

The life of ivan ilych in the context



The life of Ivan Ilych in the context of Man's Search for Meaning

In the Death of Ivan Ilych, Tolstoy presents one of the main characters, Ivan Ilych as a person who does not have a stand of his own but is dictated by the society. This essay analyzes the life of Ivan Ilych in the context of Man's Search for Meaning, by Frankl Viktor. To achieve this target, the essay gives a brief summary of Death of Ivan Ilych with special focus on Ivan Ilych, a shallow judge manipulated by the society. After this synthesis, the character of Ilych is discussed in the context of Man's Search for Meaning. The Death of Ivan Ilych commences on a sad note when judges are privately meeting and learn about the death of Ilych, through Peter Ivanovich, a close friend to the allegedly dead person (Tolstoy 1). Even though the judges are unhappy about the death of Ivan, they cannot help but marvel at the opportunities which had been created by the departure of their colleague. For this reason, they are consoled by the fact that they are not the ones who have died, but a different person. While observing Ivan's corpse, Peter notices a bothersome expression on his face, denoting warning and disapproval.

While at Ivan's home, Peter is confronted by Ivan's wife who wants to know possible ways of making use of the vacuum left by her husband in the government. After sharing the news with Gerasim, Peter is surprised by Gerasim's view concerning death, when he mentions that death was everybody's path (Tolstoy 4). The author shifts and focuses on Ivan's life, thirty years ago. As a second born in a family of three, Ivan is described as an average person in the society. He studies law, becomes a magistrate and

moves to a different province. He's comfortable until his wife changes her behavior occasioned by pregnancy (Tolstoy 13).

Ivan decides to distance himself from the family and sinks in his official duties. After missing a highly anticipated presiding judge post, Ivan is disappointed, takes a leave of absence and relocates to his brother-in-law's house. He looks for another job in St. Petersburg and purchases a high-class house for his family (Tolstoy 133). Ivan gets unwell after experiencing pain in his left side, associated with the minor accident he had before. As the situation gets worse, Ivan visits several doctors who disagree on his illness, making him fearful and depressed (Tolstoy 44).

He is filled with immortality thoughts and believes that his illness was a die or live issue and finds no way of changing his ever-deteriorating condition, which cannot be understood by his wife. Gerasim gives his best in helping Ivan who observes pretence in those around him and are unable to confront the reality of death. After his "deep black sack" dream he cuts links with Gerasim and his situation worsens (Tolstoy 55). He ponders about death and finds joy in his previous life memories. He believes that his prosperous past could not allow him to understand his suffering and maintains his artificiality view over those around him even at his death point. Ivan's greatest shortcoming is that he fails to live a life of his own but follows what the society and people around.

He believes that by imitating those in high social status, he will find satisfaction and happiness in life. He marries because of his status, and buys an expensive house to match his perceived status. He is intolerant towards

all he considers to be hindrance towards his happiness; he distances himself from the family after Praskovya's pregnancy (Tolstoy 13). He reduces his relationships to almost nothing as he sees everybody to be artificial. This isolation earns him pain and total dissatisfaction even at death point.

His death forces him to reflect on his life and confront the consequences of his isolation. Through this confrontation of reality, he notices that he had not lived rightly. He realizes that love and compassion are the main values to be upheld in life and are a major source of joy and happiness.

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl describes his experiences during the Nazi regime in Germany as a condemned Jew. However, he does this authorship without vengefulness and bitterness. He reflects on how prisoners reacted towards death camps in three phases and through personal experiences, noting that victors of brutality were characterized by the right conduct. The three phases; admission, entrenchment and liberation presented different challenges. According to the author, inmates lost meaning in life during the final phase by reflecting on passed events and the murder of family members. He notes that seekers of empty pleasures find life to be meaningless. This view can be directly linked to Ivan Ilych who lived a life of seeking pleasure in everything without realizing the true values of life.

From high paying jobs to a materialistic life, Ivan fits in Frankl's description of "empty pleasure-seekers". As a result of a meaningless life, some inmates remained in bed instead of reporting to work as expected by prison rules. In comparison, Ivan takes an absence leave after missing a promotion

to a higher paying job, not factoring in other factors which may have cost him as a way of seeking pleasure. From personal experience, Frankl learnt the need of being responsible in solving problems and performing tasks (Frankl 97).

From his perspective, life does not have a general definition; life's purpose is mostly suggested to every person through situations, problems and challenges, which have to be faced rightly. He further affirms that there is no value in seeking a convenient and inspiring meaning towards life. In describing Ivan's character, he adopts what Frankl refers to "inspiring" definition of life. When he reflects on his previous life, he is unable to find the meaning of life and believes that his success could not allow him to understand his suffering and the problem at hand.

When his wife gets pregnant, he is unhappy because of her change in behavior that generates inconveniences. As a result, Ivan gets absorbed in his official work as a magistrate, forgetting the love that his wife needed during the pregnancy period. According to Frankl, the meaning of life is found in unavoidable suffering moments of our lives. This seems impractical to Ivan who tries to run from challenges and searches the meaning of life in his prosperous past instead of confronting his suffering and death that are unavoidable. Since his unsuccessful promotion quest was beyond his control, Ivan was to find meaning of life in this situation but fails to do so by quitting and finding pleasure in a better paying job. Frankl further digs into his school of thought by introducing "Logotherapy" in realizing a fulfilling life. He believes that the inability of people to see meaning in life is the root cause of

frustrations and self-destructive traits. This approach contrasts Ivan who finds no meaning in life and develops self-destructive behaviors.

These include distancing himself from family members and seeing artificiality in every person around him. Frankl denounces a life that is based on self mechanism (Frankl 121). What is Ivan's living mechanism? He finds convenience in life by being overwhelmed by the need for material gain and rising to a higher social status. This mechanism forces him to live a life of others by sinking into an aristocratic society. The most significant argument presented by Frankl is his emphasis on individual definition of life. He believes that numerous situations and challenges pave way for the understanding of life. He further notes that the purpose of life keeps on changing as long as one lives. Does this apply to Ivan? He definitely does not view life from Frankl's perspective.

While he is seeking the meaning of life in his past, Frankl recommends the integration of current situations in finding a realistic meaning for life. Additionally, Frankl notes that anticipatory anxiety generates prophecies that are aimed at fulfilling one's desires. On the other hand, hyper-intension refers to trying beyond allowed limits to achieve something falling outside our reach, to fulfill a certain behavior within us. For instance, he advocates pursuance of one's fears to overcome obsessive fears that could be haunting us (Frankl 147). Conversely, Ivan is overwhelmed by the fear of death after all doctors gave conflicting prescriptions.

This fear makes him to be arrogant and sees malice in his family members. The analysis of Ivan Ilych's life in the context of Man's Search for Meaning,

presents contrasting views towards the true meaning of life. While Ivan is seeking inspiring definitions from his past, Frankl opposes the idea, arguing that life's meaning lies in different situations and challenges, which continuously change. Because of his wrong understanding, Ivan's suffering and death are meaningless.

Works Cited

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