

# MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Author : Dr. Victor E. Frankl

Genre: Philosophy



One philosophical conjecture that continues to enthrall people of all ages comes in the form of a question, "What is the purpose of our life?" "Why are we born?" Is our existence in this world meaningless and purposeless or there is a deep profound meaning ingrained in life. For centuries philosophers and scientists have been striving hard to find the answer to this question pertaining to existential crisis. A few people have been rather successful in answering this conjecture as well. However, amongst all these remarkable stalwarts, there is a psychologist and a philosopher who with the help of his magnum opus book "Man's Search For Meaning" has described the purpose of life with so much clarity, depth, and truthfulness that nobody has ever done before. His name is Dr. Viktor Frankl.

*What is the purpose of our life?" "Why are we born?" Is our existence in this world meaningless and purposeless or there is a deep profound meaning ingrained in life.*

This book has sold more than 10 million copies due to its awe-inspiring content which has spanned generations. Just before I discuss the main elements of the book let's put things into perspective and shed some light on the life history of Dr. Frankl. He was an Austrian psychiatrist, philosopher and holocaust survivor who along with his family was put in brutal and violent concentration camps by Nazi forces. During his confinement, Dr. Frankl's mother, father, wife and brother were badly tortured and eventually murdered. Even after these direful and dreadful events, Dr. Frankl not only lived a fulfilling life but also wrote an immortal book in the form of Man's Search For Meaning. It's not merely a book but a philosophy, a formula for life with which you can achieve the depth of your existence; eventually leading you towards the identification of the real purpose of your life.

*It's not merely a book but a philosophy, a formula for life with which you can achieve the depth of your existence; eventually leading you towards the identification of the real purpose of your life.*

Dr. Frankl was inspired by a German philosopher Fredrick Nietzsche's following quote.

He who has a why to live for, can deal with any how!

This quote suggests that an individual who has found his purpose of existence and identity can deal undauntingly with any hardship that life has to offer. This is the reason why even after



facing such pain, cruelty, atrocity and injustice in life he never lost hope and led a successful life. His time in prison gave him the most profound understanding of human psychology. During his confinement, he observed that those prisoners who were pessimistic and didn't have any hope of a brighter and better future gradually started getting ill and eventually succumbed to the hardships and brutalities of the camp.

Another reality dawned on him during his time at the Nazi concentration camp. He came to realise that a person gets to know about the purpose of his life during his worst circumstances when the chips are down and he has touched rock bottom. The one's who give up during these strenuous circumstances lose their race of life and those who remain steadfast, committed, courageous and dedicated eventually become successful. He writes that our life has certain expectations from us and the individual who understands these expectations; prospers.

One of the most significant contributions of Dr. Frankl in the field of psychology is the introduction of Logotherapy, a concept he talks about in detail in this book. With the help of logotherapy, he helped many of his patients by fulfilling their search for finding purpose in life. According to logotherapy, the best quality a human being possesses is his "free will" which means independent thinking. Every individual has full authority and freedom to live his life on his own terms. Logotherapy works wonders for people in terms of improving their overall mental health. It helps them identify the skills required to identify the gap that exists between their present and their future and then work relentlessly towards narrowing that gap as much as possible. Therefore, a fulfilling life is actually a continuous struggle to achieve a worthy ideal. One should keep on striving hard to become the best version of himself. Dr. Frankl's logotherapy enables a person to achieve the state of self-actualization; a concept popularized by famous psychologist Abraham Maslow in his famous research paper published in 1943 with the title "A Theory of Human Motivation".

Another remarkable concept propagated by the great author in the book is that every person wants to be happy in life and a large majority of us spend our lives in pursuit of happiness. However, he believes that this is not the right way to approach life. He states that the actual source of happiness is to delve into some work or hobby which enables you to even forget yourself. This is the reason why scientists, painters, sculptors and artists remain

*According to logotherapy, the best quality a human being possesses is his "free will" which means independent thinking. Every individual has full authority and freedom to live his life on his own terms.*

*Therefore, a fulfilling life is actually a continuous struggle to achieve a worthy ideal. One should keep on striving hard to become the best version of himself.*

*He states that the actual source of happiness is to delve into some work or hobby which enables you to even forget yourself. This is the reason why scientists, painters, sculptors and artists remain content in life.*



content in life since their interest becomes their profession vis a vis the people who work monotonously day in day out just to pay their bills. Therefore, one of the key determinants which can give meaning to your life is to pursue a passion, a hobby or anything of your interest which can give direction to your life and keep you happy and contented.

Here a million-dollar question arises; how can you search for the purpose of life? This isn't a very easy question to answer. However, Dr. Frankl expresses a very interesting way to seek the answer to this question. As a psychologist whenever he used to be visited by patients for consultancy, he used to ask them a very unusual question; point-blank, "Why do you not commit suicide?" He writes that many patients had a very solid answer to this outrageous and unfamiliar question. Taking this as a starting and pivotal point, he used to transform their meaningless and purposeless life into a meaningful one. Through his therapy, he untangled many minds and gave them a reason to live.

This was all about "Man's Search for Meaning" and its main concepts. According to my observation, majority of the people I meet on an everyday basis are truly clueless about the purpose of their existence. Some perennially keep on seeking the answer to this question "Is there a purpose attached to our life or not? It's painful to see that innumerable people are living a directionless life without having an idea that they have a debt to pay back to life.

*Existential crisis occurs when our society, our environment, our family, our friends and our colleagues tell us how to live our life. When you start living your life according to the wavelength prescribed by society, chances are you will be unhappy.*

There surely is a purpose attached to our existence in this world. However, if you have failed to find that purpose as you read these lines don't worry at all. This is referred to as existential frustration. It is a feeling of being restless, uneasy or unsatisfied. The good news for all of you is that it's not a negative feeling at all. You have to nurture and protect this feeling. This feeling in itself will be your beacon light and will lead you towards glory. Remember, action cures fear. Be curious, dynamic and keep on seeking in life through pragmatic actions. Existential crisis occurs when our society, our environment, our family, our friends and our colleagues tell us how to live our life. When you start living your life according to the wavelength prescribed by society, chances are you will be unhappy. Therefore, if you really want to achieve happiness and fulfill the ultimate purpose of your life then do things that you are passionate about. The goal of life should not be to get a luxury car, a big house, a world tour or uncountable wealth; rather life becomes beautiful and worth

living when it has challenges and the fixation and madness to trump those challenges. If you keep on following Dr. Frankl's theory of life, I guarantee you will soon be on your way to living a purpose driven and meaningful life.



## **PERSONAL NOTES**

Use this space to write your notes and key takeaways  
from the book