

VICTOR FRANKL: Man's Search for Meaning
Guide Questions for Summer Reading ALL SENIOR THEOLOGY CLASSES

Imagine you are a young, up and coming psychologist working in Vienna in the middle of the 20th century. You're bright, and can boast of having attended lectures by Freud. You have been working with suicidal cases, and have formulated a theory which challenges the different approaches to psychoanalysis that have been developed thus far. The only problem is: you are a Jew during the Nazi era.

You try to hide your manuscript as you are processed on arrival at Auschwitz, but it is taken from you. Nothing in your life has any meaning: you are only a number, a source of biological energy while you are able to do manual labor and a source of raw material when you are dead. What doesn't get used will be incinerated or buried in a mass unmarked grave. "Arbeit macht frei" proclaims the gates at Auschwitz – work will make you free.

Against the odds, you survive. While in the death camp system, you find yourself continuing to act the part of the psychiatric analyst, observing human behavior all around you. And you begin to notice that physical strength and stamina are not indicators of who will survive. Some of the fittest physical specimens are the quickest to die. No, there is some other factor that makes a person a candidate for survival (if the disease, work, undernourishment and lack of sleep don't ultimately kill you): and, oddly enough, you already knew what it was. Your manuscript applied to the life in the camps, predicted who could survive and who would succumb.

THESE ARE GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR READING. WRITE THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS. THESE QUESTIONS MAY BE COLLECTED OR CHECKED. YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR TEST.

1. While in the concentration camp, what was Frankl's work?
2. When Frankl walked to his work site in the bitter cold, on what did he concentrate?
3. What did Frankl mean when he talked about the "intensification of the inner life" of a prisoner?
4. If the prisoners wished to avoid being singled out for extinction, what were they told to do by fellow prisoners?
5. During a spiritualistic séance in the camp, the camp's clerk is said to have written what Latin phrase? What is its English translation?
6. The crematoria had a sign over it which stated what in German? (English translation)
7. At the beginning of Frankl's stay in camp, what did he want to keep at all costs?
8. While working alone, Frankl was struggling with himself to find a reason for his suffering. As he heard the victorious "yes" arise within himself, what did he see?
9. In choosing a "capo", the Nazis looked for what qualities in a prisoner?

10. According to Frankl, the meaningful image of a greater power serves as what?
11. Frankl learned that it was important to teach the men in the camp that “it did not matter what we asked of life, but rather...”
12. What can never be taken from a person, even in times of great stress?
13. According to Frankl what are the three main avenues for reaching meaning in life?
14. What were the consequences of undernourishment?
15. What were the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation?
16. What does Frankl trace some neurosis back to?
17. Throughout the book, Frankl does not identify himself as Jewish. Why do you think this is?
18. What do you think Frankl’s views of religion are and how are these reflected through his experiences?
19. According to Frankl, “An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal” What does he mean by this paradox?
20. Frankl says that to be alive in the camp meant that one had lost his scruples: “The best of us did not return.” What does he mean by this? How does the statement reflect life in the concentration camps during the Holocaust?
21. What do you think Frankl’s definition of love is? Does it fit into Frankl’s philosophy of existentialism?
22. What were the “phase 1” reactions following entry into the concentration camp scene?
23. What were the “Phase 2” reactions to being well-entrenched in the concentration camp routine?
24. What were the “Phase 3” reactions to being released and liberated from the camp?
25. According to Frankl, how do suffering and death complete life and give it meaning?
26. What is Frankl’s advice to the hut/block for staying alive?
27. What is the “ultimate freedom” according to Frankl?
28. Frankl cites the stripping away of all worldly possessions, including one’s name, as an important part of the process by which prisoners were dehumanized. What experiences in your life today diminish your sense of your own humanity? Can too many possessions create the same effect?
29. The author describes several antidotes to the brutal reality of life in the camps, such as cultivating feelings of love and a sense of humor. Successful “copers” also deepened their inner life and realized their connection to the natural world through the experience of beauty. How do you cope in dark times? What do you fall back on when all seems lost?

30. The author introduces the concept of “provisional existence”, or life without a sense of the future. It has been said that we are the first people in human history who must live with the knowledge that there may not be generations after us due to the prevailing threat of nuclear and environmental disaster. Do you see signs of “provisional existence” in our society today? How do we combat it?

31. Frankl states that “To choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way “is the last of human freedoms. Discuss times in your life when you have exercised this freedom and/or opportunities that you have now to do so.

32. Frankl describes the process of becoming a prisoner (three phases). Do you see this pattern anywhere in our culture today? If so, to what, or of what, are we becoming prisoners? Have you ever felt yourself a “prisoner”?

END OF GUIDE QUESTIONS