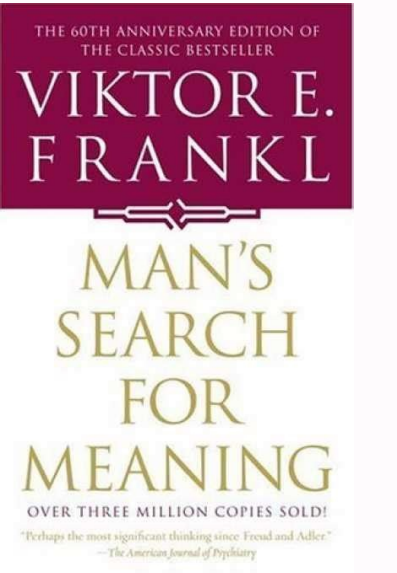
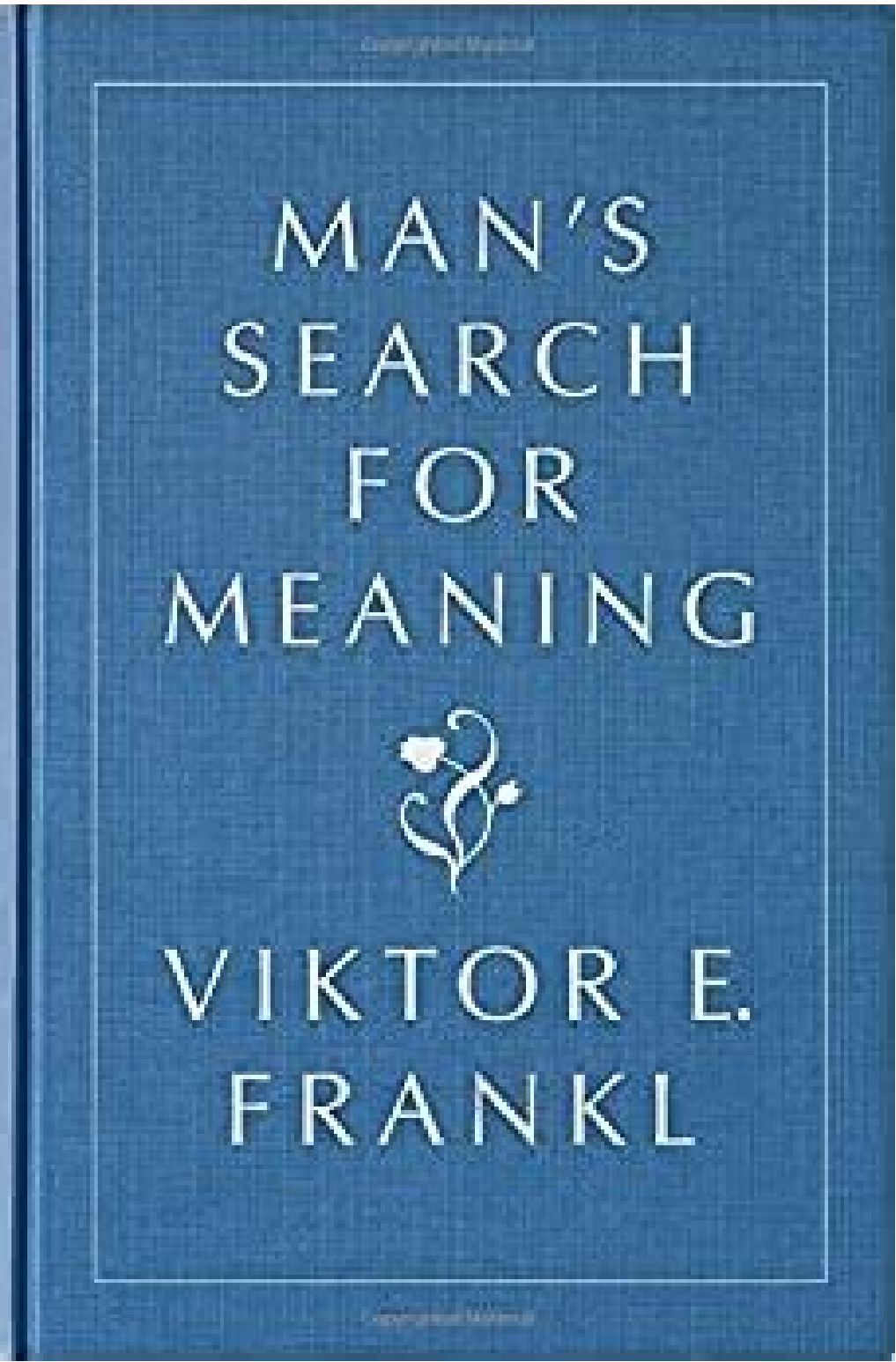
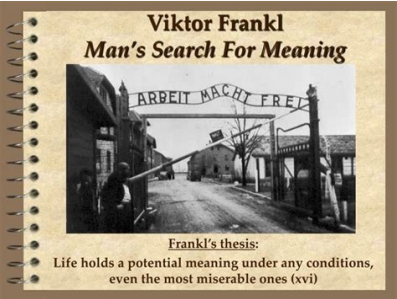
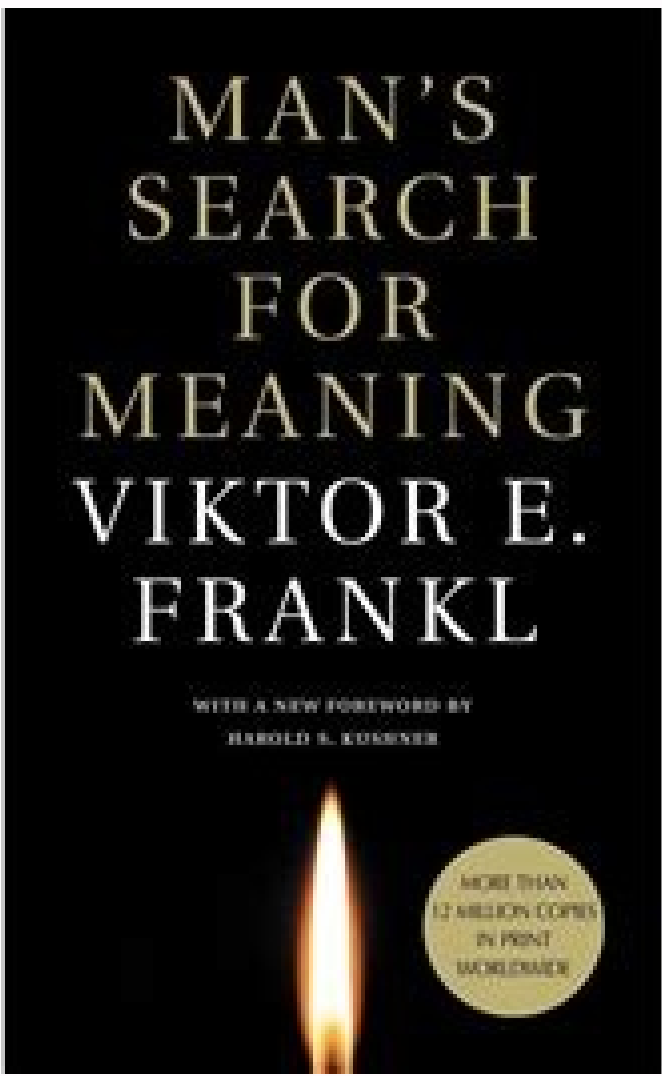
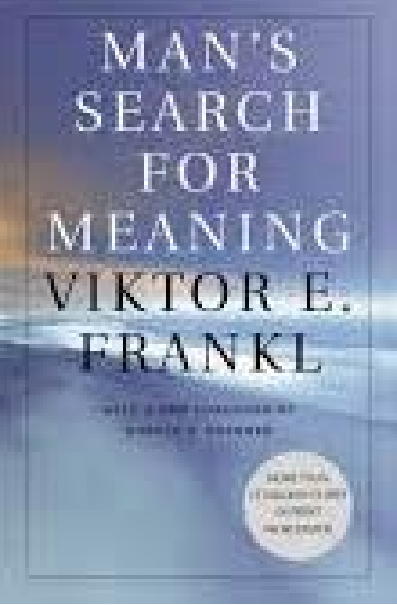


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Viktor E. Frankl was professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School until his death in 1997. His twenty-nine books have been translated into twenty-one languages. During World War II, he spent three years in Auschwitz, Dachau, and other concentration camps.Harold S. Kushner is rabbi emeritus at Temple Israel in Natick, Massachusetts, and the author of bestselling books including When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Living a Life That Matters, and When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough.William J. Winslade is a philosopher, lawyer, and psychoanalyst who teaches psychiatry, medical ethics, and medical jurisprudence at the University of Texas Medical School in Galveston. Read on Amazon 3 Sentence Summary In this autobiographical bestseller, Viktor Frankl recounts his experiences surviving the Holocaust and describes how it shaped his understanding whereby man finds meaning for his life. According to Frankl, man can find meaning in his work, in his love for another, and in the courage required to endure suffering. Viktor Frankl passed through the darkest depths of human's capacity for evil, and yet he didn't emerge angry, resentful, or nihilistic, but rather encouraged, optimistic, and hopeful by what he described as man's ultimate freedom and responsibility in life—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances. 5 Key Takeaways Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life.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.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.We should not ask, "What is the meaning of Life?" It is Life that poses the problem and asks the question of us. 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.In the past, nothing is irrevocably lost but everything irrevocably stored. Man's Search for Meaning Summary The following book summary is a collection of my notes and highlights taken straight from the book. Most of them are direct quotes. Some are paraphrases. Very few are my own words.These notes are informal. I try to organize them by chapter. But I pick and choose ideas to include at my discretion.Enjoy! Forward by Harold S. Kushner Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning.The great task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life. 3 Sources for Meaning In Work: Doing something significant.In Love: Caring for another person.In Courage: We give meaning to suffering by the way in which we respond to it. Forces beyond your control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation. You cannot control what happens to you in life, but you can always control what you will feel and do about what happens to you. Preface 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 dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. 1. Experiences In A Concentration Camp In psychiatry there is a certain condition known as "delusion of reprieve." The condemned man, immediately before his execution, gets the illusion that he might be reprieved at the very last minute. We, too, clung to shreds of hope and believed to the last moment that it would not be so bad.An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior. Apathy Apathy, the blunting of the emotions and the feeling that one could not care any more, were the symptoms arising during the second stage of the prisoner's psychological reactions, and which eventually made him insensitive to daily and hourly beatings.Apathy...was a necessary mechanism of self-defense. Reality dimmed, and all efforts and all emotions were centered on one task: preserving one's own life and that of the other fellow. Spiritual Strength 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. Only in this way can one explain the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature.Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not he is actually present, whether or not he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance. Judgement No man should judge unless he asks himself in absolute honesty whether in a similar situation he might not have done the same. Freedom To Choose Your attitude 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.Even though conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food and various mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were 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 camp influences alone. There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings.Dostoevski Meaning In Suffering If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable 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 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. Hope and Health 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. He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how.Nietzsche What Life Expects From Us What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men, that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly.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.When a man finds that it is his destiny to suffer, he will have to accept his suffering as his task; his single and unique task. He will have to acknowledge the fact that 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 unique opportunity lies in the way in which he bears his burden.There was plenty of suffering for us to get through. Therefore, it was necessary to face up to the full amount of suffering, trying to keep moments of weakness and furtive tears to a minimum. But there was no need to be ashamed of tears, for tears bore witness that a man had the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer. Responsibility For Your Life 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. That which does not kill me, makes me stronger.Nietzsche Two Races of Men It is apparent that the mere knowledge that a man was either a camp guard or a 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. The boundaries between groups overlapped and we must not try to simplify matters by saying that these men were angels and those were devils.From all this we may learn that there are two races of men in this 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. In this sense, no group is of "pure race"—and therefore one occasionally found a decent fellow among the camp guards. Liberation Psychologically, what was happening to the liberated prisoners could be called "depersonalization." Everything appeared unreal, unlikely, as in a dream. We could not believe it was true.Only slowly could these men be guided back to the commonplace truth that no one has the right to do wrong, not even if wrong has been done to them.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 any more—except his God. 2. Logotherapy In A Nutshell Logos is a Greek word which denotes "meaning."Logotherapy is less retrospective as it is introspective [in comparison to psychoanalysis].Logotherapy helps the patient focus on the meanings to be fulfilled by the patient in his future.Logotherapy defocuses all the vicious-circle formations and feedback mechanisms which play such a great role in the development of neuroses. Thus, the typical self-centeredness of the neurotic is broken up instead of being continually fostered and reinforced.In logotherapy the patient is actually confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of his life. And to make him aware of this meaning can contribute much to his ability to overcome his neurosis. The Will to Meaning Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will lead him to meaning. Existential Frustration Existential frustration is in itself neither pathological nor pathogenic. A man's concern, even his despair, over the worthwhileness of life is an existential distress but by no means a mental disease.In the Nazi concentration camps, one could have witnessed that those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfill were most apt to survive.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.What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. The Existential Vacuum The existential vacuum manifests itself mainly in a state of boredom.Boredom is now causing, and certainly bringing to psychiatrists, more problems to solve than distress. And these problems are growing increasingly crucial, for progressive automation will probably lead to an enormous increase in the leisure hours available to the average worker. The pity of it is that many of these will not know what to do with all their newly acquired free time.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. Man can observe in such cases that the sexual libido becomes rampant in the existential vacuum. The Meaning of Life 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.To put the question in general terms would be comparable to the question posed to a chess champion: "Tell me, Master, what is the best move in the world?" There simply is no such thing as the best or even a good move apart from a particular situation in a game and the particular personality of one's opponent. The same holds for human existence. 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.As each situation in life represents a challenge to man and presents a problem for him to solve, the question of the meaning of life may actually be reversed. 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. Thus, logotherapy sees in responsibility the very essence of human existence. The Essence of Existence The more one forgets himself—to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.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 Meaning of Love Love enables you to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, to see that which is potential in them, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized.By loving another person you enable them to actualize these potentialities. The Meaning of Suffering 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 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 meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice. 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, certainly, that the suffering is unavoidable. To suffer unnecessarily is masochistic rather than heroic.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. The Super-Meaning 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. Life's Transitoriness In the past, nothing is irrevocably lost but everything irrevocably stored.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 in 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.What reason does the elderly have to envy the youth? The youth has only possibilities, while the old have the realities of their past. Not only the reality of work done and of love loved, but of sufferings bravely suffered. Psychiatry Rehumanized Man is ultimately self-determining. What he becomes—within the limits of endowment and environment—he has made out of himself.In every circumstance, man has two potentialities within himself—to behave like swine or saint. Which one is actualized depends on decisions but not on conditions. Our generation is realistic; for we have come to know man as he really is. After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips.Viktor Frankl Postscript 1964 The Case for Tragic Optimism Tragic optimism means that one is, and remains, optimistic in spite of the tragic triad of human existence: (1) pain; (2) guilt; and (3) death.Optimism in the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential 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 an incentive to take responsible action. A human being is not one in pursuit of happiness but rather in search of a reason to become happy, last but not least, through actualizing the potential meaning inherent and dormant in a given situation.Man does not live by welfare alone. It's possible to have enough to live by but nothing to live for; to have the means but no meaning. Not all cases of suicide are undertaken out of a feeling of meaninglessness, but it may well be that an individual's impulse to take his life would have been overcome had he been aware of some meaning and purpose worth living for. Suffering 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.The greatest among us are those who master a hard lot with their heads held high. Guilt There is no fully biological, psychological and/or sociological factors that justify/explain why someone commits a crime.Individuals must be held personally accountable for their deeds. Having committed a crime and become guilty, one now has the responsibility for overcoming guilt by rising above it, by growing beyond yourself and changing for the better.As for the concept of collective guilt, I personally think that it is totally unjustified to hold one person responsible for the behavior of another person or a collective of persons. "An American woman once confronted me with the reproach, "How can you still write some of your books in German, Adolf Hitler's language?"In response, I asked her if she had knives in her kitchen, and when she answered that she did, I acted dismayed and shocked, exclaiming, "How can you still use knives after so many killers have used them to stab and murder their victims?" Death Live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now.The opportunities to act properly, the potentialities to fulfill a meaning, are affected by the irreversibility of our lives.In the past, nothing is irrevocably lost, but rather, on the contrary, everything is irrevocably stored and treasured. So, let us be alert—in a twofold sense:Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of.And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake.Viktor Frankl Afterword by William J. Winslade Frankl believed strongly in reconciliation rather than revenge; he once remarked, "I do not forget any good deed done to me, and I do not carry a grudge for a bad one."He renounced the idea of collective guilt. Frankl was able to accept that his Viennese colleagues and neighbors may have known about or even participated in his persecution, and he did not condemn them for failing to join the resistance or die heroic deaths. Instead, he was deeply committed to the idea that even a vile Nazi criminal or a seemingly hopeless madman has the potential to transcend evil or insanity by making responsible choices. More Books Like Man's Search for Meaning If you enjoyed Man's Search for Meaning, then check out these similar book summaries: Each week, I email the most interesting insights from famous books. Join over 250+ people who read my highlights and personal commentary.

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