

Man's Search for Meaning

Viktor Emil Frankl

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Contents

1 Experiences in a Concentration Camp	3
2 Logotherapy in a Nutshell (Abridged)	3
3 Afterword by William J. Winslate	3
4 Selected Writings	6
4.1 Letter to Wilhelm & Setpha Börner. Sep 14, 1945	6
4.2 Memorial Speech on the 40th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Türkheim Concentration Camp, Bavaria. Apr 27, 1985	7
4.3 Memorial Speech to Mark the 50th Anniversary of Hitler's Invasion. Mar 10, 1988, Rathausplatz, Vienna	7
5 Glossary	8
6 Chronology of Viktor Frankl's Life & of the Holocaust	9
References	9

Foreword by John Boyne

"When I was 15 years old, my English teacher came into school on the last day before our summer holidays & read out a list of about 40 books. "I want you to read some of these over the break," he told us. "I won't test you on them afterwards. I won't ask you what you read or tell you to write any book reports. But each one is a powerful work of literature that has meant a lot to me over the years, & if you give them a chance, if you let these stories & voices into your lives, then they might make you view the world in a different way. & they might change you."

I was unfamiliar with most of the titles, for although this was a point in my development where I was beginning to discover adult literature in a more serious way, I was new to almost all of it. However, being a teenager obsessed with both reading & writing, the list excited me, & I took to my bike & cycled to my local bookshop the next morning ready to begin. It took a long time to decide where this reading journey should start, but eventually I settled on Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man*.

The book had a profound effect on me. It may seem strange now, but growing up in Ireland in the mid-1980s, we didn't study the Holocaust in school, & so, outside of war films that I'd seen on television & the occasional World War II novel aimed at younger readers that I'd borrowed from the library, this was my introduction to a subject that would grow to fascinate & horrify me in equal parts over the years to come. A subject that would become an intrinsic part of my own story, even though I had been born more than a quarter century after the last of the death camps had been liberated.

As often happens with reading, 1 book that summer led me to another, & another after that, & soon I abandoned my teacher's list & allowed the writers & the stories to dictate where I should go next. I found myself working my way through much of Primo Levi's autobiographical writings, as well as the works of Anne Frank & Elie Wiesel, alongside some history books &, memorably, a biography of Hitler. & then, just as the summer was drawing to a close & I was being measured up for the next year's school uniform, I discovered *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl, a book whose title intimidated me but that felt like the natural continuation of my education as I attempted to understand the most terrible period of history, a time when it seemed that the human race displayed just how cruel it could be.

Frankl's book, like Levi's, like Wiesel's, like Anne Frank's, affected me greatly, both when I read it in 1986 & again, 30 years later, when I re-read it in preparation for writing this foreword. There's a clarity to his analysis of how prisoners felt in this most dehumanizing of experiences that is both surprising in its lack of bitterness & illuminating in its lucidity: The

feelings of shock, dismay, & fear that victims felt having been pulled from their homes & brought to unfamiliar & frightening places. The cycle that the mind must have gone through as it adjusted to living within the electrified fences of death. The basic human urge that must have forced a person to do all he or she could simply to stay alive. & then the effect on the devastated psyche for those victims who survived the experience & found themselves liberated into a changed world, who would take decades to come to terms with the things that had taken place.

Frankl even makes us wonder about the word *survived*. Did anyone actually *survive* the camps? I'm not so sure that they did, the experience proving so overwhelming, the memories so brutal, the grief for lost loved ones so intense that it must have weighed on the consciousness like an insupportable burden.

Each memoir written by a victim of the camps is different & surprising, but for me, 1 of the most unexpected elements of Frankl's book is his central belief that every moment of our existence – happy, sad, generous, or cruel – gives us our experience of life & should be accepted as such. There's a stoicism to this concept that takes time to understand – indeed, I think one would have had to experience what Frankl experienced to comprehend it fully – but it gave the author the courage to survive on a daily basis & eventually to use his experiences to join that extraordinary group of men & women who were willing to plunge fearlessly into their darkest days to share their experiences with the world without self-pity or acrimony but with nothing more than a clear desire that we should understand, & through understanding, prevent such things from taking place again.

Frankl was ahead of his time in his controversial belief that freedom of choice remains an inherent part of the captive's life, that under the most extreme of situations, to lose hope is to surrender entirely to the darkness. His analysis of the different types of person – whether guards or prisoners – is also startling, & there is real daring in his clinical examination of both that must have proved shocking & perhaps even unpleasant to some when the memoir was 1st published in 1946.

For me, however, the most fascinating element of the book is his exploration of the life of the victim – & I prefer the word *victim* to *prisoner*, for *prisoner* suggests rightful incarceration while *victim* is clear on the innocence of the abused party – after his or her liberation. It's impossible for someone of my generation & background to imagine the feelings of relief, confusion, & anger that must have jostled for dominion in the mind. Impossible for any of us, anymore, I think. The emotions & the personality must have been so shattered that to take pleasure in any part of life afterward would have proved a substantial challenge. When you have seen the worst of human behavior, after all, how do you continue to live among people? This was something that each victim had to come to terms with & perhaps some were more successful than others. For Frankl, there was only 1 way to hope: *write about it*.

Viktor Frankl died when I was just a child, but as a novelist who has made an attempt at understanding the Holocaust through my own fiction, I have been fortunate to be part of that last group of writers to have had the privilege of meeting survivors of the camps through my travels over the years. The single most humbling experience of my professional life has been standing in community centers, halls, theaters, & on festival stages around the world while audience members have risen to recount their own memories. Talking to them afterward, feeling honored to be in their presence & a little unworthy to have written about a subject using only my imagination when their true stories are so much more powerful & authentic than my own, is something I will always cherish. & in those conversations the name of Viktor Frankl & *Man's Search for Meaning* has come up time & again, alongside those other classic works that help keep the memories of that time alive. & it always will. That is his legacy.

Why do we keep writing about it? is a question that comes up time & again. I think it's because although all powerful works of fiction, nonfiction, & memoir inspire discussion, passion, & even criticism, the joy of literature, as opposed too often to the practice of politics or religion, is that it embraces differing opinions; it encourages debate, & it allows us to have heated conversations with our closest friends & dearest loved ones. & through it all no one gets hurt, no one gets taken away from their homes, & no one gets killed. This is something that Viktor Frankl must have understood, for *Man's Search for Meaning* is such a book. One to read, to cherish, to debate, & one that will ultimately keep the memories of the victims alive.

John Boyne¹ – Frankl, 2017, pp. 6–8

Preface to the 1992 Edition

"This book has now lived to see nearly 100 printings in English – in addition to having been published in 21 other languages. & the English editions alone have sold more than 3 million copies.

These are the dry facts, & they may well be the reason why reporters of American newspapers & particularly of American TV stations more often than not start their interviews, after listing these facts, by exclaiming: "Dr. Frankl, your book has become a true bestseller – how do you feel about such a success?" Whereupon I react by reporting that in the 1st place I do not at all see in the bestseller status of my book an achievement & accomplishment on my part but rather an expression of the misery of our time: if hundreds of thousands of people reach out for a book whose very title promises to deal with the question of a meaning to life, it must be a question that burns under their fingernails.

To be sure, something else may have contributed to the impact of the book: its 2nd, theoretical part ("Logotherapy in a Nutshell") boils down, as it were, to the lesson one may distill from the 1st part, the autobiographical account ("Experiences

¹John Boyne is the author of several notes for adults & 5 novels for younger readers, including *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*.

in a Concentration Camp”), whereas Part I serves as the existential validation of my theories. Thus, both parts mutually support their credibility.

I had none of this in mind when I wrote the book in 1945. & I did so within 9 successive days & with the firm determination that the book should be published anonymously. In fact, the 1st printing of the original German version does not show my name on the cover, though at the last moment, just before the book’s initial publication, I did finally give in to my friends who had urged me to let it be published with my name at least on the title page. At 1st, however, it had been written with the absolute conviction that, as an anonymous opus, it could never earn its author literary fame. I had wanted simply to convey to the reader by way of a concrete example that life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones. & I thought that if the point were demonstrated in a situation as extreme as that in a concentration camp, my book might gain a hearing. I therefore felt responsible for writing down what I had gone through, for I thought it might be helpful to people who are prone to despair.

& so it is both strange & remarkable to me that – among some dozens of books I have authored – precisely this one, which I had intended to be published anonymously so that it could never built up any reputation on the part of the author, did become a success. Again & again I therefore admonish my students both in Europe & in America: “Don’t aim at success – the more you aim at it & make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, & it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one’s dedication to cause a greater than oneself or as the by-product of one’s surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, & the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do & go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long run – in the long run, I say! – success will follow you precisely because you had *forgotten* to think of it.”

The reader may ask me why I did not try to escape what was in store for me after Hitler had occupied Austria. Let me answer by recalling the following story. Shortly before the United States entered World War II, I received an invitation to come to the American Consulate in Vienna to pick up my immigration visa. My old parents were overjoyed because they expected that I would soon be allowed to leave Austria. I suddenly hesitated, however. The question beset me: could I really afford to leave my parents alone to face their fate, to be sent, sooner or later, to a concentration camp, or even to a so-called extermination camp? Where did my responsibility lie? Should I foster my brain child, logotherapy, by emigrating to fertile soil where I could write my books? Or should I concentrate on my duties as a real child, the child of my parents who had to do whatever he could to protect them? I pondered the problem this way & that but could not arrive at a solution; this was the type of dilemma that made one wish for “a hint from Heaven,” as the phrase goes.

It was then that I noticed a piece of marble lying on a table at home. When I asked my father about it, he explained that he had found it on the site where the National Socialists had burned down the largest Viennese synagogue. He had taken the piece home because it was a part of the tablets on which the 10 Commandments were inscribed. One gilded Hebrew letter was engraved on the piece; my father explained that this letter stood for 1 of the Commandments. Eagerly I asked, “Which one is it?” He answered, “Honor thy father & thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land.” At that moment I decided to stay with my father & my mother upon the land, & to let the American visa lapse.

– Viktor E. Frankl, *Vienna, 1992*” – Frankl, 2017, pp. 10–11

1 Experiences in a Concentration Camp

2 Logotherapy in a Nutshell (Abridged)

3 Afterword by William J. Winslate

“On Jan 27, 2006, the 61st anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, where 1.5 million people died, nations around the world observed the 1st International Holocaust Remembrance Day. A few months later, they might well have celebrated the anniversary of 1 of the most abiding pieces of writing from that horrendous time. 1st published in German in 1946 as *A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp* & later called *Say Yes to Life in Spite of Everything*, subsequent editions were supplemented by an introduction to logotherapy & a postscript on tragic optimism, or how to remain optimistic in the face of pain, guilt, & death. The English translation, 1st published in 1959, was called *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

Viktor Frankl’s book has now sold more than 12 million copies in a total of 24 languages. A 1991 Library of Congress/Book-of-the-Month-Club survey asking readers to name a “book that made a difference in your life” found *Man’s Search for Meaning* among the 10 most influential books in America. It has inspired religious & philosophical thinkers, mental health professionals, teachers, students, & general readers from all walks of life. It is routinely assigned to college, graduate, & high school students in psychology, philosophy, history, literature, Holocaust studies, religion, & theology. What accounts for its pervasive influence & enduring value?

Viktor Frankl’s life spanned nearly all of the 20th century, from his birth in 1905 to his death in 1997. At the age of 3 he decided to become a physician. In his autobiographical reflections, he recalls that s a youth he would “think for some minutes about the meaning of life. Particularly about the meaning of the coming day & its meaning for *me*.”

As a teenager Frankl was fascinated by philosophy, experimental psychology, & psychoanalysis. To supplement his high school classes, he attended adult-education classes & began a correspondence with Sigmund Freud that led Freud to submit a manuscript of Frankl's to the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. The article was accepted & later published. That same year, at age 16, Frankl attended an adult-education workshop on philosophy. The instructor, recognizing Frankl's precocious intellect, invited him to give a lecture on the meaning of life. Frankl told the audience that "It is we ourselves who must answer the questions that life asks of us, & to these questions we can respond only by being responsible for our existence." This belief became the cornerstone of Frankl's personal life & professional identity.

Under the influence of Freud's ideas, Frankl decided while he was still in high school to become a psychiatrist. Inspired in part by a fellow student who told him he had a gift for helping others, Frankl had begun to realize that he had a talent not only for diagnosing psychological problems, but also for discovering what motivates people.

Frankl's 1st counseling job was entirely his own – he founded Vienna's 1st private youth counseling program & worked with troubled youths. From 1930–1937 he worked as a psychiatrist at the University Clinic in Vienna, caring for suicidal patients. He sought to help his patients find a way to make their lives meaningful even in the face of depression or mental illness. By 1939 he was head of the department of neurology at Rothschild Hospital, the only Jewish hospital in Vienna.

In the early years of the war, Frankl's work at Rothschild gave him & his family some degree of protection from the threat of deportation. When the hospital was closed down by the National Socialist government, however, Frankl realized that they were at grave risk of being sent to a concentration camp. In 1942 the American consulate in Vienna informed him that he was eligible for a U.S. immigration visa. Although an escape from Austria would have enabled him to complete his book on logotherapy, he decided to let his visa lapse: he felt he should stay in Vienna for the sake of his aging parents. In Sep 1942, Frankl & his family were arrested & deported. Frankl spent the next 3 years at 4 different concentration camps – Theresienstadt, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Kaufering, and Türkheim, part of the Dachau complex.

It is important to note that Frankl's imprisonment was not the only impetus for *Man's Search for Meaning*. Before his deportation, he had already begun to formulate an argument that the quest for meaning is the key to mental health & human flourishing. As a prisoner, he was suddenly forced to assess whether his own life still had any meaning. His survival was a combined result of his will to live, his instinct for self-preservation, some generous acts of human decency, & shrewdness; of course, it also depended on blind luck, such as where he happened to be imprisoned, the whims of the guards, & arbitrary decisions about where to line up & who to trust or believe. However, something more was needed to overcome the deprivations & degradations of the camps. Frankl drew constantly upon uniquely human capacities such as inborn optimism, humor, psychological detachment, brief moments of solitude, inner freedom, & a steely resolve not to give up or commit suicide. He realized that he must try to live for the future, & he drew strength from loving thoughts of his wife & his deep desire to finish his book on logotherapy. He also found meaning in glimpses of beauty in nature & art. Most important, he realized that, no matter what happened, he retained the freedom to choose how to respond to his suffering. He saw this not merely as an option but as his & every person's responsibility to choose "the way in which he bears his burden."

Sometimes Frankl's ideas are inspirational, as when he explains how dying patients & quadriplegics come to terms with their fate. Others are aspirational, as when he asserts that a person finds meaning by "striving & struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task." He shows how existential frustration provoked & motivated an unhappy diplomat to seek a new, more satisfying career. Frankl also uses moral exhortation, however, to call attention to "the gap between what one is & what one should become" & the idea that "man is responsible & must actualize the potential meaning of his life." He sees freedom & responsibility as 2 sides of the same coin. When he spoke to American audiences, Frankl was fond of saying, "I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast." To achieve personal meaning, he says, one must transcend subjective pleasures by doing something that "points, & is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself . . . by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love." Frankl himself chose to focus on his parents by staying in Vienna when he could have had safe passage to America. While he was in the same concentration camp as his father, Frankl managed to obtain morphine to ease his father's pain & stayed by his side during his dying days.

Even when confronted by loss & sadness, Frankl's optimism, his constant affirmation of & exuberance about life, led him to insist that hope & positive energy can turn challenges into triumphs. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, he hastens to add that suffering is not *necessary* to find meaning, only that "meaning is possible in spite of suffering." Indeed, he goes on to say that "to suffer unnecessary is masochistic rather than heroic."

I 1st read *Man's Search for Meaning* as a philosophy professor in the mid-1960s. The book was brought to my attention by a Norwegian philosopher who had himself been incarcerated in a Nazi concentration camp. My colleague remarked how strongly he agreed with Frankl about the importance of nourishing one's inner freedom, embracing the value of beauty in nature, art, poetry, & literature, & feeling love for family & friends. But other personal choices, activities, relationships, hobbies, & even simple pleasures can also give meaning to life. Why, then, do some people find themselves feeling so empty? Frankl's wisdom here is worth emphasizing: it is a question of the *attitude* one takes toward life's challenges & opportunities, both large & small. A positive attitude enables a person to endure suffering & disappointment as well as enhance enjoyment & satisfaction. A negative attitude intensifies pain & deepens disappointments; it undermines & diminishes pleasure, happiness, & satisfaction; it may even lead to depression or physical illness.

My friend & former colleague Norman Cousins was a tireless advocate for the value of positive emotions in promoting

health, & he warned of the danger that negative emotions may jeopardize it. Although some critics attacked Cousins's views as simplistic, subsequent research in psychoneuroimmunology has supported the ways in which positive emotions, expectations, & attitudes enhance our immune system. This research also reinforces Frankl's belief that one's approach to everything from life-threatening challenges to everyday situations helps to share the meaning of our lives. The simple truth that Frankl so ardently promoted has profound significance for anyone who listens.

The choices humans make should be active rather than passive. In making personal choices we affirm our autonomy. "A human being is not 1 thing among others; *things* determine each other," Frankl writes, "but *man* is ultimately self determining. What he becomes – within the limits of endowment & environment – he has made out of himself." E.g., the darkness of despair threatened to overwhelm a young Israeli soldier who had lost both his legs in the Yom Kippur War. He was drowning in depression & contemplating suicide. 1 day a friend noticed that his outlook had changed to hopeful serenity. The soldier attributed his transformation to reading *Man's Search for Meaning*. When he was told about the soldier, Frankl wondered whether "there may be such a thing as bibliotherapy – healing through reading."

Frankl's comment hints at the reasons why *Man's Search for Meaning* has such a powerful impact on many readers. Persons facing existential challenges or crises may seek advice or guidance from family, friends, therapists, or religious counselors. Sometimes such advice is helpful; sometimes it is not. Persons facing difficult choices may not fully appreciate how much their own attitude interferes with the decision they need to make or the action they need to take. Frankl offers readers who are searching for answers to life's dilemmas a critical mandate: he does not tell people *what* to do, but *why* they must do it.

After his liberation in 1945 from the Türkheim camp, where he had nearly died of typhus, Frankl discovered that he was utterly alone. On the 1st day of his return to Vienna in Aug 1945, Frankl learned that his pregnant wife, Tilly, had died of sickness or starvation in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Sadly, his parents & brother had all died in the camps. Overcoming his losses & inevitable depression, he remained in Vienna to resume his career as a psychiatrist – an unusual choice when so many others, especially Jewish psychoanalysts & psychiatrists, had emigrated to other countries. Several factors may have contributed to this decision: Frankl felt an intense connection to Vienna, especially to psychiatric patients who needed his help in the postwar period. He also believed strongly in reconciliation rather than revenge; he once remarked, "I do not forget any good deed done to me, & I do not carry a grudge for a bad one." Notably, he renounced the idea of collective guilt. Frankl was able to accept that his Viennese colleagues & neighbors may have known about or even participated in his persecution, & he did not condemn them for failing to join the resistance or die heroic deaths. Instead, he was deeply committed to the idea that even a vile Nazi criminal or a seemingly hopeless madman has the potential to transcend evil or insanity by making responsible choices.

He threw himself passionately into his work. In 1946 he reconstructed & revised the book that was destroyed when he was 1st deported (*The Doctor & the Soul*), & that same year – in only 9 days – he wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*. He hoped to cure through his writings the personal alienation & culture malaise that plagued many individuals who felt an "inner emptiness" or a "void within themselves." Perhaps this flurry of professional activity helped Frankl to restore meaning to his own life.

2 years later he married Eleonore Schwindt, who, like his 1st wife, was a nurse. Unlike Tilly, who was Jewish, Elly was Catholic. Although this may have been mere coincidence, it was characteristic of Viktor Frankl to accept individuals regardless of their religious beliefs or secular convictions. His deep commitment to the uniqueness & dignity of each individual was illustrated by his admiration for Freud & Adler even though he disagreed with their philosophical & psychological theories. He also valued his personal relationships with philosophers as radically different as Martin Heidegger, a reformed Nazi sympathizer, Karl Jaspers, an advocate of collective guilt, & Gabriel Marcel, a Catholic philosopher & writer. As a psychiatrist, Frankl avoided direct reference to his personal religious beliefs. He was fond of saying that the aim of psychiatry was the healing of the soul, leaving to religion the salvation of the soul.

He remained head of the neurology department at the Vienna Policlinic Hospital for 25 years & wrote more than 30 books for both professionals & general readers. He lectured widely in Europe, the Americas, Australia, Asia, & Africa; held professorships at Harvard, Stanford, & the University of Pittsburgh; & was Distinguished Professor of Logotherapy at the U.S. International University in San Diego. He met with politicians, world leaders such as Pope Paul VI, philosophers, students, teachers, & numerous individuals who had read & been inspired by his books. Even in his 90s, Frankl continued to engage in dialogue with visitors from all over the world & to respond personally to some of the hundreds of letters he received every week. 29 universities awarded him honorary degrees, & the American Psychiatric Association honored him with the Oskar Pfister Award.

Frankl is credited with establishing logotherapy as a psychiatric technique that uses existential analysis to help patients resolve their emotional conflicts. He stimulated many therapists to look beyond patients' past or present problems to help them choose productive futures by making personal choices & taking responsibility for them. Several generations of therapists were inspired by his humanistic insights, which gained influence as a result of Frankl's prolific writing, provocative lectures, & engaging personality. He encouraged others to use existential analysis creatively rather than to establish an official doctrine. He argued thta therapists should focus on the specific needs of individual patients rather than extrapolate from abstract theories.

Despite a demanding schedule, Frankl also found time to take flying lessons & pursue his lifelong passion for mountain climbing. He joked that in contrast to Freud's & Adler's "depth psychology," which emphasizes delving into an individual's

past & his or her unconscious instincts & desires, he practiced “height psychology,” which focuses on a person’s future & his or her conscious decisions & actions. His approach to psychotherapy stressed the importance of helping people to reach new heights of personal meaning through self transcendence: the application of positive effort, technique, acceptance of limitations, & wise decisions. His goal was to provoke people into realizing that they could & should exercise their capacity for choice to achieve their own goals. Writing about tragic optimism, he cautioned us that “the world is in a bad state, but everything will become still worse unless each of us does his best.”

Frankl was once asked to express in 1 sentence the meaning of his own life. He wrote the response on paper & asked his students to guess what he had written. After some moments of quiet reflection, a student surprised Frankl by saying, “The meaning of your life is to help others find the meaning of theirs.”

“That was it, exactly,” Frankl said. “Those are the very words I had written.” – William J. Winslade

William J. Winslade is a philosopher, lawyer, & psychoanalyst who teaches psychiatry, medical ethics, & medical jurisprudence at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston & the University of Houston Law Center.” – Frankl, 2017, pp. 108–116

4 Selected Writings

4.1 Letter to Wilhelm & Setpha Börner. Sep 14, 1945

²“My dears,

I’ve been in Vienna for 4 weeks now. Finally there is an opportunity to write you. But I have only sad news to communicate: shortly before my departure from Munich, I learned that my mother was sent to Auschwitz a week after me. What that means, you know all too well. & I had scarcely arrived in Vienna when I was told that my wife is also dead. She was sent from Auschwitz to work in the trenches at Trachtenberg in Breslau, & then on to the infamous concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. There, the women endured “terrible, indescribable suffering,” as it was put in a letter from a former colleague of Tilly’s³, in which Tilly’s name is listed as 1 of those who died of typhus (the letter comes from the only survivor of the former hospital nurses, such as they were, in Bergen-Belsen). I have had the “indescribable” depicted to me by a survivor of Bergen-Belsen. I cannot repeat it.

So now I’m all alone. Whoever has not shared a similar fate cannot understand me. I am terribly tired, terribly sad, terribly lonely. I have nothing more to hope for & nothing more to fear. I have no pleasure in life, only duties, & I live out of conscience . . . & so I have re-established myself, & now I’m re-dictating my manuscript, both for publication & for my own rehabilitation. A couple of well-placed old friends have taken on my cause in the most touching way. But no success can make me happy, everything is weightless, void, vain in my eyes, I feel distant from everything. It all says nothing to me, means nothing. The best have not returned (also, my best friend [Hubert Gsur] was beheaded) & they have left me alone. In the camp, we believed that we had reached the lowest point – & then, when we returned, we saw that nothing has survived, that that which had kept us standing has been destroyed, that at the same time as we were becoming human again it was possible to fall deeper, into an even more boundless suffering. There remains perhaps nothing more to do than cry a little & browse a little through the Psalms.

Perhaps you will smile at me, maybe you will be angry with me, but I do not contradict myself in the slightest, I take nothing away from my former affirmation of life, when I experience the things I have described. On the contrary, if I had not had this rock-solid, positive view of life – what would have become of me in these last weeks, in those months in the camp? But I now see things in a larger dimension. I see increasingly that life is so very meaningful, that in suffering & even in failure there must still be meaning. & my only consolation lies in the fact that I can say in all good conscience, that I realized the opportunities that presented themselves to me, I mean to say: that I turned them into reality. This is the case w.r.t. my short marriage to Tilly. What we have experienced cannot be undone, it has been, but this Having-been is perhaps the most certain form of being.

To finish, some happy news: Vally Laufer is alive & well in Vienna, stayed here in hiding as a “U-Boat” (an illegal)! I leave it to you to let Stella & my father-in-law, as well as my brother-in-law Gustav D. Grosser, gradually know the truth. Sadly Walter also probably died at Auschwitz. & Tilly’s aunt, Hertha Weiser, lost her husband in a shootout in the final days of fighting in Vienna. Are you in contact with Eugen Hofmann, Elsie Kupferberg, Thea Kissmann? Have you received my 2nd letter via Berman? Forgive these disjointed scribbles but I have to write bit by bit during my surgery hours.

With warmest greetings!” – Frankl, 2017, pp. 118–119

²Wilhelm Börner (1882–1951), a philosopher & educator, & lifelong friend of Viktor Frankl’s, headed the “ethical community” in Vienna. In this capacity, Börner founded the world’s 1st suicide-counseling body in Vienna. Börner’s initiative was also an important impetus for Frankl in the foundation of youth-counseling centers, in which Börner was also involved as a volunteer counselor.

³Tilly Grosser, Frankl’s 1st wife.

4.2 Memorial Speech on the 40th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Türkheim Concentration Camp, Bavaria. Apr 27, 1985

“Honored guests,

1st, I thank you for the honor you have shown me in inviting me. You have given me the power to speak, & so I may also speak on behalf of the dead. The city of my birth is Vienna, but Türkheim is the place of my rebirth. Rebirth after the 1st half of my life. A short while ago I turned 80, & my 40th birthday was spent in the concentration camp at Türkheim. My birthday gift then was that after weeks of typhus fever, I became free of the fever for the 1st time.

So my 1st greeting is to my dead companions. My 1st thanks, however, go to the high school students who had the memorial stone made. & I also thank them in the name of the dead, to whom it is dedicated. But I must also say thank you to those who liberated us, who saved the lives of us survivors, & I want to tell you a little story. When a couple of years ago I was in the capital of Texas, giving a lecture at its university on the psychotherapy I founded, logotherapy as it is called, the mayor made me an honorary citizen. I replied that rather than make me an honorary citizen of his tow, I should really name him an honorary logotherapist. For if young men from Texas had not risked their lives & some of them also sacrificed their life to liberate us, then as of Apr 27, 1945 there would have been no Viktor Frankl, to say nothing of any logotherapy. Tears came to the mayor’s eyes.

Now I also have to thank the people of Türkheim! Whenever I gave the last lecture of the semester at the United States International University in California, I would show, at the request of the students, a series of slides: photos [of the camps] I had taken after the war. & at the end I always showed them a slide that I had taken on the other side of the railway embankment there showing the front of a large farmhouse, in front of which I had gathered the large extended family that lived there. These were the people who during the last days of the war risked their lives by hiding Hungarian Jewish girls who had escaped from the camp! With this slide I wanted to show what my deepest conviction is – & has been from the very 1st day after the war: namely, that there is no collective guilt! Let alone – if I may so call it – a retroactive collective guilt, in which someone is held responsible for what their parents’ or even grandparents’ generation may once have done.

Guilt can only be personal guilt – guilt for what one has done oneself or even not done, neglected to do. But even then we must have some understanding of the fears of those concerned – fear for their freedom, even their lives, & not least fear for the fate of their families. Certainly, there have been those that have nonetheless preferred to let themselves be put in a concentration camp, rather than be unfaithful to their convictions. But actually one may only demand heroism of others if that person has proved that they preferred to go into a concentration camp rather than conform or make compromises. But those who sat safely abroad, they cannot ask of others that they should prefer to go to their deaths rather than pursue opportunism. & consider this: those who were in the camps judge in general much more mildly than, say, the émigrés who were able to secure their freedom, or those who were not even born until decades later. Finally, I cannot help but also thank a man who unfortunately could not attend this thanksgiving. I mean the commandment of the Türkheim camp, Herr Hofmann. I can still see him standing in front of me, as we arrived from the camp of Kaufering III, in ragged clothes, freezing, without blankets, & hear as he began to curse most heartily because he was so appalled that we had been sent there in this state. It was also he who secretly, as we later found out, bought medicines from his own pocket – for his Jewish prisoners.

A few years ago I invited some Türkheim citizens who had helped camp inmates to a get-together at a local inn; I wanted Herr Hofmann to come too, but as it turned out he had died shortly before. From a certain local spiritual advisor whom you all surely know (he too has died in the meantime) I now know that Herr Hofmann himself, he who should have had the very least need, was until the end of his life plagued by self-reproach. How willingly, & with what conviction, would I have eased his mind.

Now you will surely object: that’s all well & good, but people like Her Hofmann are exceptions. Maybe. But *they* are what counts. At least when it comes to understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation! & I feel it legitimate to say this, for it was no lesser person than the famous, late Rabbi Leo Baeck, who back in 1945 – just imagine, 1945! – wrote a “Prayer for Reconciliation,” in which he explicitly says: “Only goodness shall count!”

& if you point out to me that there was in fact so little goodness, then I can only answer with the words of another great Jewish thinker, namely the philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza, whose main work, *Ethics*, concludes with the words: *sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia, quam rara sunt*. Everything that is great is as rare to find as it is difficult to do. In fact, I myself believe that decent people are in the minority, have always been & always will be. But that’s nothing new. There is an ancient Jewish legend, according to which the existence of the world depends on there always being 36 – no more than 36! – righteous people in the world. Well, I cannot tell you exactly how many there are, but I am convinced that in Türkheim there were, & certainly still are, a couple of righteous people. & when we now remember the dead of the Türkheim camp, I would like also to thank in the name of these dead th righteous people of the town of Türkheim.” – Frankl, 2017, pp. 120–122

4.3 Memorial Speech to Mark the 50th Anniversary of Hitler’s Invasion. Mar 10, 1988, Rathausplatz, Vienna

“Ladies & gentleman,

I hope for your understanding when I ask you in this hour of remembrance to join me in thinking of my father – he perished in the Theresienstadt camp; my brother – he died in Auschwitz; my mother – she was killed in the gas chamber at Auschwitz; & my 1st wife – she lost her life in Bergen-Belsen. & yet I must ask you to expect no words of hatred from me. Whom should I hate? I know only the victims, not the perpetrators, at least I do not know them personally – & I refuse to call people *collectively* guilty. There is no collective guilt, it does not exist, & I say this not only today, but I’ve said so from day 1 when I was liberated from my last concentration camp – & at that time it was definitely not a way to make oneself popular to dare publicly to oppose the idea of collective guilt.

Guilt can in any case only be personal guilt – the guilt for something I myself have done – or may have failed to do! But I cannot be guilty of something that other people have done, even if it is my parents or grandparents. & to try to persuade today’s Austrians between the ages of nought & 50 of a sort of “retroactive collective guilt,” I consider to be a crime & an insanity – or, to put it in a psychiatrist’s terms, it would be a crime, were it not a case of insanity. & a return to the so-called “kin liability” of the Nazis! & I think that the victims of former collective persecution should be the 1st to agree with me. Otherwise it would be as if they set great store by driving young people into the arms of the old Nazis or the neo-Nazis! I shall now come back to my liberation from the concentration camp: I then took the 1st possible lift I could get (even if only illegally possible) on a truck back to Vienna. In the intervening years, I have been to America 63 times; but every time I returned to Austria. Not because the Austrians loved me especially, but rather, the other way round, because I love Austria so much, & we know that love is not always based on reciprocity. Well, whenever I’m in America, the Americans ask me: “Mr. Frankl, why didn’t you come to us *before* the war? You could have spared yourself a great deal.” & I then have to explain to them that I had to wait for years to get a visa, & how when it finally arrived, it was already too late, because I simply could not bring myself, in the middle of the war, to leave my elderly parents to their fate. & then the Americans ask me: “Well, why didn’t you at least come to us *after* the war? Hadn’t the Viennese done enough to you – you & yours?”

“Well,” I then say to these people, “in Vienna there was, e.g., a Catholic baroness, who at the risk of her own life hid a cousin of mine as a ‘U-boat’ & thus saved my cousin’s life. & then in Vienna there was a certain socialist lawyer who at great personal risk secretly gave me food whenever he could.” Do you know who that was? Bruno Pittermann, subsequently vice chancellor of Austria. Now, I go on to ask the Americans, why should I *not* return to such a city, where there are such people?

Ladies & gentlemen, I hear you say: That’s all well & good, but those were only exceptions – exceptions to the rule, & as a rule people were just opportunists – they should have shown resistance. Ladies & gentlemen, you are right, but consider: resistance presupposes heroism, & in my opinion one may demand heroism only of a single person & that is ... oneself! & whoever then says that someone should have preferred to be locked up rather than get on with the Nazis, then that person can only actually say this if they themselves have proved that *they* preferred to let themselves to be put in a concentration camp, & consider this: those who were in concentration camps do in general judge the opportunists far more lightly – more lightly than those who stayed abroad for the duration. Not to mention the younger generation – how can they imagine how afraid people were & how they trembled for their freedom, for their very lives & for the fate of their families, for whom they were always responsible? We can only admire all the more those who dared to join the resistance movement. I am thinking here of my friend Hubert Gsur, who was sentenced to death for undermining the military & executed by the guillotine.

National Socialism nurtured racism. In reality there are only 2 races, namely the “race” of decent people & the “race” of people who are not decent. & “segregation” runs straight through all nations & within every single nation straight through all parties. Even in the concentration camps one came across halfway decent fellows here & there among the SS men – just as one came across the old scoundrel or 2 among the prisoners. Not to mention the Capos. That decent people are in the minority, that they have always been a minority & are likely to remain so is something we must come to terms with. Danger only threatens when a political system sends those not-decent people, i.e., the negative element of a nation, to the top. & no nation is immune from doing this, & in this respect every nation is in principle capable of a Holocaust! In support of this we have the sensational results of scientific experiments in the field of social psychology, for which we owe thanks to an American; they are known as the Milgram Experiment.

If we want to extract the political consequences from all this, we should assume that there are basically only 2 styles of politics, or perhaps better said, only 2 types of politicians: the 1st are those who believe that the end justifies the means, & that could be any means ... While the other type of politician knows very well that there are means that could desecrate the holiest end. & it is this type of politician whom I trust, despite the clamor around the year 1988, & the demands of the day, not to mention of the anniversary, trust to hear the voice of reason & to ensure that all who are of goodwill, stretch out their hands to each other, across all the graves & across all divisions.

Thank you for your attention.” – Frankl, 2017, pp. 124–126

5 Glossary

- **“Anti-Semitism:** Prejudice directed against Jewish people.
- **Auschwitz:** 1 of the deadliest concentration camps, located in modern-day Poland. Also known as Auschwitz-Birkenau.

- **Bergen-Belsen:** A concentration camp in northern Germany notorious for its lack of food & poor sanitation. Frankl's 1st wife, Tilly, died in Bergen-Belsen in 1944.
- **Capo:** A concentration cap prisoner who was appointed to oversee the forced labor of other prisoners.
- **Concentration camps:** Places in which the Nazis imprisoned & exterminated Jews & other minorities.
- **Dachau:** A concentration camp located in southern Germany.
- **Gas chambers:** Rooms in which victims of the Holocaust were killed by poison gas.
- **Gestapo:** The secret police force of Nazi Germany that targeted perceived opponents of the Nazis.
- **Holocaust:** Term used to describe the Nazi genocide of some 6 million Jews & millions of other victims.
- **Kaufering:** A subsidiary camp of Dachau, located in Germany. Frank was imprisoned here in 1944.
- **Nazi Germany:** Also known as the 3rd Reich, this refers to Germany when it was controlled by Adolf Hitler & characterized by racism, anti-Semitism, & oppression. Officially, the Nazi Party was known as the National Socialist Party.
- **SS:** The Nazi military organization that carried out surveillance, arrests, & executions for Adolf Hitler.
- **Theresienstadt:** A concentration camp located in the modern-day Czech Republic. Frankl was imprisoned here before transferred to the Auschwitz, Kaufering, & Türkheim camps.
- **Türkheim:** A subsidiary of the Dachau camp, located in Germany. Frankl was imprisoned here until 1945, when the camp was liberated by American soldiers." – Frankl, 2017, p. 127

6 Chronology of Viktor Frankl's Life & of the Holocaust

References

Frankl, Viktor E. (2017). *Man's Search For Meaning*. Beacon Press, p. 138.