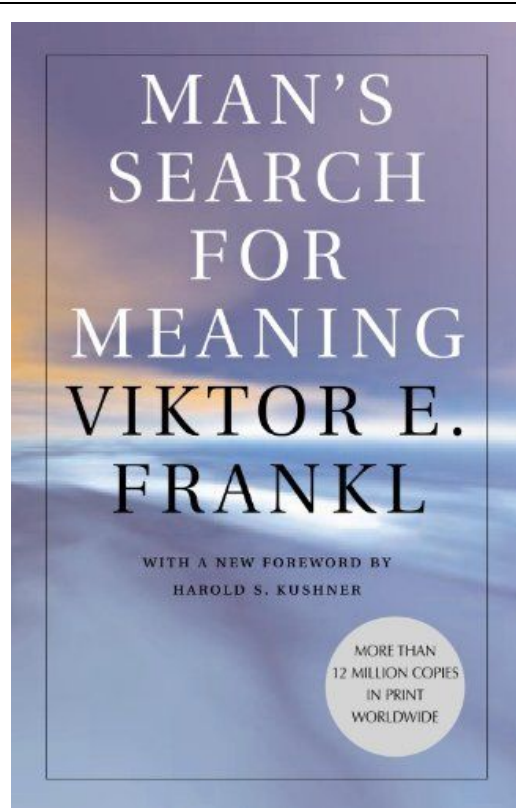


## Favorite Quote:

*“Don’t aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one’s dedication to a cause greater than oneself, or as the by-product of one’s surrender to a person other than oneself.”*



**Summary:** first published in 1946, *Man’s Search for Meaning* is an autobiographical account of Frankl’s experiences in the Nazi death camps, along with his philosophy for finding meaning in life.

Frankl is the father of [logotherapy](#) which asserts the primary motivational force of an individual is to find a meaning in life. But instead of looking backward and inward, you look forward and outward. In other words, self-actualization is only attainable as a side-effect of self-transcendence.

Frankl takes the starry-eyed question we often ask—‘*What is the meaning of life?*’—and jolts the reader into seeing that *life is actually asking us* this question, and it is our responsibility to find meaning in three ways:

1. **Work:** in service of something other than ourselves
2. **Experiences:** with/for another person or thing
3. **Suffering:** our attitude in turning tragedy into triumph

Frankl was known to say that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast should be complemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.

Amazingly, Viktor Frankl wrote this book in **only nine days**.

*“Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing: your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation.”*

**Author:** Viktor Frankl (26 March 1905 – 2 September 1997) was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. He survived Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Kaufering and Türkheim. Frankl was the founder of logotherapy, which is a form of existential analysis, the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy".

Frankl died in Vienna at the age of 92. He leaves a legacy of eight books and 14 awards for his various contributions.



## Part I: Experiences in a Concentration Camp

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**Overview:** the first half of the book is about Viktor Frankl's experiences in four different Nazi concentration camps (1944-1945). As one might imagine, the conditions and regard for humanity are horrific. These daily, life-threatening hardships compel Frankl to develop new mental models and capacities to survive his imprisonment. He would later find out that his mother (Elsa), brother (Walter) and wife (Tilly) were all murdered in the concentration camps.



*The entrance to Auschwitz where an estimated 1.1 million people were murdered.*

### Favorite quotes

- “He who has a Why to live for can bear almost any How.” - Nietzsche
- “Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it.” - Spinoza

### Top takeaways

Frankl's main belief is that life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Adler taught, but a **quest for meaning**. It is on this premise that logotherapy was built as an attempt to cure the soul by leading it to find meaning.

Frankl acknowledged that forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing: **your freedom to choose** how you will respond to the situation.

Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual. These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, differ from man to man, and from moment to moment. **Thus it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way.**

## Special moments



Frankl recalls a particular night in Auschwitz when he heard the sad weeping of a violin playing a tango. He wept too, for it was his wife's 24th birthday and she was also a prisoner in Auschwitz.

The meager pleasure of camp life, e.g. like getting a good portion of soup “from the bottom” of the pot, provided Frankl a kind of negative happiness—“freedom from suffering” as Schopenhauer put it—and even that in a relative way only.

Humor also served as a welcomed relief from the daily horrors. Frankl and his fellow prisoners would often joke how camp life would adversely affect their social graces after the war, e.g. yelling at dinner parties, requesting soup servings “from the bottom.” Humor and thoughts of the future helped them endure cold, sickness, and starvation.

*“No one has the right to do wrong, even if wrong has been done to them.”*

## Part II: Logotherapy in a Nutshell

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**Overview:** the second half of this book introduces us to Frankl's psychological school of thought, logotherapy. Part II is broken into sections like *The Meaning of Life*, *The Meaning of Love*, *The Existential Vacuum*, and *The Essence of Existence*—each of which are succinct and approachable.

### Quotes

- “I consider it a dangerous misconception of mental hygiene to assume that what a man needs in the first place is equilibrium or, as it is called in biology, homeostasis, i.e. a tensionless state.

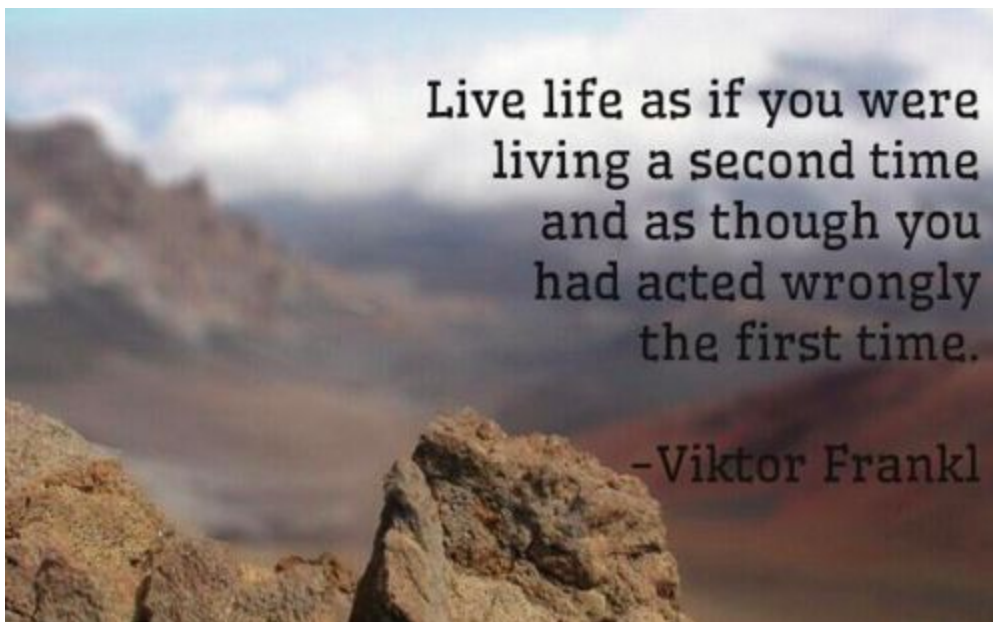
What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather **the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal**, a freely chosen task.”

- “Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is., but rather he must recognize that it is *he* who is asked.”



“What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.”

- “Freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lives in terms of responsibility.”
- “What he becomes—within the limits of endowment and environment—he has made out of himself.



## Top Takeaways

Logotherapy regards its assignment as that of assisting the patient to find meaning in his life. Logotherapy does this by encouraging people to avoid the temptation to look backward and inward, but rather **look forward and outward**.

Frankl describes the “Existential Vacuum”: *No instinct tells him what to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism) or he does what other people wish him to do (totalitarianism).*

The existential vacuum manifests itself mainly in a state of boredom.

Viktor E. Frankl

The existential vacuum manifests itself mainly in a **state of boredom**. As Schopenhauer suggested, man is apparently doomed to vacillate eternally between the two extremes of distress and boredom.

“In actual fact, boredom is now causing, and certainly bringing to psychiatrists, more problems to solve than distress. And these problems are growing increasingly crucial, for **progressive automation will probably lead to an enormous increase in the leisure hours available to the average worker**. The pity of it is that many of these will not know what to do with all their newly acquired free time.”



Therefore, the logotherapist's role consists of widening and broadening the visual field of the patient so that the whole spectrum of potential meaning becomes conscious and visible to him.

By declaring that 1) man is responsible, and 2) must actualize the potential meaning of his life, Frankl stresses 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.

And when it comes to hardship, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.

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## Postscript - Top Takeaways

<b>What is the “tragic triad” of logotherapy?</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Pain</li><li>2. Guilt</li><li>3. Death</li></ol>	<b>How should we respond to the tragic triad?</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Pain: turn suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment</li><li>2. Guilt: take the opportunity to change oneself for the better</li><li>3. Death: derive from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action</li></ol>
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**Happiness is like laughter:** one must have a *reason* to be happy or laugh. It can't be commanded. Frankl cites that of his patients, 30% were affected by lack of meaning in their lives. The resulting “existential vacuum” is a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. Another study by [Annemarie von Forstmeyer](#): **90% of alcoholics had suffered from an abysmal feeling of meaninglessness.**

Frankl ponders if life is similar to a movie in that the meaning of the film can not be known until the end. References to philosophically similar approaches of [Karl Buhler](#) and [Max Wertheimer](#) ([Gestalt perception](#)). Wertheimer was interested in making a distinction between *reproductive* thinking and *productive* thinking. Reproductive thinking is associated with repetition, conditioning, habits or familiar intellectual territory. Productive thinking is the product of new ideas and breakthroughs.

<b>What are the 3 avenues to find meaning?</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Work/deeds</li><li>2. Experiences of a thing/person</li><li>3. Suffering and turning tragedy into triumph</li></ol>	In the US, we are often given <b>very little opportunity to be proud of suffering</b> . It is considered degrading, so the person that becomes unhappy is also ashamed of being unhappy. This is bad.
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*Live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now.*

Frankl disagrees strongly with Freud's argument that, when deprived of basic needs like hunger, *all people's individual differences will blur*. To the contrary, people became *more* different in the harsh conditions of the concentration camps.