

Reading 1.1.1

The Story of a Bestseller

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Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* has become one of the longest "bestsellers" in English. In the postscript of a letter written to me on November 20, 1988, Frankl wrote:

"Perhaps it is of interest to you that so far *Man's Search for Meaning* has sold at least 2,843,409 copies solely in its English versions, and they have added up to 78 printings; together with 129 printings of editions in 20 other languages, they come to 207 printings. Small wonder that – as I heard from my American publishers a couple of years ago – *Man's Search for Meaning* was Number One in a new list called Longseller. This list refers to those bestsellers, which throughout decades do not stop best selling."

This book is the second of Frankl's books published in English, after *The Doctor and the Soul: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. Reading this book (in English) led to my taking my first sabbatical from Pacific School of Religion in 1960-1961. This book, a basic reference from Frankl's work, is less graphic than the autobiographical material in *Man's Search for Meaning*. It was published in a second expanded edition in 1965 with some of the deficiencies in translation corrected.

The history of *Man's Search for Meaning* begins in 1957 when Frankl was sponsored by The Religion in Education Foundation for the first lecture tour to American universities. The director of RIE was Randolph Sasnett. His wife Martena wrote to me about Frankl's meeting with Gordon Allport at Harvard University, referring to the earlier edition of the book.

The first edition found recognition in The Religion in Education Foundation. Viktor was glad then for any organization in higher education which could give him an introduction to American audiences through bookings in colleges of medicine. Viktor met Gordon Allport who hosted him at Harvard on the first RIE tour in '57. (Randolph knew Allport since '52 when Allport read and was enthusiastic about Randolph's manuscript *The Mind of Jesus and the Future Mind*.)

Sasnett persuaded Beacon Press to publish Frankl's book. He was helped by the endorsement of Allport who was well-known in American psychological circles. Allport was so captivated by Frankl's presentation in his class that he asked Frankl if his story had ever been written down. Frankl gave him an English translation of the German *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp), translated by Ilse Lasch, a native of Vienna and a nurse with the British forces in occupied Austria. She had read his book in German and was deeply moved by it. She had voluntarily translated it and sent it to Frankl as an expression of gratitude for his writings. Allport read it in one sitting, was enthusiastic, and wrote a preface, which placed his stamp of approval on the material. Beacon Press accepted the suggestion of Sasnett backed by Allport and agreed to publish the book with the proviso that Frankl write a brief exposition of Logotherapy. The book published in 1959 carried the title *From Death-Camp to Existentialism: A Psychiatrist's Path to a New Therapy*.

Allport wrote a letter dated October 24, 1966 to Sasnett describing Frankl's reactions to a subsequent paperback edition:

"His jubilation of the sale of the paperback edition is understandable. From his outselling Kinsey, one might draw the inference that meaning is more important than sex; I am sure this inference has not escaped him. I personally am pleased with the sales since they vindicate my original judgment. Did you know that Beacon Press tried to pull out of publishing it even after the agreement was made? They had financial difficulties, but now must be glad that they stood by the deal."

In the same letter Allport goes on to set the record straight on his part in introducing Frankl to America.

"Viktor gives me credit for introducing him to America, but actually, of course, the credit is yours. Without your mediation, I never should have encountered him..."

Frankl acknowledges Sasnett's role on opening the way for him in the United States. The article by Frankl, "The Feeling of Meaninglessness: A challenge to Psychotherapy," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 32, 10, 1972, carries a note which reads: "To J. Randolph Sasnett who introduced me to Academic America, gratefully." The RIE Foundation, under Sasnett, eventually sponsored five major American tours for Frankl.

The title *From Death-Camp to Existentialism: A Psychiatrist's Path to a New Therapy* was a good one for a book published in 1959. Interest in concentration camp experiences was high in those years but for the long run a more general title was needed. Thus when Frankl revised the book for Beacon Press in 1962, a new title was given: *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. The preface by Gordon W. Allport was included in this and in all subsequent editions of the new title. (*Much later editions have a different preface, Allport's preface is re-printed in these course materials. Ed.*)

At the end of Allport's preface in this revised edition, the publisher printed a statement about Allport:

"Gordon W. Allport, a professor of psychology at Harvard University, is one of the foremost writers and teachers in the field in this hemisphere. He has written a large number of original works on psychology and is the editor of the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. It is chiefly through the pioneering work of Professor Allport that Frankl's momentous theory was introduced to this country; moreover, it is to his credit that the interest shown here in Logotherapy is growing by leaps and bounds."

Allport concluded his preface with these words:

"I recommend this little book heartily, for it is a gem of dramatic narration, focused upon the deepest of human problems. It has literary and philosophical merit to the most significant psychological movement of our day."

Because Frankl had numerous requests for an enlarged treatment of the theoretical section of Logotherapy, which followed his autobiographical death-camp experiences, he expanded Part II, "Basic Concepts of Logotherapy." The revision was done in 1960-1961 while I was studying with Frankl in Vienna. Three American professors from different theological schools, Paul E. Johnson from Boston University

School of theology, Boston, Massachusetts, Melvin A. Kimble from Lutheran-Northwestern Seminaries, St. Paul, Minnesota, and I from Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, assisted with written comments on Frankl's revised manuscript.

Since the Beacon Press hardback edition in 1962, many paperback editions have appeared, including those by Simon and Schuster, Washington Square Press, and Pocket Books. Of particular interest is a 1984 edition that includes a chapter called "The Case for a Tragic Optimism." It is based on a lecture presented at the Third World Congress of Logotherapy at Regensburg University, West Germany, in June, 1983. This is thus an updating of Frankl's best-known work.

Of special interest to followers of Frankl's writings is a new German edition, which makes available the original telling of Leben death-camp experience, which has long been out of print: ... *Trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen (Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager)*. The book includes "Synchronisation in Birkenwald," a philosophical dramatization of the concentration camp. Frankl commented that this edition of the book offered a "stereoscopic view" of his death camp experience.

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