

Dr. Frankl didn't invent it, "The Meaning of Life".

But he invented Logotherapy, that is based on it.

The book consists of two parts. The first is a short autobiography of his time in the concentration camps, as he experienced it as a logotherapist. The second part of the book is an introduction to his therapeutic doctrine of Logotherapy. He added this chapter to his book because there was a great demand for it by readers.

The second chapter therefore will only appeal to readers who want to know

Dr. Frankl didn't invent it, "The Meaning of Life".

But he invented Logotherapy, that is based on it.

The book consists of two parts. The first is a short autobiography of his time in the concentration camps, as he experienced it as a logotherapist. The second part of the book is an introduction to his therapeutic doctrine of Logotherapy. He added this chapter to his book because there was a great demand for it by readers.

The second chapter therefore will only appeal to readers who want to know more about his therapy, and about mental health in general, or how he came to write his experiences in the camp the way he did.

“Logos is a Greek word which denotes meaning. Logotherapy, or, as it has been called by some authors, “The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy,” focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man’s search for such a meaning. According to logotherapy, this striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man.

According to his doctrine, the feeling of meaninglessness must be treated in assisting the patient to find meaning in his life :

“By declaring that man is responsible and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system. I have termed this constitutive characteristic “the self-transcendence of human existence.” It denotes the fact that being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. 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.”

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

P

It is his doctrine about the meaning of life that can be found in the attitude toward suffering, that Dr. Frankl applies to his experiences in the camp.

Therefore, the first section of the book, is more a study of his experiences, based on this premise, rather than an autobiography. He observed the way how both he and others in Auschwitz coped (or didn't) with the experience.

To me, it's the ultimate testing of his doctrine, based on the universal search for a meaning in one's life. Can there really be found some good in an experience so abysmally bad ? Can there really be given a higher meaning to suffering, in order to survive the suffering ?

This is what this book is all about.

Dr. Frankl tries to explain how everyday life in a concentration camp was reflected in the mind of the average prisoner ; his book (first chapter) aims to be a psychology of a concentration camp.

He describes three phases of the inmate's mental reactions to camp life : the period following his admission ; the period when he is well entrenched in camp routine ; and the period following his release and liberation.

The symptom that characterizes the first phase is shock and the 'delusion of reprieve'.

The second phase is the phase of relative apathy, in which the inmate achieves a kind of emotional death. Apathy, the main symptom of the second phase, was a necessary mechanism of self-defense.

It is in this part of the book, that Dr. Frankl implements his theories.

He is convinced that "the way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity—even under the most difficult circumstances—to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish.

Any attempt at fighting the camp's psychopathological influence on the prisoner by psychotherapeutic or psychohygienic methods had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could

look forward. Instinctively some of the prisoners attempted to find one on their own. It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future"sub specie aeternitatis. And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task."

The last phase is the psychology of the prisoner who has been released. For most, it was a "disillusionment", "there could be no earthly happiness which could compensate for all we had suffered."

This is definitely a book that make you think, about meaning in life in general, and about the meaning of suffering in particular.

It helps to understand the experiences and the sufferings of the inmates, and above all their behaviors in response to these experiences, which for someone who has not been there, may seem inconceivable.

To me, it was very useful to better understand the biographies of Holocaust survivors that I have read so far. Imre Kertész's nostalgic memories of camp's life after his release ; the importance of religion in the camp, as described by Eli Wiesel ; the strong will to survive by Olga Lengyel, in order to testify about what she and others endured ... And so much more.

One thing that I missed in Dr. Frankl's psychology of the prisoner who has been released, was the feeling of guilt that he and not others had survived. Apparently, many survivors struggled with this guilt. I would have liked it to be handled in the book.

I also think that the small part of prisoners who were able to find a higher meaning in their suffering, had been given some opportunity, by mere luck, to find a meaning.

Dr. Frankl himself believed that his wife was still alive ; he was given the opportunity to work as a doctor in the camp, which he accepted, because :

"I knew that in a working party I would die in a short time. But if I had to die there might at least be some sense in my death. I thought that it would doubtless be more to the purpose to try and help my comrades as a doctor than to vegetate or finally lose my life as the unproductive laborer that I was then."

To me, the question arises, what he would have written if he hadn't had these circumstances which enabled him to see a meaning, a purpose in the suffering.

For a great deal of the prisoners, who had been taken everything - their house and everything in it ; their family, friends and neighborhood - and who had to do unproductive labor in extremely harsh conditions every day, and who didn't met kindness but only cruelty, what was left to them to live for ? What meaning was there to be found in their world ?

No therapy in the world could help these poor poor creatures, who were completely dehumanized.

In reading this book you will ask yourself these kind of questions, and many others, which in itself is a great achievement by Dr. Frankl.

For Dr. Frankl, writing his book probably also was a form of self-therapy to cope with his experiences, in finding a meaning in it.

7/10

Reference

[Key Research and Study Skills in Psychology](#)

[Foundations of Behavioral Research \(PSY 200 \(300\) Quantitative Methods in Psychology\)](#)