Man's Search for Meaning

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF VICTOR FRANKL

Viktor Frankl grew up in Vienna at a time when great advances in the field of psychology were being made there. His interest in the subject developed early, and as a medical student, he organized suicide watch programs that maintained a 100% success rate. Upon completing his residency, Frankl set up a private practice. In 1938, during the German occupation of Austria, Nazi leaders forbid Frankl, a Jew, from seeing non-Jewish patients. Two years later, Frankl became the head of the neurological department at the Jewish Rothschild Hospital. In 1942, Frankl, his wife Tilly, and Frankl's parents were arrested and sent to Nazi death camps. Frankl's wife and parents died in the camps, but Frankl survived three years in four camps, after which he wrote many books and served as a professor at a number of universities. He is best known for his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, and for developing the fields of logotherapy and existential therapy. Frankl remarried several years after his liberation and had one daughter. He died of heart failure at the age of 92.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Frankl's book is set during and in the immediate aftermath of World War II. During this war, which lasted from 1939 to 1945, Hitler (the dictator of Germany at the time) and his followers, the Nazis, killed six million Jews and five million other "undesirables," including homosexuals, Romani people, and the mentally disabled. Victims were usually taken prisoner and sent to concentration camps (like the ones Frankl experienced), where they were either killed or made to work in starvation conditions. This systematic genocide, known as the Holocaust, was the product of Hitler's desire to create a pure "Aryan" race that would rule the world. Frankl's book also relates to Sigmund Freud's theories of psychoanalysis, the impact of which is difficult to overstate. Frankl's psychological theory, "logotherapy," is considered the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" after Freud's psychoanalysis (which focuses on sexuality, childhood events, and subconscious drives) and Alfred Adler's "individual psychology" (most famous for the idea of the "inferiority complex"). Frankl's logotherapy is based in the philosophical idea of existentialism, which holds that freedom is the most important value in life, and that one must create one's own meaning in a fundamentally meaningless world. Famous existentialists include Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Frankl wrote many other books during his career, including *Psychotherapy and Existentialism* (1967), *The Will to Meaning* (1988), and *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (1997). His text references the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, as well as the philosophical writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, among others. *Man's Search for Meaning* is often compared to Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1956), which is an account of Wiesel's experiences in Nazi camps. Frankl's book could also be compared to twentieth-century existentialist and religious works like Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* (1952), or Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1923).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*
- **When Written:** 1946
- **Where Written:** Vienna, Austria
- **When Published:** 1946, although Frankl updated the book until its final version was published in 1984
- **Literary Period:** Post-war non-fiction
- **Genre:** Psychology, memoir
- **Setting:** Nazi concentration camps during WWII
- **Climax:** This book does not have a traditional narrative arc or climax. Important moments included Frankl's vision of his wife and his decision to rewrite his manuscript.
- **Antagonist:** Nazis, apathy
- **Point of View:** First person (autobiographical)

EXTRA CREDIT

Adventurer. Frankl received his pilot's license at age 67, and was an avid mountain climber.

Statue of Responsibility. Frankl proposed that the United States build a Statue of Responsibility on the West coast to compliment and balance the Statue of Liberty in the East.

PLOT SUMMARY

Man's Search For Meaning is a work of non-fiction that deals with Viktor Frankl's experience living in Nazi concentration camps, as well as his psychotherapeutic technique called logotherapy. Frankl never gives the reader a linear narrative of his time in the camps—instead, he is more focused on explaining how the daily struggles of camp life affected the mental state of its inmates. As a result, he only gives details about his experience

when those details can be used as evidence for his psychological theories.

Frankl says that based on his observations of his fellow inmates, the typical prisoner passes through three mental stages: shock in the first few days after his arrival, apathy and "emotional death" once he has become used accustomed to life in camp, and disillusionment with life after he has been liberated. Most of the first section of the book, "Experiences in a Concentration Camp," explores what happened to apathetic prisoners and how Frankl managed to avoid this apathy.

The core of Frankl's philosophy is that a man's deepest desire is to find meaning in his life, and if he can find that meaning, he can survive anything. Frankl found meaning in his experiences in the concentration camp by deciding that he was going to use his suffering as an opportunity to make himself a better person. Instead of becoming apathetic and accepting that he was doomed, he chose to embrace his suffering. According to Frankl, while a man's destiny in life is certainly affected by the circumstances in which he finds himself, he is ultimately free to choose his own path in life. Even in the worst situation possible, man always has the freedom to choose his attitude towards life.

Frankl claims that there are three ways to find meaning in life: through work, through love, and through suffering. Frankl kept his will to meaning—or his desire to live a meaningful life—alive through his three years in the camps by focusing on the potential meanings he could create for himself. In addition to finding meaning in his suffering, Frankl motivated himself by thinking about the work he wanted to do after leaving camp. Namely, he wanted to rewrite his **manuscript** about logotherapy—a manuscript that the Nazis took from him when he arrived at Auschwitz. Frankl also found hope in love, and the image of his wife helped him through many of his most difficult times.

Frankl was able to use his work, love, and suffering to keep himself alive because he felt that he was responsible for and to them. He argues that humans cannot understand the general meaning, or super-meaning of life—instead, we must look for ways to make each individual moment valuable. Every person has a unique vocation that only he can accomplish, and he is responsible for undertaking this job.

The second section of the book, "Logotherapy in a Nutshell," is devoted to explaining Frankl's ideas about logotherapy in more detail. He explains that man's will to meaning can become existentially frustrated, which can in turn provoke noögenic neuroses. In other words, if a man cannot find the meaning or purpose in his life, he can develop mental problems that need to be addressed. Frankl argues that everyone should strive to be in a state of noö-dynamics, in which there is a tension between what one has already done and what one hopes to accomplish. To Frankl, this tension between past and present is vital to mental health. For those who need therapy, Frankl helps them overcome their anxieties and fears by using paradoxical intention, in which the person tries to bring about the precise thing he fears. Ultimately, logotherapy seeks to help its patients develop goals—whether they be getting rid of a phobia or surviving a horrible situation—and finding ways to meaningfully accomplish them.

Frankl ends his book by saying that "man is that being who invented the gas chambers at Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the *Shema Yisrael* on his lips." Frankl believes that while man is certainly capable of doing evil, no individual human *must* be evil. Every human has the capacity to change his behavior and attitude in every possible situation. In his postscript, Frankl reaffirms this belief as the basis for his tragic optimism, or belief in the importance of saying "yes" in spite of everything.

TERMS

Anticipatory anxiety – Anticipatory anxiety is a type of neurosis in which one is so worried about something that the worry actually causes that thing to happen. For example, someone who sweats a great deal might end up sweating even more by worrying about how much he is sweating.

Delusion of reprieve – The delusion of reprieve is a term that Frankl applies to prisoners who have just arrived at concentration camps. These prisoners firmly believe that they themselves will not be murdered and mistreated, even though they are familiar with the camps' reputations.

Depersonalization – Depersonalization is a psychological term that Frankl applies to newly-liberated prisoners. In this state, man looses his connection with reality, and everything feels to him as if it is happening in a dream.

Essence of human existence – For Frankl, the essence of human existence is "responsibleness." We are human because we have responsibilities to others, and more importantly, to life itself. Life demands that each of us find a way to make our time on Earth meaningful.

Existential despair – While existential frustration can lead to noögenic neuroses, it can also cause existential despair. This term refers to a deep sadness regarding one's inability to find meaning in one's life. Existential despair does not need to be treated through therapy, and can be overcome by looking for the meaning in one's work, love, or suffering.

Existential frustration – When a person is existentially frustrated, he is having trouble finding the meaning of his life and needs to be reoriented toward his potential to accomplish a unique goal in the future.

Existential vacuum – The existential vacuum is a pervasive problem in the twentieth century. In this vacuum, man becomes bored and then begins to question the value of his life. Unlike

many of his contemporaries, Frankl maintains that life *is* meaningful.

Hyper-intention – Hyper-intention is Frankl's term for a neurosis that causes patients to be unable to accomplish that which they intend. For example, Frankl writes that one will never achieve success when that is one's intention. Instead, it will only come when one has forgotten about it entirely.

Hyper-reflection – Hyper-reflection is Frankl's term for a neurosis that causes people to place more focus on themselves than on their goals, thus making it less likely for them to achieve those goals.

Logotherapy – Logotherapy comes from the Greek word *logos*, which Frankl defines as "meaning." Also known as the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy, logotherapy is a type of psychology that focuses on helping patients find meaning in their lives. Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, says that the search for meaning is the fundamental motivating force in a human's life. Through logotherapeutic practices, therapists can help their patients deal with mental problems by encouraging them to think about their futures and helping them accomplish their goals in meaningful ways.

Noö-dynamics – Noö-dynamics is Frankl's term for the tension between what one has already achieved and what one *ought* to achieve. Frankl says that healthy people must live in a state of tension between past and present. Logotherapy helps people endure and make the most of this tension instead of encouraging them to live tension-free.

Noögenic neuroses – Existential frustration can lead to noögenic neuroses, or psychological problems having to do with the meaning of one's life. "Noögenic" comes from the Greek word for "mind." These neuroses can only be treated through logotherapy, because noögenic neurosis focuses the patient's mind on the lack of meaning in his life.

Pan-determinism – Pan-determinism is the idea that human behavior is the symptom of biological and social conditions. In other words, it is the idea that humans do not have control over who they become, but instead simply become the people their genes and upbringing force them to become. Frankl disagrees with pan-determinism—he believes that humans have free will and the capacity to change at any moment.

Paradoxical intention – Frankl uses paradoxical intention to help reverse his patients' anticipatory anxiety. By asking his patients to try to do that which they fear doing, Frankl demonstrates that their anxieties actually hurt them rather than help them. For example, Frankl might tell someone with a severe stutter to try his best to stutter the next time he spoke to someone. When that person *tries* to stutter, he discovers that he cannot do so.

Provisional existence of unknown limit – Frankl says that the prisoners in the concentration camp lived in a provisional existence of unknown limit, because they did not know when their suffering would end, or if they would ever be freed from the camps. They could not plan ahead, and so the prisoners found themselves unable to cope with their situations.

Psychoanalysis – Frankl uses "psychoanalysis" to refer to Sigmund Freud's school of psychology in which patients are instructed to look into their past to find the source of their problems in the present. Freudian psychoanalysis places much emphasis on sexuality and pleasure.

Self-transcendence of human existence – Frankl uses this term to refer to the fact that one can only find meaning through an encounter with something external to oneself. In other words, you must forget yourself and focus on your responsibility to something else in order to make your life meaningful.

Super-meaning – The super-meaning is the broader meaning to life, death, and suffering that man cannot understand. Frankl says that people must have faith that the "whys" in life have an answer, without being able to access that answer for themselves. For Frankl, the super-meaning has a religious dimension, but he does not feel that everyone must be religious.

Tragic optimism – Frankl defines tragic optimism as the decision to say "yes" to life despite the pain, guilt, and death that one must necessarily face. These three negative forces are counteracted by the positive forces of hope, faith, and love.

Will to meaning – Man's will to meaning is his desire to live a meaningful life. A frustrated will to meaning can lead to psychological problems that require the attention of a therapist.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

According to Frankl, the will to meaning is the motivating force in any person's life—in other words, the need for some kind of meaning in one's actions and existence is at the core of one's psychology. The first section of the book is a testament to this belief. Frankl writes from his own horrific experience as a prisoner in four different Nazi concentration camps over the course of three years, and he uses his observations there as evidence for his claims. Frankl explains that many prisoners became apathetic about their lives just a few days after arriving at a concentration camp. They quickly grew accustomed to the cruelty that surrounded them, and they knew their chances of

survival were limited, so they essentially gave up. Frankl himself managed to avoid this apathy, however, by constantly looking for ways to make his experience meaningful. He did this by deciding to use his suffering as an opportunity to become a better person. Frankl also reoriented his frame of mind, deciding to think of his time in the camps as an important opportunity to observe how such an environment affected prisoners' minds. Finally, he found meaning in his life by remembering his love for his wife and committing himself to rewriting the **manuscript** that the Nazis took from him in Auschwitz.

In the second section of the book, Frankl discusses the problems that can arise when someone's will to meaning becomes existentially frustrated outside of the concentration camp setting. Frankl's form of therapy, logotherapy, is designed to help an individual find value in every moment of life, even if he is confident that there is none to be found. Frankl says that there are three ways to find meaning in life: through work, through love, and through suffering. Ultimately, by being responsible to one's work, love, or suffering, one can improve one's own life. Frankl does not, however, purport to know the general meaning of life or to have the answer for why humans must suffer. He calls the answers to these questions the super-meaning, but claims that the super-meaning is something that humans cannot possibly understand. Instead of asking what is the overall meaning of life, he declares, we should realize that life asks us to determine our *own* meaning.

SUFFERING AND HOPE

While meaning can be found through love and work, Frankl focuses most strongly on how to find meaning through suffering. He describes in detail the many injustices he and his fellow inmates were made to endure in the Nazi concentration camps: from walking miles through the snow with bare feet, to being made to ride in train carts surrounded by their own excrement. Most men gave up in the face of this suffering, but those who were able to make their suffering seem meaningful were often able to endure their pain more successfully. For example, Frankl's friends who did their best to stay alive in the hopes of seeing their loved ones again or who thought of their suffering as a test of faith lived longer than those who lost their ability to see the meaning in life.

While Frankl acknowledges that most people reading his book will never experience anything like the suffering found in concentration camps, he says that suffering is still universal. In fact, it is man's ability to rise above his suffering that makes him human. But to Frankl, pain is like a gas: even a small amount of gas will expand to fill any room, no matter how large, just as any amount of pain and suffering—no matter the magnitude—"completely fills the human soul." As a result, the experiences of a concentration camp survivor are not so different from that of a person with a more normal life, at least in that both will have to come to terms with suffering at some point. This suffering can be incredibly meaningful, but Frankl is careful to point out that suffering should not be sought out on purpose, as meaning can also be found through love and work. When one *must* suffer, however, the best way to survive is by holding on to hope and trying to make oneself worthy of one's very experience of suffering.

FREEDOM, OPTIMISM, AND RESPONSIBILITY

While many of Frankl's contemporaries had very negative views of humanity after witnessing the horrors of the Holocaust, Frankl remained fundamentally an optimist. He believed that even the worst men could become good, because man has the capacity to change himself at any moment. This ability comes from the fact that no matter how horrible the situation in which a man finds himself, he is always free to choose his destiny by choosing how he reacts to that situation. Frankl defines himself as a "tragic optimist," because he believes that man always has the potential to make suffering into an accomplishment, to turn guilt into motivation for change, and to use the potential meaninglessness of life as motivation for making his life valuable. While optimism is often associated with happiness, Frankl is clear that finding *meaning*, not happiness, is his goal.

Frankl is able to be optimistic because he believes that man is fundamentally free, and with that freedom comes responsibility. Man does not simply have the opportunity to find meaning in his life—he *must* do so. It is the question life asks of him, and he is responsible to life for finding its answer. When we lose our will to meaning and cannot meet this responsibility, we must reorient ourselves toward what we want to accomplish. By making ourselves responsible to things and people outside of ourselves, we can ultimately fulfill our responsibility to ourselves and to life itself. Frankl ultimately claims that everyone has unique vocations, and we must spend our lives finding these tasks and completing them to the best of our ability.

PSYCHOLOGY AND LOGOTHERAPY

Although much of Frankl's book is focused on his time in concentration camps, *Man's Search for Meaning* is fundamentally about logotherapy. Logotherapy is a school of psychology—developed by Frankl himself—that is centered around helping people find meaning in life. Logotherapy is known as the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy," after Freud's and Adler's respective theories. Unlike Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology, logotherapy claims that the search for existential meaning is the major motivating force in a person's life.

Moreover, Frankl maintained a sense of purpose in the concentration camps precisely by deciding to study how the camps affected prisoners' psychologies. Thus he gives personal details about life in the camps, but he does so from a psychologist's point of view, and draws larger conclusions from his experiences.

The second section of the book deals with logotherapy more directly, and sets out Frankl's core beliefs. He defines his therapy by comparing it to Freud's method of psychoanalysis: logtherapy is "less retrospective and less introspective." Frankl says that existential frustration (a lack of meaning in one's life) can lead to noögenic neuroses like anticipatory anxiety, which must be treated with logotherapy. This frustration can also lead to existential despair, or a state in which one deeply questions the meaning of one's life. Frankl encourages therapists to help their patients achieve a state of noö-dynamics, in which what one has already accomplished is in a healthy tension with what one hopes to accomplish in the future. This state can help clarify a man's will to meaning (sense of purpose) and set him back on a healthy path. For example, Frankl once had a patient who was still grief-stricken over his wife's death two years after her passing. Frankl helped the man realize that if he had died before she had, she would be the one suffering instead. The man was then able to think of his suffering as a sacrifice made on behalf of his wife. Once the man understood that his pain was meaningful, he was able to bear it. Likewise, Frankl himself managed to endure the concentration camps by deciding that his suffering was meaningful, and by maintaining a goal for the future. Ultimately Frankl's extreme personal experiences contribute to and shape his theories of psychology, leading to an entirely new school of therapy as developed in the book.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FRANKL'S MANUSCRIPT

When Frankl first arrives at Auschwitz, he is forced to surrender his unpublished **manuscript** on logotherapy. Over the course of his time in the four camps in which he is imprisoned, Frankl realized that he badly wanted to rewrite this manuscript, and further, that he wanted to write another manuscript about psychology within concentration camps. Frankl turned his thoughts toward the manuscript when he was struggling, and used it as way to keep himself motivated to stay alive. For example, when one of his camps was infected with typhoid, Frankl wrote keywords from his manuscript on scraps of paper to keep his mind alert. In the second half of the book, Frankl uses the manuscript to symbolize hope for the future and the importance of having something outside of oneself to live for.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Beacon Press edition of *Man's Search for Meaning* published in 2006.

Experiences in a Concentration Camp Quotes

❝ At that moment I became intensely conscious of the fact that no dream, no matter how horrible, could be as bad as the reality of the camp which surrounded us, and to which I was about to recall him.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

As in this case, Frankl is often driven to wider reflection by a particular experience he has in the concentration camp. Something Frankl sees or feels becomes, in the "intensely conscious" state he must maintain in order to survive the camp, a deeper truth about humanity. His process of thinking, it's important to remember, is always shaped by the brutal reality in which he must live. Because this thinking process is true for all of us, whether or not we feel our daily existence is brutally difficult, Frankl's book is interesting not only for its ideas but also for its demonstration of how these ideas form.

Frankl's thinking about dreams and reality touch on some of psychiatry's longest-standing debates: what might our dreams mean? What is the nature of reality, and how can we cope with it? Frankl suggests that, instead of offering an escape from reality, dreams might only be a sort of torture for those living in a terrible reality; nightmares, meanwhile, might be a source of relief relative to the concentration camp inmate's reality.

❝ Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love.* I understand how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Frankl's model for human happiness, what he calls the *self-transcendence of human existence*, consists ultimately in our ability to lose ourselves in something, or someone, else. Love, as Frankl maintains, is part of life's *super-meaning*; it is, in other words, one of the things that justifies our existence against a backdrop of pain, guilt, and death. It may give us relief "only for a brief moment," but according to Frankl even this brief moment of self-consciousness-destroying love can be enough to make up for years of pain.

Like Freud's earlier psychoanalytic model for the human mind, Frankl's draws heavily on literature and art. When he finds "the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart," Frankl is consulting a body of artistic work in his own memory. His psychiatric method, *logotherapy*, works in unison with— not in opposition to— literature, art, and other forms of thought that might be overlooked in other therapeutic methodologies. We must draw from all forms of great thought and belief, Frankl suggests, rather than separating them into categories like "art" or "science."

> Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not he is actually present, whether he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation forms the essence of Frankl's *self-transcendence*, the "going beyond the physical person of the beloved" that he sees as so essential to survival when the physical person—either the body of the lover or of the beloved— is in danger, either due to uncontrollable external circumstances (as in a concentration camp) or due to the deep *existential frustration* that can drive mind and body to self-destruction.

Frankl's conception of human existence maintains a dualism between body and spirit— your body can be in a terrible place, but you can transcend this physical reality by turning to the spirit. The spirit of another— in this case, and most powerfully, the beloved— can pull us from our physical horror into the spirit, where we can find the true meaning of our existence. The physical thing might not be present, or even "alive at all," but this "ceases somehow to be of importance." What *is* important, in Frankl's conception, is that the suffering lover has some memory of the beloved to focus on completely.

> I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious "Yes" in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In his insistence on total commitment to something outside of oneself as the only way to transcend the pain and difficulty that accompany human existence, Frankl offers a precursor to Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's well-known concept of "flow," the "state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter," according to Csikszentmihalyi's 1990 book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*.

According to both Frankl and Csikszentmihalyi, when we are fully immersed in an experience, whether of love or hope or meaningfulness, we are transcending ourselves and experiencing joy. Frankl explains this in more spiritual terms, whereas Csikszentmihalyi is more "scientific" about it. Accordingly, Frankl is more interested in existential experiences, whereas Csikszentmihalyi applies his concept of "flow" to any activity that fully engages us. To Frankl, the world is "hopeless, meaningless," without this immersion. The concentration camp is only the epitome of the world's inevitable pain and despair, not an exception to the way things normally are. It is in love and belief, Frankl says, that we find a "yes" in response to our most difficult existential question: is it all worth it?

To draw an analogy, a man's suffering is similar to the behavior of gas. If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the "size" of human suffering is absolutely relative.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Frankl uses one of the more obvious— but still jarring— analogies from Auschwitz and performs an interesting reversal, comparing the human soul to a gas chamber rather than to the suffering human entering the chamber. This analogy is meant to shock us to attention, so that we'll work to understand what Frankl is saying.

A gas, unlike a solid, evenly fills whatever open space it is introduced into. Frankl suggests that suffering works the same way, completely filling the soul. A great suffering would mean lots of suffering throughout the soul; a little suffering, though less intense, would still disperse evenly and affect the entire soul. According to Frankl, this means suffering can be said to have a relative size. By extension, then, though everyone's suffering is important, not all suffering is created equal. Some people have to deal with more intense suffering than others— those forced into Auschwitz are one example.

Who can throw a stone at a man who favors his friends under circumstances when, sooner or later, it is a question of life or death? No man should judge unless he asks himself in absolute honesty whether in a similar situation he might not have done the same.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Great moral catastrophes like the Holocaust invite lots of judgment from all sides, but few of us would think first of judging the inmates of a concentration camp. However, those like Frankl who actually had to live or die in Auschwitz would naturally judge certain choices made by guards or other inmates. In this case, something so vital to Frankl's survival as the equal distribution of food among inmates would prompt in any less generous a spirit great judgment and jealousy.

But, as Frankl explains convincingly, it is senseless and often dangerous to judge people without first honestly exploring within ourselves this central question: would we really not do the same thing in the same situation? Would we really not distribute more food to our friends in order to help them survive the traumas of Auschwitz? Frankl calls for "absolute honesty" in our self-exploration, as an antidote to the rapid-fire judgments we are always making when prompted by ethical dilemmas— both those dilemmas that are very close to us or, like Auschwitz, those that are more remote in time and space to today's reader.

Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Sigmund Freud and the school of psychoanalysis he spawned, which would go on to dominate Western psychological thought throughout the first half of the twentieth century, suggested that humans are driven primarily not by conscious desires but by deeper, more animalistic, often unknowable motivations. Throughout his book, Frankl unequivocally rejects what he calls pan-determinism, the very Freudian idea that people are driven by instincts (often unknowable to them) and cannot really make choices about what to do in any given situation.

Frankl believes strongly that humans are not simple animals but can choose to "decide what shall become of [them]—mentally and spiritually." This puts Frankl on the "yes" side of the great centuries-long debate over whether or not humans have free will. This passage is a sort of turning point in his book, and he goes on to explain how he thinks man can rise above his instinct and turn toward a greater meaning that is external to him and therefore both more admirable and more meaningful, not pulled from the depths of his animal wishes.

It is this spiritual freedom—which cannot be taken away—that makes life meaningful and purposeful.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

This freedom we all have, to find what is meaningful and focus on it, is the only thing in Frankl's philosophy that can pull us from the mire of despair and pain we all live in— to different degrees, as most of us have never experienced a concentration camp— toward spiritual realization. There are two aspects of this realization, as it must bring us toward that which is both "meaningful" and "purposeful." It is essential to note, however, that Frankl does not posit this spiritual freedom as an escape from suffering; in fact, according to Frankl, suffering is one of the most powerful sources of meaning we all have access to.

Even in Auschwitz, perhaps the most extreme example of a situation creating pain and despair, this spiritual freedom "cannot be taken away." It exists outside of the body, and so no matter how the body is beaten or disgraced by anyone else, this spiritual freedom cannot be battered.

> But there is also a purpose in life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Frankl begins to shape what he sees as the meaning of human suffering. Banned from both the "active life" of creative work and the "passive life" of enjoying other people's creations, those like the Auschwitz inmates who are forced into an existence consisting almost entirely of suffering can still find meaning without access to either creation or enjoyment.

The rest of the passage is a bit more confusing: what does Frankl mean when he says an existence of pure suffering "admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces"? Here Frankl suggests that deeply suffering people can only achieve "high moral behavior" by accepting that they can only exist (*provisionally*, meaning for a little while at least) within the confines of "external forces" outside of their control.

> If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Frankl's *logotherapy* is always as much philosophy as psychology, and here he makes a classic philosophical move: if there is to be meaning in life, there must be meaning in suffering, because suffering is always part of life. Now, in fact, this is not that well-crafted as a logical statement, because unless suffering and life are one and the same the "meaning in life" could reside elsewhere besides in its suffering. However, despite the loose logic of his philosophical statement, we get Frankl's point: suffering is a necessary part of life, and if we want to find meaning in life it makes sense to look for it not only in our creative and enjoyable moments but also in those times when we are most deeply suffering.

Logotherapy is also a spiritual practice, and much of Frankl's writing sounds like it could be pulled from a religious text. It is useful to always be skeptical of huge claims about things like suffering, fate, and death; as readers, we can choose whether or not to accept Frankl's "greater-good" argument about suffering, that we ought to find meaning in our suffering, as such arguments can be used to fetishize or justify the suffering of others. Frankl's intent though is never to justify horrific events like the Holocaust, but rather to present what we might call a tragically realistic picture of life: we all going to suffer, so we might as well try to make something of it.

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

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

This is a quotation from *Ethics*, the 17th-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza's major work on the topic. In this 1677 treatise, Spinoza tries to transpose Euclid's method— drawing a large number of conclusions from a set of axioms— from Euclidean mathematics to the potentially more touchy realm of human life and behavior.

Frankl pulls this proposition from the fifth part of Spinoza's treatise, fairly well-known at least among those who would originally have been interested in Frankl's book, in order to clearly introduce a point: suffering is not meaningful in itself, but only becomes meaningful when we "form a clear and precise picture of it." We must work, through reflection and self-exploration, to see our suffering in a meaningful way, Frankl suggests through his quotation of the famous philosopher. Spinoza's equation of emotion with suffering is outdated, emerging from a specific tradition in early modern philosophy of cherishing the rational and viewing the emotional as the root of suffering. But Frankl deviates from this view, using Spinoza's proposition more specifically to illuminate the *procedures* we might follow to make our suffering meaningful.

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

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Frankl again brings up the central component of his *essence of human existence*, "responsibleness." He asserts that we are human, and we exist, because of our responsibility to life itself, and therefore to the people and things that make it up. Until we find that thing to which we are most responsible— whether our suffering, or a meaningful act of creative work, or the object of our love— we cannot be said, as far as Frankl is concerned, to truly be alive. And until we do commit ourselves to this thing we will find ourselves immersed in existential frustration, or even despair.

> Thus it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. 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 real and concrete. They form man's destiny, which is different and unique for each individual.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is vital to building an understanding of Frankl's aim in *Man's Search for Meaning*. While Frankl has distinct philosophical aims in outlining what he calls *logotherapy*, his aim is not to explain the "meaning of life" in any universal or "general" sense. This sets him apart from philosophers like Descartes or Spinoza who made it their life's work, ultimately, to decide what life *in general* could mean.

"Life" for Frankl is not an abstract concept, but a composite of realities and our reactions to them— this is "very real and concrete," and therefore calls for reactions that are "also real and concrete." Frankl calls these "tasks," which makes us think of the more mundane behaviors we must perform day in and day out, but he connects "tasks" to "destiny," a much larger and more immediately interesting concept. Furthermore, the set of tasks each person must perform according to their "responsibleness" is "unique for each individual." What this argues, then, is that we are linked together by our responsibleness, even though that to which we are responsible is unique and different for each person.

> Every situation is distinguished by its uniqueness, and there is always only one right answer to the problem posed by the situation at hand.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Continuing to fight against generalization, Frankl makes a general claim about how to respond to each unique situation: by finding the "one right answer" to the situation and acting accordingly. It remains unclear, though, what the right answer *is* to any particular situation, or how we would go about finding this right answer in general.

Frankl might say that we cannot fail to find this "right

answer" so long as we are committed to responsibleness; as long as we are striving toward that which gives us meaning, we cannot fail to find the correct response to each external stimulus. This is pretty iffy territory, and it may not soothe anxiety like other forms of therapy, but Frankl's claim is still indicative of his more interesting philosophical propositions.

> Life in a concentration camp tore open the human soul and exposed its depths. Is it surprising that within those depths we again found only human qualities which in their very nature were a mixture of good and evil?

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Frankl's view of human nature is never a rosy one—how could we expect it to be after his time in Auschwitz?—and so he sees the "very nature" of people as "a mixture of good and evil." Again, this represents a sort of tragic realism, a middle ground amidst a sea of traditions that suggest humans are either innately good or bad.

The concentration camp again serves Frankl because it allows him to see people at their most raw; when it "tore open" the people around him, he was able to see what was inside, figuratively speaking. Concentration camps tore open their bodies too, to be sure, but Frankl is interested in dissecting the soul. And being in Auschwitz allowed him to see both the innate good and the innate evil that lie at the core of what he calls the human soul.

> At that moment there was very little I knew of myself or of the world—I had but one sentence in mind—always the same: "I called to the Lord from my narrow prison and He answered me in the freedom of space."
> How long I knelt there and repeated this sentence memory can no longer recall. But I know that on that day, in that hour, my new life started. Step for step I progressed, until I again became a human being.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Channeling Dostoevsky, the famous Russian author who said he found god in his most desperate moments while being held in prison, Frankl creates a mantra in order to survive, in a high-religious or even scriptural tone. God opens up the freedom of spiritual space for Frankl, whose body has been forced into this "narrow prison."

Interestingly, this narrow prison is not Auschwitz but Frankl's post-liberation existence. Falling to his knees in the most traditional gesture of religious submission, Frankl realizes what he wants to be responsible for, the meaning of his life: helping other people out of the "narrow prison" of their existential vacuum by showing them how to find their own meaning.

> The crowning experience for all, for the homecoming man, is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear anymore—except his God.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

In this section of the book, Frankl addresses the ongoing difficulties of fellow concentration inmates who have been liberated and find themselves once again in the outside world. This return brought joys and disappointments, as Frankl explains, but no disappointment was as jarring as the realization that life outside the concentration camp could also bring suffering.

The unfounded belief that they had experienced all suffering, and so would no longer need to fear anything besides God himself, led the concentration camp survivors to deep despair when they realized that it was incorrect. However, as Frankl maintains, suffering can be just as meaningful as any other experience; and so the suffering inherent in human existence can be seen as an opportunity for discovery of what is meaningful to us.

Logotherapy: The Meaning of Life Quotes

❝ 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. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as his specific opportunity to implement it.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

As Frankl has explained in earlier quotations, his book is not about finding the "abstract meaning of life"— the general answer to that perennial question, "What is the meaning of life?" Instead, Frankl pushes us always toward our "specific vocation or mission in life," which consists of our "concrete assignments." It is never quite clear who assigns each of us with these tasks, but given Frankl's spiritual predilections the taskmaster is most likely God.

Because each person's task is unique, each life must also be unique and so cannot be repeated. This provides a basis for the tragic optimism central to Frankl's claim that we can justify all of the pain, guilt, and despair inherent in human existence if and only if we can find our unique meaning and chase it with everything we have.

❝ Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he should recognize that it is *he* who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by *answering for* his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Frankl posits meaning-finding in this passage as an active and a creative process, rather than a passive task. In this spiritual framework, life calls on each of us to recognize our meaning and all of its specific tasks. Idly asking of life "what's the point?" will leave us with little result; but, if we take on the responsibility of making our lives meaningful, we find ourselves closer to the realization of our own meaning.

This claim seems confusing in contrast to Frankl's assertion that all people have unique and specific meanings to discover in their lives, for if people are in charge of discovering their own specific meanings it seems more likely that they might make mistakes or end up duplicating someone else's specific tasks. Still, Frankl wants us to see meaning as a process rather than a simple fact we must accept. We must sustain a dialogue with our own lives, recognizing what they ask us and "responding by being responsible."

Logotherapy: The Essence of Existence Quotes

❝ The emphasis on responsibleness is reflected in the categorical imperative of logotherapy, which is: "Live as if you were living already for the second time and if you had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now!"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

The 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant used the term "categorical imperative" to refer to moral choices that the ethical person must make— a universal law of how to behave regardless of the situation.

Frankl seems to use this term to refer to the main thing that all adherents of *logotherapy* must do in order to lead meaningful lives: to live as if you have already lived and made mistakes once. It is our mortality that gives us both all of the pain, guilt, and despair that come with life and the chance to make it meaningful despite this traumatic triad. So, if we live as if we have already made mistakes once, we hope to learn from them while realizing we will probably be imperfect once again.

Logotherapy: The Meaning of Love Quotes

❝ Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Frankl maintains that love is the only force which allows us to transcend the three types of trauma central to human existence— pain, despair, and guilt. To see beyond the superficial aspect of another person's experience, into their "very essence" or "innermost core," we must love that person.

Lest we begin to believe that Frankl's insistence on finding our own meaning in life means we should ignore other people and selfishly work only toward our own fulfillment, this passage reminds us of the importance of seeing other people's "essential traits and features" and, even more importantly, the potential in them. This is both inherently important, according to Frankl, and vital to our own search for meaning.

Logotherapy: The Meaning of Suffering Quotes

❝ For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation—just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer—we are challenged to change ourselves.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

Frankl uses the term *noö-dynamics* to suggest that the healthy human soul must live in productive tension between past and present. The vast "human potential" his entire framework of *logotherapy* is built on lies in our ability to "transform a personal tragedy" (the past) into triumph (the present).

We cannot control our predicaments, at least most of the time, but we always have the unique potential to turn them into achievements. Frankl explains that unchangeable situations, like being an inmate in a concentration camp or getting "inoperable cancer," are the most powerful inspirations of meaningful change. But this is only true if we recognize the potential for the productive transformation of a suffering-ridden past into a meaningful present and future.

❝ It is one of the basic tenants of logotherapy that man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life. That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Here again Frankl opposes his framework of *logotherapy* to other dominant strains of philosophy (hedonism is all about gaining pleasure, for example) and therapy (in some traditions, about avoiding pain). Frankl rejects the pleasure principle— Freud's means of asserting that humans hurtle toward whatever is pleasurable and away from what is painful— and suggests that meaning is both more important and ultimately more enjoyable than either pleasure or pain.

Much of Frankl's book, understandably given its origin story, is about trying to see suffering as something besides needless pain. In this passage, Frankl says that people are willing to suffer as long as they know that suffering will bring them closer to whatever is meaningful to them. Again, we might be skeptical of the "greater-good" argument for human suffering, and it is further useful to wonder what constitutes each of these specific categories; what, for example, is suffering? What is pleasure, and what is pain? None of these things are exactly clear, and Frankl might say we ultimately have to decide for ourselves.

Logotherapy: Critique of Pan-Determinism Quotes

❝ Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibleness.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

Recognizing that people long deeply for freedom, even claiming to treasure freedom above all else, Frankl reminds us that freedom is not in itself a path to a meaningful existence. In order to make meaning out of our freedom, Frankl suggests, we must be responsible to the specific and unique tasks laid out for each of us.

This fits strangely with Frankl's earlier assertion that humans *do* have free will, and we might say that Frankl's conception of free will is a limited one. Though we are free to choose, we can only have a meaningful existence if we choose to do exactly what is *right* according to what life somehow sets out for us. Once again, *logotherapy* does more to inspire us to consider our own meaning than to tell us exactly what it might look like.

Logotherapy: Psychiatry Rehumanized Quotes

❝ Our generation is realistic, for we have come to know man as he really is. After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers at Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the *Shema Yisrael* on his lips.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

The tragic realism Frankl mentions throughout his book comes into clear view here: because members of Frankl's generation have experienced some of the most pointed suffering life can offer and gone on, upon their release from the camps, to realize that outside life brings still more suffering, they are uniquely poised to make claims about the most extreme aspects of the human soul.

This realistic view reveals that humans are both innately good and evil. The latter is expressed in their invention of the gas chambers of Auschwitz, the former in their refusal to bow down before those gas chambers and their insistence on praying even in their darkest moments. For Frankl, a view of humans as either good or bad is shallow and fails to pave the way for that most important aspect of our existence, responsibleness. Until we realize that the world is both good and bad and will not resolve toward one side or the other, and that we have a limited but vital role in influencing the universe, we fail to realize the meaning of our existences.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE TO THE 1992 EDITION

Frankl writes that he is often asked how he feels about the success of this book. He responds by saying that the book's success must reflect a widespread desire to find meaning in life.

Frankl uses the success of his book as evidence for his claim that modern man (or woman, but Frankl uses "man" to mean any person) is undergoing an existential crisis.

Frankl wrote the first section of *Man's Search for Meaning* in nine days, and intended for the book to be published anonymously. He says that he was not looking for fame—he simply wanted to demonstrate that life could be meaningful in even the most terrible situation possible. Frankl didn't intend for the book to be particularly successful, and he often tells his students that they should not strive for success. He writes, "success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue." In other words, one may *become* successful, but success is not a goal in and of itself.

Frankl says throughout his book that one finds meaning in life by finding meaning in specific situations rather than looking for it more generally. He does not recommend striving for success specifically, because success is something that will only truly happen by fulfilling one's meaning in life. By focusing on making meaning from his experience, Frankl ends up being successful.

Frankl also explains why he did not flee from Austria when he had the chance. After his papers went through, Frankl was deeply conflicted over whether his primary responsibility lay with his parents, who would almost certainly be taken to concentration camps, or with his work and promotion of the theories of logotherapy. If he left Austria, he would be able to write about logotherapy from abroad.

Frankl's conflict between promoting his work and remaining with his parents represents two methods for finding meaning in life: through work or through love. Logotherapy, Frankl's theory of psychotherapy, focuses on the existential search for meaning as a source of fulfillment or neurosis.

Frankl could not make up his mind until he happened upon a piece of stone in his parents' home. His father explained to him that the stone had once been part of a monument to the Ten Commandments, which the Nazis had destroyed. This fragment came from the commandment that says, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land." After learning this, Frankl decided to stay in Austria with his parents, giving up the chance to move to America.

Frankl's decision to stay with his parents is meaningful because he makes the decision out of love (and a sense of heritage). Frankl often relies on signs—this fragment of stone or a sudden vision of his wife's face—to help him make difficult decisions. These signs might not be objectively meaningful (i.e., omens sent by God or decreed by fate) but as long as they are meaningful to the person interpreting them, they are *meaningful.*

EXPERIENCES IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP

Frankl begins by telling the reader that his book is a compilation of his experiences and observations rather than an objective history. Instead of generally describing what happened at concentration camps, Frankl wants to tell the reader about the everyday problems he and his fellow prisoners faced while living within them. His ultimate goal is to explain how the prisoners' minds were affected by these experiences.

This book is a memoir in that it is based on Frankl's personal experiences. Frankl's goal in writing the book, however, is not just to tell the story of what happened to him. Instead, he forgoes a linear narrative to focus on presenting his experiences as evidence for his practice of logotherapy.

Further, instead of writing about heroes in the camps, Frankl focuses on the common prisoner, and on his enormous sacrifice and struggle. He notes that it is impossible for those who were not in the camps themselves to understand the relentless struggle he and his fellow prison mates undertook just to survive.

Frankl's primary interest is in the everyday suffering that everyone must face. Most of his readers will not be able to relate to the level of suffering he experienced, but he is also focused on explaining how normal people deal with pain.

Frankl uses a story about gas chambers to illustrate this struggle. Often, when camps announced lists of prisoners to be transported to other camps, the prisoners on the list ended up being taken to gas chambers instead. Camp rules required that the number of prisoners listed equal the number of prisoners rounded up for "transport"—however, the guards did not care if the prisoners they collected were actually the prisoners whose names were listed. Frankl observed that in this situation, every prisoner fought to keep himself and his friends from being taken, even though everyone knew that for every person kept off the transport convoy, another human had to take his place.

Although this book is intended to help people who were not in concentration camps themselves, Frankl still provides an example of how different his experience was from that any average person might face in life. Within the horrifying world of the concentration camps, the inmates' morals adapted and changed. Their exposure to horrible situations and cruelty was incessant, and as a result, they often stopped caring about how their actions would affect others, and focused only on their own survival.

Frankl notes that generally, the prisoners able to survive were the ones who were willing to do anything, no matter how savage, to hold onto life. The cruelest prisoners were chosen to be Capos, or prisoners appointed to be guards. Brutality was so necessary in the camps that Frankl says everyone who survived a camp knows that "the best of us did not return."

Unlike the Capos, Frankl himself did not result to cruelty to survive, and he certainly does not advocate being cruel to others. Here he simply discourages a psychological leap that many readers might subconsciously make—thinking that those who survived the camps were somehow "better" or "deserved" life more than those who died.

Frankl then sets out two goals for his book: to explain to camp survivors what happened to them psychologically, and to explain to others the psychological difficulties of returning to life after surviving the camps. Frankl questions whether he achieved the detachment necessary to conduct accurate observations of camp prisoners while he was a prisoner himself, but tells the reader that in this situation, someone truly detached could never fully understand what was going on.

Frankl intends his book to be for everyone: those who shared his suffering and those who will never experience anything like it. He is aware that he may not be able to provide as objective an analysis as the standards of psychological research require, but he feels compelled to write his explanation nonetheless—and for the average reader, his lived experience makes his conclusions much more compelling.

Frankl continues by noting that while he originally intended to write his book anonymously, he realized that an anonymous book would seem cowardly, so he decided to publish the book under his name. He dislikes revealing intimate details of his life to the general public, but feels it is necessary for him to do so. Frankl clarifies that he only served as a true doctor at the camps for a few weeks. For most of his time there, he was a common prisoner and was made to lay railroad tracks and perform manual labor.

Frankl makes it clear to the reader that even though he is a doctor and author, he was treated as a commoner within the camps. As a result, he is able to better assess the common prisoner's state because he has experienced similar treatment himself.

According to Frankl, the prisoners who were ultimately liberated passed through three phases during their time in the camps: the arrival at camp, the absorption into camp routine, and the release from camp. The first of these phases is associated with shock.

The first section of Frankl's book is more like a memoir than a text on psychology, but he gives the section a psychological underpinning by defining the mental stages through which inmates passed.

Frankl gives a personal example of the shock that he felt by telling the reader about his own arrival at the concentration camp. He and fifteen hundred other people rode for many days in extremely cramped train cars. When they neared a sign for Auschwitz, they panicked, because the camp was already known for torture and executions. But the next day, having noticed that the prisoners welcoming them seemed to be in good shape and healthy, the new arrivals all felt a sense of relief.

Frankl and his fellow prisoners were in such shock over what was happening to them that they were unable to process the reality of it. They deluded themselves into believing that perhaps Auschwitz would not be as bad as it was rumored to be. The average person knows that horrifying things happen in the world all the time, but we never think anything that bad will happen to us.

Frankl attributes this relief to a phenomenon known as "delusion of reprieve." A man sentenced to die, for example, becomes convinced that he might be set free just before his execution. Unfortunately for the newly arrived prisoners, their welcoming squad turned out to be a carefully selected group who were in much better health than the common prisoner. But as they were stripped of their clothing and belongings, Frankl and his travel mates remained convinced that their situation was not doomed.

Even in the face of much evidence to the contrary, the prisoners continued to believe that they would be spared from the horrors awaiting them. Frankl defines these feelings as a distinct psychological phase of the inmates' experience. At this point, they still are hopeful about the future, and essentially in denial. The reality of their situation is too much to process all at once.

Each of the new prisoners was made to pass in front of a guard who sorted the prisoner to the right or the left. At the time, they did not know what was going on, but they would later learn that everyone sent to the left—about 95% of them—were immediately executed in a crematorium. The SS guards tricked these prisoners by giving them each a bar of soap, walking them to a building labeled "bath," and then gassing them to death.

Unlike most other books written by concentration camp survivors, Man's Search for Meaning *does not provide much detail about some of the most horrific aspects of camp life. Instead, Frankl almost skims over them, and then goes into depth exploring how the inmates* responded *to these situations.*

Those sent to the right, including Frankl, then had their possessions looted or destroyed by the guards. Frankl tried to save his scientific **manuscript** that he was carrying with him, but was forced to surrender it. This proved to be a psychological turning point in his life.

At this point Frankl did not know how important his lost manuscript would be to his mental state in the camp. He is ultimately able to find meaning in his life by trying to live long enough to rewrite his manuscript.

After giving up their belongings, the prisoners were then shaved from head to toe. Frankl notes that at this point, all they owned was their own "naked existence." And yet, he and the other prisoners tried to make light of the situation, and Frankl found himself to be incredibly curious about what awaited him. This curiosity characterized the prisoners' first few days in camp. They were constantly curious about what would happen if they went without sleep or stood for hours in the cold, and constantly surprised that they were able to do so many things they once believed to be impossible. Frankl writes that there is much truth in Dostoyevsky's definition of a human as a being able to grow accustomed to anything.

The attitudes and behaviors of the inmates in their first few days is remarkably different from how they will behave and feel once they've become accustomed to camp life. The newly arrived prisoners were often astonished by their ability to withstand such conditions and punishments—in modern life we are almost never left alone with just our "naked existence," so we have few real tests of just what the human body can endure and still survive.

As the reality of their situation set in, Frankl and his prison mates all considered committing suicide, even if only for a short time. This was done by running into the electrical wire surrounding the camp, but Frankl promised himself that he would never commit such an act. He decided that since his chances of surviving were so low that there wasn't much point in killing himself. Frankl observes that the newly arrived prisoner is so shocked that he does not fear death.

As the prisoners begin to process their situation, they look for ways to escape from it. The decision to commit suicide would be a way of trying to take control over one's fate, even if in the most desperate way possible. Frankl considers this, but ultimately decides to try and find meaning and agency through surviving.

Later in life, Frankl's friends told him that they were shocked when he was able to smile on his first full day in camp. He tells the reader that his smile was due to a visit from an old friend, and now fellow camper. This friend gave Frankl and his prison mates important advice about how to keep from being sent to the crematorium: always shave and never walk with a limp. Essentially, he told them to avoid looking like a "Moslem"—someone who is sick and can no longer do manual labor. If they maintained their appearance, they wouldn't be gassed. The friend then joked to the other inmates that Frankl was the only one with anything to worry about—a joke that made Frankl smile.

Frankl could have despaired because he was weaker than the other prisoners, but instead, he decides to make light of the situation. Even this early in his time in the camps, Frankl is practicing logotherapeutic techniques that help him stay alive. Here, Frankl chooses to react to a situation in a positive way.

Frankl says that psychologists consider an unusual reaction to be normal in an unusual situation. As a result, while the concentration camp prisoner's state of mind was far from normal in the context of everyday life, under the circumstances it *could* be considered normal, or even typical. After the initial shock of arriving at camp, prisoners passed into a new mental state of indifference and "emotional death."

Frankl moves from describing the first stage of the prisoner's emotional development, shock and curiosity, to the second and most prolonged stage of apathy. Most of the book is dedicated to describing and explaining this stage, especially as it is so difficult to find meaning when one feels hopeless and apathetic.

Frankl notes that in addition to shock, the new prisoner also felt extreme grief over the loss of their family and freedom and horror at the cruelty of the camps. Initially, prisoners looked away when their fellow inmates were beaten, or recoiled when excrement was splashed in their faces. Prisoners in the second stage, however, no longer displayed any sort of emotional reaction to these events. Instead, they became completely numb to feeling "disgust, horror, and pity."

As the prisoners get used to their situation, the difference between right and wrong stops mattering to them. They feel that there is no point in trying to save themselves or anyone else from bad treatment, because being treated badly is inevitable. This essentially means giving up the idea of "freedom" (the freedom of how to react to any situation, no matter how horrible it is) and thus losing any real meaning for one's experiences.

Frankl himself became numb to the horrible situation around him. When he was working as a doctor for inmates with typhoid at the end of his time in the camps, he was completely unfazed by the dead bodies that surrounded him, and felt nothing even at the sound of a corpse's head bumping down the stairs as a "nurse" dragged it to another part of camp. The man had died only two hours before. Frankl says he only remembers the event because he was shocked at his own emotional detachment—not because of the actual horror of the situation.

Despite the fact that Frankl practiced his logotherapeutic techniques during his time in the camps, even he could not escape this numbness. He did not just study his fellow inmates for their psychological reactions to the camps—he also studied himself.

Frankl's prison mates grew to be so apathetic that they did not even react to the guards' frequent beatings. Frankl recalls that in his own experience, he was often hurt more by the injustice of the beatings than the physical pain they caused. While he did not react to many of the guard's blows and taunts, from time to time they treated him so inhumanely that he could not stop himself from reacting. For example, after a guard called him a "pig" and accused him of never having done work, Frankl could not resist telling him that he had spent most of his life as a doctor for impoverished patients. He was severely punished for this comment.

Later in the book, Frankl discusses at length the idea that humans can retain their dignity in any situation if they find a "will to meaning." Here, Frankl asserts his own will to meaning—helping others—in response to the guard's demeaning comment.

Frankl was lucky to be in the unit of a slightly less brutal Capo. The Capo liked Frankl because he gave him advice on his marriage problems, and in return, the Capo helped Frankl avoid doing some of the worst and hardest labor. The Capo also held Frankl a spot at the front of the line to walk to the worksite, which saved Frankl a great deal of pain. Since all of the prisoners suffered from edema (swelling in their tissues), walking was difficult, and inmates frequently fell down on the way to work. Those standing behind a fallen man would then need to run to catch up to the rest of the line once the man was back on his feet. Running was extremely painful, but in the front of the line, Frankl never had to do it. He credits this Capo with saving his life.

Frankl provides evidence for his idea, which he reveals later in the book, that good people and bad people exist everywhere. He writes that even some of the prison guards were good men. Frankl believes that no one's character is predetermined—instead, each of us has the opportunity to decide how we will behave in any given moment. Here, the Capo chooses to be kind to Frankl even though he is also one of Frankl's guards.

Frankl observes that to a certain degree, the prisoners needed to become apathetic to their situation, as this apathy helped them stay alive. But by pushing away all of their emotions, the prisoners also "regressed" to a more "primitive" state, in which they constantly dreamed of good food and warm baths. Frankl wonders if this dreaming was good for them, since every morning they would wake up and have to again face reality. Frankl once heard a fellow inmate having a terrible nightmare and went to wake him up. Just before he touched the man, however, he decided to let him sleep, because he was sure any nightmare was better than the reality in which they lived.

This incident speaks to the intensity of the inmates' suffering in the camps. In the normal world, nightmares are nightmares because they are worse than reality. But within the concentration camps, the prisoners' lives are so bad that their nightmares are preferable to their reality. Overcoming this suffering and finding meaning in it would have been enormously difficult, and the fact that Frankl was able to do so gives his ideas about psychology special weight.

While other inmates spoke frequently of the food they wished to eat, Frankl felt that detailed descriptions of delicious food were harmful to the prisoners' spirits. Everyone in the camps was extremely malnourished—they lived on nothing but a piece of bread, thin soup, and maybe a small bit of cheese or butter each day. It was easy to calculate how long a prisoner would survive by how much fat remained on their bones. Frankl argues that the prisoners wanted good food so badly not because they cared deeply about eating good food, but because the second they had food, they would be able to stop thinking about it and dreaming off it.

Once again, Frankl is more upset by the humiliation he feels in the concentration camps than the physical pain he experiences there. While Frankl is certainly hungry, he is even more frustrated by the fact that his mind is consumed by thoughts of food all day long. He is humiliated by how trivial and animalistic his life has become.

Frankl tells the reader that anyone who has not starved him- or herself cannot possibly understand the mental agony brought on by intense hunger. The prisoners spent much time debating whether it was best to eat their rations all at once and feel fine for a little while, or try to stretch them out for as long as possible but be hungry all day. The worst part of each day, Frankl says, was waking up and facing everything that lay ahead of them. He found that saving a small piece of bread from the night before to have in the morning brought him some comfort.

Frankl's experience in the camps is so different from his experience in the normal world that something as insignificant as a small piece of bread can provide relief from his terrible life. While Frankl writes much about the apathy of his fellow inmates, the fact that they bothered to debate when to eat their bread suggests that they had not entirely lost interest in living, and sought different ways to maintain hope.

Frankl notes that the intense hunger from which everyone suffered likely accounted for the lack of sexual urges among the men. In fact, the prisoners rarely even dreamed about sex or women. Because staying alive was so difficult, the prisoners were no longer able to appreciate anything that did not serve that purpose. For example, when Frankl was being transferred from Auschwitz to a camp affiliated with Dachau, the train passed the street on which he grew up. He begged the inmates standing near the window of his train car to let him look out as they passed, but they refused to help him.

Frankl observes that survival takes over the minds of the prisoners—so much so that they are unable to think of anything else. Indeed, just as the prisoners became apathetic to seeing evil and cruel things occur, they also became unwilling to do anything good or helpful for anyone else. In this example, the prisoners refuse Frankl a glimpse of his former home for no reason whatsoever other than that they don't feel like helping.

Frankl also notes that there was what he calls a "cultural hibernation" at camp. The only cultural topics that were discussed were religion and politics. While the political talk was mostly based on rumors, the religious beliefs of many of the prisoners were genuine and intense. People often prayed in the corners of cells and train carts.

The conditions in the camps were so terrible that they completely stripped the inmates of any possibility for engagement with man-made beauty. Those who were religious, however, often grew more so, perhaps in response to their suffering.

A typhoid outbreak struck the camp in the winter and spring of 1945, and many succumbed to delirium brought on by the disease. Frankl's close friend deliriously imagined that he was on the brink of death, and he badly wanted to pray, but he was so sick that he was unable to think of the words to do so. Frankl tried to keep his own mind busy and active by trying to rewrite his **manuscript** on scraps of paper.

Over and over again, Frankl's manuscript helped him find the will to live despite such suffering. In this instance, focusing on his manuscript helps him keep his mind sharp and distracts him from the horrible things happening around him.

The religious fervor of some prisoners was so intense that Frankl was once invited to attend a séance. During the séance, a man was given a pencil but agreed he would not use it to write anything. Nevertheless, he ended up writing "VAE V." Since this man did not know Latin and had never heard the phrase *vae victis*, or "woe to the vanquished," the attendees felt that a spirit must have moved him to write these letters, which they chose to interpret as a sign that the end of the war was near.

Frankl writes that many of the prisoners lost hope, but that does not mean that they never tried to find a reason to live. Here, a man subconsciously writes a message that suggests the end of the war is near. At this point, the people participating in the séance still have dreams for the future.

According to Frankl, those accustomed to a life of the mind before coming to camp fared poorly physically, as they were accustomed to reading and writing all day, but they often fared better spiritually and emotionally. Frankl suggests that prisoners who used to be professors or rabbis were better able to retreat into their own imaginary world, and thus were able to tolerate the camps more easily.

Although the prisoners needed to be strong enough to do physical labor and withstand the guards' beatings, Frankl says that those whose minds were engaged survived more easily than those who were physically strong. Frankl believes that having a will to meaning is far more important than being able to physically endure.

One day, while walking to a worksite, another inmate said to Frankl that he wished his wife could see him working so hard, and he hoped that she was doing better than he was. At that moment, Frankl was overcome by a vision of his own wife looking more beautiful than ever, and he writes that he realized then "that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire." He says that he finally understood the secret lesson of poetry and art: "*The salvation of man is through love and in love.*"

This vision is an important turning point during Frankl's time in the camps. According to logotherapy, love is one of the ways one can create meaning in one's life, and in this moment, Frankl finds meaning through his love for his wife. Tragically, Frankl's wife died in the camps while they were separated.

Frankl discovered that he could still experience bliss, even in the worst possible situation. While he did not even know if his wife was still alive, he felt he could converse with her, and he learned that "love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved." He loved his wife's inner spirit so much that it ultimately did not matter if she was still alive. He tells the reader that had he known she was dead, her image would have inspired him just as much, and he quotes a Bible verse that reads, "Set me as a seal upon thy heart… love is as strong as death."

Frankl's experience in this moment is evidence for his belief that the freedom to choose one's attitude can never be taken away from someone, no matter how horrible his or her situation may be. Frankl is so inspired by his love for his wife that he is able to feel real joy and happiness. His love for her gives him something for which to live.

Frankl writes that memories of the past offered a refuge for the prisoners, and they often escaped into their own minds and memories of their previous lives. He notes that the stronger the prisoner's "inner life" became, the more beautiful art and nature seemed. These men came to appreciate the beauty of the sunsets they saw on their deadly marches to work each morning. For Frankl, this beauty was evidence that life has "an ultimate purpose."

Frankl and many of his inmates retreated to a world inside their minds when their physical reality became too much to bear. By remembering the past, the prisoners relearned how to appreciate beautiful things and experiences. Frankl believes that the existence of beauty in such a bleak setting is proof of the "super-meaning" of life.

While there was little art in the camps, there was an occasional performance. Many prisoners attended these shows with the hope of laughing a little, despite the fact that they had to miss their meal to do so. Frankl says that these performances only came close to being true art in the contrast they provided to the inmates' terrible realities. Once, when Frankl heard a beautiful piece of music, he wept not for the music's beauty, but for his wife, who turned twenty-four that day.

Frankl seems to define art as a beautiful, man-made creation that provokes emotion in those who regard it. While the cabaret is only beautiful in comparison to the horribleness of the inmates' lives, the classical music he hears is so inspiring and emotion-provoking that he cries not just over the music, but also for everything beautiful and good that it reminds him of, like his wife.

Frankl imagines that the reader must be surprised to hear that there was any art at all in the concentration camps, but he assures the reader it was possible to find comedy as well. Frankl sees humor as a tool for self-preservation because it enables people to "rise above any situation." He and a surgeon friend filled their time by imagining what it would be like if the friend returned to his practice and brought some of the habits from camp with him.

Frankl also finds comfort in humor. He argues that humor helps man detach himself from a situation and gain perspective on it. By being able to laugh at what was happening to him, Frankl was able to give himself a few moments of reprieve from his horrific life.

Frankl says that trying to see the humor in things is a necessary part of "the art of living." He argues to the reader that it was possible to practice this art in a concentration camp, despite the suffering the practitioner was surrounded by. While most people will never experience pain like the prisoners in concentration camps did, Frankl believes that pain is like a gas. A gas will completely fill any room, no matter how big the room is, just as pain completely takes over a human, no matter how big or small his or her injury might be.

Here, Frankl begins to translate his experiences into ideas that are useful to the average reader. Although he repeatedly says that only people who experienced it themselves will be able to understand the horrors of the concentration camps, Frankl believes that everyone experiences pain and must suffer at some point in his or her life. The amount of pain one feels cannot be compared with the pain of anyone else—we can only account for our own experiences and feelings.

While a small amount of pain can consume a person, a trivial thing can also spark true joy in someone, even in a terrible situation. For example, when Frankl was taken from Auschwitz to the camp affiliated with Dauchau, he and his inmates became increasingly worried they were being taken to Mauthausen, a camp with a reputation for being particularly brutal. When the train passed Mauthausen, they danced with joy and were relieved to arrive at the Dauchau camp.

One thing Frankl learned in the camps is that very small things could provoke a disproportionate amount of happiness. His point with this anecdote is that humans are very adaptable, and experience a similar range of emotions no matter their situation. At this point in Frankl's life, being sent to a less deadly concentration camp was cause for celebration, whereas a few years earlier he would have been crushed by this news.

Frankl and the other inmates were further relieved—even elated—when they learned that this camp did not have a gas chamber, so Moslems were not taken straight there, and instead waited for a sick transport. Despite being made to stand outside, soaking wet and freezing, for the entire night, they were thrilled to be out of Auschwitz. The prisoners envied those assigned to good jobs—jobs that were still so horrible, they never would have dreamed of doing them before coming to a camp—and considered themselves lucky that they were not in a worse camp.

Within the camps, the prisoners' priorities shift dramatically. Jobs that they once would never have deigned to do now seem enormously appealing. The concentration camps fundamentally changed the inmates' outlook on life. Even though they became immune to watching cruelty, they also learned to find happiness in even the smallest relief or comfort.

Frankl describes the relief that even the most trivial things brought as "negative happiness." While the prisoners were not truly happy, they were happy that something worse was not happening. Frankl once made a list of the truly happy moments he experienced at camp and discovered there had only been two. One such moment was when he received soup from a prisoner-cook who distributed the potatoes and peas in the soup fairly among the prisoners instead of saving it for his friends. Frankl writes that he did not judge the other cooks who were not impartial, because he might have done the same thing in their position.

Still, there were relatively few times when Frankl experienced true joy at camp. Much of his happiness was actually relief that something worse wasn't happening. But seeing a cook distribute soup evenly instead of saving the best scoops for his friends made Frankl truly happy. Perhaps Frankl felt this way because the act suggested that the man was not regressing and was still able to see his fellow inmates as human beings who deserved to be treated fairly—there was a moment of shared humanity and meaning between the cook and the other inmates.

Frankl recalls seeing a photograph many years later of concentration camp prisoners staring up at the photographer from their bunks. The person who showed the picture to him was horrified by it, but Frankl could not understand her reaction. Instead of provoking horror, the picture made him think of one of the better times in camp during which he was sick and thus was relieved from a few days of work in the cold. He explained his reaction to the person with the picture, who then understood that the people in the photo might not have been nearly as unhappy as she believed them to be.

This incident is a testament to how difficult it is for the reader of this book to truly understand Frankl's experiences in camp. Indeed, even though Frankl says the reader cannot imagine the horrors of the camp, we are also unable to imagine the small joys the prisoners felt there. This woman believes that the people in the picture must have been deeply unhappy, while Frankl thinks the picture captures a moment of relative peace.

Frankl says that when he was asked to volunteer as a doctor in the sick unit, his friends strongly warned him against doing so because the position would increase his exposure to disease. But Frankl was certain he would die if he continued to do hard labor in the cold, so he decided he would rather in the sick tent where he could do meaningful work.

Although Frankl was not a doctor for most of his time in the camps, the time he did spend as a doctor helped him retain his will to meaning. He knew his chances of survival were slim no matter what, and he didn't want to die a meaningless death, so he took a riskier job in order to live meaningfully.

Frankl writes that it was easy for the prisoners to lose their sense of self and value as an individual while in the camp. They were often herded around like sheep and made to feel as inhuman and insignificant as possible. Frankl observes that prisoners desperately wanted a moment of solitude or privacy, which Frankl was able to find only once he was taken to a "rest camp." Every so often, he was able to duck into a small tent for a few moments and be alone with his thoughts. This was a peaceful moment for Frankl, despite the fact that the tent in which he was "alone" was filled with insect-ridden corpses.

Part of the suffering Frankl and his fellow prison mates endured was the utter lack of privacy in the camps—this wasn't just something uncomfortable, but it also had a dehumanizing effect, as people felt themselves no different from all the other prisoners they were always surrounded by. This moment also shows how much the camp changed Frankl, and how necessary a certain degree of numbness was to being able to survive.

Frankl explains that those who did not experience the camps cannot understand how little human life was valued there. Sick people were literally thrown onto carts and dragged through snowstorms to new camps, and all of the inmates were treated as nothing more than numbers. The prisoners felt as though they had no control over their lives and were nothing more than "the playthings of fate."

The prisoners did not care about what happened to the people around them because they felt that caring was meaningless. They lost any sense of control over their lives and no longer felt like individuals with a purpose. In logotherapeutic terms, they lost their "will to meaning."

Frankl tells the reader about his nerve-racking transport to the rest camp, where he was sent to attend to the sick. Many in the camp thought that the convoy was actually going to take the sick patients straight to a gas chamber, or to a new worksite to get a few more day's labor out of them. A guard offered to have Frankl's name removed from the list, but Frankl insisted on following fate's course. Before leaving, he made his friend Otto memorize his will: first, to tell his wife he talked about her everyday; second, to tell her that he loved her; and third, to tell her that even though their marriage was short, it was far more significant for him than the time he spent in camps.

Frankl's decision to go with the convoy should not be interpreted as sign of apathy. While others may have apathetically boarded the convoy, Frankl does so because he has decided that he can make his suffering meaningful by accepting and embracing it. He refuses to let his pain terrify him. Further, this is not an example of Frankl seeking suffering or failing to avoid it. Instead, he knows he will suffer no matter where he is, so he decides not to fight fate's path.

Frankl and the patients were taken to a true rest camp, and a few months later, they learned that their previous camp had suffered a famine and that some prisoners had turned to cannibalism. Frankl compares this situation with the story of "Death in Tehran," in which a servant tells his wealthy Persian master that he has just run into Death. The master gives the servant a horse so that he can flee from Death and ride to Tehran. The master himself then meets Death and asks him why he scared his servant. Death replies, "I did not threaten him; I only showed surprise in still finding him here when I planned to meet him tonight in Tehran."

The parable of Death in Tehran demonstrates the necessity of accepting one's suffering. Logotherapists teach their patients to embrace their struggles instead of fighting against them or denying them. Once a patient has accepted the reality of his or her situation, he or she can start finding meaning in it. For Frankl, finding meaning in suffering is the only path out of suffering.

While Frankl often let fate guide his actions, he also considered taking control of his situation and trying to escape from camp. Often, the opportunity for escape presented itself for only a few moments, so Frankl and his fellow inmates had to make this important decision very quickly. When Frankl's opportunity appeared, he hurried to collect some provisions and gather his **manuscript** scraps before fleeing. He made the rounds with his patients for a final time, but in doing so, he encountered a fellow Austrian who had lost all hope. Frankl was then overcome with unhappiness, and Frankl told his friend with whom he was planning to flee that he needed to stay in the camp. This decision brought Frankl more peace than he had ever experienced before.

Frankl doesn't explain exactly why he decided to remain in camp, but perhaps it was to help this friend who had lost his hope for the future. Once again, however, Frankl chooses to embrace the pain fate has doled out for him instead of turning away from it. By being willing to suffer, Frankl is able to help his fellow inmates, and consequently, he can find meaning in his pain.

On what would turn out to be Frankl's last night in camp, he again had the opportunity to escape. The moment he was getting ready to leave, however, a Red Cross truck broke through the camp gates. Frankl felt safe, so he remained in camp, but later that night, an SS guard brought an order to take some inmates to Switzerland to be exchanged for prisoners of war. The guards were friendly, and Frankl and his friend were annoyed to be left out of the trip. The next morning, a white flag was hung over the camp. Frankl learned later that everyone who went with the friendly SS guards was taken to a new camp and burned to death. Once again, Frankl remembered Death in Tehran.

Once again, Frankl is saved by his decision not to interfere with "fate," and this decision is also perhaps derived in his belief in a "super-meaning" of life. While Frankl does not discuss his religious beliefs in this book, he does believe that there is some sort of higher power who has knowledge of the ultimate meaning of suffering. Frankl firmly believes that his experiences have a purpose, and as a result, he trusts the path fate (or God) lays out for him.

Frankl writes that while apathy amongst the prisoners was a defense mechanism, it had other causes as well. A lack of sleep and food contributed to this apathy, as did an "inferiority complex" from which most of the prisoners suffered. While the prisoners had felt important in their previous lives, they were now nothing more than a number. Frankl notes, however, that prisoners who were promoted to being cooks or Capos did not feel degraded—instead, they felt fortunate and important. There was a great deal of tension between these two groups.

Frankl's description reveals that many of the prisoners became apathetic precisely because they lost their will to meaning. They once found meaning through work, and without that purpose, they did not know what to live for. The loss of the will to meaning can be very dangerous, and even deadly, especially in such harsh survival conditions.

While serving as a doctor, Frankl was in charge of making sure that the sick hut passed an inspection for cleanliness. The cleanliness required, however, was not so much the type of cleanliness that would have actually benefitted the patients, but the type that required endless amounts of straightening and rearranging to make everything look tidy. Frankl felt that this inspection was a form of torture, as it certainly was not designed to improve the patients' wellbeing. Often, patients in the hut were so apathetic about their life and surroundings that Frankl had to scream at them to keep their areas neat.

Frankl hated inspections because they were designed to seem as if they were for the benefit of the prisoners, when in reality, they were just a meaningless exercise in appearances and order. All of the effort he put into tidying the medical hut did not have a purpose or "meaning," and thus it became very frustrating for Frankl.

Frankl tells the reader that his description of the mental state of concentration camp inmates may have led the reader to believe that that human beings are completely determined by their surroundings. He asks a number of rhetorical questions about whether humans have free will, and then tells the reader that man *does* have control over his own life. Even in the most horrible circumstances possible, man can exercise a small amount of freedom. The one thing that cannot be taken away from a man is his ability to choose how he reacts to any given situation.

One of Frankl's fundamental beliefs is that man, in every situation, maintains some level of freedom. And while Frankl allows fate to determine his path in the concentration camps, he is actively choosing *to follow fate rather than passively and apathetically going along with it. He always has the freedom to choose how he responds to any given event, no matter how terrible that event may be.*

Frankl writes that in the camps, every moment offered the chance to choose whether or not one would follow the path of the normal inmate and become apathetic. Frankl argues that while the prisoner's circumstances certainly affected his character, who he was and how he behaved was ultimately the product of "an inner decision." Frankl says than in every possible situation, man has the power to control his mental and spiritual fate.

While Frankl's surroundings certainly affected his mental state, he did not allow them to change his character. Instead (he claims), his character was determined by his own decisions. Here, Frankl argues against the belief (a common one in modern philosophy) that man cannot determine his own destiny.

While in the camps, Frankl thought frequently of a Dostoyevsky quote that reads, "There is only one thing I dread: not to be worthy of my suffering." Frankl became determined to make his suffering worthwhile by seeing it as an opportunity to exercise his last remaining freedom. When viewed this way, suffering became an "achievement" instead of something forced upon him. Frankl writes that it is this freedom that makes our lives valuable and meaningful.

Frankl found a will to meaning by deciding to embrace the opportunity with which his immense suffering provided him. He saw this as an opportunity to challenge himself, as well as to enact his logotherapeutic ideas. When reframed as a challenge rather than a burden, suffering becomes much more bearable.

According to Frankl, there is meaning in creating and appreciating the creations of others, but meaning can also exist in a place devoid of beautiful creations. He writes, "If there is meaning in life, there must be meaning in suffering." To Frankl, suffering is an important—even fundamental—part of the human experience. Each time man chooses how to bear his suffering, he makes his life more meaningful. A man's reaction to suffering determines whether he is worthy of his suffering or not.

Frankl believes there is value in situations that otherwise might appear to be valueless, because he sees each situation as an opportunity to exercise his freedom and make his life more meaningful. The decision man makes determines whether he is worthy of the opportunities with which life has presented him.

Frankl tells the reader that because everyone suffers, everyone has the opportunity to make a meaningful life. His philosophy applies to people in everyday situations as much as it does to prisoners in concentration camps. He says, for example, that those with terminal illnesses have a similar opportunity to choose how they will respond to their own death.

As Frankl has said many times before, this book applies to everyone because suffering is universal. It is a condition of life and our ability to choose our response to it makes us human.

When Frankl was still in a concentration camp, he encountered a woman who knew she was going to die in a matter of days. She told Frankl she was grateful for what had happened to her because in her life before the camp, she did not value spiritual growth. The woman pointed to the tree outside her window and told Frankl that this was her only friend in the world. She spoke to it often, and the tree responded to her, "I am here—I am here—I am here—I am life, eternal life."

Frankl provides an example of a woman who used her suffering to make her life better and more meaningful. Her experiences in the camp helped her find religion, and even when she was on her deathbed, she felt that she was not alone. By making the best of her situation and learning from it, the woman found peace.

Frankl explains that in psychological terms, life in the camps could be referred to as a "provisional existence of unknown limit." This meant that the prisoners had no idea how long they needed to survive or when the war would be over, and thus it was difficult for them to hold on to hope. Further, because there was no end in sight, it was extremely difficult for the inmates to set goals for themselves.

At this point in the book, Frankl is still describing the second mental stage of a prisoner's experience. Because the prisoners had no idea if and when their suffering would end, they struggled to have hope for the future, and consequently became apathetic.

Those who were not able to hold on to a dream for the future often occupied their time with nostalgic thoughts of the past. In some cases, as discussed previously, thinking about the past helped the inmates escape from their horrible present lives. Frankl argues, however, that those who spent too much time dwelling in the past lost sight of the present, and thus missed opportunities to exercise their freedom to choose a meaningful life. In believing that the best things in life were behind them, these men missed the chance to better their mental and spiritual selves.

While thinking about the past helped the inmates see beauty in their present, the prisoners who spent too much time living in the past lost the ability to experience reality in a meaningful way. They stopped exercising their fundamental freedoms because they lost hope. Everything became an attempt to escape reality, rather than find meaning in reality.

Frankl tells the reader that any attempt to counteract the effects of the camps had to revolve around giving the inmates a sense of the future. He remembers being at camp and feeling fed up with thinking about things as trivial as how he was going to tie his shoes, when suddenly he felt as if here transported into a lecture room with a large audience. Frankl then realized that all of his experiences could benefit science, and that he wanted to deliver lectures on psychology within concentration camps. Once he had this goal, he could more easily cope with his situation.

Frankl, too, experienced times in which he was not hopeful, but in those moments, he turned his thoughts toward potential responsibilities he might fulfill and meanings he might be able to find in the future. Frankl decided to use his time in the camps as an opportunity for research, and this decision made his situation much more bearable.

Frankl tells the story of a fellow inmate who dreamed that he was granted one wish, and he wished to know when he would be free. The voice in his dream told him that his suffering would end on March 30, 1945. When the camp did not seem like it was going to be liberated on March 29, the man fell ill, and then died the next day. While death ultimately fulfilled his dream and brought his suffering to an end, Frankl suspects that his crushed hopes brought about his death. The man no longer felt he could hope for the future. Frankl notes that the death rates in the camps between Christmas and New Years were higher than at any other time of year, likely because people hoped to be home for the holidays and gave up when they realized they would not be.

This example demonstrates how dangerous it could be to lose hope within a concentration camp. In this situation, hope does not just make people happier—it is powerful enough to keep them alive.

Frankl quotes Nietzsche to the reader to explain the prisoners' situation: "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*." Frankl came to understand that he needed to stop expecting something better from life, and instead ask himself "*what life expected from us*." In other words, he believed that he owed it to life—to the fact that he had born and was still on the Earth—to make himself the best person possible. He writes that the ultimate meaning of life can be found by taking responsibility for one's actions and making use of opportunities to better oneself.

Frankl believes that life presents us with a series of possibilities and that we must spend our lives trying to live up to the opportunities life gives us. Fulfilling one's responsibilities is an essential element to living well. As Nietzsche says, when we don't feel responsible for anything or anyone, it becomes very difficult to endure suffering.

According to Frankl, every person has a unique destiny, and it is impossible to compare one person's destiny with another's. Further, each situation in which an individual finds himself is unique and calls for a new and different response. In some cases, man must act, while in others, he must contemplate his life or accept his fate and suffering. Frankl is certain that in every situation, there is "only one right answer" to any given problem.

While many of the prisoners in the concentration camps ceased to feel like individuals, Frankl says that maintaining one's individuality is extremely important. Each person has a responsibility which only he or she can meet. This means that part of finding "meaning" (for Frankl) involves placing oneself as the "protagonist" in the story of life.

The unique task of the prisoners was to accept their suffering. Those who were able to see that their task was to suffer could then embrace this task—instead of distracting themselves from their suffering, they turned to face it bravely. Twice, Frankl was able to talk men out of committing suicide by helping them find something external for which to suffer. In one case, this external reason was the man's daughter, while in the other, it was his unfinished series of scientific publications. Both men felt important and valuable when they realized that only they could accomplish these tasks. Frankl writes that love can help one bear suffering because when one is in love, one is responsible to someone other than oneself.

Finding one's responsibility can help one find a will to meaning. It is vital for each person to feel like he has a specific and unique purpose, as without that, he will fall into despair. In this example, one man felt a responsibility to his work, while another felt responsible to his daughter whom he loved.

At one point, the senior warden, a promoted prisoner, asked Frankl to give his fellow inmates some therapy and advice. He told the prisoners that theirs was not the worst possible situation, and that most of them had not suffered too many truly irreplaceable losses. He said that since everyone there had survived so much, they absolutely had reason to hope for the future. Frankl's fortune changed so many times in camp that he told them they could not predict what might lay just an hour or day ahead of them. Thus, they needed to maintain hope and live for that moment.

Frankl uses logotherapeutic techniques to help his fellow inmates reorient themselves toward their future. Instead of seeing fate as the reason they are suffering, he encourages them to view fate as a reason to hope they might escape. Indeed, since they survived this long, there was good reason to believe that they might continue surviving.

Finally, he told the prisoners that "the hopelessness of our struggle did not detract from its dignity and meaning." Frankl knew many of them would die before they were liberated, but he also believed that those deaths would be meaningful. He told the prisoners that someone in the world, whether it be God or their wife or children, hoped that they were "suffering proudly" instead of giving in to apathy. He encouraged them to see their deaths as sacrifices in which they could find value.

Frankl encourages the prisoners to believe their lives have meaning by reframing their suffering as sacrifice. He tells them that someone one day will be proud of the way they embraced their suffering, and because of that, they should suffer bravely. Even if we cannot know that there is a "super-meaning" to one's suffering, that doesn't make one's personal choice of meaning any less valuable.

Frankl writes that before analyzing the third and final stage through which the liberated prisoner must pass, he wants to talk briefly about the psychology of the guards and how they were able to be so cruel. He says that some guards were true sadists, and he does not try to explain their behavior. But for many of the guards, their sensitivity to cruelty had been dulled by being exposed to it for such a long time. These men did not participate in sadistic acts themselves, like refusing an inmate the right to warm his hands just to see his disappointment, but they also did not do anything to stop these acts from happening.

Despite everything that he lived through, Frankl does not believe that all of his guards were truly bad people. Instead, he believes that they simply became accustomed to the way things were. Even though most guards watched evil things occur and did nothing to stop them, they did not torment the prisoners simply for their own pleasure. It is a testament to Frankl's strength of character and objective perspective that he can still see the good in his captors.

Frankl also notes that some guards showed some sympathy for the prisoners. For example, after being liberated, Frankl learned that the commander of his camp had spent a great deal of his own money on getting medicine for his inmates. Frankl writes that there are "two races of men in this world, but only two—the 'race' of the decent man and the 'race' of the indecent man." There is no "pure" group, and decent and indecent men could be found among the guards and among the prisoners.

Frankl's use of the word "race" here is particularly important because Hitler's goal was to "purify" the world into an Aryan "master race." Frankl criticizes this policy and argues that no group of people can be pure. Further, it is not always easy to tell who is decent and who is indecent—Frankl only learned of his commander's sacrifice after the war was over—and people can always be changing as well, based on their choices.

Frankl then turns to discussing the final stage of the inmates' mental development: life after the camps. He says that after hoping for freedom for such a long time, the word had lost its meaning for all of them, and they could not comprehend what was happening when they were being liberated. The prisoners passed a beautiful field on the way out of camp, but none felt anything. They had "literally lost the ability to feel pleased and had to relearn it slowly."

The final stage of the prisoner's experience is marked by confusion and disbelief upon being freed. Just as they were unable to process the reality of their situation when they first arrived at the camps, now the inmates are unable to process what it means to be free. They needed to rid themselves of their numbness and relearn how to feel normally.

The psychological term for what was happening to them is "depersonalization," in which everything seems dreamlike and unreal. The prisoners had confused their dreams with reality so often in the camps that they now could not differentiate the two. While their bodies trusted their new situation—they ate for days on end—their minds had trouble accepting that their new lives were real.

The prisoners had trained themselves to live in their dreams so much that when their dream came true, it still seemed dreamlike. Once again, their bodies proved to adapt much more quickly to their new situation than did their minds.

A few days after liberation, Frankl walked through a field and looked up at the sky. He fell to his knees and thought, "I called to the Lord from my narrow prison and He answered me in the freedom of space." This moment, Frankl says, marked the beginning of his slow journey towards becoming human again.

This is perhaps the most religious moment in Frankl's book. For the first time, Frankl not only has hope, but also has the opportunity to act on that hope. He is immensely grateful to God for freeing him from his prison and his suffering.

Frankl warns the reader not to think that once the prisoners accepted their new lives, they could smoothly transition back into them. Instead, he says that the newly liberated prisoner had the psychological equivalent of "the bends" (decompression sickness from coming up to the surface too quickly when diving). In other words, it could be dangerous to be relieved of so much emotional and physical pressure so quickly.

Although liberation seems like it would make the prisoners extremely happy, it did not. Instead, the prisoners had to relearn how to make sense of their lives outside of the camps. This was a slow and gradual process.

When some of the prisoners were freed, they used their horrible experiences as license to do anything they wanted, and they become oppressors themselves. For example, Frankl went on a walk with a friend who went out of his way to stomp on young crops simply because he could. Frankl asserts that "no one has the right to do wrong, not even if wrong has been done to them." He did his best to help these men understand that they needed to break out of the cycle of oppression.

Frankl provides an example of what happens when an individual feels free but not responsible to anything or anyone. While their responsibility is to break free from their past, all the men want to focus on is their new ability to do whatever they want. Without responsibility to guide them, they become destructive and even violent.

In addition to this violence, freed prisoners also typically felt bitterness and unhappiness with their new life. The bitterness came from the fact that when these men returned home, they often encountered people who felt that even though they had not been in concentrations camps, they had suffered a great deal during the war, too.

Frankl's belief that pain and suffering is relative and universal is very different from the ideas of the average prisoner. The inmate feels that what he has been through is exceptional and no one else's suffering can compare to his.

Frankl says that the liberated prisoners' disillusionment came from the fact that they felt they had suffered as much as humanly possible, only to be freed and discover that there are no limits to human suffering. Often, the people these men had been determined to live for while in camp were not alive to greet them when they were freed. While none of them expected to be happy after all that they had experienced, they certainly did not expect to be *un*happy after being freed. Frankl sees this disillusionment as a challenge that psychologists must help the former prisoners overcome.

The inmates struggled with their liberation because freedom did not meet their expectations. Even worse than suffering in the concentration camp was suffering after one had been freed from it. All of their dreams for the future were crushed when they discovered that they were still unhappy, and the inmates became deeply dissatisfied and frustrated with their lives.

The final transition out of the prisoner's mindset is the moment when a man thinks back to his time in the camps and cannot understand how he was able to withstand the experience. Just as freedom was nothing but a dream for the inmates, imprisonment eventually comes to seem dreamlike, too. The best part of being freed for any prisoner, Frankl writes, is "the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear anymore—except his God."

A prisoner's passage through Frankl's three stages ends when the prisoner has detached himself enough from the concentration camps that he can no longer make sense of his own experience. At this point, the man knows that he has nothing to fear because he has lived through the greatest suffering imaginable. Only then is the prisoner truly free.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: INTRODUCTION

Frankl tells the reader that the original version of this book did not include a discussion of logotherapy, but he has added one on because so many people have asked for it. His full explanation of logotherapy fills twenty volumes in German, so what he presents here is a much-condensed version of his ideas on therapy. He starts out by defining logotherapy in relation to psychoanalysis: it is "less retrospective and less introspective."

Now the "memoir" half of the book ends, and Frankl expands on the logotherapy itself. He first must define his form of psychology in relation to Freud's practice of psychoanalysis, as Freud's beliefs were hugely dominant at the time. According to Freud, people are controlled by their egos and sexual urges. Psychological issues can be solved by looking back into the patient's past and finding the origin of that problem.

Frankl named his practice logotherapy after the Greek word *logos*, which means "meaning." His form of therapy is oriented around helping patients find meaning in their future, in contrast to the psychoanalytic practice of solving a patient's problems by focusing on his or her past. In logotherapy, which is also called "The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy," the most important force in a man's life is his desire to find meaning. While Freud speaks of a "will to pleasure" and the psychologist Alfred Adler speaks of a "will to power," Frankl focuses on a "will to meaning."

Frankl's version of psychology is much more forward-looking than is Freud's, and it also gives the patient more agency. Instead of saying that humans are controlled by their desires for pleasure or power, Frankl says that man is willing to live only because life is meaningful. Since it is up to us to create that meaning, we have a great deal of control over the path we choose to follow.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE WILL TO MEANING

Frankl posits that the will to meaning, or the desire to find and create meaning in one's life, is the primary motivating force in a person's life because it is the one thing for which a person is willing to live and die. Frankl cites a number of surveys in which the vast majority of people said that finding their purpose was the most important thing they hoped to accomplish in life. Frankl concedes that some retrospective work may need to be done to get a patient to the point where the meanings in his life become clear, but once that point has been reached, a patient must be reoriented toward focusing on the future.

Here Frankl explains a belief to which the first half of his book testifies: that man must find a purpose for his life in order to survive. Earlier, Frankl framed this search for meaning in personal terms, and now he follows this explanation up in psychological terms. Frankl's argument is particularly convincing because he has witnessed what is necessary to survive in the most horrible situation imaginable.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: EXISTENTIAL FRUSTRATION

Frankl defines the term "existential" as referring to the state of existing as a human being, the value and purpose of existence, or the will to meaning. In other words, existential problems are those that involve the question of what it means to be a human and to be alive. Frankl says that a man's will to meaning can be hampered by "existential frustration," which can in turn cause "noögenic neuroses." Noögenic is a logotherapeutic term that comes from the Greek word *noös*, or "mind," and refers to anything connected to "the dimension of human existence."

Frankl applies terms to the phenomena he witnessed while living in concentration camps. A nöogenic neurosis might include the profound apathy the prisoners felt, because this apathy was brought about by existential frustration and a loss of the will to meaning.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: NOÖGENIC NEUROSES

Unlike the neuroses dealt with in psychoanalytical practice, noögenic neuroses come from existential issues and problems with the will to meaning. Frankl says that the only treatment for these issues is logotherapy, which deals with "the specifically human dimension."

Frankl believes that we are made human by our freedom to choose our response to any situation. He positions himself in contrast to Freud and asserts that only logotherapy deals with the fundamental problems of being human.

One of Frankl's patients was an American diplomat who had been receiving psychoanalytical therapy for the past five years. The man was unhappy with his job and disagreed with much of American foreign policy, and his psychotherapist told him that his frustration with following orders came from deeply-held frustrations with his father.

Because Freud's beliefs were so pervasive at the time of Frankl's writing, he needed to prove why logotherapy was worth paying attention to. Here, he gives an example of a problem that logotherapy can cure and psychoanalysis cannot.

Frankl realized that this man's will to meaning was existentially frustrated, and saw that what he needed to do was find a new job, rather than reconcile with his dad. The patient switched careers and continued to live happy and therapy-free for many years. Frankl writes that this man did not truly have a noögenic neuroses or need any therapy at all. He simply needed to be reoriented toward thinking about his future.

Just as Frankl made it clear that everyone can learn from his experiences in the concentration camp, he also demonstrates that everyone, even those without serious problems, can benefit from logotherapy.

According to Frankl, while existential frustration *can* bring about noögenic neuroses, or legitimate psychological problems that need to be addressed, this type of frustration does not inherently cause serious, long-term problems. In milder cases, frustration leads to "existential despair," or a deep concern over the meaning of one's life.

Frankl does not discount the experiences of those without truly pathological existential frustration. Anyone can use logotherapeutic techniques to reorient themselves and help them find meaning in their lives. "Despair" sounds like a more extreme problem than "neurosis," but Frankl uses the term to refer to a milder, more solvable problem.

Like psychoanalysis, logotherapy involves an analytical approach that seeks to help a patient figure out and orient towards his problems. It is unlike psychoanalysis, however, in that it holds that man's will to meaning is far more important than his will to pleasure. Logotherapy seeks to make the patient aware of his existential frustration and help him reconnect with his will to meaning.

Instead of searching for the origin of a patient's problem in his past, logotherapists look for problems in their patients' outlook on the present and future. They then help them understand why they are frustrated.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: NOÖ-DYNAMICS

Frankl writes that man's search for meaning may initially cause more problems than it solves. He claims, however, that tension caused by existential frustration is essential for good mental health. For example, when Frankl's will to meaning was frustrated in Auschwitz and he was not able to work on his **manuscript**, the tension that frustration caused kept him alive and in a much better state of mind than many of his fellow prisoners.

Although logotherapists help their patients become aware of their frustration, they do not necessarily seek to get rid of that frustration. Instead, they encourage patients to use that frustration as motivation to find meaning in their lives. Further, that frustration helps patients pay active attention to how they are choosing to live.


Frankl defines mental health as the tension between what one has accomplished and what one hopes to achieve. Thus logotherapists should not shy away from challenging their patients and helping them find this tension between their past and future. To be healthy, man must constantly be struggling and striving. Frankl calls this a state of "noö-dynamics." While everyone needs to be in a noö-dynamic frame of mind, it is particularly important for those with legitimate mental problems to find such a state.

Frankl believes that we must actively search for the meaning in our lives—it will not simply appear. Being in a state of nöo-dynamics helps us create meaning because it reminds us to look for opportunities to do so. We must constantly reconcile the things that we've done with the goals we hope to achieve in the future.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE EXISTENTIAL VACUUM

Frankl defines the existential vacuum as a twentieth-century phenomenon in which many people feel that life is meaningless. He says that once, man was able to over come great loss by relying on tradition, but in the twentieth century, these traditions are falling away. An existential vacuum manifests itself primarily through boredom, which then leads to distress. Frankl notes, for example, that many people become distressed on Sundays when they are not so busy and have time to contemplate the meaning of their lives. Those living in such a vacuum often try to fill this void with sex or money.

Frankl relates his philosophy to a twentieth-century phenomenon more broadly. After WWII many people came to believe that life was meaningless, because they could not reconcile a just or meaningful universe with the atrocities committed during the war. Having lived through these atrocities himself, however, Frankl remains certain that every life has purpose.


Frankl says that many patients have other types of neuroses that need to be addressed by more traditional psychoanalysis, but argues that the patient will never be successful if treated through psychoanalysis alone. Once the truly mentally ill patient has been cured of his other neuroses, his noögenic neuroses must then be addressed in order for him to remain cured.

Frankl doesn't think that psychoanalysis is useless, but he does believe that the practice leaves some problems untreated. He asserts that no one who is mentally ill can become healthy (and remain healthy) without using logotherapy.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE MEANING OF LIFE

The meaning of life is different for every individual, and thus no universal answer can be provided. Frankl believes that it is useless to look for a broad, general meaning of life—instead, people should focus on the meaning that can be found in each specific situation. Frankl argues that "every man has his own specific vocation" which cannot be fulfilled by anyone else. It is his responsibility to fill this unique role. This means, Frankl says, that instead of asking, "what is the meaning of life," man must recognize that life asks him what *his* meaning will be. Man is responsible to life to discover this meaning. In logotherapy, "responsibleness" is the "essence of human existence."

Here Frankl restates what he experienced in the camps. When Frankl realized that he was responsible to his manuscript and his wife, he felt like a human being and an individual again. These responsibilities were unique to him; no one else could write his book or love his wife. Frankl says that once a person becomes aware of his responsibilities, he can find meaning in his life. Man's greatest responsibility is to life itself, and he must strive to live up to the opportunities life presents him with.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE ESSENCE OF EXISTENCE

The "categorical imperative" of logotherapy—the fundamental action that it promotes—is to "live as if you were living already for the second time and if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now." In other words, logotherapists instruct their patients to live as if they have the chance to live their life over again with all of the knowledge they gained the first time around. The finiteness of life—the fact that it cannot go on forever and that one will not, in fact, have a chance to relive it—motivates people to be responsible.

By telling their patients to behave as if this is their second chance at life, logotherapists encourage them to pay attention to their responsibilities. We are only responsible to our future because the amount of time we have left is finite. If we never died, there would be no reason to be responsible, because there would be plenty of opportunities to do so later on.

Frankl compares a logotherapist's job to a painter and an eye doctor. A painter tries to explain his vision of the world, which the logotherapist does not try to do. On the other hand, the eye doctor helps people see the world as it is. This is what a logotherapist seeks to accomplish.

Logotherapists don't try to create explanations for a patient's problem like a psychotherapist might. Instead, logotherapists simply help their patients see their lives and futures more clearly.

Frankl argues that the true meaning in life can be found only through a responsibility to something or someone other than oneself. Frankl calls this phenomenon the "self-transcendence of human existence." By forgetting oneself and focusing on an encounter with something else, man finds more meaning in his life. Logotherapy states that meaning can be found in three ways: through purposeful work or creations, through love, and through suffering. He does not elaborate on the first path.

In the preface to his book, Frankl states that success should not be anyone's goal, but rather it should simply occur as a side effect of pursuing one's meaning. His beliefs on self-transcendence are similar. Man can only transcend himself by focusing on something outside of himself.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE MEANING OF LOVE

According to Frankl, "love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality." Essentially, it is impossible to fully understand and appreciate another person without loving him. Frankl says that when someone loves another person, he or she can see the potential of that person and the meaning the person ought to strive to find. By loving someone, one has the opportunity to help that person find his or her purpose in life.

Frankl believes that one can only fully understand people whom one loves because by loving a person, one is able to see that person's potential. One becomes responsible for helping that person find his or her vocation and meaning, and in doing this, one is able to find one's own meaning.

Frankl understands sex as an important expression of love and encourages sex to happen when, and only when, it is "a vehicle for love." He views the act as a way of finding an "ultimate togetherness."

While Freud writes extensively about sex, Frankl rarely mentions it. For him, sex is only worthwhile when it intensifies love.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

Through suffering, one has the opportunity to turn a terrible situation into a personal achievement. Frankl writes that when we cannot change what is happening to us, "we are challenged to change ourselves." For example, one of Frankl's patients' wives died two years previously, and he was still overcome with grief that he had to live without her. Frankl asked him what would have happened if *he* had died instead of his wife. When the man realized that if the situation were reversed, his wife would be suffering instead, he could understand his own pain as a *sacrifice* he made for his wife. Once he discovered the meaning of his suffering, he was able to bear his burden.

Frankl gives a more real-world example of how to overcome suffering to complement the descriptions of suffering he provides from his time in concentration camps. Once this man was able to frame his suffering as a sacrifice, he was able to withstand his grief. Frankl did not encourage the man to find a reason for his grief—instead, he just helped him see it in a new light.

Logotherapists believe that man's will to meaning is stronger than his desire for pleasure or need to avoid pain. It is for this reason that man is able to endure incredible pain when that pain is meaningful. Frankl says, however, that suffering should never be sought out on purpose. While those who are suffering should embrace their suffering as an opportunity to find meaning in their lives, those who are not suffering should explore their will to meaning through love or work.

Frankl is very clear that suffering is not the only path to finding meaning in one's life, and it should be avoided when possible. Suffering, however, is inevitable, so everyone must come to terms with it at some point in his or her life.

Frankl tells the reader about the most meaningful moment of his time in the camps. After giving up his clothing and **manuscript** upon his arrival to Auschwitz, he was given the clothes of a prisoner who had died. In a pocket, Frankl found a page from a Jewish prayer book containing the most important Hebrew prayer, *Shema Yisrael*. He interpreted this moment as a challenge to live out his logotherapeutic ideas instead of just writing about them. Frankl argues that if suffering does not have meaning, then there is no reason to live at all.

Frankl came to terms with his suffering by framing it as an opportunity to practice the teachings of his life work. Instead of suffering pointlessly, he understood that he could suffer for the benefit of science and humankind. Thus Frankl found meaning both through suffering and through work.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: A LOGODRAMA

Frankl tells the story of a woman who had two sons, one of whom was crippled. The healthy son died, and she could not bear her grief. When she tried to commit suicide along with her crippled son, the son stopped her plan because he did not want to die. Frankl asks why life was worth living for him, but not for her, even though both had suffered a major loss?

In this section of the book, Frankl gives examples of how logotherapy has helped people find meaning in their lives. In this situation, a boy who seems to be much worse off than his mother is actually happier and finds more meaning in life.

Frankl asked the woman to pretend that she was on her deathbed and had lots of money but not children. When she did this, she discovered that she would be sad without her children, and that they are her reason for living. She further realized that by taking care of her crippled son, she prevented him from having to live in an institution, and thus her struggle had made his life better and was worthwhile.

By following the logotherapeutic categorical imperative and imagining her life as if it were over, the mother discovers that she is happy she had children. She has made sacrifices to improve the life of her child, and those sacrifices have made her life worthwhile.

Frankl then asked the group in which he met this woman if they believed that a monkey would be able to understand his own suffering fully. The group decided that only humans are able to comprehend real pain. Frankl challenged this by saying that if the monkey could not access the human dimension of understanding suffering, then perhaps humans are unable to understand a further dimension of the meaning of life.

Frankl sets up an analogy in which he compares a monkey to a human and a human to something like God. A monkey, he claims, is not aware of that which he does not know, and neither is a human. Frankl then suggests that there is an even greater meaning to life that we cannot understand or access.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE SUPER-MEANING

Frankl writes that man cannot access the "super-meaning" of life, or the answer for why man must suffer. Man's job, Frankl says, is not to endure the void caused by a meaningless life, as some existentialist philosophers believed, but rather to understand that man *cannot* know the full meaning of life.

Part of living a meaningful life is accepting the fact that man cannot know the full meaning of his life. Instead, he must find as much meaning as he can in specific situations and have faith that a greater meaning exists (or doesn't).

Frankl encourages logotherapists not to give the super-meaning a more specific name like God, but if they have patients who are religious, they should use their faith as a way to help them accept the unknowability of the super-meaning of life. For example, Frankl once worked with a rabbi who felt that he would never see his children in heaven because his children had died innocent martyrs, and he would not be allowed into such a section of heaven. Frankl suggested that perhaps by enduring so much suffering and grief over the loss of his children, the rabbi was making himself worthy of their place in heaven.

Frankl does not believe that the idea of the super-meaning should be used to convince patients to become religious, but he says that patients who are already religious should be talked to about the super-meaning in religious terms. In the case of the rabbi who already believed in God and heaven, Frankl could use the man's beliefs about heaven to help him realize that there might be a greater meaning to his suffering of which he was unaware.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: LIFE'S TRANSITORINESS

Frankl argues that while some people say life is meaningless because it is transitory, the only transitory part of life is the potential that a person has not yet fulfilled. Once this potential is reached, it becomes a reality preserved in the past. Man's responsibility is to make transitory potentials into past realities.

Frankl is not concerned by the transitory nature of life like some other existentialists are. Instead, he thinks that the transitory nature of the future is important, because without it, we would not have potential to try to live up to.

Frankl sees logotherapy as an "activistic" rather than pessimistic field. Instead of thinking about the shrinking number of days a person has left in his life, logotherapists tell their patients to think of all of the wonderful things they have already accomplished. Elderly people have no reason to envy the young because elderly people have already actualized their potentialities—they've turned their goals into realities.

Frankl thinks of the past as the place in which achievements are stored. Those who are young have not yet stored away achievements, while those who are old have many of them. Once these achievements are converted from possibilities to past actions, they can never be taken away.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: LOGOTHERAPY AS A TECHNIQUE

Frankl explains that logotherapy is well-suited to treating "anticipatory anxiety," in which a person's fear of something makes that thing actually happen. For example, a man worried about performing well in bed is then unable to perform well in bed. Frankl also discusses "hyper-reflection," in which the patient is so attentive to an issue that his attention affects his life. For example, a woman who had been sexually abused had trouble enjoying sex with her partner because she was so worried about the toll this abuse might take on her sex life, not because of the actual abuse itself. She was too focused on her anxiety, and thus could not focus on the sexual act itself.

Here, Frankl discusses the more clinical aspects of logotherapy. He describes problems that are more applicable to the average reader's life than those Frankl himself experienced in the camps. His basic idea is that by fearing something and worrying about it so much, one actually brings about that which one fears. Even though Frankl doesn't seem to consider sexuality very important except as an aspect of love, many of his examples of psychological concepts revolve around sex.

Logotherapy uses "paradoxical intention" to counteract these two tendencies. By instructing patients to bring about that which they fear or that which hyper-reflection prohibits, logotherapists can help them overcome their neuroses. For example, Frankl worked with a patient who was so afraid of sweating profusely that he sweated all the time. When the patient tried his hardest to sweat, however, he found that he could not sweat at all. By reversing a patient's habits, paradoxical intention can help expose patients' anxieties and hyper-attentions and give them control over their lives.

This section provides specific instructions for how logotherapists can help their patients. It also explains a method that readers of the book can try themselves. This method is very similar to what is known as "exposure treatment," where one is exposed to the very thing one is afraid of. This method empowers patients and makes them feel as if they have control over their minds and destinies.

Frankl successfully treated many patients, including a bookkeeper afflicted with bad handwriting and a man with a horrible stutter, through paradoxical intention. Frankl says that this form of treatment is particularly helpful for those with obsessive-compulsive disorder. While paradoxical intention cannot fix everything, it is a useful therapeutic device in that it cuts through the cycle by which anxious behaviors are reinforced. The patient can only heal when he orients himself toward a unique goal and meaning.

The type of treatment described here is widely considered to be the most effective method for treating OCD, even today. Instead of fearing what they will do in the future, patients are taught to take control over their futures and possibilities. Once they find a will to meaning instead of being afraid of the future, they start to overcome their neuroses.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE COLLECTIVE NEUROSIS

Every era has its own collective neurosis, and Frankl says that the twentieth-century neurosis is nihilism, or the belief that life is meaningless. Nihilists often argue that man is simply the product of biological and social factors and his life is completely predetermined. Frankl contends, on the other hand, that while man's freedom is not absolute, in every possible situation, he maintains at least the freedom to choose his own attitude.

In addition to needing to compare his theories with psychoanalysis, Frankl must also explain his relationship with nihilism, a popular philosophy at the time (and a reaction to the atrocities of WWII). Frankl firmly disagrees with the nihilistic idea that life is without meaning, as well as the idea that our actions are completely determined by our environment and genes.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: CRITIQUE OF PAN-DETERMINISM

Frankl again asserts that man ultimately has control over his own destiny, and that "every human being has the freedom to change at any instant." As a result, the future of each human being cannot be known or predicted by biological or sociological factors. Instead, man has the ability to transcend these factors and become something of his own making.

Frankl believes in man's freedom to change at any moment because his philosophy is focused on man's possibilities. Further, his belief is backed up by his experiences in the camps, where he saw firsthand that man's actions were not entirely determined by his environment.

Frankl tells the reader about Dr. J, a mass murderer and a truly terrible person. Frankl once met a person who had been imprisoned with Dr. J, and who told him that Dr. J was his best friend in prison. Frankl sees this as proof that anyone, no matter how cruel, has the capacity to change.

Despite all of the pain and suffering Frankl experienced at the hands of others, he is certain that even the cruelest people can become good. He is willing to forgive, despite this man's horrible reputation and past actions.

Frankl disagrees with pan-determinism, or the idea that humans cannot control their destiny, because he believes that there are certain freedoms which can never be taken from a man. However, Frankl writes, "Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibleness." In other words, while man has the freedom to choose the meaning of his life, he is also responsible for choosing that meaning. The only freedom worth having, Frankl argues, is freedom that is coupled with responsibility.

Although man is fundamentally free, that freedom is meaningless without responsibility. Thus, in order to fully take control of one's life and find meaning in it, one must live in a state of tension between one's freedom and one's obligations (even if that obligation is only to life itself). Later in life, Frankl even went on to propose that America's Statue of Liberty should have a corresponding "Statue of Responsibility" on the nation's West Coast.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: THE PSYCHIATRIC CREDO

Frankl asserts that man is always free, and that his innermost self can never be taken away or damaged by an external actor—even by mental illness itself. In cases in which a patient is incurable, Frankl hopes to at least help them maintain their dignity and humanity.

Frankl believes that his theories apply to absolutely everyone, no matter how mentally ill that person might be. Even in the most severe cases, he believes that the patient can still retain his freedom to choose his path.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL: PSYCHIATRY REHUMANIZED

Frankl writes that many psychologists have understood the mind as a machine and thus have focused on techniques for fixing that machine. He feels that it is important to treat patients as more than machines—as humans. Who a man becomes is solely determined by the decisions that man makes. Frankl ends his book by saying that, "man is that being who invented the chambers of Auschwitz; however, man is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the *Shema Yisrael* on his lips."

Frankl's ideas are much more human-focused than are those of other philosophers and psychologists of his time. He sees the potential for both goodness and evil within man. Despite the horrors of WWII, Frankl urges the reader to not give in to the belief that man has no control over his life. Instead, we must constantly maintain hope in our ability to choose our own paths. This is the end of the original version of the book, where Frankl ties everything back to his horrifying yet powerful experiences in the death camps.

POSTSCRIPT 1984: THE CASE FOR TRAGIC OPTIMISM

Frankl defines tragic optimism as optimism in the face of "pain, guilt, and death," or "saying yes to life in spite of everything." This kind of optimist believes that man can make suffering meaningful, use guilt as motivation to improve oneself, and interpret the "transitoriness" of life as a reason to find responsibility and meaning.

In his postscript, Frankl explicitly states that his philosophy is an optimistic one. This type of optimism does not hold that everything will always turn out well. Instead, "tragic optimists" believe that life is worth living no matter what, and that one can find meaning even in suffering.

Optimism cannot be commanded because the counterparts to pain, guilt, and death—hope, faith, and love—cannot be commanded. Instead, optimism must appear naturally. And just as one cannot pursue optimism, one also should not pursue happiness because when one strives for happiness, one will not find it. Frankl says that this is similar to the hyper-intention that occurs in sexual neuroses. For example, when one focuses on finding pleasure during sex instead of giving it, that pleasure will not come. Frankl calls this "the pleasure principle."

One cannot decide *to become an optimist—like success, happiness, and self-transcendence, optimism must ensue as a result of finding the meaning in one's life. By pursuing these goals specifically, we often prevent ourselves from achieving them because we become overly focused on ourselves. Only when we stop trying to become successful or optimistic can we truly be successful or optimistic.*

When one finds meaning in one's life, one is naturally happy. However, when one has lost the will to meaning, one turns to pleasure to fill the void. In the concentration camps, it was clear that a prisoner had given up on life when he smoked the cigarette he had been carefully saving. Frankl suspects that the recent rise in drug usage is an indication that more and more people believe that life is meaningless and are turning to pleasure for fulfillment.

Frankl disagrees with Freud's idea that man is driven by his will to pleasure, but he does believe that man uses pleasure as a distraction from a frustrated will to meaning. Frankl attributes the drug problems that increased over the course of the twentieth century to man's desire for relief from his existential frustration.

Man can come to believe that life is meaningless through several different paths. Unemployment, in particular, makes man feel useless, which in turn makes him feel that there is nothing for which to live. Depression can trigger a similar feeling.

Frankl lays out two specific twentieth-century phenomena that contribute to existential frustration and despair. Man must feel useful in order to thrive.

According to Frankl, there is an over-arching meaning to each man's specific life, but that meaning only becomes clear after the man's death. Thus, it is not useful for man to concern himself with this meaning. The type of meaning in which Frankl is interested is the meaning that can be found on a day to day level.

Frankl argues that man must not spend his time trying to figure out the super-meaning of life, because doing so is pointless. We cannot understand that meaning (as a monkey cannot presumably understand the "meaning" we might find in our individual lives), so we must focus on only finding meanings that we can comprehend and apply to ourselves.

In addition to the paths to meaning set out in previous sections of the book, Frankl says that one can also study the biographies of those who have lead meaningful lives. Still, suffering is the most valuable path to meaning because man can change himself by choosing to rise above his situation. Indeed, many people who endure immense suffering say that they are grateful for that suffering because they learned a great deal by going through it.

While suffering should never be sought out, Frankl does believe that it is the most productive path to a meaningful life. While love and work can also make man's life meaningful, only suffering forces man to change himself and his attitude toward his situation.

Frankl says that the best case for tragic optimism can be made by "the defiant power of the human spirit." He cites as evidence a case in which a paralyzed man willed himself able to attend college and told Frankl that he actually considered his disability an asset because it helped him understand how to help others. Frankl says that if possible, we should do everything we can to avoid suffering. But in the case that we must suffer, we need to learn how to endure our suffering and make it meaningful.

Human beings' ability to persevere makes tragic optimism possible. Even in the face of terrible odds, it is possible to choose one's own path and carve out a meaningful life for oneself. A person with a strong will to meaning can withstand even terrible treatment and torture.

Frankl then shifts his focus away from optimism in the face of pain and toward optimism in the face of guilt. He refers to a theological concept, *mysterium iniquitatis*, which holds that a crime can never truly be explained because if it were, it would take away the criminal's guilt. Indeed, an explanation would mean that the person was driven to commit a crime by biological or social factors rather than his own free will. With the freedom to commit a crime comes the responsibility to feel guilt over it.

Frankl believes that guilt comes from the fact that we are responsible for our actions. For example, if we could fully explain why we committed a crime based on social and biological factors, we would not need to feel guilty—because it would not be our fault that we committed that crime. Guilt is indicative of the fact that man has the power to control his life, however limited that power may be.

While Frankl sees value in individual guilt, he believes that it is not just to hold one person responsible for the actions of a group or collective. When people asked him how he could continue to write books in German after all of his experiences, he replied that people did not stop using knives simply because murderers also used them.

Frankl again demonstrates a remarkable capacity for forgiveness. While he holds specific people responsible for the suffering he was made to endure, he certainly does not blame all Germans or likely even all Nazis for his experiences.

While life is meaningful because of the possibilities it holds in the future, people are valuable because of the things that they have accomplished in the past. By valuing youth and success, today's society emphasizes the wrong things. Instead, we should value the elderly because of the number of possibilities they have turned into realities. Frankl is very clear that a man's value should not be determined based on his present usefulness.

Frankl gets more vague and scattered with his arguments here, claiming that society is incorrect to value youth, because the young have yet to achieve their potential and convert their possibilities into past realities. Those who have more experience fulfilling their responsibilities, on the other hand, should be revered. Frankl seems to suggest that man's value is based on the sum of his purposes in life rather than his purpose at any given moment.

Frankl writes that, in contrast to Freud, he believes that each person should be considered as an individual with a unique responsibility to the world. Frankl is sure of this because his experience in concentration camps helped him understand that no man's path is predetermined, and anyone can change from good to bad, or vice versa, in only a moment.

Frankl values each person's individuality because he knows what it is like to live in an environment in which that individuality is stripped away. We must feel that we have a unique purpose in life and that we are responsible for accomplishing that goal.

Frankl challenges his readers to try to be good. This is extremely important because the world will become even worse if people do not strive to become better. He says, "So let us be alert—alert in a twofold sense: Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of. And since Hiroshima what know what is at stake."

Deciding how to live does not only affect the individual. Instead, each individual's actions combine to bring about events. The horrors of WWII (namely the genocide of the Holocaust and the dropping of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki) prove how necessary it is to choose to live a good and meaningful life.

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