



Spirit and Meaning
*Testimonies of Healing Trauma
through Christianity and Logotherapy*

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"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

(Isaiah 40:31)

"In some fashion, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice." (Viktor Frankl, "Man's Search for Meaning")

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Preface

I wrote this book in just a few breaths. I felt a pressing need to set down on paper several moments from my life that remained deeply etched in my mind. To escape certain fears, psychologists urge you to give them a name. By naming them, their resistance weakens; you can detach yourself and use the filter of reason to analyze events that seem to make no sense.

There are indeed painful memories in life, but despite being devoid of reason, they still possess a meaning. Surely, if I were to go back in time, I would not choose to undergo similar events again; however, for many of us, life does not provide an "arsenal" to help in the struggle against difficulties.

Writing this book was like an "exorcism." The more I saw my ideas laid out on the screen, the greater the sense of liberation became. Psychologists also say that verbalized ideas become more logical. Memory is like a darkened room where you only have a vague idea of what is inside; you see shadows and outlines, but not clearly. But when the sunlight enters the room, you can distinguish the objects. Moreover, you can see the dust that has settled on them; you can clean and then organize them so as to highlight their true value.

Depression makes you feel like an isolated island in an ocean. While writing this book, I no longer felt alone. I felt as though I was slowly approaching other islands, forming a continent—a continent of people free from trauma, who can look into each other's eyes and find their meaning. Just as Viktor E. Frankl, isolated in a camp, gazed at a sunrise and saw the face of his wife.

Later, Viktor E. Frankl would say: "Love is the ultimate and highest goal to which man can aspire."¹ We, as humans, are the crown of nature. We can conquer territories, we can dominate masses of people, we can reach the far corners of the universe, we can conquer hearts and minds; yet, despite all this, we are—as Blaise Pascal said—mere "thinking reeds"² Today we are here, but tomorrow we do not know what will happen. Life is so fragile. However, as Pascal also noted, we have within us a longing for the infinite that cannot be satisfied by earthly loves or achievements.

¹ *Man's search for meaning*, Viktor E. Frankl

² *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal

As it was for Pascal, this infinite has the same name for me: God. By writing this book, I placed my experiences before God, and through this, they began to take on meaning. Those stirrings of the spirit were what gave form and understanding to this book. It was a great consolation to find meaning in my suffering, and if it was necessary to pass through hell to reach God, then I no longer regret anything that happened.

If this book reaches even a single soul and gives them hope, it has achieved its purpose.

1. Leaden Wings – And Yet, They Fly

It is said that in the year 1633, Galileo Galilei, forced by the Inquisition to recant his conviction—based on astronomical observations—that the Earth revolves around the Sun, finally signed the act of abjuration. However, upon leaving the courtroom, he reportedly stamped his foot on the ground and whispered: *"Eppur si muove"* ("And yet, it moves").

I don't know how old I was—5, 6, 7... I stood frozen in bed, my eyes fixed on the scene before me: my father, his eyes filled with hatred and rage, his hands clamped around my mother's neck as she screamed for help. Finally, someone came and pulled them apart. Until that person arrived, one question persisted in my mind: "Why is no one coming to save us?" I don't think I formulated the question exactly like that back then, and I wasn't just thinking of being saved from the clench of "iron fists," but from the hell within us.

The light in the eyes of the child with leaden wings was being extinguished not only by the hell within the family but also by the generalized hell of society. The electricity rationing of that time forced us to spend our evenings by the gas lamp. One evening, when the light went out, before my mother could light the lamp, I was seized by a terror as if I were in a nightmare from which I could not wake up, and I began to scream. I felt the darkness so heavy, as if I had been locked in an iron cage. Suddenly, I felt a slap across my face and I stopped. Since then, I am no longer afraid of the darkness.

The mystery of Santa Claus's existence was kept alive in the family during my childhood. I waited with bated breath for Christmas Eve to see what surprise Santa had prepared as a reward for being a "good girl." Every year, he brought me a large doll, almost my size. I was fascinated by their beauty and had the impression that nothing more beautiful existed in the world than those dolls.

A friend my age would join me in that fantastic world where we gave names to the dolls and educated them from a teacher's desk. There were moments when I forgot the turmoil, not only because of the dolls but also because my friend could reflect both my sadness and my joy.

To be a man was equivalent at that time—and often even today—to trampling snowdrops with heavy boots to make room for thorns. To be a woman was equivalent, as it still is in certain areas of our country, to stifling one's own voice and sacrificing oneself on the altar of the family.

It was a summer day, early in the morning, before the sun had entered the room. However, a beautiful day of light and warmth was foretold. I turned on the television, and my attention was captured by a ballet scene. I watched for a few minutes, then I stood up, stretched on my toes, extended my arms gracefully as if I had wings, and began to spin in a circle. In that moment, I felt the lead on my wings melt away, making room for a powerful air of freedom and movement. I don't know how high I soared then, but in any case, I rose above the daily hell.

2. The Hidden Idol – Beyond the Clouds

A few years later, also on a summer day, I was in the room adjacent to the one where I had performed my "Davidic" dance. It was a windowless room where light only entered through the doorway. I was lying on my stomach on the rug, propped up on my elbows, holding a cup of caramelized sugar that I was slowly savoring. Before my eyes lay a book. It was titled *"The Good News."*

I don't recall concrete details, but the main character, Jesus, fascinated me completely. He seemed to be a "Man after my own heart." Besides performing miracles, He spoke about a "Kingdom." My imagination began to take flight. What could be in this "Kingdom"? If Jesus speaks of love and is a wise Man who never loses His temper, it must mean that in that "Kingdom," it must be infinitely better than in my daily hell.

Thus, I began to pray in secret in that darkened room. My daily prayer sounded something like this: "Lord, take me to You in heaven; there is too much suffering on this earth." I don't know how much time passed, but one day, a large newspaper headline caught my eye: *"Life is a Gift from God."* I was shocked because my conviction began to waver. What did it mean, that it's a gift? The gifts Santa Claus brought me were wonderful, but life isn't like that! What kind of gift is this? In other words, if He gave us life as a gift, are we obligated to live on this earth even if we are unhappy? When I reached the clouds, my wings began to falter, and I fell back to earth.

My parents did not have a Bible in the house. Someone, by chance on the street, had offered them this book, which they placed somewhere on a shelf. I wish I had kept that book to remember my feelings from back then more vividly; however, years later, after I became an Orthodox Christian and learned it was a Neo-Protestant Bible, I burned it. That was how I understood religion back then.

Yet, the fascination with Jesus remained throughout the years, even as I changed denominations or drifted radically away from a Christianity I misunderstood for years. He remained the model of a human being I always longed to meet: mysterious, wise, gentle, courageous, and full of compassion even for the most wretched of people. The expectation of a miracle remained stored deep within my subconscious.

3. Melancholy – Dreams Take Flight

In the Night

*When the sunset slowly descends
And darkness wraps me in its fold,
When the moon through the heavens bends,
My soul swims in pains untold.*

*When enchanted stars appear
With a mystery deep and vast,
When my thoughts to dream-palaces steer,
My heart is with tears o'er cast.*

*When the sea of fire and crystal
Spreads silent, with a charm so bright,
When my mind seeks the celestial,
I sense the distance in the night.*

*When angels softly glide below
In the blue and starry night,
When dreams wrap all in a gentle glow,
I weep by the window's light.*

*When my soul asks in secret deep
Why it was given to exist,
When there's no one its secrets to keep,
My eyes are dimmed by a sad mist.*

This is one of the poems I composed on the threshold of adolescence, around age 14 or 15. In our backyard stood an old walnut tree where my brother had built some benches during our childhood; I used to sit there and read. There, I would also compose poems, looking down at the world or up at the sky.

My adolescence was marked by my first love, which ravaged my inner world with a palette of emotions, feelings, and experiences that I did not understand, yet lived intensely. Other new things also appeared: a friend, a forced residence at an aunt's house, and high school life where literature was religion, while mathematics belonged to an impenetrable galaxy.

During my first year of high school, I received recognition for my poetry. It happened during the "Freshmen's Ball," which I did not attend, being occupied with "travels" in higher spheres. After the ball, my Romanian teacher entered the classroom during chemistry class, looked at me threateningly, and asked: "What have you done, Oana?". My heart leaped out of my chest, even though I couldn't remember doing anything wrong, especially towards him. I looked at him with wide, wondering eyes, and he burst into laughter. He approached me, handed me a few books and an envelope with money: the reward for first prize in the creative writing contest.

My first love was more a source of suffering than of happiness. I found my wings mostly in dreams, for in reality we rarely met, being under the strict supervision of my father, who refused to accept that, at such a tender age, his daughter had found her heart's choice. Looking back now, I do not condemn him. However, I do not regret the suffering of love either, because it gave wings to my imagination and depth to my soul.

4. Innocence Lost – Sensation Without Reason

The neurologist glances at the X-ray, looks at my father, and says with contempt: — There's nothing wrong with her, sir! She's just drugged!

Dreams, wings, poetry, dance, literature, love, transcendence — chapter closed.

Neurosis, depression, pills, alcohol, the wrong crowd, debauchery, parties, rock revolution, the numbing of self-awareness — chapter open.

Jealousy led my father to hurl vulgar reproaches at my mother. One evening, witnessing such an episode again, a sudden fit of rage seized me. I jumped up, grabbed an empty fruit basket, and flung it at the wall where the icon hung; then, I cursed God and turned a gaze full of reproach and hatred toward my father.

Surprised by my reaction, he stood up and looked at me in wonder. Instinctively, I began to strike him with my palms and scratch his face. He tried to stop me, but I broke away and punched the windowpane. After the shards scattered across the floor, I noticed my hand beginning to bleed. I still carry the scar.

I was sitting by the cassette player, alone in the kitchen of a friend's apartment. My arms were crossed on the table, my head resting on them. "Nothing Else Matters" was playing from the speakers. I was sobbing uncontrollably, though I don't remember why. There was a bottle of alcohol on the table, but I don't recall what kind. Not long before, I had taken a diazepam pill.

— I'd like to talk to a psychologist, he says.

— I'd like to talk to a gynecologist. The sex was painful, I say with disappointment.

— I'm having feelings I don't understand, he moans.

— I don't even understand why I had sex with you since I don't love you, I remark, staring into the void.

— Oana, what is happening? In your first years of high school, you were one of the best students in class. You worked hard, you went to Olympiads. Now, I don't recognize you

anymore, my Romanian teacher tells me with a worried look. I didn't know how to answer without scandalizing her.

One evening, I was sitting at a table in a bar with several people. I turned to a friend, who was also a friend of my brother's:

— Hey, won't you buy a bottle of *Grasă de Cotnari*?

— Sure, he says kindly. He brings the wine, puts it on the table, and pours me a glass. A few gulps and the glass is empty.

— Pour me more, I ask him. He looks at me, amused, and refills my glass. Before long, it's empty again.

— Pour me more, I tell him. He looks at me with concern, but I don't remember if he poured any more. What I vaguely remember is reaching home carried in my brother's arms. The next day, I didn't leave my room.

— My child! my father cries out, leaning over me as I lay on the floor next to an empty tube of sleeping pills. The next day, I lay in bed in semi-consciousness after the emergency doctors had performed a gastric lavage.

"You want to sleep and you sleep

You can't even imagine

You want to sleep and you sleep

*Only your pillow you see..."*³

"People are strange

When you're a stranger

Faces look ugly

*When you're alone..."*⁴

*"And she's buying a stairway to heaven..."*⁵

³ *Bizarre Sleep*, Iris

⁴ *People are strange*, Doors

⁵ *Stairway to Heaven*, Led Zeppelin

*"If you're leaving, close the door
I'm not expecting people, anymore...
I'm a blind man!
I'm a blind man!
And my world is cold..."⁶*

⁶ *Blind Man*, Deep Purple

5. The Lone Wolf – Why He Licks His Wounds

"Philosophy" comes from the Greek terms *philo* and *sophia*, meaning "love of wisdom" or "the search for truth." If *sophia* means wisdom, *zophia* translates to darkness. During the communist era, the term shifted from *filosofie* to *filozofie* due to Slavic influence. They could not have chosen a better term than *filozofie* for what was being taught under that subject.

I chose the Faculty of Philosophy because I liked the way my high school philosophy teacher spoke. He possessed a vast culture and an elegant, fluent vocabulary. Given that I was emerging from a period marked by *zophia*, I thought it wouldn't hurt to draw closer to *sophia*.

During university, I lived in an apartment located at "Kilometer Zero" of the city. My room was small: a bed, a desk, and a chest full of books—books that were scattered on the floor, on the bed, and on the desk. I had red drapes at the window, and the view looked out toward one of the largest hotels in the city. A classmate who came to visit concluded it was a "bohemian" room that invited one to dream.

I did not escape this habit of dreaming during university, and I remained close to philology, considering I read more literature than philosophy. The tendency to dream made me like the shadow in Plato's cave. I believed I was seeing reality, but the truth was entirely different—much brighter and more colorful.

The most beautiful memory I have from university is forming a friendship—a somewhat strange one, as we speak rarely, but it lasts to this day. In many ways, I feel I resonate with my former classmate just as she was back then. I have always admired her for the way she practices "resistance through culture" in the face of life's adversities.

My identity in relation to others never took clear shape. I did not become wiser, as I had hoped. I remained like a wounded wolf, blinded by its own injuries, learning to navigate the forest of life alone. Because of this, I had a tendency to focus on the dangers surrounding me, such as rigid, stiff, brutal, vulgar, or hypocritical people with egos that overflowed.

I remember, for example, that at the "Philosophy of Religions" course—a subject where I should have excelled given my leaning toward religion—I witnessed a pathetic and grotesque spectacle, defined by my values at the time. The professor began to comment on a

text from the Old Testament. Perhaps the most difficult one: the passage where God tells Moses, "I am who I am." This revelation seemed ridiculous to the professor and sparked a wave of amusement in the lecture hall. A classmate, a devoted Christian, stood up and left the room, refusing to participate in such a cheap comedy. I did not follow him, and I regret that now.

Only later did I acquire some understanding of this difficult text, which that professor failed to grasp and did not have the common sense to show even a modicum of respect toward Christians. I understood it with the help of Bishop Robert Barron, who said that God is the very essence of being; He is pure existence, the foundation of all existence. Another interpretation Bishop Barron gives to this text is that God's answer is an ironic one directed at Moses. As if He were saying: "Moses, stop asking stupid questions. Your limited mind will never be able to contain Me." We have millions of examples around us of people trying to fit God into categories and definitions, an endeavor that is doomed from the start.

A reading from that period that came to mind was Steinhardt's *"The Happiness Diary,"* in which he compared Christ to a nobleman who never asks us to be fools. In such situations, however, we as Christians are not called to condemn, but to forgive and to treat others with compassion and patience. As Silvano Fausti said: "The Bible exists for you to beat your own breast with it, not to hit someone else over the head."⁷

⁷ A Community Reads the Gospel of Luke, Silvano Fausti.

6. Persona – Beyond the Mask

The more you hide your suffering, the louder it screams. I don't remember who said that, but I do remember that I was in a desperate search for a psychiatrist. After graduating from university, I didn't know which way to turn; I became confused, and a silent despair took hold of me. Without a reference point to anchor us, we wander through life as mere victims of chance.

There is a Romanian saying: "Take away a man's dignity, and you might as well give him his funeral bread and candle." I wandered through the virtual world for a while, looking for "the right" people to help me escape the darkness of despair. But the people I met believed that the best cure for an identity crisis was public humiliation. Thus, I found myself in the spotlight, and the "directors" told me to play my part; but I refused to act, and I hid under a mask of silence for years.

This silence was, in reality, a desperate cry for authenticity. I never had the ability to mask my suffering. I wore my interior on my exterior. Even though I longed for liberation from the prison of suffering, I was convinced there was no cure for me. I was seized by a bitter self-dissatisfaction. *I am not beautiful enough, I am not smart enough, I don't have a refined education.* Hypocrisy and vanity. *Why am I like this and not otherwise?*

Another scene, some 2,000 kilometers away, different "directors," but the same script in which I was the lead actress named *The Victim*. I was seized by a freezing cold, both outside and in. One day, I accidentally discovered an "oasis." I cannot describe many details of the church I entered. What I do remember, however, is sitting on a bench facing the altar, and to my left was a life-sized statue of the Virgin Mary. I didn't look too closely, but I was left with a powerful sensation that she was very beautiful and surrounded by flowers.

But most importantly, though it was a statue made of stone, she radiated a great deal of warmth. Why do I say this? Because suddenly, the ice on my exterior and my interior began to melt. I burst into tears—a weeping with my entire being. I laid at her feet all my troubles and those of my ancestors, all the way back to Adam and Eve.

My mother sees things in black and white. That was the corner of heaven where she lived. I have always lived with the sensation that there are pieces of heaven where the rainbow has a wide palette of colors. And I wish with all my soul to gaze at them in all their splendor—and to show them to my mother as well.

In 2014, I got married. My husband has always seen the world in diverse shades and has strived with his whole being to show it to me. He has always been a man well-anchored in reality, with intense cerebral activity. To this, he added his heartbeats, which he wished to be in sync with mine. Yet, the demon of sadness and bitter dissatisfaction still held a monopoly over me.

One autumn morning in 2015, I got up from bed and, with a sudden and desperate gesture, filled my palm with sleeping pills, swallowed them, and prayed: "Lord, if You love me, You will save me." And He saved me.

When I opened my eyes, I saw a little girl with chestnut hair and large brown eyes—scared and sad at the same time.

— What happened? I ask her. Why are you upset?

— I built a sandcastle on the beach, but my parents scolded me. They say I should have helped them build their stone house instead, because that's where we live, not in a castle.

— Don't you like living in a stone house?

— No, the girl says, it's cold there.

— But when it's winter outside, with wind and cold, isn't it better to be in your parents' house, under shelter?

— "Yes, but I still like the sandcastle on the beach more," the girl admits sadly.

— And if a storm comes and the sea waves knock down your castle, what will you do?

— I go to my parents' house, she says sadly.

— Why do you think your parents built a stone house?

— My father says he inherited the house plan from his parents.

— Is it always cold there?

— Not really. Sometimes, when my mother makes warm bread, I get warm. And when my father speaks kindly to me, the room gets warmer.

— What do you think is missing from your parents' house to make it warmer?

— Large windows, icons, cats, flowers, books, paintings...

— Don't you think you could bring some of those things into the house yourself?

— I can't, the girl whispers softly, I'm just a child.

— Why do you like icons? I ask her.

— Because they spread light and warmth.

— I wonder why?

— I don't know, the girl says softly, but I heard that if you get close to them, you surround yourself with light, and your heart warms up so much that it keeps those next to you warm, too.

— Have you ever approached an icon?

— Yes, the girl says.

— And what happened?

— I don't know exactly, but when I got home, it seemed warmer. My father asked me where I was coming from, and I told him from church. I had never seen him happy, but then he truly was. I didn't understand why.

7. Glimmerings – Searchings and Turmoil

On the classical music channel "Mezzo," artists are often asked: "If you were to go to a deserted island, what piece of classical music would you take with you?" I thought about this too. What musical work would I take with me? Without hesitation, Bach's *"St. Matthew Passion"* comes to mind—specifically the 1971 concert conducted by Karl Richter. It possesses such depth and beauty, as if Bach had captured the very weeping of the Father at the sight of the Son crucified on the Cross. My leaning toward suffering remained my faithful scent throughout the years.

The December cold had begun to penetrate my bones while I was waiting for Father C. At one point, it began to snow. Along with the snow appeared Father P., who asked me: "Why are you standing here in the cold?". "I am waiting for Father C." "But go and wait for him inside the church; don't stay here in the cold."

I arrived home frozen and irritable, passing by my husband and looking at him as if to say: "Stay out of my way! I am full of nerves!" My husband looked at me in surprise, sat down beside me, and asked: "What happened?" My frustration was just waiting to surface: "Father C. left me waiting in the cold for half an hour, after which he came in a hurry and sat on pins and needles while we talked. We didn't even speak for more than two minutes. I stopped, he gave me a quick absolution, and sent me on my way. How can you treat soul matters with such superficiality?". "Father C. is a good preacher," my husband said, "as you yourself said, but he is not a good spiritual father. He is only human, Oana, and like all people, he isn't perfect."

His answer brought me not a grain of solace. I took refuge in the bedroom and let the tears of frustration flow. I stopped at one point and stared into the void, thinking about my feverish search for a guide in spiritual life. Suddenly, I remembered that a few years ago, I had exchanged a few words with Father P., who introduced me to Sister M., and Sister M. gave me the phone number of Father I., a monk at a Greek-Catholic monastery.

The monastery is located in the heart of a forest where wild dogs roam freely. But when you enter the monastery gates, the barking of the dogs becomes a distant echo, and you are "hit" full-on by a feeling of tranquility and peace. The chapel is so small that barely ten people can fit. This narrow space has an air of intimacy that gives you the sensation that you can talk to God as if to a friend. The altar is guarded by two icons: one of the Virgin Mary and Child. Her gaze is full of peace and tenderness. In the other icon, Jesus has a steady gaze—a

sign that He never loses sight of us, and at the same time, it gives you the feeling that He can pull you out of the deepest pit of hell.

I was troubled by many questions about God. I had long desired to meet a spiritual father who would have patience with me, listen to me, and give me wise advice—but Father I. exceeded all expectations. In him, I discovered a true friend of God.

— Father, I ask him, why does God allow suffering?

— Why not? says Father I. I have stopped asking such questions. Just as Christ carried His Cross, so too are we called to do the same.

— Father, how do I get rid of this self-dissatisfaction?

— Repeat after me this sentence by St. Thérèse of Lisieux: 'Perfection consists in perfectly accepting one's own imperfection.' The ground on which God works is not one of soul-stirring turmoil; the most fertile ground is interior peace. Read Jacques Philippe and you will understand.

I never had the ability to listen to people wiser than myself. I had a profound feeling that no one understood me, not even God, and that I had to manage on my own because only I knew what was best for me.

Jacques Philippe: "We often agitate ourselves and let ourselves be overcome by anxiety, wanting to solve everything by ourselves. When, in fact, it would be much more practical to remain quiet under God's gaze and let Him work and act in us with His wisdom and power, which are infinitely superior to our capacities."⁸

Anyone who imagines that spiritual life means staring blankly at an icon waiting for miracles to happen without lifting a finger is mistaken.

Jacques Philippe: "...the Christian life is a struggle, a relentless war... It is the confrontation of one who fights with the certain awareness of having already won, because the Lord is risen: 'Do not weep! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed' (Rev 5:5). He does not fight the battle alone, by his own strength, but through that of the Lord who tells him: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor

⁸ *Searching for and Maintaining Peace*, Jacques Philippe.

12:9), and his important weapon is not strength of character or human skill, but faith—that total adherence to Christ."⁹

My thoughts: we are defined by animalistic impulses most of the time. Does Jesus not ask the impossible when He says: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"?¹⁰

Jacques Philippe: "But according to the Gospel, the perfect one is he who loves more, not so much he who behaves flawlessly. Perfect conduct... where there is more disinterested love for God and less prideful search for self."¹¹

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Matthew 5,48*

¹¹ *Searching for and Maintaining Peace*, Jacques Philippe.

8. Spirit and Meaning – The One Who Gazes at the Sunrise

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

A grey, cold morning at the Auschwitz camp. While being marched toward the sites of forced labor, prisoner 119,104 dares to raise his head to admire the sunrise, which evokes for him the face of his wife. Later, he would say: "Love is the ultimate and highest goal to which man can aspire."¹²

Viktor E. Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist and neurologist of Jewish origin. He spent three years in Nazi concentration camps, losing most of his family there. After being liberated, he wrote to the surviving members of his family: "When I look back, all I can do is cry a little and read from the Psalms."¹³

In my opinion, there are two categories of people: those who fall to their knees or become embittered because of suffering, and the second category, those who rise above suffering and give it a meaning. Moreover, the harsher the conditions, the more determined they are to keep their spirit free.

Such was Viktor Frankl, who, citing Hölderlin, said: "He who steps over his misery rises higher."¹⁴ The period in the Nazi camps was the incubation period for one of the most staunch defenders of the right to life. After the war, he delivered numerous lectures in Germany and throughout the world, campaigning against "nihilism" and the "existential vacuum," which he considered the primary causes of suicide. He made a significant contribution to the philosophy of meaning, and his method, called "logotherapy," became known as the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy.

In his book *"Yes to Life: In Spite of Everything,"* Frankl says that you can find meaning in life if you ask the question correctly. The correct way is not to ask: "What do I still expect from life?" but rather: "What does life expect from me?". In this context, he speaks about

¹² Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

¹³ Viktor Frankl, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*

¹⁴ Viktor Frankl, *Theory and therapy of neuroses*

responsibility. "To live means to be questioned," and you must prepare yourself inwardly to respond.

If you are conscious and responsible, neither suffering nor death can frighten you anymore, because in every moment there are thousands of possibilities from which you are free to choose which one to materialize. Life does not ask us to win at any price; it imperatively asks us not to give up the fight.

Precisely because it is hard, Frankl believed, life has meaning: "Suffering is something so purely human, something that somehow belongs to human life as such, that under certain circumstances, precisely not to suffer can be an illness."¹⁵

Frankl's conviction found meaning even in people considered burdens by society, such as the mentally ill or the terminally ill. A person's value is not found only in what they produce, but through their existence itself: "Utility to society is not, and will never be, the only measure we have the right to apply to a human being... Life has infinitely much meaning, so there must be a meaning even in suffering and failure."¹⁶

¹⁵ Viktor Frankl, *Yes to Life: In Spite of Everything*

¹⁶ *Id.*

9. Spirit and Meaning – How to Bring the Light from Dreams into Reality

According to Frankl's logotherapy, the child with leaden wings, living in a predominantly hostile environment, suffered several traumas. This hostile environment was not exclusively the choice of her parents; they inherited it from their parents, and so on, back to Adam and Eve. Yet, this child had wings, even if they were weighed down by lead. Still, where do these wings come from? From where does the spirit draw the power to rise above matter? Why God allows suffering, especially in children, we do not know. What we do know, however, since the time of Isaiah, is this: *"Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you; your walls are ever before me"*.¹⁷ We are marked into the very Being of God.

In logotherapy, a child facing the image of a restrictive and imposing authority will feel a blockage in accessing their own self and, as a result, will create a world in black and white. But God created a wide palette of colors. As the Psalmist said: *"I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me!"*¹⁸. What are these gifts in vivid colors? They are what God places within us to lift us above our daily hell: a free spirit and the search for meaning in that "Kingdom" discovered in the semi-darkness of a windowless room.

Melancholy is described by logotherapy as an "existential vacuum" or a paralysis of the "will to meaning." It is felt as a loss, which is actually a loss of the meaning of reality. Thus, having no levers in reality, the child takes refuge in imagination. The suffering of love and the inconsolable sadness created depth and ignited a longing not only for a first love but also for the infinite—that is, for God.

The experiences in *Innocence Lost* are interpreted by logotherapy as attempts to fill the inner void through the "will to pleasure" (the numbing of conscience). It is the flight from pain that leads to the loss of the inner compass. It was the "dark night" of the spirit. Mary Magdalene wandered long before reaching the feet of Jesus, but through this wandering, she prepared her soul for an even greater love and total forgiveness.

The lone wolf self-detaches from a painful past, licks its wounds to heal, and learns to look at its own pain with honesty. If the words of philosophy failed to console me, they

¹⁷ *Isaiah 49:15-16*

¹⁸ *Psalm 13:6*

nonetheless led me to the Word which is the essence of existence. A fundamental text for understanding God's creative and meaning-giving Word is found in the Gospel according to John (1:1-5, 14): *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be that came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory."*

The conflict between social identity (the mask, the "persona") and the authentic self can lead to a crisis so profound that inner resources dwindle, and suicide seems the only solution for liberation. Logotherapy views a suicide attempt as an ultimate cry for meaning or a leap into the void that forces the spirit to choose life. But when human resources are exhausted, the Grace of God intervenes—He who conquered death with the power of love.

The glimmerings, or the torches lit by the spirit, created a process of spiritual maturation. Viktor Frankl believed that one does not need to be perfect to have meaning. Just like Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, whom Father I. spoke to me about: "Perfection consists in perfectly accepting one's own imperfection." The peace discovered in the corner of heaven at the monastery was the balm over the wounds of the child with leaden wings, the child who dreamed of a "Kingdom" to escape the daily hell, the melancholic girl who escaped reality through poetry, the "numbed" adolescent, the lone wolf, the suicidal victim, and the woman weary of searching and turmoil.

"I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world." (John 16:33).