

Mans search for meaning book review examples

[Business](#), [Management](#)



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Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl

Introduction:

Viktor Frankl's seminal book was written in 1946 and draws on his experiences in four different concentration camps but particularly during his time in Auschwitz, that great factory of mass murder where over 1. 5 million Jews and other political prisoners were exterminated. Frankl had to suffer several of his family's deaths including his pregnant wife while he had to continue labouring and blocking out the suffering from his mind.

Frankl's encounters with the terrible and almost unreal experiences in the concentration camps truly prove to be harrowing reading. Yet he is constantly searching for catharsis and redemption in his experiences whilst continuing to understand the human psyche and how it manages to cope with such extreme and arbitrary cruelty. However he also realises that innately, man is a cruel persona and he manages to find even beauty in cruelty especially when those who are about to die leave with dignity and without fear.

Frankl is also concerned with the effects of all this mass murder on the

Germans themselves who also end up severely traumatized by their experiences. Indeed he has words of comfort for those who have to go through their own personal suffering to achieve some sort of understanding and catharsis, yet he is obviously much more sympathetic with what the camp inmates are going through.

The experiences of those who are left in the starvation block are particularly harrowing and disturbing as Frankl has to examine some of them who are very near death. Here one begins to understand the horror and torture that these person were going through with absolutely no chance of survival.

Personal experiences

Frankl is particularly descriptive in a passage where he describes himself and other workers being herded out into the icy cold of the Polish winter to work like dogs. He finds incredibly deep thoughts in terrible situations such as the arbitrary beating of weak men to death, guards shooting prisoners for no reason and also setting of dogs upon them. It obviously makes for some pretty harrowing reading, yet it is all too real and effective. He also splits persons into good or bad with no fine lines in between and here the situation becomes ever more complex to understand. The sense of chance is also present as more often than not, survival depended on sheer luck which was the mood of the guard at the time. Frankl also deplores his fellow men who acted as Kapos who were only in their situation for personal gain.

However Frankl is always positive even when apparently in the depths of despair especially in the inner recesses of the nights in Auschwitz. His reflections on the smoke coming from the crematoriums and the clouds of ash which descended silently onto the camp are quite harrowing and at

times also very beautiful. He manages to find positive notions when even in the blackest moments of despair such as arbitrary executions which happened almost on a daily basis in Auschwitz and other camps such as Dachau, Mathausen and Buchenwald.

Conclusion – philosophy as a means to an end

The experiences which Frankl faced in the concentration camps undoubtedly changed him forever and would have affected his life substantially. The final section of the book focuses extensively on life after the camp experiences and how former prisoners had to deal with that. Obviously some would have been completely destroyed by what happened and having lost a considerable number of loved ones in the catastrophe, they would have had great difficulty in rebuilding their lives. Others could perhaps focus on the positive, that they had survived this living hell and come to terms with their new life. Frankl tries to focus on this positive aspect as at the end of the day, after such an experience, there remains nothing to fear but fear itself.

Frankl's book is seminal in more ways than one as it treats the camp experiences in an entirely different manner than other others. It brings about an understanding and personal catharsis to these harrowing situations whilst also focusing on character study and inner philosophical meaning. In making sense out of the wanton slaughter and cruelty, Frankl manages to paint a picture of reality which can only be understood through personal experience. In his own way, Frankl is positive about the camps as they also served a purpose, almost like a cleansing of suffering and the peak of darkness in the world. After the darkness comes the light and life will never be the same again. That is perhaps the overriding theme of the whole book which is

running through the narrative text and which Frankl succeeds in imparting to his readers. Philosophy can change according to situations and here Frankl is indeed a master in extracting the good from the bad in what can only be described as a sublime feeling.

Works cited

Frankl V (2000), Man's Search for Meaning Beacon Press