (MLQ-P) and search for meaning (MLQ-S). The former refers to the subjective sense of one's life as being meaningful and comprehensible and the latter reflects "the strength, intensity, and activity of people's desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance and purpose of their lives" (Steger et al. 2008a; p. 200). In line with the purported centrality of eudaimonia to well-being, extensive research has provided evidence that the presence of meaning is beneficial to various aspects of well-being, including positive affect, life satisfaction and happiness (e.g., King et al. 2006; Park et al. 2010; Ryff 1989; Steger 2012; Steger et al. 2008).

In contrast, the construct of the search for meaning presents a more complex picture, conceptually and empirically (Steger et al. 2011). Some researchers believe that searching for meaning is fundamental to human life and hence there is natural motivation (will to meaning) to pursue this important and central human endeavor (e.g. Frankl 1963). Others, however, discuss it as a warning sign that meaning has been lost (e.g. Baumeister 1991). Empirical research has found that searching for meaning as assessed using the MLQ is associated with less life satisfaction (e.g., Park et al. 2010) and greater anxiety, depression and rumination (e.g., Steger et al. 2008b). Yet studies have also shown that searching for meaning is associated with positive outcomes such as open mindedness, drive and absorption (Steger et al. 2006; Steger et al. 2008b). Thus, search for meaning may have multifaceted associations with well-being. Reflecting this view, some research also indicates that the association between searching for meaning and decreased well-being may differ across cultures, as searching for meaning was found to be positively related to mental health in collectivist cultures (e.g., Datu 2015). Along the same lines, another study showed that while the search for meaning was negatively related to the presence of meaning among U.S. participants, it was positively related to the presence of meaning among Japanese individuals. This suggests that the search for meaning, as assessed by the MLQ, may evoke different understandings in different cultures and may moderate cultural effects on presence of meaning (Steger et al. 2008c). This is consistent with the concerns that lack of context and content regarding what presence and search constitute means these concepts remain rather abstract (Wong 2014) and are subject to intuitive judgments regarding what they mean on a personal level and how they align with individuals' lives (George and Park 2016).

Taken together, these results indicate that the interplay between the search for meaning and well-being may require further unpacking. Recently, it has been suggested that the search for meaning may operate as a schema, helping the individual to identify and arrange information relevant to making accurate meaning-in-life judgments (Steger et al. 2011). For example, the relation between the presence of meaning and life satisfaction was found to be stronger among individuals searching for meaning (Steger et al. 2008c).

This finding may be interpreted as suggesting that one aspect of the general search for meaning is the active prioritization of meaning in daily life (Steger et al. 2011). It thus can be suggested that when the search for meaning is expressed by actively prioritizing meaning in daily life, the search for meaning may be expected to be associated with benevolent



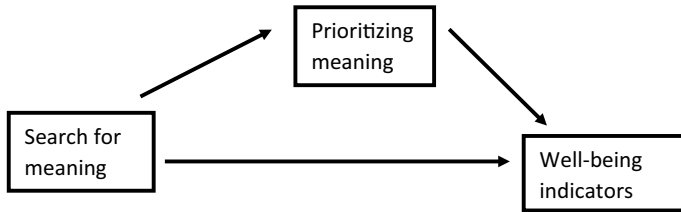
**Fig. 1** Theoretical model: the mediational role of the presence of meaning between prioritizing meaning and well-being indicators

outcomes. In this sense, prioritizing meaning, as defined and characterized here, reflects individual differences in the extent to which meaning is implemented via the decisions individuals make about where to invest effort in the context of everyday life. Existential scholars such as May (1967) and Maddi (1970) have already demonstrated that experiencing meaning requires action and praxis. More specifically, Frankl (e.g. 1963) emphasized concrete action that is congruent with one’s logos or will to meaning as a route to experiencing meaningfulness. Similarly, Wong (2010) indicated, in his PURE model, the importance of taking action, finding it fundamental to experiencing meaning, alongside other components of purpose, understanding and evaluation. According to the model, action refers to value-driven responsible actions, choices and reactions (Wong 2014).

#### 4 Overview of the Present Research

The present study sought to explore the differences reflected in the extent to which individuals intentionally act and organize, as well as make decisions, in their day-to-day life to experience more meaning. Such individual differences may play two complementary functions. First, given that prioritizing meaning refers to the differences in the way people approach meaning through the concrete actions they choose to be involved with in their daily lives, prioritizing meaning was expected to be positively associated with the presence of meaning where such presence would mediate to some extent the benevolent associations of prioritizing meaning with other indicators of well-being (see Fig. 1). Second, it was suggested that in addition to this association, prioritizing meaning would also provide one of the missing links in the interplay between the search for meaning and well-being. Search for meaning mostly reflects a general state of mind or attitude towards life. The general rather than concrete nature of such an intention creates the possibility that it may or may not lead to well-being. In contrast, prioritizing meaning reflects a more specific, concrete and operationalized stance. Hence, prioritizing meaning might be conceived as the concrete vehicle through which search may culminate in well-being including presence of meaning. Specifically, it was hypothesized that prioritizing meaning also would be positively associated with the search for meaning and that it would mediate the association between the search for meaning and well-being (see Fig. 2).

Two studies were conducted to explore the validity of prioritizing meaning and its association with the search for and presence of meaning and various aspects of well-being. In these studies, well-being was assessed using a variety of indicators: positive emotions, happiness, generativity, sense of coherence, gratitude and satisfaction with life, as well as negative emotions and depression. More specifically, the positive and negative affect scale (PANAS) is considered a commonly used measure of hedonic



**Fig. 2** Theoretical model: the mediational role of the prioritizing of meaning between search for meaning and well-being indicators

well-being (Deci and Ryan 2008; Huta and Ryan 2010). The measure for the prevalence of depressive mood and symptoms (CES-D scale; Radloff 1977) is often the indicator for the most pertinent negative affective state in connection to hedonic well-being (Vanhoutte 2014). Happiness is another widely used measure for hedonic well-being (e.g., Nave et al. 2008). Generativity (e.g., de St. Aubin 2013), sense of coherence (e.g., Temane and Wissing 2006), and gratitude (e.g., Wood et al. 2008) generally reflect measures for eudaimonic well-being. Satisfaction with life is considered a common indicator of hedonic well-being (e.g., Deci and Ryan 2008; Kahneman et al. 1999), yet some studies have found that both eudaimonia and hedonia are related to life satisfaction (Huta and Ryan 2010; Peterson et al. 2005).

## 5 Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to develop and test a measure for prioritizing meaning. Its factor structure and internal consistency were examined. It was hypothesized that prioritizing meaning would be positively associated with the presence of and search for meaning (two scales of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire; MLQ; Steger et al. 2006) since the two measures assess conceptually similar constructs, but the association would not be too high, indicating that they are interrelated but represent different constructs. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that prioritizing meaning would be positively associated with the various well-being indicators, both hedonic and eudaimonic.

## 6 Method

### 6.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 107 Israeli adults with a mean age of 34.9 years ( $SD=14.47$ ). Approximately 87 percent of the sample ( $n=93$ ) were women. The majority of the participants were Jewish (72%), with the remainder of the sample identifying as Muslim (12%), Christian (10%) and Druze (5.6%). That said, 56.5% of the participants defined themselves as secular. As for education, 17% were high-school graduates, 46% had a bachelor degree (BA), and the rest had higher degrees. As for marital status, 52% were married and 44.4% single.

## 6.2 Procedure

Participants were recruited via an e-mail request that was widely distributed through various mailing lists and websites targeting the general public as well as university students. Participants completed a series of on-line questionnaires. They received no compensation for participating in the study.

## 6.3 Measures

*Prioritizing Meaning:* This measure was developed specifically for the present study in order to examine the extent to which individuals intentionally act and organize, as well as make decisions, in their day-to-day life so that they can experience more meaning. Twelve items referring to prioritizing meaning in everyday life were formulated based on a review of existing measures of meaning in life, as well as by consulting items from a recent scale related to prioritizing positivity in everyday life (Catalino et al. 2014). These items were tested on a sample of 85 undergraduate students to evaluate their clarity and wording. Respondents were asked to use a 9-point scale (1 = disagree strongly, 9 = agree strongly; see results section). The measure was translated into English using back-translation by both the author and a native English speaker who is bilingual in Hebrew, independently (see Table 1 for items and psychometric information).

*Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985):* This scale measures the extent to which individuals judge their lives to be satisfactory. Using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), participants indicated the extent they agree or disagree with five items, including, “the conditions of my life are excellent” and “I am satisfied with my life.” The scale was translated into Hebrew and validated by Anaby et al. (2010). In the present study, Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient was .87.

*Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson et al. 1988):* This was used to measure how frequently individuals experienced positive and negative emotions during the past week. The measure includes two 10-item mood scales and was developed to provide brief measures of positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they had experienced each particular emotion within a specified time period on a 5-point scale (1 = very slightly or not at all to 5 = very much). Anaby et al. (2010) developed and validated the Hebrew version of the PANAS and several studies have demonstrated the validity and reliability of the PANAS as a measure (Watson et al. 1988). In the present study, Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficients for PA was .87 and for NA was .86.

*Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al. 2006):* This was used to assess the search for and presence of meaning in the individual’s life, with “search for” and “presence of” representing two subscales of the overall measure. The present study used the Hebrew version of this questionnaire (Littman-Ovadia and Steger 2010). The search subscale is comprised of five items (MLQ-S; e.g., “I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful” and “I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life”) and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient = .87. The presence of meaning subscale is comprised of the remaining five items of the measure (MLQ-P; e.g., “I understand my life’s meaning” and “My life has no clear purpose”) and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient = .91. Both subscales were rated using a 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true) Likert scale.

*Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS; McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992):* The measure includes 20 items (e.g., “I feel as though I have made a difference to many people” and

**Table 1** Prioritizing meaning item means, standard deviations and factor loadings (PCA)

Prioritizing meaning item	Study 1 (N= 107)		Study 2 (N= 251)		Factor loading (PCA)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
I prefer to engage in activities which are related to the sense of meaning in my life	7.59	1.45	6.22	2.31	.79
I devote as much time as I can to activities that have great meaning for me	7.32	1.50	5.98	2.19	.84
The manner in which I organize my day reflects values that are meaningful to me	6.87	1.84	5.94	2.23	.84
My major decisions in life (e.g., the job I choose, where I choose to live) are influenced by how much I might experience meaning as a result	7.63	1.27	6.14	2.24	.77
I admire people who make their decisions based on the meaning they will gain	8.06	.99	6.91	1.99	.67
One of the main considerations in my choice whether to do something is the sense of meaning it will bring me	7.46	1.27	6.41	2.08	.86
In my day-to-day life, I choose to do things in accordance with my life's purpose	6.90	1.52	5.90	2.20	.87
I choose and prefer activities which stimulate a sense of value and meaning	7.38	1.52	6.54	2.09	.86
The consideration which guides the priority I give to activities is the extent to which I will be able to be involved in things that are meaningful and make a difference in the world	6.78	1.85	5.77	2.18	.80
I structure my day to be involved in things that are meaningful and valuable to me	6.68	1.83	5.92	2.13	.87
The activities I choose to be involved with reflect who I really am	7.05	1.63	6.32	2.03	.81
I choose to include in my life activities that are meaningful to me, even if they often require effort	7.43	1.28	6.55	2.04	.84

Participants were provided with the following instructions: Using the scale below, please select a response from 1 to 9. The response scale was 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree mostly, 3 = disagree somewhat, 4 = disagree slightly, 5 = neither disagree or agree, 6 = agree somewhat, 7 = agree slightly, 8 = agree mostly, and 9 = agree strongly



“I feel as though my contributions will exist after I die”) rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (almost always) and Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient = .85.

## 7 Results and Brief Discussion

### 7.1 Factor Analysis and Descriptive Information

Results of the exploratory factor analysis using principal components ( $KMO = .9$ ) indicate one dominant factor for all 12 items. Eigen values suggest one dominant factor (6.47), which explains 53.90% of the variance in all 12 items. Results may possibly indicate two additional factors (eigenvalues 1.07 and 1.01), but these values are very weak and explain very little variance (8.90% and 8.45% respectively). The fourth eigenvalue equals .73. Reviewing the item-loading indicates all items load onto the first factor (minimum loading .61, maximum loading = .83). The full loadings are detailed in Table 1. Two items may also load onto a second factor, but these loadings are weak compared to their loading on the first factor (.68 and .46, .67 and .57 respectively). Finally, two additional items may also load onto a third factor but these too are weak in comparison to the first factor (.64 and .53, .61 and .58), further strengthening the dominance of only one factor. The factor structure was further examined in study 2.

Another sample (a third one) that included emerging adults from the general population (mean age in years = 25.55;  $SD = 2.66$ ) was used to examine factor loadings and distinctiveness between prioritizing meaning and prioritizing positivity ( $N = 285$ ; 142 males). Items from the prioritizing meaning and prioritizing positivity scales together were subjected to a principal component factor analysis with Oblimin with Kaiser rotation yielding two factors, one with all 12 prioritizing meaning items (Eigen value = 8.15, 45.30% explained variance) and the other with all six prioritizing positivity items (Eigen value = 2.30, 12.77% explained variance). Factor loadings on the pattern matrix of the 12 items that load on the first factor ranged from .54 to .85 with the six other items of prioritizing positivity having low loadings ranging from  $-0.07$  to 0.14. Factor loadings of the six items of prioritizing positivity that load on the second factor ranged from .64 to .86 with 12 other items having low loadings ranging from  $-0.08$  to 0.16. Factors were correlated  $r = .43$ . These results substantiate the factor structure of prioritizing meaning and its distinctiveness from prioritizing positivity despite their association.

As Table 2 shows, prioritizing meaning was evaluated relatively highly by the participants ( $M = 7.24$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ , range 1–9, skewness =  $-0.652$ ,  $SE = .235$ ) and was positively associated with other constructs of meaning in life—presence and search—yet not too high ( $r = .54$  and  $.34$  respectively), which supports the contention that they reflect related yet unique constructs. In addition, and as expected, prioritizing meaning was found to be significantly and positively correlated with life satisfaction, positive affect and generativity. It did not significantly correlate with negative affect (NA).

In sum, Study 1 aimed to test the factor structure and internal consistency of the prioritizing meaning scale. Results indicated one dominant factor for all 12 items. As hypothesized, prioritizing meaning was positively associated with the presence of and search for meaning (two scales of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire; MLQ; Steger et al. 2006), indicating that they are interrelated but represent different constructs. Furthermore, prioritizing meaning was positively associated with the various well-being indicators, both hedonic and eudaimonic. To further assess the robustness of the factor structure, Study 2

**Table 2** Means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables, Study 1 (N= 107)

	<i>M (SD)</i>	Life satisfaction	Positive affect	Negative affect	Presence of meaning	Search for meaning	Generativity
Prioritizing meaning	7.24 (1.10)	.57***	.56***	-.11	.54***	.34***	.39***
Life satisfaction	4.95 (1.27)		.39***	-.25*	.52***	.06	.35***
Positive affect	3.69 (0.63)			-.12	.47***	.36***	.51***
Negative affect	2.37 (0.68)				-.32***	.03	-.04
Presence of meaning	5.29 (1.25)					.29**	.52***
Search for meaning	4.97 (1.38)						.28**
Generativity	2.81 (0.33)						

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

sought replication in an independent sample, as well as to examine the effects of prioritizing meaning on well-being beyond the effects of prioritizing positivity, and the relationship between prioritizing meaning and the presence of and search for meaning in life.

## 8 Study 2

Study 2 sought to expand the exploration of Study 1 by: (1) replicating its results in an independent and larger sample; (2) examining whether prioritizing meaning is associated with a variety of measures of well-being beyond the effects of prioritizing positivity, reflecting the distinctiveness of the two pathways to well-being, hedonic and eudaimonic; and (3) exploring the relationship between prioritizing meaning and the presence of, and search for, meaning in life. Specifically, (1) it was hypothesized that prioritizing meaning would be positively correlated with life satisfaction, happiness, positive affect, presence of meaning, sense of coherence and gratitude, and negatively correlated with negative affect and depression. It was also hypothesized (2) that prioritizing meaning would be positively associated with hedonic and eudaimonic well-being beyond the effects of prioritizing positivity. Furthermore, it was hypothesized (3) that presence of meaning would somewhat mediate the benevolent effects of prioritizing meaning on well-being (Fig. 1). Finally, it was expected that (4) prioritizing meaning would mediate the link between the search for meaning and various well-being indicators (Fig. 2).

## 9 Method

### 9.1 Participants

A heterogeneous community sample consisting of 251 Israeli adults, 108 males (43%) and 143 females (57%) participated. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 70 ( $M=40$  years,  $SD=14.36$ ). Most of the participants were Jewish (80.5%) and 56.2% of the sample identified themselves as secular. Education levels ranged from high school (25.6%) and training/professional diploma (20%) to higher academic education (54.4%). Participants who were married made up 60.6% of the sample; 31.9% were single. This distribution resembles the general Israeli population (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics 2015) with 75% Jewish and 56% married. However, it departs from the general Israeli population in terms of gender, having more women compared to the gender distribution in the general public (with 50% males), secularism (with 43% secular in the general public), and education (with 32% with an academic degree in the general public).

### 9.2 Procedure

Participants were recruited via a nationwide survey aimed at creating a broad community sample representative of the general population in Israel through the use of *iPanel*, a survey company specializing in Internet-based research. This method made it possible to obtain a heterogeneous sample representing a wide range of occupations, ages, education levels and marital statuses. Participants completed a series of on-line questionnaires.

### 9.3 Measures

*Prioritizing Meaning:* Participants completed the same prioritizing meaning scale as in Study 1.

Results of the exploratory factor analysis using principal components ( $KMO = .94$ ) indicate all 12 items load onto one single factor (eigenvalue 8.06), which explains 67.15% of the variance in all 12 items (minimum loading .67, maximum loading = .87). The second eigenvalue equals .82. The full loadings are also detailed in Table 1, together with the loadings from Study 1. I also repeated this model using CFA with one factor for all 12 items. All 12 items load onto one single factor and all measures of the model fit, but RMSEA indicate a good fit:  $\chi^2(52) = 237.37, p < .001$ ;  $NFI = .91$ ,  $TLI = .91$ ,  $CFI = .93$ ,  $SRMR = .04$ ,  $RMSEA = .12$ . All items indicate significant and positive estimates for the single factor. See Table 3.

Overall, for sample 1, Eigen values suggest one dominant factor (3.419), which explains 56.97% of the variance in all six items. Reviewing the item-loading indicates all items load onto the first factor (minimum loading .686, maximum loading = .835). For sample 2, Eigen values suggest one dominant factor (4.23), which explains 70.5% of the variance in all six items. Reviewing the item-loading indicates all items load onto the first factor (minimum loading .785, maximum loading = .887). For sample 3 (collected for validation purposes, as mentioned below), Eigen values suggest one dominant factor (3.409), which explains 56.81% of the variance in all six items. Reviewing the item-loading indicates all items load onto the first factor (minimum loading .701, maximum loading = .801).

*Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS;* Diener et al. 1985): The same measure was used as in Study 1 and  $\alpha = .90$ .

*Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS;* Watson et al. 1988): In the present study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for PA was .88 and for NA was .91.

*Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ;* Steger et al. 2006): In the present study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was .88 for both the search subscale and for the presence subscale.

*Prioritizing Positivity* (Catalino et al. 2014): Participants indicated the extent of their agreement or disagreement with six items using a 9-point scale (1 = disagree strongly, 9 = agree strongly), including "A priority for me is experiencing happiness in everyday life," "I look for and nurture my positive emotions," "What I decide to do with my time outside of work is influenced by how much I might experience positive emotions," "I structure my day to maximize my happiness," "My major decisions in life (e.g., the job I choose, the house I buy) are influenced by how much I might experience positive emotions," and "I admire people who make their decisions based on the happiness they will gain." The scale was translated into Hebrew by the author, who is fluent in English and Hebrew. A native English speaker who is bilingual in Hebrew verified correspondence with the original version of the questionnaire using the back-translation method. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was .91.

*Valuing Happiness Scale* (Mauss et al. 2011): This consists of seven items measuring to what extent participants value happiness to an extreme degree (e.g., "How happy I am at any given moment says a lot about how worthwhile my life is," "If I don't feel happy, maybe there is something wrong with me," and "Feeling happy is extremely important to me") rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The original English version was translated into Hebrew by the author and back-translated independently by a native English speaker who is bilingual in Hebrew. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was .78. This measure was included in the study as a covariate in order to control for its effect and to gain

**Table 3** Prioritizing meaning item means, standard deviations and factor loadings (CFA)

Prioritizing meaning item	Study 2 (N = 251)				Explained variance (%)
	Estimate	SE	Standardized estimate		
I prefer to engage in activities which are related to the sense of meaning in my life	1.00		.75***		57
I devote as much time as I can to activities that have great meaning for me	1.01	.06	.80***		65
The manner in which I organize my day reflects values that are meaningful to me	1.04	.08	.81***		66
My major decisions in life (e.g., the job I choose, where I choose to live) are influenced by how much I might experience meaning as a result	.96	.08	.75***		56
I admire people who make their decisions based on the meaning they will gain	.72	.07	.62***		39
One of the main considerations in my choice whether to do something is the sense of meaning it will bring me	1.00	.07	.84***		70
In my day-to-day life, I choose to do things in accordance with my life's purpose	1.10	.07	.87***		76
I choose and prefer activities which stimulate a sense of value and meaning	1.02	.07	.84***		71
The consideration which guides the priority I give to activities is the extent to which I will be able to be involved in things that are meaningful and make a difference in the world	.99	.07	.79***		62
I structure my day to be involved in things that are meaningful and valuable to me	1.05	.07	.86***		74
The activities I choose to be involved with reflect who I really am	.92	.07	.79***		62
I choose to include in my life activities that are meaningful to me, even if they often require effort	.97	.07	.83***		68

Model fit:  $\chi^2(52) = 237.37, p < .001$ ; NFI = .91, TLI = .91, CFI = .93, SRMR = .04, RMSEA = .12

Participants were provided with the following instructions: Using the scale below, please select a response from 1 to 9. The response scale was 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree mostly, 3 = disagree somewhat, 4 = disagree slightly, 5 = neither disagree or agree, 6 = agree somewhat, 7 = agree slightly, 8 = agree mostly, and 9 = agree strongly  
 \*\*\* $p < .001$

a more “pure” measure of prioritizing positivity. This was done in accordance with the indication by Catalino et al. (2014) that “prioritizing positivity, although chiefly a positive trait, may have a bit of a ‘dark side’ that is captured by its shared variance with the valuing happiness measure. When this dark side is partialled out, our scale even strongly reveals the potential benefit of making positivity a priority” (p. 1159).

*Center for Epidemiological Studies–Depression (CES-D; Radloff 1977)*: This was used to assess negative aspects of well-being and to measure participants’ reported depressive symptoms experienced during the past week with 20 items (e.g., “I couldn’t get going” and “I felt depressed”) measured on a 4-point scale (0=rarely or none of the time—less than 1 day; 3=all of the time—5–7 days). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient was .90.

*The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999)*: The scale consists of four items on a 7-point Likert scale and was used to measure how happy people rate themselves in general (1=not a very happy person, 7=a very happy person) and relative to their peers (1=less happy, 7=more happy). The participants also indicated the extent to which a description of a “very happy” person characterizes them (1=not at all, 7=a great deal) and  $\alpha=.82$ .

*Sense of Coherence (SOC; Antonovsky 1987)*: This was measured by items rated on a 7-point semantic differential with an anchoring phrase on each end, whereby higher scores reflect a stronger sense of coherence. The SOC is considered a reliable, valid and cross-culturally applicable instrument for measuring the manner in which individuals manage stressful situations and stay well (see Eriksson and Lindstrom 2005). The current research used the short Hebrew version of the scale, including just 13 items, which addresses the three components of SOC, namely participants’ comprehensibility (feeling that they understood their environment), manageability (experiencing feelings of control) and meaningfulness (experiencing feelings of being involved in their environment), as an overall score. Items included: “Do you have the feeling that you don’t really care about what goes on around you?” (reverse scored); “Has it happened that people whom you counted on have disappointed you?” (reverse scored); and “Are you surprised by the behaviour of people whom you thought you knew well?” (reverse scored) and revealed Cronbach’s  $\alpha=.74$ .

*Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6; McCullough et al. 2002)*: This is designed to measure four dimensions of a grateful disposition: intensity (e.g., “I feel thankful for what I have received in life”); frequency (e.g., “Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone” – reverse scored); span (e.g., “I sometimes feel grateful for the smallest things”); and density (e.g., “I am grateful to a wide variety of people”). All six items were measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) with higher scores denoting greater gratitude. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient was .83 (see Table 4).

## 10 Results

### 10.1 Prioritizing Meaning as a Predictor

In order to explore whether prioritizing meaning and prioritizing positivity contribute to well-being in an independent yet complementary manner, a series of hierarchical regression models were conducted. In line with Catalino et al. (2014), prioritizing positivity was controlled for valuing happiness as follows: As prioritizing positivity and valuing happiness had different scales, they were both standardized. The adjusted residual gain of prioritizing positivity was defined, controlling for valuing happiness. This controlled variable

**Table 4** Means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables, Study 2 (N=251)

	M (SD)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Prioritizing meaning	6.22 (1.75)	.69***	.33***	.45***	.37***	.29***	-.36***	-.19**	.57***	.26***	.34***	.39***
2 Prioritizing positivity	6.34 (1.69)		.47***	.46***	.40***	.27***	-.33***	-.16*	.39***	.23***	.28***	.31***
3 Valuing positivity	4.47 (1.06)			.27***	.04	.03	-.01	.12	.14*	.37***	-.05	.07
4 Life satisfaction	4.66 (1.37)				.56***	.44***	-.39***	-.45***	.57***	.04	.47***	.47***
5 Happiness	4.88 (1.25)					.45***	-.51***	-.45***	.54***	.10	.54***	.58***
6 Positive affect	3.59 (0.70)						-.18**	-.39***	.47***	.03	.45***	.32***
7 Negative affect	2.20 (0.81)							.66***	-.47***	-.07	-.55***	-.40***
8 Depression	36.60 (10.67)								-.45***	.05	-.61***	-.37***
9 Presence of meaning	4.98 (1.31)								.19**	.53***	.01	.21**
10 Search for meaning	4.45 (1.38)											.41***
11 Coherence	4.61 (0.84)											
12 Gratitude	32.04 (7.05)											

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

was used in the following regression analyses. In each regression, age in years and gender (dichotomized as 1-males, 0-females) were entered at step 1, whereas prioritizing meaning and prioritizing positivity were used as the predictors, entered at step 2. Specifically, as Table 5 shows, results of step 1 indicate that for satisfaction with life, positive affect, and search for meaning, age and gender were non-significant. For happiness and gratitude, both age and gender were significant with females and older respondents showing higher levels. For negative affect and depression, as well as for presence of meaning and coherence, age was significant with older participants showing less negative affect and depression and higher levels of presence of meaning and coherence; gender was non-significant. As for step 2, for satisfaction with life, both prioritizing positivity and prioritizing meaning were significant, explaining 22% of the variance (final model:  $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(4243) = 18.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ); for happiness, the two predictors were both significant and together explained 17% of the variance (final model:  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $F(4243) = 20.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ); for positive affect, the two predictors were both significant and explained 8% of the variance (final model:  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $F(4243) = 6.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ); for negative affect, the two predictors were significant and explained 11% of the variance (final model:  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $F(4243) = 16.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ); for depression only prioritizing positivity was significant and 3% of the variance was explained (final model:  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(4243) = 5.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ); for presence of meaning only prioritizing meaning was significant and 28% of the variance was explained (final model:  $R^2 = .35$ ,  $F(4243) = 33.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ); for sense of coherence the two predictors explained 8% of the variance (final model:  $R^2 = .21$ ,  $F(4243) = 17.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ); and for gratitude only prioritizing meaning was significant and 15% of the variance was explained (final model:  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $F(4243) = 20.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ).<sup>1</sup>

## 10.2 The Relationship Between Prioritizing, Search and Presence of Meaning (Figs. 1 and 2)

The goal of the models proposed in Figs. 1 and 2 was to examine the role of prioritizing meaning in relation to existing concepts of meaning, namely, presence of meaning and search for meaning. The proposed mediation models were estimated using model 4 using Process Macro for SPSS (Hayes 2013) with bootstrapping of 5000 samples.

## 10.3 Presence of Meaning as a Mediator Between Prioritizing Meaning and Well-Being (Fig. 1)

Presence of meaning was hypothesized to somewhat mediate the positive associations of prioritizing meaning with well-being. Seven mediation models (coefficients and standard errors) were conducted—one for each measure of well-being, while presence of meaning served as a mediator in the association between prioritizing meaning and well-being (see Table 6). Two control variables were included in all models: age and gender (a binary indicator for female). Presence of meaning was found to mediate the effect of prioritizing meaning on all seven indicators of well-being. Results indicated significant mediation in

<sup>1</sup> Note: when valuing happiness is not controlled for, the results for prioritizing meaning are similar, but for positive affect, negative affect, depression, search for meaning and coherence ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $\beta = -.15$ ,  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $\beta = .09$ , and  $\beta = .06$  respectively), prioritizing positivity is not a significant predictor. For satisfaction with life and happiness, prioritizing positivity is significant ( $\beta = .29$  and  $\beta = .26$  respectively).



**Table 5** Regression models of dependent variables on prioritizing meaning and prioritizing positivity (N=251)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
<i>Life satisfaction</i>						
Age	0.01	0.01	.08	-0.01	0.01	-.05
Gender	-0.13	0.18	-.05	-0.18	0.16	-.06
Prioritizing positivity				0.25	0.10	.18*
Prioritizing meaning				0.28	0.06	.36***
Change R <sup>2</sup>	.001			.22		
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	1.06			35.53***		
F final model				R <sup>2</sup> = .22, F(4243) = 18.44, p < .001		
<i>Happiness</i>						
Age	0.02	0.01	.21***	0.01	0.01	.09
Gender	-0.53	0.16	-.21***	-0.54	0.14	-.21***
Prioritizing positivity				0.36	0.09	.28***
Prioritizing meaning				0.14	0.05	.20**
Change R <sup>2</sup>	.07			.17		
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	10.31***			27.53***		
F final model				R <sup>2</sup> = .24, F(4243) = 20.05, p < .001		
<i>Positive affect</i>						
Age	0.01	0.01	.12	0.01	0.01	.03
Gender	0.02	0.09	.01	0.01	0.09	.01
Prioritizing positivity				0.12	0.05	.17*
Prioritizing meaning				0.07	0.03	.17*
Change R <sup>2</sup>	.01			.08		
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	1.84			11.74***		
F final model				R <sup>2</sup> = .09, F(4243) = 6.88, p < .001.		
<i>Negative affect</i>						
Age	-0.02	0.01	-.30***	-0.01	0.01	-.20***
Gender	0.17	0.10	.11	0.18	0.10	.11
Prioritizing positivity				-0.17	0.06	-.21**
Prioritizing meaning				-0.09	0.03	-.19**
Change R <sup>2</sup>	.09			.11		
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	12.51***			18.09***		
F final model				R <sup>2</sup> = .20, F(4243) = 16.19, p < .001.		
<i>Depression</i>						
Age	-0.16	0.05	-.22***	-0.11	0.05	-.15*
Gender	0.69	1.36	.03	0.60	1.34	.03
Prioritizing positivity				-2.02	0.84	-.19*
Prioritizing meaning				-0.21	0.47	-.04
Change R <sup>2</sup>	.04			.03		
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	5.82**			5.51**		
F final model				R <sup>2</sup> = .07, F(4243) = 5.77, p < .001.		
<i>Presence of meaning</i>						
Age	0.02	0.01	.27***	0.01	0.01	.13

**Table 5** (continued)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Gender	-0.25	0.16	-.09	-0.33	0.14	-.12
Prioritizing positivity				0.01	0.09	.01
Prioritizing meaning				0.41	0.05	.55***
Change R <sup>2</sup>	.07			.28		
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	9.66***			52.70***		
F final model				R <sup>2</sup> = .35, F(4243) = 33.24, $p < .001$ .		
<i>Coherence</i>						
Age	0.02	0.01	.37***	0.02	0.01	.28***
Gender	-0.18	0.10	-.11	-0.19	0.10	-.11
Prioritizing positivity				0.13	0.06	.16*
Prioritizing meaning				0.09	0.03	.19*
Change R <sup>2</sup>	.13			.08		
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	19.19***			13.39***		
F final model				R <sup>2</sup> = .21, F(4243) = 17.27, $p < .001$		
<i>Gratitude</i>						
Age	0.09	0.03	.18**	0.03	0.03	.07
Gender	-4.09	0.87	-.29***	-4.33	0.80	-.30***
Prioritizing positivity				0.58	0.50	.08
Prioritizing meaning				1.40	0.28	.35***
R <sup>2</sup>	.09			.15		
F for change in R <sup>2</sup>	13.65***			24.30***		
F final model				R <sup>2</sup> = .24, F(4243) = 20.29, $p < .001$ .		

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

five models with the following well-being indicators: happiness, positive affect, negative affect, depression and coherence. Analyzing the 95% confidence intervals of the indirect effect suggested a positive indirect effect on happiness, life satisfaction, positive affect, coherence and gratitude. This indicates that as prioritizing meaning increases, each of these measures of well-being indicators increases as well. As expected, on negative affect and depression, the 95% CI of the indirect effect indicated a negative association. In other words, as prioritizing meaning increases, these two measures decrease. In addition, prioritizing meaning showed direct effects on life satisfaction and gratitude, suggesting prioritizing meaning is positively associated with these two measures both indirectly (through presence of meaning) and directly. These effects held while controlling for age and gender of the participants.

#### 10.4 Prioritizing Meaning as a Mediator Between Search for Meaning and Well-Being (Fig. 2)

Prioritizing meaning was hypothesized to mediate the link between the search for meaning and various well-being indicators. Eight mediation models (coefficients and standard errors) were conducted—one for each measure of well-being (including presence of

**Table 6** The mediational role of presence of meaning, between prioritizing meaning and other well-being indicators

	Happiness	Life satisfaction	Positive affect	Negative affect	Depression	Coherence	Gratitude
Prioritizing meaning	.08 (.05)	.17 (.05)***	.00 (.03)	-.05 (.03)	.78 (.43)	.01 (.03)	.56 (.25)*
Presence of meaning	.42 (.06)***	.49 (.07)***	.25 (.04)***	-.22 (.04)***	-4.06 (.57)***	.18 (.04)***	2.51 (.34)***
Age	.01 (.00)	-.01 (.01)	-.00 (.00)	-.01 (.00)**	-.08 (.04)	.02 (.00)***	.01 (.03)
Gender: female	.45 (.14)**	.02 (.15)	-.08 (.08)	-.13 (.09)	.65 (1.25)	.07 (.09)	3.58 (.73)***
Intercept	1.78 (.32)***	1.54 (.34)***	2.37 (.19)***	4.12 (.21)***	54.95 (2.89)***	2.59 (.21)***	13.65 (1.70)***
Indirect effect [95% CI]	.17 (.03) [.11, .25]	.20 (.04) [.13, .27]	.10 (.02) [.07, .14]	-.09 (.02) [-.13, -.05]	-1.66 (.32) [-2.37, -1.09]	.08 (.02) [.04, .12]	1.03 (.18) [.70, 1.42]
N	245	245	245	245	245	245	245
R <sup>2</sup>	.33	.36	.23	.27	.23	.25	.39

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 7** The mediational role of prioritizing meaning, between search for meaning and well-being

	Happiness	Life satisf-action	Positive affect	Negative affect	Depression	Coherence	Gratitude	Presence of meaning
Search for meaning	-.01 (.05)	-.10 (.06)	-.03 (.03)	.01 (.04)	.77 (.50)	-.07 (.03)*	.51 (.29)	.04 (.05)
Prioritizing meaning	.26 (.04)***	.39 (.05)***	.11 (.03)***	-.15 (.03)***	-1.06 (.40)**	.10 (.03)***	1.47 (.24)***	.40 (.04)***
Age	.01 (.01)*	-.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	-.01 (.00)***	-.12 (.05)*	.02 (.00)***	.04 (.03)	.01 (.00)*
Gender: female	.59 (.15)***	.20 (.16)	.01 (.09)	-.21 (.10)*	-.84 (1.35)	.14 (.09)	4.31 (.80)***	.32 (.14)*
Intercept	2.56 (.37)***	2.71 (.39)***	2.89 (.22)***	3.67 (.24)***	45.32 (3.36)***	3.13 (.23)***	16.49 (1.99)***	1.65 (.34)***
Indirect Effect	.09 (.03)	.13 (.04)	.04 (.01)	-.05 (.02) [-.09, -.02]	-.36 (.17) [-.75, .03 (.01)	.50 (.16)	.50 (.16)	.14 (.04) [.07, .22]
[95% CI]	[.04, .15]	[.07, .22]	[.02, .07]		[-.10]	[.02, .06]	[-2.5, .89]	
N	245	245	245	245	245	245	245	245
R <sup>2</sup>	.20	.22	.09	.19	.07	.20	.14	.36

Standard errors in parentheses. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

meaning), while prioritizing meaning served as a mediator in the association between search for meaning and well-being (see Table 7). Two control variables were included in all models: age and gender (a binary indicator for female). Mediation models were estimated using model 4 of the Process Macro for SPSS (Hayes 2013), with bootstrapping of 5000 samples. In all but one model—coherence –prioritizing meaning was found to significantly mediate the effect of search for meaning on all dependent measures of well-being (including presence of meaning). Analyzing the 95% confidence intervals of the indirect effect suggests a positive indirect effect on happiness, life satisfaction, positive affect, coherence, gratitude and presence of meaning. As expected, on negative affect and depression, the 95% CI of the indirect effect indicates a negative association. Results also suggest that search for meaning is related to coherence both indirectly through prioritizing meaning and directly. The direct effect of search for meaning on coherence is negative, suggesting that search for meaning is associated with sense of coherence via two paths simultaneously: Search for meaning is positively related to coherence through the mediation of prioritizing meaning and at the same time search for meaning is negatively related to the sense of coherence in life through a direct path. The effects detailed hold while controlling for age and gender of respondents.

## 11 General Discussion

The present study aimed to expand the current understanding of meaning in life by exploring the potential contribution of intentionally prioritizing activities and situations that are conducive to experiencing meaning. Research on prioritizing positivity (Catalino et al. 2014), a construct linked to hedonic well-being, has demonstrated that individuals who regularly seek out activities and contexts that evoke positive emotions and experiences in their day-to-day lives may in fact be happier than those who do not. Based on these findings, the present study applied this rationale to eudaimonic well-being, focusing on one key part of it (meaning), and demonstrated that, as expected, prioritizing meaning is associated with increased well-being. This is reflected in higher levels of positive affect, meaning in life, happiness, coherence, gratitude and life satisfaction along with lower levels of negative characteristics such as depression and negative affect.

The findings are consistent with existing research stressing the complementary functions of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (e.g., Peterson et al. 2005), which is reflected in their partly overlapping as well as distinct contributions to well-being (Huta and Ryan 2010). In line with this depiction, as indicated in Study 2, both prioritizing meaning and prioritizing positivity were associated with hedonic and eudaimonic oriented well-being indicators. This accords with the suggestion that individuals who seek out both positivity and meaning when they make decisions about where to invest effort in the context of everyday life may gain both short-term (e.g., happiness and positive affect) and long-term (e.g., coherence) benefits in building personal resources and overall well-being. The two types of prioritization are related and this may be due to a similar potential mechanism that underlies both types—that of actively creating the context or conditions to facilitate the likelihood of desired experiences. Yet, despite this commonality, each also showed distinct association with diverse well-being indicators, showing separate and added contributions to benevolent outcomes. These findings accord with the view that the combination of hedonia and eudaimonia, or their prioritizing, is more important to comprehensive well-being than either of them separately (e.g., Huta and Ryan 2010; Peterson et al. 2005). Moreover,

these findings underscore the potential significance and distinctiveness of prioritizing meaning—the new construct conceptualized and empirically assessed in this paper.

Alongside mutual contributions, prioritizing meaning and prioritizing positivity also showed distinct patterns. For example, when examined in tandem, only prioritizing positivity predicted less depression, although depression was associated with prioritizing meaning when examined separately. As the measure used in this research, the CES-D, mostly refers to behavioral symptoms (e.g., “my sleep was restless”) and affective aspects (e.g., “I felt sad”) experienced by individuals, it may be more sensitive to strategies aiming at increasing positive affect through prioritization of pleasant and enjoyable activities in everyday life, as previous research indicates (Catalino et al. 2014; Lewinsohn et al. 1980) than prioritizing meaning. Future studies may need to consider depression with different sources, that is, depression which is more cognitive-existential oriented (i.e., rooted in lack of meaning) and depression which probably reflects characteristics of an affective disorder. Furthermore, when both types of prioritizing were considered together, only prioritizing meaning was found to be positively associated with gratitude and presence of meaning, constructs that are essentially eudaimonic (e.g., Huta 2016; Wood et al. 2008) and thus may more directly go hand in hand with prioritization of eudaimonic activities in everyday life than with hedonic-oriented ones.

### 11.1 Presence of Meaning as a Potential Mediator of the Positive Effects of Prioritizing Meaning

This paper also sought to examine the connection between prioritizing meaning and presence of meaning. Although the present research design did not allow for causal inferences, the findings accord with the notion that prioritizing meaning leads to the experience of meaning which in turn mediates the beneficial effects of prioritizing meaning on a variety of well-being indicators. These findings suggest that concrete plans and actions designed to experience meaning could be successful and that the presence of meaning that could result from such prioritizing might be a potential gateway to experiencing other aspects of well-being.

For some well-being indicators, the analysis yielded a significant mediation effect (happiness, positive affect, negative affect, depression and coherence), suggesting that presence of meaning might be a central vehicle through which prioritizing meaning could contribute to higher well-being in a variety of indicators. The findings, however, also demonstrated concurrent direct effects of prioritizing meaning on some well-being indicators. These included gratitude and life satisfaction, the latter of which is often conceived as a general overarching well-being indicator (e.g., Lounsbury et al. 2005). These findings further suggest that actively constructing one’s daily life to include meaningful activities may have benevolent effects above and beyond the effects of the general and more abstract presence of meaning. Namely, prioritizing meaning could result in positive outcomes even without the conscious comprehension of what one’s meaning in life is.

Holding a set of personal values that gives one a sense of meaning or being familiar with sources of meaning in life may not be the whole story. For example, if family is an important source of meaning for a person, spending time with children thus grants this person a sense of meaning. However, if this value is not translated into action through structuring daily life accordingly, it may not benefit well-being (cf. Wong 2014). Furthermore, individuals may engage in prioritizing family and children in their life without *consciously contemplating* on the meaning in life that is associated with such pursuits—they just

*experience* it. This may relate to the existence of two distinct types of presence of meaning: (1) “having meaning”—a more abstract sense of having an overall meaning in life, which is more cognitive and includes being able to identify personal values and sources of meaning and (2) “experiencing meaning”—a more concrete, experiential presence of meaning in life. The experience of meaning is not the same as having a sense of meaning and prioritizing is more oriented towards experiencing meaning and embodying it in daily lives. This suggests that there may be a need for more nuanced measures of presence of meaning differentiating between two such types, as some people may understand the items as relating to knowledge about life and its meaningful values and some may treat the items as referring to an experience of meaning.

Together it appears that to better elucidate the meaning in life construct, we might need to pay attention to cognition (comprehension; “having meaning in life”), experience (“experiencing meaning in life”), and activity (prioritizing meaning in life).

## 11.2 Prioritizing Meaning as a Potential Link between the Search for Meaning and Well-being

The findings support the hypothesis that prioritizing meaning is an important mediator between search for meaning and well-being. This suggests that individuals who actively search for meaning and choose to anchor such searching in intentional behavior as part of their daily routines may derive greater levels of well-being. The findings of the present research thus can help us begin to unpack the complex associations of search for meaning with a variety of outcomes (Steger and Kashdan 2007). Though the present studies used a cross-sectional design and hence causal paths cannot be deduced, actively searching for meaning appears to translate to an increase in the individual’s likelihood of intentionally prioritizing potentially meaningful activities in day-to-day life, which as discussed in the previous section, is positively associated with benevolent outcomes. The current findings also demonstrate that searching, which does not go through prioritizing meaning, is negatively associated with sense of coherence, as an indicator of healthy functioning.

These findings may help to explain why searching for meaning may not always lead to positive outcomes as has been found in a number of studies (e.g., Steger et al. 2006; Steger et al. 2008b) even though it is considered an inherent human motivation (Frankl 1963; Steger et al. 2011). Furthermore, it may also assist in extending previous attempts to discern a healthy or unhealthy search for meaning (e.g. Steger et al. 2008). As has been suggested, the search for meaning may function as a state of mind or a schema, enabling the individual to identify information relevant to meaning in life (cf. Steger et al. 2011), reflecting individual differences in motivation (Frankl 1963; Maddi 1970): “Across people, regardless of how they construe meaning or where they are searching for it, being more concerned with searching for meaning in life seems to highlight the importance of meaning relevant information” (Steger et al. 2011; p. 179). In this context, prioritizing meaning may reflect the specific, active and concrete implementation of such intention or schema, through the planning and decision-making that weave meaningful activities and situations into daily life routines. Thus, searching which results in active attempts to identify situations which have the potential to provide meaning (i.e., prioritizing meaning) may be associated with other positive outcomes. In contrast, searching that is not tied to specific actions or decisions may be associated with negative outcomes or would not affect well-being. The mostly nonsignificant associations between the search for meaning and well-being indicators in the present studies as well as in other studies (e.g., Steger et al. 2008) may conceal

two opposing processes—one leading to positive and the other leading to negative outcomes. Future research may need to investigate this possibility and try to disentangle these two hypothetical processes.

### 11.3 The Importance of Culture

Previous research has indicated that the interplay between search for meaning and positive versus negative outcomes is affected by culture (Steger et al. 2008). Hence it is important to recognize cultural nuances in the manner in which individuals across various contexts understand and experience the search for, presence of and prioritizing of meaning, as well as prioritizing positivity and their relationship. In the context of the present study, the sample was diverse and heterogeneous, allowing the study to extend beyond the previous reliance on undergraduate samples which represent restricted age and education ranges. However, all participants were from a Western, moderately individualized culture. Furthermore, the Israeli context where the study took place may have additional unique characteristics that underscore the potential salience, significance and importance of searching for meaning in life as well as its prioritization. These cultural characteristics include, for example, the prominence of existential threats, a sense of collective vulnerability, uncertainty, and insecurity all coupled with dialectic identity and worldviews as part of a multicultural immigrant society (e.g., Ezrachi 2004). Thus, it is possible that the notion of meaning in life, its search and prioritization may hold high value in Israeli society. This might be one reason why searching for meaning which in North American samples is negatively associated with well-being indicators, yet in the Israeli samples was either not significantly correlated with them or was positively associated with some of them. The notions of meaning in life, its search and prioritization may have different functions and levels of salience across diverse range of cultures and societies. Given that culture plays an important role in individuals' values, assumptions and needs (Markus and Kitayama 1991), future work needs to address different cultures and populations to further explore how people understand and consider meaning while making decisions and choices concerning their everyday activities.

### 11.4 The Centrality of Actions and Directed Pursuit in Prioritizing

The abstract and multifaceted nature of the construct of meaning in life (MIL) has been previously noted by scholars (e.g., George and Park 2016; Martela and Steger 2016). It appears that when the rather ambiguous, complex and abstract construct of meaning in life is considered in terms of priorities, it can be more easily understood and especially cultivated through the choices one makes in day-to-day life. In the words of Viktor Frankl, “what matters is not the meaning in life in general, but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment” (1963, p. 131). In Frankl’s (1963) view, meaning is manifested in what individuals choose to do with their lives. Wong (2010) also voiced this view regarding actively applying meaning to everyday life, stressing the importance of acting in accordance with one’s values, beyond cognitive comprehension and emotional importance of meaning.

In line with this depiction, people who were committed to self-generated personal projects (Little 1983) that reflected their guiding values and identity reported higher levels of meaning in life (McGregor and Little 1998). Prioritizing meaning—assessed by items such as “the manner in which I organize my day reflects values that are meaningful to me” or “I



choose and prefer activities which stimulate a sense of value and meaning”—tap into how individuals make choices regarding their time to actively nurture a more meaningful life.

Daily behaviors are malleable and can be adapted (e.g. Gollwitzer 1999). Yet time is a limited resource and how and where individuals choose to allocate their time conveys what they seek to accomplish in life (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Priorities, thus, are essentially defined by the choices individuals consciously make regarding how to spend their time or where to invest it. The findings of the present research underscore the possibility that meaning can be shaped, experienced and lived through the daily activities and interactions one chooses to be involved with. Through prioritizing meaning, it may be possible for one to take ownership of cultivating and experiencing a meaningful life. In this sense, prioritizing meaning may offer a possible practice for proactive meaning development and enhancement that goes beyond reactive perspectives of meaning restoration (Steger 2012). Focusing on and prioritizing engagement in activities that are inherently value-congruent may serve as a tangible and concrete vehicle to imbuing life with meaning and offer a promising route to experiencing well-being.

The capability to prioritize meaningful activities in daily life appears to constitute a significant yet intricate process that requires not only intrinsic choice, but also continuous reflection and examination in order to make self-concordant and personally appropriate decisions. Self-awareness is thus vital in discerning personal values, aligning daily choices of activities accordingly and refining such choices through detecting potential shifts of meaning. Such an ongoing process enables individuals to shape and cultivate a sense of personal meaning which is authentic, personally relevant and rooted in everyday experience. Through actively organizing daily routines to include meaningful activities, individuals can become aware of what is personally meaningful and of value to them, consciously focus their intention and energies to invest in them, and eventually contribute to their well-being. Prioritizing meaning may therefore be a useful construct to increase understanding of the role of these intentional activities and what it means to live a eudaimonic lifestyle.

## 12 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration. All surveys were self-reported, a method which may be suitable for assessing personal motivations and subjective experiences (e.g., Sheldon and Lyubomirsky 2007), but could also lead to some biases in participants' responses. Future research could include peer-reports or behavioral measures in order to strengthen the associations found with well-being variables and provide further evidence beyond the limitations of self-reporting methods. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to consider using mixed methods in future research, as qualitative methods may contribute to discovering other layers of human experience and richness within the data that was less apparent in quantitative research (e.g., the two kinds of presence of meaning), thus facilitating broadened understanding of people's perceptions, experiences and cultural factors (Delle Fave et al. 2011). As an individual and unique process, forging a sense of meaning may take a fluctuating variety of patterns and pathways. Taking note of such varieties, nuances and individual differences is important when exploring such processes as different people may view and describe their understanding of meaning in rather diverse ways.

Furthermore, future research should consider expanding previous attempts to map out the vast and multifaceted area of the motivational aspects with regard to meaning and

well-being, by exploring potential associations between prioritizing meaning and other measures of well-being orientations/priorities, such as the Orientations to Happiness scale (OTHQ; Peterson et al. 2005) and the Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities scale (HEMA; Huta and Ryan 2010). Although these measures address orientation and may seem close, they appear to illuminate complementary aspects of the motivational process (e.g., seeking rather than prioritizing). Future research may need to address the nuanced landscape of motivations leading individuals to experience well-being in their life.

Finally, these results are correlational and are based on cross-sectional research. Hence causal directionality implied here should be examined with longitudinal designs or intervention and experimental research to further validate and refine this newly developed measure of prioritizing meaning. For example, future research could develop methods of manipulating the prioritizing of meaning in order to examine causality. Future research may also include empirical testing of possible interventions to advance prioritizing of meaning, such as utilizing daily diary methods (e.g., Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli 2003). Similarly, future research may also examine the two suggested developmental processes related to search for meaning—one associated with higher well-being and the other with lower well-being.

Overall, despite the aforementioned limitations, this study extends existing literature by offering insights regarding the importance of exploring the effect of actively prioritizing meaning in day-to-day life with regard to individuals' sense of meaning in life and well-being. The findings imply potential practical implications for the development of therapeutic, organizational and educational interventions that may assist in scaffolding the prioritization of significant activities and behaviors to self-generate increased meaning and well-being.

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