**PERMA Frankl Essay**

By my signature below, I certify that I have not received improper help nor given it to others in writing this assignment nor have I used any method that would give me an unfair advantage over others in the class. This assignment represents my own work only and I had no assistance from another person or any other source unless it is referenced at the bottom of each appropriate page.

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(Full Typed Signature and Date)

A thorough read of the books ‘Flourish’ by Martin Seligman and ‘Man's Search for Meaning’ by Victor Frankl highlights various similarities in two seemingly unrelated texts. Seligman, through his research, identifies Well-being to be the goal of positive psychology and identifies – **P**ositive Emotion, **E**ngagement, Positive **R**elationships, **M**eaning and **A**ccomplishment as the five independent elements that contribute to it. In stark contrast to this, Victor Frankl’s grim yet meaningful book looks at life, human psychology and meaning from the perspective of a Holocaust era prisoner who has witnessed all kinds of horrors and has little to lose. Both the books, however, touch upon some common ideas through an analysis of these ideas, I have come to a conclusion that **Humor, Purpose, Good Relationships and Friendships give a man enough strength to get through any hardships or difficult situations in life.**

**Components of PERMA**

Seligman (2011, p. 16) says that the elements of well-being take us safely away from Aristotle’s monism and have the following properties:

* Contributes to well-being.
* People pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements.
* Defined and measured independently of the other elements (exclusivity).

The five elements of PERMA are as follows:

* **Positive Emotion:** It is concerned with the ‘pleasant life’. Includes indicators like happiness and life satisfaction.
* **Engagement:** It involves entering into and being in the state of Flow.
* **Positive Relationships:** This includes all kinds of connections one has but mainly friends and family. Other people are the best antidote to the downs of life and the single most reliable up.
* **Meaning:** Meaning is to finda purpose in life that is bigger than oneself. The dispassionate and more objective judgment of history, logic, and coherence can contradict a subjective judgment.
* **Accomplishment:** Accomplishment (or achievement) is often pursued for its own sake, even when it brings no positive emotion, no meaning, and nothing in the way of positive relationships.

**Connections between Well-being (PERMA) and Frankl**

While it seems to be a trifle compared to the other points mentioned in my thesis, I do believe that humor even in dark times can serve as a ray of hope in an otherwise wretched environment. Seligman (2011, p. 24) mentions humor as one of the twenty-four strengths and virtues in the authentic happiness theory. Besides, humor is not to be seen in isolation but as a means to attain positive emotion that ultimately contributes to our well-being. Victor Frankl highlights the role of humor during his time as a prisoner in the Auschwitz camp under Nazi Germany. He mentions (Frankl 1992, p. 55) that even in a place as dark and gloomy as a concentration camp, people found a sense of humor. He talks about humor as a weapon for self-preservation that can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation. His anecdote on training his friend to develop a sense of humor through fabricated stories and dreams is a prime example of the strong impact that humor can have in a desolate environment. Humor, he says, and as I believe, is a trick learned while attempting to master the art of living that can be practiced anywhere, even in a concentration camp.

Purpose or meaning is another important aspect of well-being that Seligman talks about in his Well-Being Theory. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs describes self-actualisation as the highest level of need and there can be no self-actualisation without purpose. Human beings, ineluctably want meaning and purpose in life which involves being a part of and serving something bigger than the self (Seligman 2011, p. 12). Humanity has created plenty of positive institutions which allow this like religion, political parties, family, etc. Frankl also talks about multiple instances where a purpose bigger than himself drove him and his fellow prisoners forward and gave them the will to live. He talks about the Typhus outbreak (Frankl 1992, p. 46,110) in the spring of 1945 and how, to avoid attacks of delirium, he began reconstructing the manuscript he had lost in the disinfection chamber of Auschwitz and his deep desire to write the manuscript anew helped him to survive the rigors of the camp. He talked about occasional scientific debates and how deepening spiritual life helped explain the paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make up survived the camp life better than those of a more robust nature. Another instance when we find Frankl serving a higher purpose is during his fourth day in the sick quarters (Frankl 1992, p. 59) where he decides volunteer for medical duties despite knowing that life would be short in a working party. He concluded that if he were to die, there would rather be some sense in his death. The works of the two authors reinforce my belief that a true purpose to life is essential to survival and can help us weather the most intense storms by serving as a guiding light. Serving a purpose leads to **engagement** and the pinnacle of well-being, in my opinion, is when we attain a **Flow** while engaging actively to serve that very purpose.

Finally, we get to relationships which I believe are the backbone of human society. Human beings with their cognitive capabilities and emotional variety are capable of forming bonds and relationships whose depths cannot be fathomed. The impact of positive relationships was one of the two factors that influenced Seligman to update ‘Authentic Happiness Theory’ with the ‘Well-being Theory’. He says that anything that is positive is seldom solitary (Seligman 2011, p. 19) be it joy, pride, profound meaning, or purpose. Positive and healthy relationships are an independent element which one needs to achieve to flourish and maximize their well-being. Taking an example from his life, he mentions that he listens to his daughter’s excruciating piano recital even if it doesn’t make him feel good because it is his parental duty (Seligman 2011, p. 11). Frankl treads a similar path during his time at the concentration camp in Auschwitz. Even though he often mentions that at the camp it was every man for himself, he also talks about his relationship with his fellow prisoners. One instance of the same is during the selection process where he says that it was a signal for free fight among prisoners and all that mattered was that one’s name along with that of his friends was crossed off the list (Frankl 1992, p. 18). He also mentions later how the memory of the love of his life was clear as day in his mind and how he used to converse with her in his thoughts and the fact that whether she was alive or not would’ve mattered little at that point because her memories were so strong it seemed like a reality (Frankl 1992, p. 48,49). I believe that these anecdotes are examples enough to show that family, friends, and relationships define a human being and the company one keeps is one of the most important factors that define well-being.

**The differences and Conclusion**

While there are many similarities, PERMA and Frankl’s writings also have many differences which spring from the fact that both were written by people who have starkly different experiences. While PERMA describes what a common man must do to achieve well-being, Frankl looks at life from the perspective of a man who has witnessed unprecedented horrors and thus, has become apathetic all that happens around him. These differences manifest themselves in their way of thinking which is also reflected in their style of writing. Whatever be the case, both the authors through their writings lead me to a conclusion that that to survive or flourish, positivity and humor, good relationships and close friends and a goal/purpose to work towards are must haves.

**References**

Frankl, V. (1959). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: a visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. 1st Free Press hardcover ed. New York, NY, Free Press.