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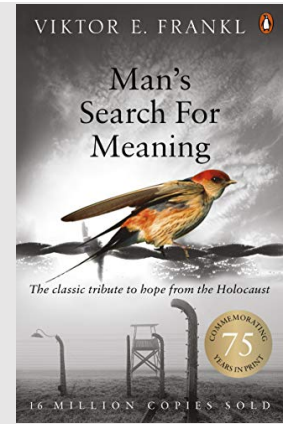


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## Further Reading, 'Man's Search For Meaning' (extract) – Victor Frankl

"I venture to say that nothing would so effectively help one to survive - even the worst conditions - 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...* What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task."

- Victor Frankl



'In attempting this psychological presentation (of men in the concentration camps) and a psychopathological explanation of the typical characteristics of a concentration camp inmate, I may give the impression that *the human being is completely and unavoidably influenced by his surroundings*. (In this case the surroundings being the unique structure of camp life, which forced the prisoner to conform his conduct to a certain set pattern.). But what about human liberty? Is there no spiritual freedom in regard to behaviour and reaction to any given surroundings? Is that theory true which would have us believe that man is no more than a product of many conditional and environmental factors – be they of a biological, psychological or sociological nature? Is man but an accidental product of these? Most important, do the prisoners' reactions to the singular world of the concentration camp prove that man cannot escape the influences of his surroundings? Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances?

We can answer these questions from experience as well as on principle. *The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action*. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.

We who lived in the concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that *everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way*.

And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become moulded into the form of the typical inmate.



Seen from this point of view, the mental reactions of the inmates of a concentration camp must seem more to us than the mere expression of certain physical and sociological conditions. Even though conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food and various mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were bound to react in certain ways, in the final analysis it becomes clear that *the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone*. Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him – mentally and spiritually.’

(Extract 2)

‘To be sure, man’s search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than equilibrium. However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health. There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions 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.”* ... In the Nazi concentration camps, one could have witnessed that those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfil were most apt to survive...

As for myself, when I was taken to the concentration camp of Auschwitz, a manuscript of mine ready for publication was confiscated. Certainly, my deep desire to write this manuscript anew helped me to survive the rigors of the camps I was in. For instance, when in a camp in Bavaria I fell ill with typhus fever, I jotted down on little scraps of paper many notes intended to enable me to rewrite the manuscript, should I live to the day of liberation. I am sure that this reconstruction of my lost manuscript in the dark barracks of a Bavarian concentration camp assisted me in overcoming the danger of cardiovascular collapse.

Thus, it can be seen that mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become. Such a tension is inherent in the human being and therefore is indispensable to mental well-being. *We should not, then, be hesitant about challenging man with a potential meaning for him to fulfil*. It is only thus that we can evoke his will to meaning from its state of latency. I consider it a dangerous misconception of mental hygiene to assume that what man needs in the first place is equilibrium or, as it is called in biology, “homeostasis,” i.e., a tensionless state.

“What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task.”

What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him. What man needs is not homeostasis but what I call “noo-dynamics,” i.e., the existential dynamics in a polar field of tension where one pole is

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represented by a meaning that is to be fulfilled and the other pole by the man who has to fulfil it. And one should not think that this holds true only for normal conditions; in neurotic individuals, it is even more valid. If architects want to strengthen a decrepit arch, they increase the load which is laid upon it, for thereby the parts are joined more firmly together. So if therapists wish to foster their patients' mental health, they should not be afraid to create a sound amount of tension through a reorientation towards the meaning of one's life...'