

## THE EFFECTS OF LOGOTHERAPY ON THE PANDEMIC PERIOD OF COVID -19: A STUDY OF MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

BY VICTOR E. FRANKL

**Simran Tripathi**

Research Scholar,  
IIS (Deemed to be) University,  
Jaipur

### Abstract

*After witnessing the Catastrophic effects of World Wars, people started becoming dubious about their existence, where the rationality has privileged over the irrational beliefs. New scientific discoveries and radical thinking question the traditional structure. The epidemic coronavirus has sparked up the essence of meaninglessness as experienced by Dr. Victor Frankl in a Nazi Concentration camp during World War II. With the help of psychological therapy, he aims to identify the meaning of life that was lost by him during the years of imprisonment. The flickering new idea of Existential Psychotherapy<sup>1</sup> provides a new ray of hope that we can strive for the meaning despite the tragic triad aroused by the pandemic Covid-19. During this pestilence of coronavirus, the choice to have meaning has subjugated. When men declare as a Pan-Determine<sup>2</sup> this generates the existential frustration<sup>3</sup>, and the Noo-Dynamic<sup>4</sup> effects could barricade our will to meaning. The prevalent notions of Victor E. Frankl in his book Man's Search of Meaning mitigate the feeling of meaninglessness during the pandemic period of COVID -19. This paper is an attempt to examine the self that is victimized by the other during the pandemic period. Here, the psychic notion of Logotherapeutic effects reanimates the lost meaning and sets human free to have an optimism despite the tragic triad<sup>5</sup> of Covid-19.*

**Keywords:** Logotherapy, existential frustration, Noo-Dynamic, and Tragic Optimism.

## THE EFFECTS OF LOGOTHERAPY ON THE PANDEMIC PERIOD OF COVID -19: A STUDY OF MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

BY VICTOR E. FRANKL

- Simran Tripathi

“There is much that is wrong with human nature. Man is an existential being whose life is more than logic and who must discover the meaning of existence. There are no answers to the human predicament to be found in the back of a book; philosophy is to be lived, something to be proven in action.”

*(Davis and Miller, 206)*

**T**he devastation and blood bath of the two wars questioned human existence. Bloodshed loosen the root of faith, and then the storm of rationality repeatedly tried to diminish the entire region of morality; from here, the conflict among morality, science, and religion tried to entangle the human, and then the quest takes place. With the rise of the pandemic coronavirus, the quest for meaning begins again. That started with the occurrence of wars. The bloodshed sprouted the seed of doubts in man and started questioning his existence. He starts losing his beliefs by plunging his self into a world where technology redefines him and provides him a completely new identity as a man of the postmodern pragmatic world, in this postmodern world where the irrationality dribbles over the man's rationality that ceased him to get a center and shapes him like a pendulous who keeps dangling between logics and beliefs. From the bloodshed of 1914 and in 1945, till today 2020's pandemic of the corona, the years are passing, and we can witness how our morality is privileged over by technological enhancement. Man's ethics are determined by the reasons that ceased his beliefs towards his meaningless existence. The same ethics starts wambles again when a widespread disease, the corona, is seizing the year 2020.

Covid-19 is an x-ray, and it has exposed what we have done to our society. In some countries, the disease has been devastating. In others it's the cure that has caused the devastation. (Arundhati Roy)

Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by the Corona Virus, was discovered by China Wuhan in December 2019. From the day of the outbreak until August 2020, the death rate keeps increasing, and 800,906 deaths have registered so far. It is clinically proven that the virus spreads from a person to another. When the person coughs, exhales, and by touch also. The disease forced every man to live in solitude and urge to maintain a social distancing. The most common symptoms are fever, tiredness, cough, runny nose, and sore throat. In order to fight against this disease, the whole world has come together by maintaining a physical remoteness.

During the wars, the enemies could, and the war fought with the help of weapons. This time as the virus, we cannot detect with our necked eye. It is more difficult to fight. The weapons that we are using in order to fight with the epidemic is not guns and cannon, but reducing the chances of being affected by Covid-19, we are using alcohol-based sanitizers or can use sops and water. We can cover our mouth and nose with a mask. It decreased the probability of getting affected by the virus. Another very simple weapon is to maintain a distance of at least one meter. These are some common remedies that we are using to fight against the most undetectable disease. While fighting with this virus, until now, we have been lost many people. The death rate keeps increasing day by day as no vaccine has prevented yet. These days, we are spending our time in home quarantine as the conditions outside is not safe to move out freely, and by staying home, a place where we can move freely but outside the home boundary, the virus is waiting to attack us. It has been more than six months. We are continually struggling to have an existence that we can live at the utmost.

In order to examine today's existential phenomena, we need to move back in the time of Holocaust<sup>6</sup>. As introduced by Victor E. Frankl, the founder of the third Viennese school of psychotherapy or the school of Logotherapy, explores in the book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946). The book talked about Frankl's experiences when he was a prisoner

in a Nazi concentration camp at the time of world war, and the book also explores how the psyche of a commoner dealt with the imprisonment. His theories provide us an understanding that human's who have lost the essence during the devastation caused by war can regain optimism by seeking the lost meaning whose quest defines them as an existentialist. While going through the journey of exploring self, men have to go through many tides that barricade him to reach his destination. The quest generates frustration in him is called Noo-dynamic, whose effects can be detected when the man starts plunging into solitude and starts moving away from the other and self. The freedom of searching self barricades by his given notion of pan-determinism that explores that human's existence is defined by the society and by his biological conditions. He is not free to make choices; this notion silently refutes against the Soren Kierkegaard's and Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of Existence Precedes Essence.

Whenever human beings have hited by any devastation, whether in the form of war or an epidemic. We can see how easily human starts losing faith from existence and starts looking for ways to escape. During the Tragic Triad of Covid-19, it is difficult for people to maintain a belief over the existence and the will to have a meaning seems misty within the eyes where tragic optimism is about to die. In order to keep that optimism alive, man needs to seek meaning in the Existential Vacuum these days. We are urging to stay at home in solitude, instead of becoming passive and crying over the conditions, we can actively accomplish our quest of meaning. The similar notion can be seen in *Man's Search for Meaning* when Frankl spent his days in the concentration camps as he says;

“An active life serves the purpose of giving man the opportunity to realize values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyment affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art or nature but there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behaviour; namely in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces.” (*Man's Search for Meaning*, 75)

In this modern era, people are not aware of what they can get by exploring solitude. They believe that as they are far away from the world, they alone cannot explore

anything while it is their solitude that can bring the solution. In most of the absurd readings, we can explore how the character successfully explores their real selves only by moving away from the world where being lost is the way to found selves. Sometimes the search for self generates Existential frustration. According to Frankl, that frustration results in neurosis.

“I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe.”

“But in imagining an erroneous order, you will found something.”

*(The name of the Rose, 599)*

In solitude, man’s failure to seeking self makes him dangling man, and the conflict begins between his mind and soul and starts while existing in the present. He revisits his past, and this escape provides him a chance where he can explore the self. After a while, failure in searching self generates frustration in them and forces them to have a false identity. This false identity successfully befools self and provides a false existence. The similar case we can explore these days where we are all existing dual identities the one create to exist in this world and another we experience in self. As during the quarantine period, we are spending days in solitude, and these days we are away from the worldly affairs. By recalling the past, we are also becoming an escapist with this escape; instead of exploring self, we are developing the power of imaginations where we can generate another imaginary identity that is different from self and other. This pluralism in identity generates inner tension of not having a singularity. As we can see in Frankl where he says;

“A man who let himself decline because he could not see any future goal found himself occupied with retrospective thoughts. In a different connection, we have already spoken of the tendency there was to look into the past, to help make the present, with all its horrors, less real.” *(Man’s Search for Meaning, 80)*



The traumatic past does not allow men to seek meaning. The psyche and body both seem to entangle in the past and barricades him to make choices. As these days, while spending time in quarantine, our psyche seems to entwine in the memories that recall us about our time that we used to spend in free air palisade our power of thinking that can look forward and can form choices to grow ahead. The same experiences shared by The Frankl, the memories hit him as it hit every other being, but in order to cope up with memories, he works to create some other memories by working in the present. As Frankl explores, "Any attempt at fighting the camp's psychopathological influence on the prisoner by Psychotherapeutic or psycho-hygienic methods had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which we could look forward." (81)

Either we can exist in our memories or can spend time to create some more. In the Aristotelian era, people believe that it is the essence that precedes our existence. With the change of time, people start considering that it is our existence that has the power to privilege our essence, and in this postmodern era, it is the time that guides our essence. We have many choices that we can choose and can form our essence of existence. Here in the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, it is the existence of the prisoners that was guiding there essence. Their diasporic memories did not allow them to make choices when the people were in concentration camps; they never tried to escape out of there. Whatever the conditions were, they accept everything, and besides working against and for forth, they accepted imprisonment first and then all the cruelties done by the Nazi's "The thought of suicide was entertained by nearly every-one, if only for a brief time. It was born of the hopelessness of the situation..."(31). Frankl explores that it is the essence that they consider as the gist that guides their existence and believes as it is the choice of supreme against which they cannot revolt and accepts whatever life serves in its platter with full enthusiasm. Frankl, in his book, talks about the tragic optimism that explores that even after facing so much of domination, the prisoners never lose hope for the good days. Although hundreds of times, they express their wish to commit suicide because death is the only way they can use it as a medium of escape from daily depression. There the hope breathes alongside the torments, and there Frankl talks about tragic optimism as a concept. Frankl makes the prisoners believe that they are not Pan Determine, but by

choosing to exist as per their choices. He explores how to exist in the harsh conditions of the camp is his first choice. There Frankl silently revolt against the notion of essence precedes essence and move towards the modernist approach that focuses on how it is our existence that holds power to guide their essence. "In brief it means that one is, and remains, optimistic in spite of the 'tragic triad,' as it is called Logotherapy, a triad which consists of hope aspects of human existence which may be circumscribed by; (1) Pain; (2) guilt; and (3) death." (139)

In this 2020's era, everything revolves around the time when the coronavirus entered in the fast running world and has freeze-up everything. We came to know that how time is the real essence that guides our existence. During this time, the conflict between morality, science, and religion is at its peak, and now it is difficult to decide that what aspect is the entire course of the germination of human degradation. As the corona is a human-made virus, everyone is blaming today's technology that has entwined us, and now the suffocation is not allowing us to breathe in the open air. At the same time, some philosophers claim that it is the result of our moral degradation as we are moving away from spiritual beliefs, and the logic has privileged over morality. Years ago, over the foundation of belief, the castle of technology was formed. The belief that the development in technology can provide us a healthy and bright future now seems to be hollow because the same foundation is now weaker after years. With a constant rise in other sources, we can experience a fallen in self that generates doubt in and also there with the seed of conflict between self and others. Besides everything, we came to know that how time is supreme over mind and body and hold power to privilege our existence that precedes our essence.

"This soul in essence, the reflection of the spirit, never under goes the throes of death or the pangs of birth; nor, having once known existence, is it ever nonexistent. This soul was never born; it is everlastingly living, untouched by maya-magic of change. The soul is ever constant through all cycles of bodily disintegrations." (*Bhagavada Gita*, II: 20)

The moment human starts facing pain was the moment when we were first stricken by corona, and then the real journey begins when we took a ride towards the

past that hunts and make us realize the guilt that we will carry throughout the life is not to bother about the belief that is the real foundation of our rational existence. These days whenever a man dies of the corona, we came to know death is the ultimate reality from which we cannot escape. We can escape from guilt and pain, but the fear of death makes us recall all pain that we are enduring and about our deeds on which only we can repent. They continuously increase in the death rate of people makes us recall that how death is the ultimate reality with whom we cannot escape; still, his try of escape provides us an imaginary world where for a while, we can experience how we have the power of self-determination. Today whatever miserable conditions we are facing is the result of our own choices, and we are responsible for our own choices. As the corona is created by man to destroy other men, we cannot blame the outer world as others victimize the self. This other exists in self whom we lost when we were struggling to found the self. In order to locate a self, we decentralized the other, and the decentralization provides us so many centers that can force us to create a false self whom we can consider as an imaginary self and can sustain a real-life on that unreal self. If we can create an imaginary world where we can exist at our choices, in reality, also we can make choices that hold power to guide our existence. "Psychologically, what was happening to the liberated prisoners could be called 'depersonalization.' Everything appeared unreal, unlike, as in a dream." (95). These psychological conditions are explored by the Frankl when he examined the psyche of the prisoners in the concentration camp.

By Nazis, not only their bodies but also their soul was an object of torture. After liberation, it was their body that was liberated, not the soul. The same we can see here as Even after years ago of atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The conditions at both places are improving, and day by day with constant development. Transformation is taking place. The psyche of the people is in the process of recovery from the traumatic devastation. World war lasted from 1914 to 1918 and the other from 1939 to 1945. The traumatic effects in people haunt them till today, and here in the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, the terror of concentration camps keeps haunting man till after their liberation. It is their body that is librated, not their soul. We can say it is difficult to release the soul from traumatic imprints of the past that were witnessed by our bodies. IN the 2020's era,



it is our body that is victimized, but the imprints of this decimation could be seen even after years will pass away. "But for every one of the liberated prisoners, the day comes when, looking back on his camp experiences, he can no longer understand how he endured it all." (*Man's Search for Meaning*, 99)

The paper explores that how even after facing so many harsh conditions, it is our psyche that has the power to guide our body as the psychotherapy claims that man's will to meaning has the power that can camouflage all the doubts generated by us as these days, rationality tries to privilege over belief. Whether it was the struggle of war or in concentration camps and as nowadays the struggle of Covid-19, we have to make choices either we can fight against the conditions or can sit and accept as everything is pre-determined. Covid-19 taught us while striving for Logotherapy, a man goes through many stages as sometimes he experiences existential vacuum, or sometimes he suffers from meta clinical, and Noo-dynamic effects make his existence full of frustration. We all somehow chose to escape from the absurd conditions that are germinated by a coronavirus. The only way to attain a meaning is to know 'self' first, that is struggling to have an existence in this 'other' world.

#### End Notes;

- 1.) Existential Psychotherapy talks about the human condition as a whole. It uses a positive approach that applauds human capacities.
- 2.) Pan Determinism talks about that human is not free to make choices; it depends on their conditions and their genes.
- 3.) Man's will to meaning can be frustrated, in which case Logotherapy speaks of existential frustration. (*Man's Search for Meaning*, 106)
- 4.) Noo-Dynamic focuses on man's search of meaning that arouses inner tension rather than equilibrium. (*Man's Search for Meaning*, 109)
- 5.) The tragic triad talks about human existence that is made up of three aspects; pain, guilt, and death.
- 6.) Holocaust is a word of Greek meaning "sacrifice by fire." The Nazis, who came to empower Germany in 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and the

Jews, deemed “inferior,” were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community. (*War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*)

### Works Cited;

- Bergen, Doris. *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* . Lanham, MD Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.
- Davis, E. and Miller, D. *The Philosophic process in physical*. Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger. 1967.
- Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1983.
- Fosse, Lars Martin. *The Bhagavad Gita*. Yoga Vidya. 2007.
- Viktor, E. Frankl. *Man' Search For Meaning*. Translated by Lasch Ilse. Rider, 2014.

