

Forget facts and events, let's talk about personal experiences of suffering and what was found through the struggle.

Forget everything that's already been talked about that no one's listening to anyway.

How is personal experience of suffering reflected in the mind of the prisoner?

Forget the suffering and sacrifices of the mighty; what of the pain and deaths of the army of unknown?

Among the prisoners, some of the so-perceived mighty exceeded any wealth known in their previous lives and found great delight in reinforcing their very own cages in order to keep those nameless around them in captivity so that the exercise of control might never end. These prisoners are often more frightening and immediately dangerous than the guards and wardens who truly rule the cages.

There is a never-ending fight for existence, for food and life itself, among the prisoners.

The selection process is an invitation to freely fight; prisoner against prisoner, or group against group.

There is an ordered line to the grim reaper, and when the list is being written for who's to stand in line before their time, all that matters is that one's own name, and not that of a friend are crossed off the list of victims, knowing that for each saved another victim must be found.

There is no time for moral ethics, just the thought of preserving one's own life.

There is a self selecting process going on all the time among the prisoners. Surviving the selection were only those who had trekked for years from camp to camp, who had lost all hesitations in fighting for existence, and were prepared to use any means, honest or otherwise, even physical brutality, theft, and betrayal of friends in order to save themselves.

Facts are important only so far as they relate to the personal experience.

It is the nature of these experiences that will be described.

It is typically disliked, talking about the experience; no explanations are needed for those who have been inside, and the others will neither understand how we felt then, or now.

It is difficult to attempt a methodical presentation of the subject is difficult, as psychology requires a certain scientific detachment. Does a man who makes the observations while himself a prisoner have the necessary detachment? Such detachment is granted to the outsider, who is too removed to make any statements of real value; only the man inside knows. His judgements may not be objective and evaluations may be out of proportion; this is inevitable. An attempt must be made to avoid personal biases, though at times it will be necessary to have the courage to tell of intimate experiences.

Once lost, the will to live seldom returns.

Three phases of inmates mental reaction to prison life become apparent:

1. immediately after admission - shock. striking out. Not realizing, not grasping, that everything's being taken away and you're left just a number. All that remains is naked existence. A strange humor strikes; followed by curiosity elicited by strange circumstance. Cold curiosity of the outcome. What happens next? What are the new consequences of our actions? Curiosity evolves into surprise. Sleep brought the only

relief from pain. Thoughts of suicide are born from hopelessness and the threat of death as well as the closeness of the death of those near us. In the shock, death is not feared.

2. period when well entrenched in routine - Relative apathy; emotional death. Begins with longing for home and family until it consumes and is replaced with disgust with the ugliness that surrounds him. A man can get used to anything; but don't ask us how.
3. period after release and liberation

The condemned often fall into the delusion of reprieve; believing unrealistically that they would be saved, pardoned, and liberated.

There are things which must cause you to lose your reason, or you have none to lose.

An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation, is normal behaviour.

I had to listen to a man judge my life, a man who looked so vulgar and cruel.

In general, there is a cultural hibernation in camp, with two exceptions: politics and religion. Politics were almost discussed based on rumors, which were often contradictory and ultimately only added to the war of nerves among the prisoners.

The religious interests were the most sincere imaginable. The depth and vigor often moved new arrivals. Services and prayers were improvised everywhere.

Despite the primitive living of prison life, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Damage to the inner self was limited by the ability to retreat to an inner haven.

Love is the ultimate and highest goal to which man can aspire. The salvation of man is through love and in love. A man with nothing left in this world, may still know bliss, if even for only a moment in contemplation, when knowing his love, find fulfillment. Love goes very far beyond the physical person; it finds it's deepest meaning in spiritual being, the inner self. Whether or not one is still present or even still alive at all, ceases to hold any importance.

Given free reign, the prisoner's memory played with past events, many unimportant. These simple things could move one to tears.

One could even forget their terrible fate, when taken away by the beauty and call of nature so missed when glimpsed even momentarily.

Staring at one particularly glowing plasma cloud covered sunset, after a few moments of moving silence, one prisoner said to another: how beautiful the world could be.

On one grey dawn, from somewhere in my spirit, transcending the colorless, dark, and meaningless world, was heard a victorious yes in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose.

Et Lux In Tenebris Lucet - & The Light Shines in The Darkness

Whether or not there is art in prison depends on what you want to call art.

Songs, games, poems, jokes, many with underlying satire.

Humor is another of the souls weapons for self preservation.

The attempt to see things in a humorous light is some kind of trick learned while mastering the art of living. Learning to live may be done even while surrounded by suffering. Great or little, like a gas, suffering fills the human soul and conscious mind completely; the size of human suffering is relative.

The prisoner is nothing but a number, and all that matters is the accuracy of The List. What's behind the number is irrelevant. Classifications and segregations are made. Groups are formed by generic commonalities.

A rich and mighty Persian once walked in his garden with one of his servants. The servant cried that he had just encountered Death, who had threatened him. He begged his master to give him his fastest horse so that he could make haste and flee to Teheran, which he could reach that same evening. The master consented and the servant galloped off on the horse. On returning to his house the master himself met Death, and questioned him, "Why did you terrify and threaten my servant?" "I did not threaten him; I only showed surprise in still finding him here when I planned to meet him tonight in Teheran," said Death.

There was great apathy. Inmates are frightened of decisions and initiative, brought about by a feeling that fate is one's master and that one must not interfere in any way but rather let it take its course. At times, fast decisions regarding life and death HAD to be made, and through the prisoner would prefer that fate make the decision for him, the escape from commitment was sometimes inevitable. The decision for or against an escape attempt in a very short time would torture the prisoner when even the smallest opportunity presented itself.

We found out how uncertain human decisions are, especially in matters of life and death.

Apart from being a defensive mechanism, a prisoner's apathy and irritability arose from other factors. Hunger and a lack of sleep contributed as they do in normal life as well. Many prisoners suffered from some sort of inferiority complex; all having once been or at least believed oneself to be of some importance and now being treated like non-entities. The consciousness of one's inner value is anchored in higher, more spiritual things, and cannot be shaken by camp life. But how many free men, let alone prisoners, possess it? Without thinking about, the average prisoner felt absolutely degraded; the more prominent prisoners (cooks, policemen, storekeepers) did not feel degraded like most, but rather, promoted. Some even had small delusions of grandeur. When the degraded majority and the promoted minority came into conflict, the results were explosive. Because prisoners frequently witnessed it, the impulse toward violence was greater than normal. One's own irritability took on enormous proportions in the face of others' apathy and especially in the face of the ever looming dangers.

In these analysis, it may seem that the psychological presentation of the typical inmate describes human beings as completely and unavoidable influenced by their surroundings. But what about human liberty? Is there no spiritual freedom in regard to behaviour and retain to any given surroundings? Is the theory true that would have us believe that man is nothing but a product of many conditional and environmental factors. Be they of biological, sociological, or psychological nature, is man but an accidental product of these? Most important: do the prisoners' reactions to the singular world of imprisonment mean that man cannot escape the influence of his surroundings? Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances? We can answer these questions from experience and on principle. The experience of prison life shows that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often heroic, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed; man can preserve a piece of spiritual freedom, presence of an independent mind, even in the presence of psychic and physical stress. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything may be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms: to choose one's attitude and one's own way in any given set of circumstances. There are always choices to make, every day and hour offered the opportunity to make a decision that determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers that threatened to rob you of your very self, of your inner freedom. These choices determined if you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity, to become molded into the form of the typical inmate. Even though conditions such as lack of sleep, mental stress, and lack of food seems to suggest that inmates are bound to react in certain ways, in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision and not the result of prison influences alone. Therefore, fundamentally, any man can decide even under horrible circumstance, may decide what will become of him mentally and spiritually. He may retain human dignity even in a prison. Bearing suffering is a true inner achievement. This final freedom that cannot be taken away makes life meaningful and purposeful.

An active life gives man the opportunity to realize values in creative work. Passive life of enjoyment affords man the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in the experience of beauty, art, or nature.

There is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits only one possibility of high moral behavior: man's attitude towards his existence. An existence restricted by external forces. A creative life and a life of enjoyment are banned to him, but those two things alone are not the only meaning in life. If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete. The way in which a man accepts his fate and the suffering it brings, gives him ample opportunity, even in the most difficult circumstances, to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified, and unselfish, or in the bitter fight for self preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here is the opportunity for a man to either make use of, or forgo, the opportunities of obtaining the moral values that a difficult situation may afford him; this decides if he is worth of his sufferings or not. While it is true that only a few may reach these high moral standards, even just one example is sufficient proof that man's inner strength may raise him

above his outward fate. These men are not only in prisons, but everywhere in life man is confronted by fate with the chance of achieving something through his own suffering.

Though we all have seen and felt images of great men, and felt that call to the same, after the images are gone we find ourselves forgetting the strange metaphysical thoughts that had crossed our minds for a moment, and when we are confronted ourselves with a great destiny and faced with the decision of meeting it with equal spiritual greatness, by then we forget our youthful resolutions of long ago and we fail.

Only the men who allowed their inner-hold to loosen on their moral and spiritual selves to subside fell victim to the prison's degenerative influences.

What constitutes this inner hold? Most prisoners agreed that the most depressing influence was that a prisoner could not know how long his term of imprisonment would be. Imprisonment terms were uncertain and unlimited.

With the end of uncertainty came the uncertainty of the end. It was impossible to force if this form of existing would end. A man who could not see the end of his provisional existence was not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life. He ceased living for the future. Therefore the entire structure of his inner life changed and decay set in. In prison a day lasted longer than a week. Life seemed without future and was regarded as over and done, as if death had already happened. This lifelessness was intensified by the limitlessness of the imprisonment term. Anything outside of prison became out of reach and in many ways unreal. Everything "outside" had a ghostly aspect to the prisoner, as though a dead man were looking into another world.

With no goals, the mind is occupied with retrospective thoughts. In robbing the present of its reality, it became easy to overlook the opportunities to make something positive of imprisonment, which did exist. Everything became pointless. Often it is the exceptionally difficult external situation which gives man the ability to grow spiritually beyond himself. Instead of taking difficulties as a test of inner strength, life was not taken seriously, despised, and considered of no consequence; they preferred to close their eyes and live in the past. Life for them became meaningless. Some few were capable of reaching great spiritual heights even through their apparent worldly failure and death, something they would have never achieved in other circumstances. For the others, the mediocre and half hearted, life was spent in wait of the worst to come but yet it is over already. These believed the real opportunities of life had passed, when in reality there was an opportunity and challenge for one to make a victory of the suffering, turning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate as do most of the prisoners.

Inner strength is built upon a future goal to which one can look forward to. Emotion which is suffering ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise vision of it.

The prisoner who lost faith in his own future was doomed; with his loss of belief in the future he also lost his spiritual hold, began to decline, and fell to physical and mental decay.

The sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect. Man's mind and immunity are not unlinked to the will to live.

The death rate between xmas and new year's increased beyond all previous experience, with an explanation no in harder conditions, deteriorations of food supplies, harsh weather, or epidemics, but rather that many lived in a naive hope that they would be home by xmas. As the time drew near with no news of release, courage was lost and overcome by disappointment. This dangerously weakened powers of resistance, and many died.

Any attempt to restore inner strength had to start in showing oneself a future goal.

He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how. - Nietzsche

One must have a why, an aim in life, to bear the terrible how of their existence.

Those with no aim, no purpose, no point in carrying on, are soon lost.

What's needed is a fundamental change in the attitude towards life.

We had to learn ourselves, and teach the despairing, that it did not matter what we expected from life, but what life expected of us.

We needed to stop asking the meaning of life, and instead think of ourselves as though being questioned by life daily and hourly. The answer must exist not in talk and thought but in right conduct and action. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.

These tasks, and thus the meaning of life, differ from man to man and even moment to moment.

This makes the meaning of life difficult to nail down in a single sweeping statement. Life does not mean anything vague but rather things real and concrete.

No man and no destiny may be compared with another man or destiny. Each situation calls for a different response. Sometimes the situation may require man to shape his own fate by action, while others times it may be more advantageous to take advantage of contemplation. Every situation has one right answer to its problem.

Man must accept suffering as his task. Even in suffering he is unique and alone in the universe. No one can relieve him of his suffering or suffer in his place. His opportunity lies in the way he decides to bear his burden.

For prisoners, these thoughts were not speculations far removed from reality, they were the only thoughts of any help. They kept prisoners from despair.

Once the meaning of suffering had been revealed, prisoners refused to alleviate suffering by ignoring it or trying to replace it with visions of optimism. The hidden opportunity for achievement through suffering had been realized.

Tears show that man still has the courage to suffer.

Uniqueness and singleness which distinguishes each person and gives meaning to existence, has a bearing on creative work just as much as it does on human love. When the impossibility of replacing someone is realized, it allows the responsibility which a man has for his existence and its continue to appear in all its magnitude.

The immediate influence of behavior is always more effective than words. But at times a word was effective too; when mental receptiveness had been intensified by external circumstances.

Life never ceases to have a meaning, and this infinite meaning of life includes suffering and death.

Suffer proudly, not miserably, knowing how to die.

Most of the guards had been dulled by the years of witnessing the brutal methods of prison. These hardened men at least avoided taking part in sadistic measures, but they did not stop others from carrying them out. Even among the guards, there were some who took pity on us.

Whether a man was a guard or prisoner tells us almost nothing. Human kindness can be found in all, even in those who as a whole would be easy to condemn. The boundaries of groups overlapped, and there is no good in calling one group or the other exclusively angels or devils. Devilry seen among inmates was especially contemptible, and the smallest kindness from any guard would profoundly move emotions.

From this we may learn there are two men in this world: The decent man, and the indecent man. Both are found everywhere and penetrate all groups of society. No group is truly "pure". Among the worst may be found the best, and within the best always may be found the worst in hiding.

The psychology of the prisoner who has been released lost the ability to feel pleased and had to relearn it, slowly.

Everything appears unreal, unlikely, and dreamlike. It could not be believed to be true, for the number of times dreams had deceived during imprisonment.

The body has fewer inhibitions than the mind and makes good use of the newfound freedom, eating ravenously and nearly nonstop.

The tongue loosens, finding nearly endless things to say after so much time of being restrained.

The path from the war of nerves to mental peace was not free of obstacles. It would be in error to think a freed prisoner was no longer in need of spiritual care. Having been under such enormous mental pressure for such a great time is in danger after liberation from the sudden release of pressure. During this phase, it may be noticed the more primitive minds cannot escape the brutality that was around them in prison life. They became the oppressors instead of the oppressed. They justified their terrible behavior using their own terrible sufferings. Only slowly could these men be guided back to the common truth that no man has a right to do wrong, even if wrong has been done to them.

Two other fundamental experiences that threatened to damage the character of the liberated: bitterness and disillusionment when returning to former life.

Bitterness came from finding himself met with indifference upon returning home, and wondering why he had suffered so much when no one should know. Those he returns to say they did not know of his suffering, that they have suffered as well, and he wonders that they have nothing else to say to him regarding his trials.

The experience of disillusionment comes not from the disgusting superficiality and lack of feeling of others, but from fate itself which seems so cruel. Having suffered for so long, believing to have reached the peak of suffering, it is difficult to face that suffering has no limits and that more suffering could come and with greater intensity than was known before.

Woe to the man with expectations, which kept him alive and gave him courage in prison, that were not met upon liberation, finding that the ideas of places and people that helped persevere were completely gone, changed, transformed, and never to be found again.

In prison it was not believe that there was any earthly happiness that could be found which would compensate for all that had been suffered. Happiness was not was was hoped for, nor was it what gave courage to us and meaning to suffering; yet the liberated are not prepared for unhappiness, which leads to disillusion.

For each liberated prisoner the day comes, looking back on prison life, when he can no longer understand how he endured it all.

The crowning experience for the homecoming man is the feeling that for all his suffering, there is nothing he need fear anymore but his own god.

ON LOGOTHERAPY:

If psychoanalysis may be boiled down to the idea of lying on a comfy couch or chair and talk, sometimes about things very unpleasant to talk about, then logotherapy may be said to leave the patient sitting upright and left listening, sometimes to things that are very unpleasant to hear. Logotherapy is less retrospective and less introspective. It focuses on the future, on the meanings in the patient to be fulfilled in the future. The patient is confronted with and reoriented toward their meaning in life. This awareness of meaning can contribute to the ability to overcome neurosis. By this theory, the strive for meaning in life is the primary motivating force in man. Instead of striving for power or pleasure, instead meaningful fulfillment is sought.

There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst 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."

Thus it can be seen that mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the 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.

We should not, then, be hesitant about challenging man with a potential meaning for him to fulfill. It is only thus that we evoke his will to meaning from its state of latency. I consider it a dangerous misconception of mental hygiene to assume that what man needs in the first place is equilibrium or, as it is called in biology, "homeostasis," i.e., a tensionless state. What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him.

Such widespread phenomena as depression, aggression and addiction are not understandable unless we recognize the existential vacuum underlying them. This is also true of the crises of pensioners and aging people. Sometimes the frustrated will to meaning is vicariously compensated for by a will to power, including the most primitive form of the will to power, the will to money. In other cases, the place of frustrated will to meaning is taken by the will to pleasure. That is why existential frustration often eventuates in sexual compensation.

The meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.

Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible.

"Live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!"

It seems to me that there is nothing which would stimulate a man's sense of responsibility more than this maxim, which invites him to imagine first that the present is past and, second, that the past may yet be changed and amended. Such a precept confronts him with life's finiteness as well as the finality of what he makes out of both his life and himself.

It is, therefore, up to the patient to decide whether he should interpret his life task as being responsible to society or to his own conscience.

The logotherapist's role consists of widening and broadening the visual field of the patient so that the whole spectrum of potential meaning becomes conscious and visible to him.

Being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for

the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.

We have shown that the meaning of life always changes, but that it never ceases to be. According to logotherapy, we can discover this meaning in life in three different ways:

- (1) by creating a work or doing a deed;
- (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and
- (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering. The first, the way of achievement or accomplishment, is quite obvious. The second and third need further elaboration.

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true.

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.

Once, an elderly general practitioner consulted me because of his severe depression. He could not overcome the loss of his wife who had died two years before and whom he had loved above all else. Now, how could I help him? What should I tell him? Well, I refrained from telling him anything but instead confronted him with the question, "What would have happened, Doctor, if you had died first, and your wife would have had to survive you?" "Oh," he said, "for her this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!" Whereupon I replied, "You see, Doctor, such a suffering has been spared her, and it was you who have spared her this suffering—to be sure, at the price that now you have to survive and mourn her." He said no word but shook my hand and calmly left my office. In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.

It is one of the basic tenets of logotherapy that man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life. That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning

But let me make it perfectly clear that in no way is suffering necessary to find meaning. I only insist that meaning is possible even in spite of suffering—provided that the suffering is unavoidable. If it were avoidable, however, the meaningful thing to do would be to remove its cause, be it psychological, biological or political. To suffer unnecessarily is masochistic rather than heroic.

There are situations in which one is cut off from the opportunity to do one's work or to enjoy one's life; but what never can be ruled out is the unavoidability of suffering. In accepting this challenge to suffer bravely, life has a meaning up to the last moment, and it retains this meaning literally to the end. In other words, life's meaning is an unconditional one, for it even includes the potential meaning of unavoidable suffering.

The question which beset me was, "Has all this suffering, this dying around us, a meaning? For, if not, then ultimately there is no meaning to survival; for a life whose meaning depends upon such a happenstance—as whether one escapes or not—ultimately would not be worth living at all."

What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. Logos is deeper than logic.

the transitoriness of our existence in no way makes it meaningless. But it does constitute our responsibility; for everything hinges upon our realizing the essentially transitory possibilities. Man constantly makes his choice concerning the mass of present potentialities; which of these will be condemned to nonbeing and which will be actualized? Which choice will be made an actuality once and forever, an immortal "footprint in the sands of time"? At any moment, man must decide, for better or for worse, what will be the monument of his existence.

In the same way that fear brings to pass what one is afraid of, likewise a forced intention makes impossible what one forcibly wishes. Pleasure is, and must remain, a side-effect or by-product, and is destroyed and spoiled to the degree to which it is made a goal in itself.

The neurotic who learns to laugh at himself may be on the way to self management, perhaps to cure.