(This first and most important part of this book was written in 1945 over a period of “nine successive days and with the firm determination that the book would be published anonymously.” It was first published in 1946 under the title: *Ein Psycholog erbelt das Konzentrationslager*)

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p. 9

The central theme of existentialism: to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. If there is a purpose in life at all, there must be a purpose in suffering and a purpose in dying. But no man can tell another what this purpose is. Each must find out for himself, and must accept the responsibility that his answer prescribes.

p. 12

I therefore admonish my students: “Don’t aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one’s personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one’s surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge.

p. 19

On the average, only those prisoners could keep alive who, after years of trekking from camp to camp, has lost all scruples in their fight for existence. They were prepared to use any means, honest or otherwise, even brutal force, theft and betrayal of their friends, in order to save themselves. We who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles—whatever one may choose to call them—we know: the best of us did not return.

p. 20
I had intended to write this book anonymously, using my prison number only. But when the manuscript was completed, I saw that as an anonymous publication it would lose half of its value, and I must have the courage to state my convictions openly.

p. 30

We were unable to clean our teeth, and yet in spite of that and a severe vitamin deficiency, we had healthier gums than ever before. For days, we were unable to wash, even partially because of the frozen water pipes, and yet the sores and abrasions on our hands which were dirty from work in the soil did not suppurate.

If someone were to ask of us the truth of Dosteyevsky's statement that flatly defines man as a being who can get used to anything, we would reply, "Yes, a man can get used to anything, but don't ask us how."

p. 32

I think it was Lessing who said, "There are things which must cause a you to lose your reason or you have none to lose." An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior.

p. 47

In spite of the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of live in a concentration camp, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain (they were often of a delicate constitution), but the damage to their inner selves was less. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom.

p. 48

For the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth—that love is the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the truth of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love.* I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world may still know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist of enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life, I was able to understand
the meaning of the words, "The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory."

My mind still clung to the image of my wife. A thought crossed my mind: I didn't even know if she was alive. I knew only one thing—which I have learned well by now: Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self.

p. 50

I did not know whether my wife was alive, but at that moment it ceased to be important. There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved.

This intensification of the inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of existence, by letting him escape into the past.

p. 55

If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus, suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the "size" of human suffering is absolutely relative.

p. 66

The camp inmate was frightened of making decisions and of taking any sort of initiative whatsoever. This was the result of a strong feeling that fate was one's master, and that one must not try to influence it in any way, but instead let it take its own course.

p. 74

Is there no spiritual freedom in regard to behavior and reaction to any given surroundings? Is that theory true which would have us believe that man is no more than a product of many conditional and environmental factors—be they of a biological, psychological or sociological nature? Is man but an accidental product of these?

The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.
Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

Dostoevsky said once, "There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings." These words frequently came to my mind after I became acquainted with those martyrs whose behavior in camp, whose suffering and death bore witness to the fact that the last inner freedom cannot be lost.

p. 76

The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity—even under the most difficult circumstances—to add a deeper meaning to his life.

p. 77

Some details of a particular man's inner greatness come to one's mind, like the story of the young woman whose death I witnessed in the concentration camp. It is a simple story. To me it seems like a poem.

This young woman knew that she would die in the next few days. But when I talked to her she was cheerful in spite of this knowledge. "I am grateful that fate has hit me so hard," she told me. "In my former life I was spoiled and did not take spiritual accomplishments seriously." Pointing through the window of the hut she said, "This tree here is the only friend I have in my loneliness." When I talked to her she was cheerful in spite of this knowledge. "I am grateful that fate has hit me so hard," she told me. "In my former life I was spoiled and did not take spiritual accomplishments seriously." Pointing through the window of the hut she said, "This tree here is the only friend I have in my loneliness." Through that window she could see just one branch of a chestnut tree, and on the branch were two blossoms. "I often talk to this tree," she said to me. I was startled and didn't quite know how to take her words. Was she delirious? Did she have occasional hallucinations? Anxiously I asked her if the tree replied. "Yes." What did it say to her? She answered, "It said to me, 'I am here—I am life, eternal life.'"

p. 78

Psychological observations of the prisoners have shown that only the men who allowed their inner hold on their moral and spiritual selves to subside eventually fell victim to the camp's degenerating influences.

p. 80

Often it is just such an exceptionally difficult external situation which gives man the opportunity to grow spiritually beyond himself.

Naturally only a few people were capable of reaching great spiritual heights. But a few were given the chance to attain human greatness even
through their apparent worldly failure and death, an accomplishment which in ordinary circumstances they would never have achieved.

p. 82

The prisoner who has lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay.

p. 83

I once had a dramatic demonstration of the close link between the loss of faith in the future and this dangerous giving up. F—, my senior block warden, a fairly well known composer and librettist, confided in me one day: "I would like to tell you something, doctor. I have had a strange dream. A voice told me I could wish for something, that I should only say what I wanted to know, and all my questions would be answered. What do you think I asked? That I would like to know when the war would be over for me. [This was in the beginning of March, 1945] "What did your dream voice answer?"

Furtively he whispered to me, "March thirtieth."

When F— told me about his dream, he was still full of hope and was convinced that his dream would be right. As the date approached, the war news that reached us made it appear very unlikely that we would be free on the promised date. On March twenty-ninth F— suddenly became ill and ran a high temperature. On March thirtieth, the day his prophecy told him that the war and suffering would be over for him, he became delirious and lost consciousness. On March 31st, he was dead. To all outward appearances, he died of typhus.

p. 84

Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man—his courage and hope, or lack of them—and the state of immunity of his
body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect. The ultimate cause of my friend's death was that the expected liberation did not come and he was severely disappointed. This suddenly lowered his body's resistance against the latent typhus infection. The faith in the future and his will to live had become paralyzed and his body fell victim to illness—and thus the voice of his dream was right after all.

Nietzsche's words, "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how," could be the guiding motto for all psychotherapeutic and psychohygienic efforts regarding prisoners. Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a why—an aim—for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible how of their existence. Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost.

p. 87

This uniqueness and singleness which distinguishes each individual and gives a meaning to his existence has a bearing on creative work as much as it does on human love. When the impossibility of replacing a person is realized, it allows the responsibility which a man has for his existence and its continuance to appear in all its magnitude. A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears towards a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the "why" for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any "how."

p. 89

{For many inmates} the real reason for their deaths was giving up hope. He maintained that there should be some way of preventing possible future victims from reaching this extreme state. It was to me that the warden pointed to give his advice. Whoever was still alive had reason to hope. Health, family, happiness, professional abilities, fortune, position in society—all these were things that could be achieved again or restored. After all, we still had our bones intact. Whatever we had gone through could still be an asset in the future and I quoted from Nietzsche: “Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich staerker.” ("That which does not kill me, makes me stronger.")

p. 90

Then, I spoke of the many opportunities of giving life a meaning. I told my comrades (who lay motionless, although occasionally a sigh could be heard) that human life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning, and that this infinite meaning of life includes suffering and dying, privation and death. I asked the poor creatures who listened to me attentively in the darkness of the hut to face up to the seriousness of our position.
And finally, I spoke of our sacrifice, which had meaning in every case. It was in the nature of this sacrifice that it should appear to be pointless in the normal world, the world of material success. But in reality, our sacrifice did have meaning. Those of us who had any religious faith, I said frankly, could understand without difficult. I told them of a comrade who on his arrival in camp had tried to make a pact with Heaven that his suffering and death should save the human being he loved from a painful end. For this man, suffering and death were meaningful; his was a sacrifice of the deepest significance. He did not want to die for nothing. None of us wanted that.

The purpose of my words was to find a full meaning in our life, then and there, in that hut and in that practically hopeless situation. I saw that my efforts had been successful. When the electric bulb flared on again, I saw the miserable figures of my friends limping towards me to thank me with tears in their eyes.

It is apparent that the near knowledge that a man was either a camp guard or prisoner tells us almost nothing. Human kindness can be found in all groups, even those which as a whole it would be easy to condemn. I remember how one day a foreman secretly gave me a piece of bread which I knew he must have saved from his breakfast ration. It was far more than the small piece of bread which moved me to tears at that time. It was the human "something" which this man also gave to me the word and the look which accompanied the gift.

From all this one may learn that there are two races of men in the world, but only these two—the "race" of the decent man and the "race" of the indecent man. Both are found everywhere. They penetrate into all groups of society. No group consists entirely of decent or indecent people.

One day, a few days after the liberation, I walked through the country past flowering meadows for miles and miles toward the market town near the camp. Larks rose to the sky and I could hear their joyous song. There was no one to be seen for miles around; and there was nothing but the wide earth and the sky and the larks' jubilation and the freedom of space. I stopped, looked around, and up to the sky—and then I went down on my knees. At that moment there was very little I knew of myself or the world—I had but one sentence in my mind—always the same: "I called to the lord from my narrow prison and he answered me in the freedom of space."
We have to consider that a man who has been under such enormous mental pressure for such a long time is naturally in some danger after his liberation, especially since the pressure was released quite suddenly. This danger (in the sense of psychological hygiene) is the psychological counterpart of the bends.

During this psychological phase one observed that people with natures of a more primitive kind could not escape the influences of the totality which had surrounded them in camp life. Now, being free, they thought they could use their freedom licentiously and ruthlessly. The only thing that had changed for them was that they were now the oppressors instead of the oppressed.

Only slowly could these men be guided back to the commonplace truth that no one has a right to do wrong not even if wrong has been done to them. I can still see the prisoner who rolled up his shirtsleeves, thrust his right hand under my nose and shouted, "May this hand be cut off if I do not stain it with blood on the day when I get home!" I want to emphasize that the man who said these words was not a bad fellow. He has been the best of comrades in the camp and afterwards.

The crowning experience of all for the homecoming man is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear anymore—except his God.

Logotherapy focuses rather on the future, that is to say, on the meanings to be fulfilled by the patient in his future. (Logotherapy, indeed, is a meaning centered psychotherapy.) At the same time logotherapy defocuses all the vicious-circle formations and feedback mechanisms which play a great role in the development of neuroses. Logos is a Greek work which denotes "meaning". According to logotherapy, this striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force of man.
In a survey of 8,000 students from 48 [U.S.] colleges, 16 percent of students checked making a lot of money as very important, while 78 percent said that their first goal was "finding a purpose and a meaning to my life."

p. 109

There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would effectively help one to survive even the worse conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "he who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."

p. 110

Thus, it can be seen that mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, a tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become.

What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task.

If architects want to strengthen a decrepit arch they increase the load which is laid upon it for thereby the parts are joined more firmly together. So if therapists wish to foster their own patients' mental health, they should not be afraid to create a sound amount of tension through a reorientation towards the meaning of one's life.

p. 116

We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation—just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer—we are challenged to change ourselves.

p. 135

A doctor who would interpret his own role mainly as that of a technician would confess that he sees in his patient nothing more than a machine. Instead of seeing the human being behind the disease!
In the concentration camps, for example, in this living laboratory and on this testing ground, we watched and witnessed some of our comrades behave like swine while others behaved like saints. Man has both potentialities within himself; which one is actualized depends on decisions but not on conditions.

Frankl postulates that life is potentially meaningful under any conditions even those which are most miserable and this in turn presupposes the human capacity to creatively turn life's negative aspects into something positive or constructive. Frankl speaks about tragic optimism, that is an optimism in the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential which at its best always allows for 1. Turning suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment, 2. Deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better; and 3. Deriving from life's transitoriness and incentive to take responsible action.

Once an individual's search for meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering and what happens if one's groping for a meaning has been in vain? This may well result in a fatal condition.

Some people have enough to live by but nothing to live for; they have the means but no meaning. He speaks about "unemployment neuroses." And I could show that this neurosis really originated in a twofold erroneous identification: being jobless was equated with being useless, and being useless was equated with having a meaningless life. Consequently, whenever I succeeded in persuading the patients to volunteer in youth organizations, adult education, public libraries and the like—in other words, as soon as they could fulfill their abundant free time with some sort of unpaid but meaningful activity—their depression disappeared although their economic situation had not changed and their hunger was the same. The truth is that man does not live by welfare alone.

Logotherapy teaches that there are three main avenues which one arrives at a meaningful life. The first is by creating a work or by doing a deed. The second is by experiencing something or encountering someone. In other words, meaning can be found not only in work but also in love.

Most important, however, is the third avenue to meaning in life: even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, may grow beyond himself and by so doing, change himself. He may turn a personal tragedy into a triumph.
Traditionally usefulness is usually defined in terms of functioning for the benefit of society. But today's society is characterized by achievement orientation, and consequently it adores people who are successful and happy and, in particular, it adores the young. It virtually ignores the value of all those who are otherwise, and in so doing blurs the decisive difference between being valuable in the sense of dignity and being valuable in the sense of usefulness.

Austrian public opinion pollsters reported around 1985 that those held in highest esteem by most of the people interviewed were neither the great artists nor the great scientists, neither the great statesmen nor the great athletes, but those who master a hard lot with their heads held high. [Just think about Lance Armstrong - and his book "It's not about the bike."] Confounding the dignity of man with mere usefulness arises from a conceptual confusion that in turn may be traced back to the contemporary nihilism transmitted on many academic campus and many analytical couch.

Frankl ends with this quote: "Sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia quam rara sunt" (but everything great is just as difficult to realize as it is rare to find). From the last sentence of the ethics of Speioza, For the world is in a bad state, but everything will become still worse unless each of us does his best.

So let us be alert - - alert in a twofold sense: Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of. And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake.