

# Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor E. Frankl

...the best of us did not return.

- **Delusion of Reprieve** — the condemned man, immediately before his execution, gets the illusion that he might be reprieved at the very last minute.

Another sensation seized us: curiosity. I have experienced this kind of curiosity before, as a fundamental reaction toward certain strange circumstances.

Yes, a man can get used to anything, but do not ask us how.

...the mortification of normal reactions...

At such a moment it is not the physical pain which hurts the most; it is the mental agony caused but he injustice, the unreasonableness of it all.

...a retreat to a more primitive form of mental life.

The truth — that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire.

The salvation of man is through love and in love.

Then, after minutes of moving silence, one prisoner said to another, “How beautiful the world / could/ be!”

Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation.

The attempt to develop a sense of humor and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living.

The last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

There is only one thing that I dread; not to be worthy of my sufferings.

...in camp a day lasted longer than a week.

They preferred to close their eyes and to live in the past. Life for such people became meaningless.

It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future.

Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it.

It did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.

Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.

Questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements.

“Life” does not mean something vague, but something very real and concrete, just as life’s tasks are also very real and concrete.

His unique opportunity lies in the way in which he bears his burden.

But there was no need to be ashamed of tears, for tears bore witness that a man had the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer.

A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life.

What you have experienced, no power on earth can take from you.

Human kindness can be found in all groups, even those which as a whole it would be easy to condemn.

We had literally lost the ability to feel pleased and had to relearn it slowly.

- **Depersonalization** – everything appeared unreal, unlikely, as in a dream

...the commonplace truth that no one has the right to do wrong, not even if wrong has been done

to them.

...moral deformity...

- **Logotherapy** – focuses on the meanings to be fulfilled by an individual in their future.

...this striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man.

Man is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values!

...suffering may well be a human achievement, especially if the suffering grows out of existential frustration.

...tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health.

...mental health is based on a certain degree of tension... the gap between what one is and what one should become.

I consider it a dangerous misconception of mental hygiene to assume that what man needs in the first place is equilibrium or, as it is called in biology, "homeostasis," i.e., a tensionless state.

- **noöynamics** – the existential dynamics in a polar field of tension where one pole is represented by a meaning that is to be fulfilled and the other pole by the man who has to fulfill it.

Now we can understand Schopenhauer when he said that mankind was apparently doomed to vacillate eternally between the two extremes of distress and boredom.

What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment.

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!

...the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system.

the self-transcendence of human existence

The more one forgets himself — by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love — the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.

...self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.

According to logotherapy, we can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering.

[on love] By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, [she] makes potentialities come true.

When we are no longer able to change a situation...we are challenged to change ourselves.

In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.

That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning.

suffer bravely [and proudly]

Viewing her life as if from her deathbed, she had suddenly been able to see a meaning in it, a meaning which even included all of her sufferings.

I should say /having been/ is the surest kind of being.

Instead of possibilities, I have realities in my past, not only the reality of work done and of love loved, but of sufferings bravely suffered. These sufferings are even the things of which I am most proud, though these are things which cannot inspire envy.

- **Hyper-intention** — the excessive and intense intention and attempt to do something.
- **Paradoxical Intention** — focusing intention on the opposite of a problematic behavior.

The neurotic who learns to laugh at himself may be on the way to self-management, perhaps to

cure.

A given symptom is responded to by a phobia, the phobia triggers the symptom, and the symptom, in turn, reinforces the phobia.

It is not freedom from conditions, but it is freedom to take a stand toward the conditions.

Every human being has the freedom to change at any instant.

Man is capable of changing the world for the better if possible, and of changing himself for the better if necessary.

...man is more than psyche.

An incurably psychotic individual may lose his usefulness but yet retain the dignity of a human being. That is my psychiatric credo.

Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive fact is responsibility.

A human being is not one thing among others; /things/ determine each other, but /man/ is ultimately self-determining.

Man has both potentialities within himself; which one is actualized depends on decisions but not on conditions.

- **Tragic Optimism** — “saying yes to life in spite of everything.”

The best way to seek tragic optimism is (1) turning suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment; (2) deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better; and (3) deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action.

...a human being is not one in pursuit of happiness but rather in search of a reason to become happy.

...the feeling of meaninglessness...that people have enough to live by but nothing to live for; they have the means but no meaning.

The truth is that man does not live by welfare alone.

...the perception of meaning, as I see it, more specifically boils down to becoming aware of a possibility against the background of reality or, to express it in plain words, to becoming aware of /what can be done/ about a given situation.

...experiencing can be as valuable as achieving is therapeutic because it compensates for our one-sided emphasis on the external world of achievement at the expense of the internal world of experience.

I know that without the suffering, the growth that I have achieved would have been impossible.

I only insist that meaning is available in spite of — nay, even through — suffering, provided that the suffering is unavoidable.

In the past, nothing is irretrievably lost, but rather, on the contrary, everything is irrevocably stored and treasured.

Just as life remains potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable, so too does the value of each and every person stay with him or her, and it does so because it is based on the values that he or she has realized in the past, and is not contingent on the usefulness that he or she may or may not retain in the present.

...in doing so blurs the decisive difference between being valuable in the sense of dignity and being valuable in the sense of usefulness.

*/Sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia quam rara sunt/* (but everything great is just as difficult to realize as it is rare to find).

For the world is in a bad state, but everything will become still worse unless each of us does his best.

So, let us be alert — alert in a twofold sense:

Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of.

And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake.

It is we ourselves who must answer the questions that life asks of us, and to these questions we can respond only by being responsible for our existence.

[We must do something that] points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself...by giving [ourselves] to a cause to serve or another person to love.

Even when confronted by loss and sadness, Frankl's optimism, his constant affirmation of and exuberance about life, led him to insist that hope and positive energy can turn challenges into triumphs.

one's inner freedom

he does not tell people /what/ to do, but why /they/ must do it.

Instead, he was deeply committed to the idea that even a vile Nazi criminal or a seemingly hopeless madman has the potential to transcend evil or insanity by making responsible choices.

His deep commitment to the uniqueness and dignity of each individual...