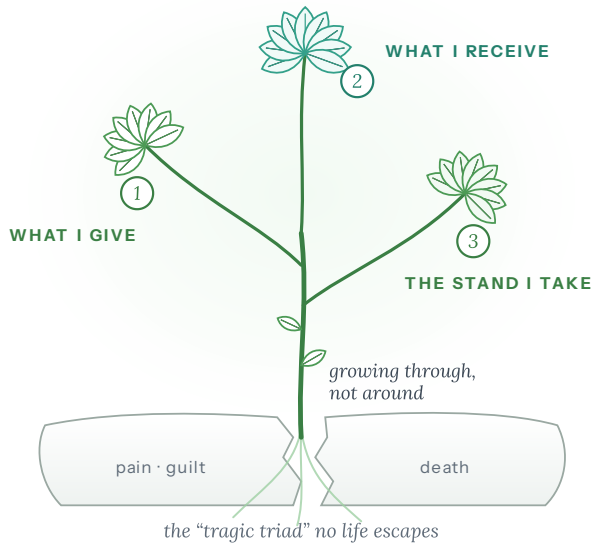


Viktor Frankl: The Search for Meaning

Logotherapy and existential analysis

Viktor Frankl (1905–1997) was an Austrian psychiatrist, neurologist and Holocaust survivor. His **logotherapy** holds that our deepest drive is the **will to meaning**, and that meaning remains possible in any circumstance, even great suffering.



Three paths to meaning *discovered, not invented*

- 1 **CREATIVE VALUES · WHAT I GIVE**
Work, creation and contribution
What we make, do or offer: a task, a craft, an act of care.
- 2 **EXPERIENTIAL VALUES · WHAT I RECEIVE**
Love, beauty and encounter
Truly meeting another person, or being moved by nature or art.
- 3 **ATTITUDINAL VALUES · THE STAND I TAKE**
Facing unavoidable suffering
When suffering can't be changed, meaning may lie in our attitude to it.

THE LAST OF THE HUMAN FREEDOMS

Choosing one's attitude

In the camps, Frankl concluded that when almost everything is taken, one freedom remains: *"to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances"*.

01 Key ideas

the roots of logotherapy

Will to meaning

A basic need for purpose, as central as Freud's pleasure or Adler's power.

Existential vacuum

Without meaning, we may feel boredom, apathy or emptiness.

Self-transcendence

Meaning is often found by reaching beyond ourselves.

Freedom and responsibility

We are free to respond, and responsible for the response we choose.

02 Tragic optimism

saying yes to life despite the tragic triad

pain → human achievement

Growing through what cannot be undone.

guilt → change for the better

Regret as a reason to act differently.

transience → responsible action

Life's shortness prompting choices now.

03 Logotherapy in practice

three core methods

● Socratic dialogue

Open questions that help people discover meaning already present in their own lives.

● Dereflection

Gently shifting attention away from excessive self-focus towards people and tasks that matter.

● Paradoxical intention

For anticipatory anxiety: humorously "wishing" for the feared outcome, loosening fear's grip.

What research suggests

Meaning in life is associated with wellbeing (Steger et al., 2006). A meta-analysis found meaning-centred therapies improved quality of life and reduced distress, mostly in people with serious illness (Vos & Vitali, 2018).

A note on a famous quote

"Between stimulus and response there is a space..." is widely credited to Frankl but isn't found in his writings. Stephen Covey popularised it from a book he couldn't name.

04 Reflection

"He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how" (Nietzsche, quoted by Frankl)

1 · CREATIVE

Something I create, give or contribute...

2 · EXPERIENTIAL

Someone or something I love, or that moves me...

3 · ATTITUDINAL

A stand I choose to take towards something I can't change...

MY WHY

What gives me a reason to keep going, even on hard days?

Meaning doesn't require suffering. Frankl held that suffering which can be changed should be. If you feel hopeless or have thoughts of self-harm, speak with your psychologist or GP; in a crisis, contact emergency services or a crisis line _____

SOURCES

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