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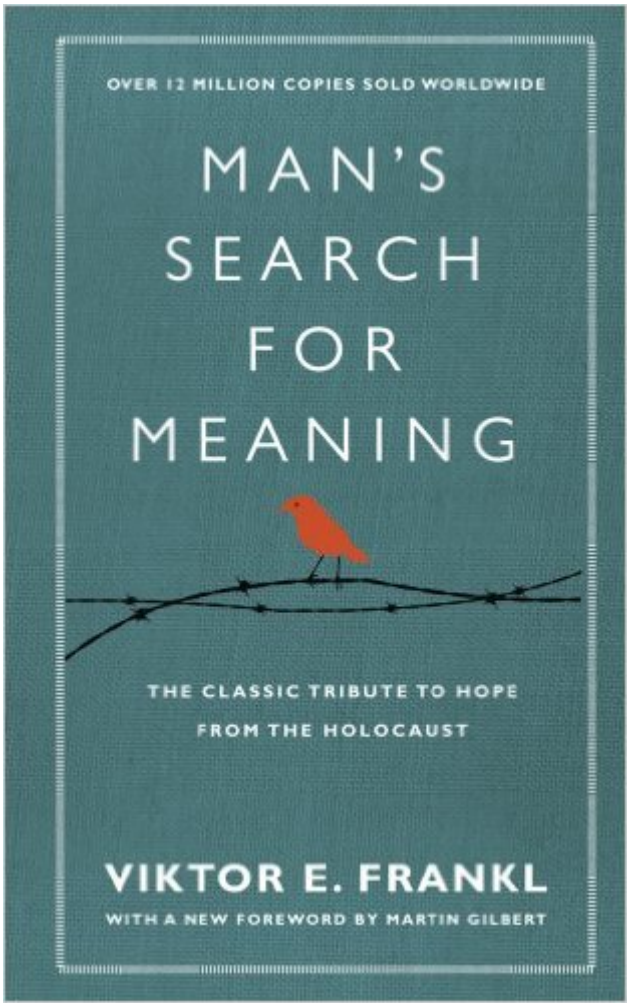
Man's Search For Meaning The Classic Tribute To Hope From The Holocaust



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Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An American doctor once asked Viktor Frankl to explain the difference between conventional psychoanalysis and logotherapy. Before answering, Frankl asked the doctor for his definition of psychoanalysis. The man said, "During psychoanalysis, the patient must lie down on a couch and tell you things which sometimes are very disagreeable to tell." Frankl immediately replied by saying: "Now, in logotherapy the patient may remain sitting erect but he must hear things which sometimes are very disagreeable to hear." By this he meant that in logotherapy the patient is actually confronted with and reoriented toward the MEANING of his life. The role of the therapist, then, is to help the patient discover a purposefulness in his life. Frankl’s theory is that man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives. Whereas Freudian psychoanalysis focuses on the "will to pleasure" and Adlerian psychology focuses on the "will to power" it can be said that Frankl’s logotherapy focuses on the "will to meaning." Does man give in to to conditions or stand up to them? According to Frankl, the strength of a person’s sense of meaning, responsibility, and purpose is the greatest determining factor in how that question will be answered. He believed that "man is ultimately self-determining" and as such, "does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment."The first (and largest) section of this book is the searing autobiographical account of the author’s experience as a longtime prisoner in a concentration camp. These camps claimed

the lives of his father, mother, brother, and wife.

This book was read many years ago at a time when this reviewer felt nearly crushed under the weight of family and personal troubles. It is not light and diverting reading; indeed, in part it is terrifying. Yet the memory of it has persisted across all these years.A prominent psychiatrist in pre-World War II Vienna, Doctor Frankl found himself suddenly stripped of all money, possessions, position, respect, and ultimately, his family--including his pregnant and beloved wife. After confinement in some of the smaller concentration camps, he ultimately arrived at Auschwitz--the lowest circle of the man-made Hell that was the system of concentration and extermination camps (in German, 'Konzentrationslager' and 'Vernichtungslager'). There, his medical skills were not employed until nearly the end of the war. Instead, he was employed at hard labor just like the rest of the men in his prison block who were marched every day to their work site before dawn and marched back late at night.The most striking thing about Frankl's account of his imprisonment (to me at least) was not the backbreaking work, the all-pervading fear, nor even the constant, maddening hunger; but the unrelenting degradation of the prisoners in order to get them to accept the Nazi's judgment of them as sub-human. For example, when carrying heavy tanks filled with human sewage for disposal, almost inevitably some would splash prisoners full in the face. Any move to wipe one's face, or even show instinctive grimaces of disgust would be punished by the Capos (trusted prisoners, chosen mostly for their brutality) with a prompt beating from a club or whip. Because of this, the normal reactions of prisoners to being befouled were soon suppressed.

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