



Viktor Frankl's story is one of the great stories of survival, not merely for the fact that he survived a life threatening ordeal but, for the fact that his spirit soared and enabled him to discover learning moments in the face of wretched circumstances. Frankl was an Austrian psychologist who achieved a modest level of acclaim and had begun writing a book in 1940 that would later be called "Man's Search for Meaning".

In 1942, Frankl was taken to a German concentration camp and, like millions of other Europeans, lost his family – two parents, a wife and a brother – to the experience. Frankl survived the horrific ordeal and finished his book after he was released from Auschwitz in 1945.

His book achieves two levels of intense insightfulness. The first is that it recounts his ordeal with brutal honesty and details the fallibility of humans and their response to challenging circumstances. At the same time, the book sets the stage for the second profundity of his theory of Logotherapy, the theory about the search for meaning, i.e. man's desire to find meaning and purpose in life. In the end, not all humans are as fallible as others and Frankl offered reasons to discover what leads one human being to give up and another to soar.



What greater challenge could there be to strive for meaning of life in circumstances in which the real specter of death revealed itself daily? That is the environment in which Frankl pondered the meaning of life, the question with the all too elusive answer. Frankl's answer is that meaning is found and discovered only by the power of choice. You can take all away from a human being but can never take away the power of choice. He ultimately writes that freedom is the ability "to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances".

It is during his incarceration in the Nazi prison camp that he discovers the lack of will displayed by so many of his fellow captives. The stress of the situation he observed, as expected, was so overwhelming that people relinquished their choices and caved into the demands of the Nazi guards, even when it meant performing degrading acts and mistreating other captives.

The behaviors of concentration camp captives, for Viktor Frankl, provided insights into the will of man. Rather than allow degrading circumstances and horror of his daily existence to break his will, Frankl realized that his vision of the future would keep him alive. It thus became his goal that he would later share his psychological theories with others, even fantasizing that he would one day lecture to a group in a large auditorium in Vienna (a vision which later came to fruition!). This vision kept him focused on

surviving his ordeal. Surely the ability to physically survive in a Nazi concentration camp was a matter of chance, but the survival of the will was not.

Frankl's story is poignant on multiple levels, but ultimately it is a powerful story of triumph and survival of the spirit. That it has sold over 15 million copies is hardly surprising, yet perhaps still disappointing as the story told in "Man's Search for Meaning" is one that every human being should know.