



Man's Search for Meaning

Viktor E. Frankl , Harold S. Kushner (Foreword) , William J. Winslade (Afterword) , Ilse Lasch (Translator)

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A new gift edition of a modern classic, with supplemental photographs, speeches, letters, and essays

Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's memoir of life in Nazi death camps has riveted generations of readers. Based on Frankl's own experience and the stories of his patients, the book argues that we cannot avoid suffering but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward. *Man's Search for Meaning* has become one of the most influential books of our times, selling over twelve million copies worldwide. With a foreword by Harold S. Kushner, Frankl's classic is presented here in an elegant new edition with endpapers, supplementary photographs, and several of Frankl's previously unpublished letters, speeches, and essays.

Man's Search for Meaning Details

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From Reader Review Man's Search for Meaning for online ebook

Riku Sayuj says

For most of the book, I felt as dumbfounded as I would have been if I were browsing through a psychiatric journal. Filled with references and technical terms and statistics, it was mostly a book-long affirmation of the then innovative technique called 'logo-therapy'. I do not understand how this book is still relevant and found in most popular book stores. It might have been that the book was popular in the sixties and seventies as it offered a powerful and logical argument against the reductionist approach that leads inevitably to existential nihilism, but is that still relevant today? It also attempts to free psychiatry from the belief that 'eros' was the cause of all neurosis and turns the flashlight on repressed 'logos' - which forms the premise of the book and the title.

But, while the basic premises are powerful and moving, the breadth and scale of repetition of the same ideas and the technical jargon and the constant Freud-bashing ensured that I did not enjoy the book as much as I had hoped. Furthermore, the whole chapter dedicated to the theory that ultimately our basic necessity of 'search for logos' can also be explained as a 'repressed religious drive' and his exhortation to religious people to not look down on irreligious ones (read atheists and agnostics) just because they have achieved a stage that the atheists/agnostics are still aspiring (unconsciously of course) towards rang patently false and too much in line with his argument of psychiatry being a sister to theology.

I wish Frankl had stuck to his original title of 'The Unconscious God' - it would have been more representative of the book as his 'logos' argument directly derives from his postulation of a transcendent unconscious super-ego that trumps Freud's 'Super Ego' and a spiritual cum instinctual subconscious that trumps Freud's 'id'.

Unless you are looking for a historical perspective on the technical aspects of psychiatry and about the origins of 'logo-therapy', I would not recommend this book, especially for general reading. If you pick up this book, like I did, in the hope that it is about Frankl's personal quest for meaning amidst the horrors of Auschwitz with a strong scientific perspective, you will be disappointed to find that you have picked up a medical journal that is pedantic and repetitive, with hardly any reference to Frankl's personal journey or about how he evolved his theory and practices (that did transform many lives) based on his experiences.

Emily says

After the Book of Mormon, this would be my second recommendation to anyone looking for purpose in life.

Here's a poignant excerpt from one of my favorite parts of the book when Frankl has been in Auschwitz and other camps for several years and doesn't know the war is only weeks away from ending. He had decided to escape his camp near Dachau with a friend and was visiting some of his patients for the last time.

"I came to my only countryman, who was almost dying, and whose life it had been my ambition to save in spite of myself, but my comrade seemed to guess that something was wrong (perhaps I showed a little nervousness). In a tired voice he asked me, 'You too, are getting out?' I denied it, but I found it difficult to avoid his sad look. After my round I returned to him. Again a hopeless look greeted me and somehow I felt it to be an accusation. The unpleasant feeling that had gripped me as soon as I had told my friend I would escape with him became more intense.

Suddenly I decided to take fate into my own hands for once. I ran out of the hut and told my friend that I could not go with him. As soon as I had told him with finality that I had made up my mind to stay with my patients, the unhappy feeling left me. I did not know what the following days would bring, but I had gained an inward peace that I had never experienced before. I returned to the hut, sat down on the boards at my countryman's feet and tried to comfort him..."

I found such strength and wisdom in this book--strength and advice for me as a mother of five young children. While potty training, bending over to clean up a handful of toys for the the thousandth time that day, scraping Play Dough off of a filthy kitchen floor on hands and knees, and preparing the fifth snack of the day for several hungry mouths (directly after doing the dishes from the previous snack) I find the text of this book to give profound meaning to small and simple acts of selflessness, patience, and service. What a profound reminder that "The immediate influence of behavior is always more effective than that of words." I desperately needed to read this book, if only to remember to be calm and kind to my little ones so that they will pass on the favor to their own next generation.

Bravo to Viktor Frankl for bringing human frailty and greatness into perspective.

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms--to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." -Frankl

anarki says

Have you ever been in a situation wherein unreasonable suffering seems the only task left in your life that suicide seems to be a very reasonable option? Have you ever thought that living only extends the misery and torment you've already took? Have you felt the vacuum of meaningless suffering sucking the life out of you like a black hole? Have you ever thought that breathing is a disease only death can cure? If yes, then you haven't read this book.

The meaning of life ... Many people already died trying to find it or died before even finding it. We, human beings, have this need to fill the void. "What's the meaning of life?" is a very famous question. A question that is a widespread epidemic around the world.

In this book, Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl, he shares his experiences in the concentration camp. Horrifying. It makes your gut feel sick. It makes you grind your teeth and clench your fists and punch the wall. Or whatever. It makes you stop reading and reflect. If you're not familiar with the history of Hitler, The Nazis, or watched movies like "A Beautiful Life" or "Schinder's List", you will be in a state of shock reading this autobiographical account.

Frankl discussed in the first part of the book the Psychological Reaction or Phases of a prisoner in the concentration camp. First phase is Shock. You are welcomed by the horror and brutality. This is the moment when everything from you is taken off. Every possession that you have. Every strand of hair in your body is shaved off. Even your name is replaced by a number. You are no longer a human being. Inside the camp, you are nothing but a number. 119, 104 was Frankl's.. It's only you and your naked existence --even minus the hair. During this phase, everyday life in the camp is hell. There was even a night that someone was having a delirium while he was sleeping. At first, Frankl wanted to wake him up, but after a few second he decided not to. Fact is: The reality he's gonna be waking up to is a lot worse than the nightmare he was having. This is the moment when you'll realized that nightmares are better than reality. Every minute in the camp, the thought of death doesn't escape your thoughts. Every day, someone dies. Or decides to kill himself. The

death toll increases, and you are nothing but a statistic that won't even be recorded. You could be next.

Later, this day to day camp experience will take your capacity to feel pain itself. The next phase is Apathy. In this phase, you are accustomed to the camp environment. It was once said that man can adapt to any situations, only he thinks he can't. The blows in the head no longer hurt you. It's the mental agony that will make you suffer –the injustice. You can even drag the dead body out of the way and steal his belongings for your own betterment. You only bother to take care of your survival. Survival of the fittest.

Frankl discovered that they already proved Science wrong. If Science were right, then they should have been dead meat. There's something inside the human body that is more than itself. Something beyond their own anatomy.

Pause. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever wondered why there were some people who got the guts to escort the prisoners to the Gas Chambers? The Schutzstaffel, a.k.a in abbreviated form: the SS, and the Capos. How did they get the nerve of doing that? And how do they even find tyranny pleasurable?

Here, we come to the last phase of a prisoner's Psychological Reaction. It's Depersonalization. The person is depersonalized. It's no longer a person, but a thing. The morals are distorted. The person inside, dies. The person has become nothing but a number. A prisoner a prisoner. An SS an SS. A Capo a Capo. They killed the spiritual life inside them, thus resorting to such evil acts making the people around them suffer instead of themselves. When liberation had come, at first thought, they expected themselves to be happy and free. They were wrong. Being happy was something they've unlearned. After years of meaningless suffering as prisoners of war, they forgot how it feels like to be free again –how to be free –how to be a human being. A human being who became a number. Then a number finding its way back to be a human being.

I apologize for the attempt to summarize.

Frankl's experience in the concentration camp put Sigmund Freud into shame. It's not really pleasure that drives people to live his life. It disputes the Pleasure Principle and Adler's Will to Power. After reading this book and know the immeasurable meaningless suffering a prisoner had went through, you would wonder how were these people able to survive. It's the Will to Meaning.

Quoting from from a famous philosopher "He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how." No matter how much suffering one is going through. If he finds a reason to live through it. His soul will speak with pride. Looking back, shouting to the world "I went through it all!" The suffering had become an inspiration. It had become a trophy. It had become an achievement that no one can ever steal. "That which does not kill me makes me stronger." Again, from that famous philosopher.

Because of this theory, the suffering impregnated Viktor Frankl and later gave birth to Logotherapy or Existential Therapy which is going to be discussed in the 2nd half of the book. It's more than being logical. Logos is deeper than Logic. It is self-transcendence. A form of Psychotherapy that focuses on meaning. The psychotherapist plays the role of an Ophthalmologist. He makes the patient see what he doesn't see. Everything, no matter how miserable it is, has a meaning. No matter how much suffering one is going through, it doesn't take away the internal freedom to deal cope with the situation. "Everything can be taken away from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms —to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." and, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

And what happens to a man after going through hell? Simple. He is no longer afraid of anything.

To end this, I want to share a story.

After the liberation, some personnel visited the concentration camps. They took a look around the ruins of war. And as they were roaming, one personnel noticed something etched on the wall,

"Vielen Dank, Mein Lieber Gott! Sie haben mir die Gelegenheit geben, denen vergeben, die unverzeihlich!"

Translated in English it says,

"Thank you, my dear God! For you have given me the opportunity to forgive the unforgivable!"

And by the way, I have a blog: www.pagexero.wordpress.com.

K.D. Absolutely says

The sun is slowly rising up ushering the dawning of a new day. The mother and the father are sipping their first cups of coffee. Their schooling children are rising up from their bed. The mother attends to her children's daily routine. She bathes, feeds them their breakfast and makes sure that their things are all in their individual school bags. *Para Kanino Ka Bumabangon?* (translation: Whom Do You Wake Up For?) is heard as a voice over. This is Nestle's TV ad for Nescafe coffee but it sends a very clear message: *that each of us has our own reason for living and this reason is the meaning of our life, our existence.*

In a nutshell, this is what **Viktor Emil Frankl** (1905-1997) an Austrian Jew, neurologist, psychiatrist and a Holocaust survivor, is saying in this 1946 originally-published book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. He says that the life of each one of us has its own meaning. That meaning cannot be generalized. His theory of *logotherapy* which is a form of Existential Analysis, can be used to determine one's meaning for living or even suffering. Using his horrendous experiences at Auschwitz concentration camp, which he narrated in the first part of this book, he said that he and the other survivors kept themselves alive by imaging and looking forward to their lives after the war. Those who felt hopeless and they could not picture themselves reuniting with their families after the war, perished. As if they had no longer any reason for living and thus they chose to die rather than to survive.

He also said that we should not ask for the meaning of our life. Rather, we should ask what life wants from us.

I have read several books about the holocaust. I have seen and liked Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and read and liked Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark*, Imre Kertesz's *Fatelessness*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Victor Klemperer's *I Will Bear Witness* and of course Anne Frank's *Diary of the Young Girl*. That's why the first part of this book did not shock me anymore. However, there are some parts here that were new to me like Frankl's heavy interactions with the *Gapos*, co-inmates but they have leadership positions and also he, as a doctor, had a chance to escape from the Auschwitz concentration camp together with another doctor. This was the first time I heard that a prisoner could *well, almost* successfully escape the camp.

The second part of the book is more on clinical analysis and theories about *logotherapy* which Frankl pioneered. It is similar to psychotherapy but this one is more forward-looking. It is a type of existentialist analysis that focuses on a will to meaning as opposed to Adler's Nietzschean doctrine of will to power or Freud's will to pleasure. Rather than power or pleasure, logotherapy is founded upon the belief that it is the striving to find a meaning in one's life that is the primary, most powerful motivating and driving force in humans. (Source: Wikipedia).

be useful to others despite depression. As opposed to Freud, who believed that the primary drive in man, the most urgent motivation, was pleasure, Frankl believes that it is meaning. Now meaning for Frankl is not something abstract and airy and noble but rather something very concrete and specific to your life - what is the task that life asks of you that only you can do? Look at the circumstances of your life, look at your talents and the people that surround you. Where is the need that is calling for you to respond? For Frankl, the hope that kept him trudging on day by day in the concentration camps was the need to re-write the manuscript (taken away when first imprisoned) where he could present to the world his theory of Logotherapy. Why I found this book so helpful in my struggles with depression is because one of the rock-bottom places where depression can take you is despair. Despair is the absence of hope. The search for meaning, for a response to something life is asking of you, is the place where hope is born. Frankl states that hope, like genuine laughter or like faith or love is not something that we can will into being. We cannot make hope appear willy nilly in our lives because hope is more than a nice thought, it is, like true love something that involves your whole being. I find this to be true but there are things that we can do to prepare the way for hope's arrival and hope will come, it will always come. We can search for meaning because searching and looking and asking and expecting are acts and attitudes that we can will. Meaning, according to Frankl is found in three different forms. Meaning is found in creating or doing. Meaning is found in experiencing something greater than ourselves and in encountering another being through love. And finally, meaning can be found in the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering. The important thing here is that in all of these instances the value of the thing that gives meaning is subjective. There is no scale out there that says that writing a novel gives more meaning than helping your spouse with the dishes. When it comes to meaning, the small, the hidden, the unsaid is as important as the great acts of genius and you alone are the judge. Orienting yourself to responding in some way to what life is asking of you may not be the sole cure to depression but it is for me a necessary part of any healing process, of learning to live and be useful, despite the illness.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

This is a short but extremely intense book, first published in 1946. It begins with the author's experiences in four (!) different German concentration camps in WWII, including Auschwitz, and how he coped with those experiences -- and saw others cope with them, or not. He continues in the second half of this book with a discussion of his approach to psychiatry, called logotherapy, based on the belief that each person needs to find something in his or her life, something particular and personal to them, to give their life meaning. We need to look outside ourselves.

There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."

The first half of the book is completely absorbing, fascinating reading. When I tried to read the second, more academic part of it years ago, I floundered (I don't think I ever got through to the end). But I stuck with it this time and found it truly rewarding.

The second part did sometimes challenge my brain cells with concepts like this:

I never tire of saying that the only really transitory aspects of life are the potentialities; but as soon as they are actualized, they are rendered realities at that very moment; they are saved and delivered into the past, wherein they are rescued and preserved from transitoriness. For, in the past, nothing is irretrievably lost but everything is irrevocably stored.

I had to read that one two or three times before I felt like I really grasped what Frankl was saying. And this one:

Live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!

I assume it's to help give us motivation to avoid making a wrong choice, by thinking through the likely consequences of what we are about to do. But there are so many nuggets of wisdom in this short volume. A few things that really impacted me:

We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men, that *it did not matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.*

One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated.

It is one of the basic tenets of logotherapy that man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life. ... In accepting this challenge to suffer bravely, life has a meaning up to the last moment, and it retains this meaning literally to the end.

Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment. By the same token, every human being has the freedom to change at any instant.

Inspiring words; inspiring life.

Bonus material: Here is an interview with Viktor Frankl when he was 90 years old. He died just a couple of years later.

#16 of 24 in my 2016 Classics Bingo Challenge. 2/3 done!

Laurel says

I read this book for the first time during my senior year in high school. The year prior, I had gone to Germany for spring break with some fellow classmates. During the trip, we spent a day visiting a former WWII concentration camp in Dachau. As one might expect, this visit had a profound effect on me. I had of course read and knew about the atrocities that occurred under the Nazi regime, but to actually see the gas chambers in person is a deeply haunting and disturbing experience. Perhaps for this reason, Frankl's book affected me even more deeply than it otherwise might have.

The book is divided into two parts. The first section recounts in vivid detail Frankl's horrifying experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. Frankl, a former psychiatrist, also describes his observations of other prisoners and what he felt to be the main way in which people tried to cope with the insurmountable obstacles they faced. He found that those who could find meaning or purpose in their suffering were the ones who also seemed better able to find the strength to go on. As I recall, Frankl personally found his purpose in the hope of someday being able to see his wife again - a hope that was strong enough to get him through the daily horrors he faced.

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Merci .
Thank you .

:D

J.L. Sutton says

In Man's Search for Meaning, Victor Frankl begins his description of life in Nazi concentration camps (including Auschwitz) with the premise that life in the camps represents a provisional existence. In what must have seemed hopeless circumstances, is there any point in searching for meaning for one's life? Frankl does not dwell on the atrocities, but he does detail the mindset of his fellow prisoners facing what most of them knew was their death (as well as the death of their loved ones). Using his experiences as a guide, he outlines his ideas about logotherapy while finding reason to hold to a 'tragic optimism.' There are other essential books detailing life in concentration camps (I'm thinking especially of Primo Levi's Life in Auschwitz), but Frankl's is an important work which should be read by those who seek to understand how concentration camp prisoners faced their ordeal.

Pouting Always says

The original part one was the strongest I think because the rest started to go into the typical psychobabble inherent to books trying to contribute to the academic side of psychology or psychiatry but the first part really grounded the idea of giving meaning to one existence into personal experience and I found it very poignant about the mental state of people in very stressful and hopeless situations. It's a very empowering and important idea that no matter the situation a person can control their behavior and influence their own feelings of the situation. This idea of a person having so much control over their own selves and survival is one I whole heartedly agree with. Anyone having trouble figuring out life or what the point is could benefit from reading this I think.

????? says

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Petra X says

How is it possible to write dispassionately of life in a concentration camp in such a way as to engender great feeling in the reader? This is how Frankl dealt with his experience of those terrible years. The dispassionate writing makes the horrors of the camp extremely distressing, more so than writing that is more emotionally involved. It is almost reportage. The first half of the book is equal in its telling to The Diary of a Young Girl in furthering our understanding of those dreadful times.

There are occasional glimmers of humanity from the Germans. These are so small that rather than illuminate any basic goodness, they cast further into the shadows the terror of living in a place and time where death might be a beating or a shot to the head at any moment. There are also stories of the depths that some of the Jewish victims would sink to in what they would do to stay alive themselves. It made me think that rather than condemn these people for becoming tools of the Nazis, what would I do faced with death or the chance to stay alive a little longer and maybe save family or friends.

7 stars, golden stars for this half of the book.

The second half is about Frankl's psychotherapeutic methods and lost me in boredom. I did read this in its entirety but it wouldn't have spoiled the book, or my appreciation of the genius retelling and brilliant writing of the first half, if I hadn't.
