

The Survivor's Compass Finding Meaning & Purpose

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Define Your “Why”

It has been said, “Those who have a ‘why’ to live can bear with almost any ‘how’. This, from Viktor Frankl, an Australian neurologist and psychiatrist who survived the concentration camps of the Holocaust. During his time in the camps he observed that men who had a reason to live, something to motivate their will to survive, were the ones who did survive. Those who gave up were the ones who ceased to believe in anything, who lost their reason or purpose to go on.

Frankl believed that “Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment”. This discovering of one’s purpose brings meaning to life and suffering.

Based on his experiences, Dr. Frankl developed logotherapy, a psychotherapy that incorporates this belief in a higher purpose or meaning as a motivation for overcoming mental and emotional challenges. According to Dr. Frankl, we can find 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 is simple and refers to a task or work that is your life’s purpose, something you are meant to accomplish. The second is to find meaning in pursuit of experiences; such as the experience of beauty, truth, nature or culture. Meaning can also be found in experiencing the uniqueness of others, such as a life partner or your children, by loving them. By finding the “why” of our lives we can manage the “how”, no matter how difficult.

Dr. Frankl believed that what mattered most is our ability to transform personal tragedy into triumph, to turn one’s predicament into a human achievement. He said, “When we are no longer able to change a situation... we are challenged to change ourselves.”

This is the heart of our journey to wholeness, as survivors. To turn our personal tragedies into triumphs of human achievement. If you know why you are working so hard to heal, you will be better able to stick to your commitment. Having a reason can make all the difference. Sometimes it needs to be more than just “feeling better”. You need a compelling reason to do the work.

Consider Dr. Frankl’s ideas about the “why” of our lives. Choose what you think fits you best; it could be that you feel there is something you are meant to accomplish, or perhaps you are working to heal because you want to experience your life more fully, through

