

In Search of Meaning

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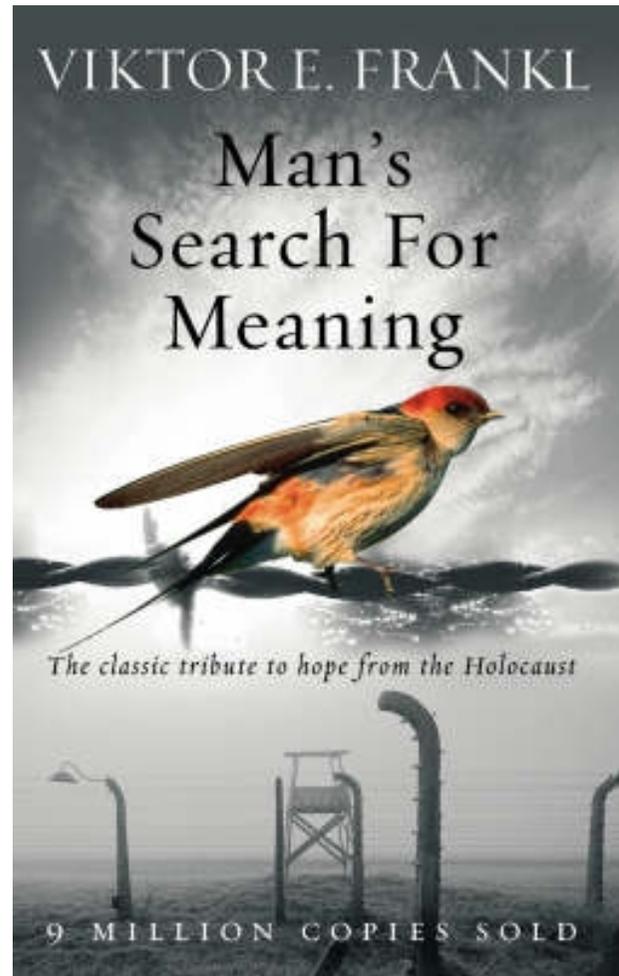
The Pathway Followed

- The **Search** for **Meaning** by 2 major thinkers from the last 2 centuries –
- **Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) &**
- **Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)**
- The **Search** for **Meaning** in **Scripture**
- Our **Search** for **Meaning**

Everything is Meaningless!

- *Study – pleasure – wisdom – work – fate – achievement – dreams – words – money – wealth – possessions – honour – laughter – righteousness – marriage – death – youth and vigour - **Everything is meaningless.***
- *A chasing after the wind - I come from dust, and to dust all return - who knows what is good for man in life, during the few and **meaningless** days he passes through like a shadow? - Enjoy...all the days of this **meaningless** life that God has given you under the sun - No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to **search** it out, man cannot discover its **meaning.***
(Ecclesiastes)

Man's Search for Meaning



Man's Search for Meaning

- Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe Erlebt das Konzentrationslager. – **Viktor Frankl** (1946)
- Saying Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp.
- From Death- Camp to Existentialism.
- **Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy.** (1959)

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997)

- Holocaust survivor – Austrian Jewish Neurologist & Psychiatrist.
- Founder of **Logotherapy** – a form of existential analysis.

Concentration Camps (1942-45)

- September 1942 (+wife Tilly & parents) – Nazi Theresienstadt Ghetto – worked as GP – organised a unit to help newcomers to the camp overcome their shock & grief – set up a '**suicide watch**' unit.
- October 1944 – Auschwitz (+Tilly).
- Kaufering – 5 months slave labour.
- Tilly died in Bergen-Belsen Camp.
- March 1945 – Turkheim – liberated.

Post-War

- 1946-71 – Vienna Polyclinic of Neurology.
- 1947 – Married Eleanor (Catholic).
- 29 honorary doctorates, 39 books translated into 40+ languages.
- **Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning** (1997).
- Died in September 1997, aged 92.

Concentration Camp Experience

- Man is *'capable of resisting even the worst conditions'*.
- *'If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us...'*
- *'For the first time in my life I saw the truth...that **love is the ultimate and highest goal to which man can aspire**. 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**'.*

Concentration Camp Experience...

- *'The crowning experience of all, for the homecoming man, is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear any more – except his God'.*
- *'That which does not kill me, makes me stronger' (Nietzsche)*
- *'There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions in life as the knowledge that there is a **meaning** in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how'.*

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

- Philosopher, poet, composer, cultural critic, & classical philologist
- **'God is dead!'**

Logotherapy

- A belief that it is the striving to find a **meaning** in one's life that is the primary, most powerful motivating and driving force in humans.
- Basic principles – (**a**) life has **meaning** under all circumstances, even the most miserable ones; (**b**) our main motivation for living is our will to find **meaning** in life; (**c**) we have freedom to find **meaning** in what we do, and what we experience, or at least in the stand we take when faced with a situation of unchangeable suffering.

Logotherapy...

- ‘*Logotherapy* deals with the **Logos**; it deals with *Meaning*’. (‘In the beginning was the *meaning*, and the *meaning* was with God, and the *meaning* was God’ – [John 1:1](#)).
- ‘Specifically I see *Logotherapy* in helping others to see *meaning* in life. But we cannot give *meaning* to the life of others. And if this is true of *meaning* per se, how much does it hold for *Ultimate Meaning*?’

Three levels of Depression

- **Psychological** – feelings of inadequacy stem from undertaking tasks beyond our abilities.
- **Physiological** – a '*vital low*', a '*diminishment of physical energy*'.
- **Spiritual** – tension between who one actually is in relation to what one should be – the '*gaping abyss*'.
- If goals seem unreachable, an individual loses a sense of future, and thus **meaning** resulting in depression.
- **Logotherapy** aims to '*change the patient's attitude towards their disease as well as towards their life as a task*'.

Sunday Neurosis

- Lack of **meaning** is the paramount existential stress, synonymous with a crisis of **meaninglessness**.
- **Sunday neurosis** is a form of anxiety resulting from an awareness in some people of the **emptiness of their lives once the working week is over** – an existential vacuum, or feeling of **meaninglessness** – a common phenomenon characterised by the subjective state of boredom, apathy, and emptiness – a state in which one apparently feels cynical, lacks direction and questions the point of most of life's activities.

Further Quotations

- *‘When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves’.*
- *‘In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a **meaning**, such as the **meaning** of a sacrifice’.*
- *‘It did not really matter what **we expected from life**, but rather what **life expected from us**. We needed to stop asking about the **meaning of life**, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being **questioned by life** – daily and hourly...Life ultimately **means** taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual’.*

Further Quotations...

- *'Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue' (Nietzsche).*
- *'The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve, or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.'*
- *'Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfilment... Everyone's task is unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.'*
- *'Patients never really despair of any suffering in itself! Instead, their despair stems in each instance from a doubt as to whether suffering is meaningful. Man is ready and willing to shoulder any suffering as soon and as long as he can see a meaning in it.'*

God Searches Us

- 1 Chronicles 28:9- *'The Lord **searches** every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. **If you seek Him**, He will be found by you'.*
- Psalms 139:1-3 & 23-4- *'O Lord, You have **searched** me and **You know me**... You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways... **Search** me, O God, and **know my heart; test me** and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting'.*

God Searches Us...

- 1 Corinthians 2:9-14- *'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him – but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit **searches** all things, even the deep things of God...No-one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us...**The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned**'.*

In Search of Meaning

- Luke 18:31-4- *‘Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be turned over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. On the third day He will **rise again**. The disciples did not understand any of this. Its **meaning** was hidden from them, and they did not know what He was talking about’.*

In Search of Meaning...

- Acts 2:11-12- *'We hear them declaring the **wonders of God** in our own tongues! Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, What does this **mean**?'*
- Acts 17:18-20 & 23- *'Paul was preaching the **good news about Jesus and the resurrection**. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they **mean**...**What you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you**'.*

Our Search for Meaning

- Where and how do **we** find **meaning**?
- In our faith? – our work? – our families? – our Church? – our hobbies? – our life?
- Within palliative care?

Discussion Points

- ‘*The greatest secret...The salvation of man is through love and in love*’. (Frankl)
- ‘After all (man) has suffered, there is nothing he need fear anymore – **except his God**’. (Frankl)
- ‘He who has a **why** to live for can bear almost any **how**’. (Nietzsche)
- Life has **meaning** under all circumstances, even the most miserable ones. (Frankl)
- ‘*Affluence, hedonism and materialism*’ are barriers to our **search** for **meaning** in life. (Frankl)
- Every person has a ‘*spiritual unconscious*’. (Frankl)
- A depressed person faces tension between who he actually is in relation to what he should be. (Frankl)

Discussion Points...

- **Sunday Neurosis** – an awareness of the emptiness of life once the working week is over. (**Frankl**)
- *‘Man is ready and willing to shoulder any suffering as soon and as long as he can see a **meaning** in it’.* (**Frankl**)