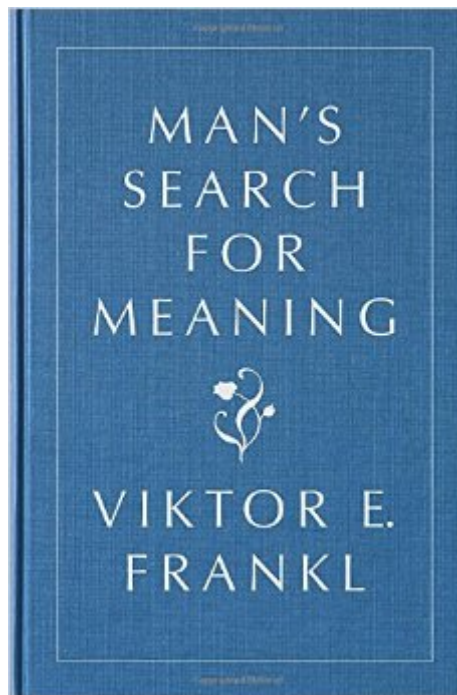


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Man's Search For Meaning, Gift Edition



Synopsis

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presented here in an elegant new edition with endpapers, supplementary photographs, and several of Frankl's previously unpublished letters, speeches, and essays.

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Customer Reviews

An American doctor once asked Viktor Frankl to explain the difference between conventional psychoanalysis and logotherapy. Before answering, Frankl asked the doctor for his definition of psychoanalysis. The man said, "During psychoanalysis, the patient must lie down on a couch and tell you things which sometimes are very disagreeable to tell." Frankl immediately replied by saying: "Now, in logotherapy the patient may remain sitting erect but he must hear things which sometimes are very disagreeable to hear." By this he meant that in logotherapy the patient is actually confronted with and reoriented toward the MEANING of his life. The role of the therapist, then, is to help the patient discover a purposefulness in his life. Frankl's theory is that man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives. Whereas Freudian psychoanalysis focuses on the "will to pleasure" and Adlerian psychology

focuses on the "will to power" it can be said that Frankl's logotherapy focuses on the "will to meaning." Does man give in to conditions or stand up to them? According to Frankl, the strength of a person's sense of meaning, responsibility, and purpose is the greatest determining factor in how that question will be answered. He believed that "man is ultimately self-determining" and as such, "does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment." The first (and largest) section of this book is the searing autobiographical account of the author's experience as a longtime prisoner in a concentration camp. These camps claimed the lives of his father, mother, brother, and wife. Frankl's survival and the subsequent miracle of this book are a testimony to man's capacity to rise above his outward fate. As Gordon W. Allport states in the preface, "A psychiatrist who personally has faced such extremity is a psychiatrist worth listening to." I agree, and highly recommend this book. As the sub-title says, it is an "introduction" to logotherapy, and anyone who wants to go deeper into the principles and practical application of Frankl's existential psychiatry should go to his excellent "The Doctor And The Soul". Frankl was fond of quoting Nietzsche's dictum... "He who has a WHY to live can bear with almost any HOW."

Dr. Frankl's logotherapy is straightforward and easy to understand. It is also a useful antidote to the rather frightening drift in psychology during the past two decades toward strict biological determinism. This particular work is one I keep at hand and re-read on a regular basis. I read it for the first time a few months after I started medical treatment and therapy for life-long depression. I get more from it each time I go back to it. Logotherapy manages an incredible balance. It does not put man himself at the center of the universe, thus avoiding the kind of narcissistic self-reflection common to much of the therapeutic literature today. Yet, it does not sweep man aside as irrelevant. Instead, Frankl argues that we have an incredible power to shape our attitudes and responses to the challenges life presents us and that we inevitably grow thanks to these challenges. This is a quick read and could conceivably change your life. Man is more than the sum of his biology and his environment. We inevitably choose to be who we are. Frankl's argument is that, if we choose wisely, we can triumph even in tragedy. It's a truth many of us have lost sight of in our cynicism.

This book was read many years ago at a time when this reviewer felt nearly crushed under the weight of family and personal troubles. It is not light and diverting reading; indeed, in part it is terrifying. Yet the memory of it has persisted across all these years. A prominent psychiatrist in pre-World War II Vienna, Doctor Frankl found himself suddenly stripped of all money, possessions, position, respect, and ultimately, his family--including his pregnant and beloved wife. After

confinement in some of the smaller concentration camps, he ultimately arrived at Auschwitz--the lowest circle of the man-made Hell that was the system of concentration and extermination camps (in German, 'Konzentrationslager' and 'Vernichtungslager'). There, his medical skills were not employed until nearly the end of the war. Instead, he was employed at hard labor just like the rest of the men in his prison block who were marched every day to their work site before dawn and marched back late at night. The most striking thing about Frankl's account of his imprisonment (to me at least) was not the backbreaking work, the all-pervading fear, nor even the constant, maddening hunger; but the unrelenting degradation of the prisoners in order to get them to accept the Nazi's judgment of them as sub-human. For example, when carrying heavy tanks filled with human sewage for disposal, almost inevitably some would splash prisoners full in the face. Any move to wipe one's face, or even show instinctive grimaces of disgust would be punished by the Capos (trusted prisoners, chosen mostly for their brutality) with a prompt beating from a club or whip. Because of this, the normal reactions of prisoners to being befouled were soon suppressed. Every attempt possible was made to degrade the prisoners by the (frequently delighted) SS guards and the Capos. Subjected to this treatment, some prisoners gave up hope and committed suicide by running into the inner electric fence that encircled the camp. Others would lie motionless in their bunks in their own waste--ignoring pleas to get up from fellow prisoners, and blows from guards alike--smoking up all of the cigarettes they might have been saving for barter. Faced with this, Frankl combated this potential demoralization in himself and others by leading the prisoners back to their own humanity. "Every freedom may be taken away from a man but one; the freedom to choose what attitude he will take towards his conditions." Despite every attempt to rob them of human dignity, prisoners still had a choice. Would they take an attitude of 'I die tomorrow; you die today' and behave as starving beasts--stealing other prisoner's food, for example; or would they show that they were neither animals nor things, but human beings? Some reviews of an earlier edition of this book seemed to imply that Frankl had judged those who despaired and died to be weak, or that he was somehow 'better' than they for having survived. Those reviewers can only have done this by forgetting what they had read. Frankl instead writes with sorrow that "the best of us did not survive", warmly remembering comrades who ended their days offering comfort and sometimes their last bit of bread to fellow prisoners. We live in an age when the feeling that one's life is meaningless is rampant even compared to the recent past. Many compensate by drowning themselves in their career; working fourteen hour days, always gabbing into their cell phone, and carrying their laptop everywhere so they can do some work even in what would be an idle moment. Others escape into escapist and/or authoritarian religion, gladly handing over the miserable burden of their freedom and

the need to find meaning to someone else. (Frankl--an observant Jew throughout his life--was not anti-religious I should point out. He writes that a therapist's attempts to debunk genuine religious or spiritual views are an unethical attempt to force the therapist's views on a client.) Still others use alcohol and/or drugs (including perfectly legal drugs) as a response to a sense of life's meaninglessness or futility. Frankl writes that our struggle--even our despair--over finding meaning in our lives is not an psychiatric illness, or even a precursor to one. Potential readers of this book will not find "The Meaning of Life". What they will find is the story of a man who was compelled to develop the tools to find his own meaning, his 'why'--at a time when his life depended on it in a way seldom seen in life and history. Hopefully, these tools will benefit others as they have benefited me. As someone wrote of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "He did not try to lead others to himself, but to themselves."

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