

Man's Search for Meaning

Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart.

Anne Frank

Death camp survivor Vienna psychiatrist Viktor Frankl wrote Man's Search for Meaning describing his experiences in the Nazi death camps and man's purpose in life. He discovered prisoners that survived had something to look forward to or some task to finish. There was no single purpose. Frankl's conclusion is that humans have to discover (invent) their own purpose.

I offer two thoughts, the first is a purpose to reject and the second is one to accept.

The business as usual model, generating more and more goods and services, for the upper 1% while those in the lower 90% stagnant is unacceptable. The illegal drug use, the legal drug use, endless wars, environmental destruction, world poverty and 11,000 nuclear weapons are all testimony to a failed model. The free market fundamentalists failed miserably on their own terms in 2008 and thereafter. This model that inflicts misery on 90% in the US and even more in the rest of the world is unacceptable.

The world society must look to foster human potential first and think less about protecting the major institutions. Abraham Maslow's needs hierarchy is so simple that it is a surprise that a Jewish prophet, Aristotle, Buddha or someone else did not come up with the idea centuries ago. Humans have to have basic security, shelter, health and food needs met before they can go on to self-actualization. Society must look to satisfy its citizens' basic needs.

Money does not buy happiness. Shankar Vedantam had an article in July 3, 2006 Washington Post issue, "Science Confirms: You Really Can't Buy Happiness." He cites Japan's example where income rose fivefold from 1958 to 1987. Researchers could not find any corresponding increase in happiness. He cites studies published in the journal Science which found that high income is not associated with good mood. "People with above-average income...are barely happier than others in moment-to-moment experience, tend to be more tense, and do not spend more time in particularly enjoyable activities."

The model to seek is the caring society. When I recently looked up the lyrics to "I'll Be Home for Christmas," I had warm feelings and then thought about an entire society that cares for everybody, that everyone has a happy home and lives in a caring community.

I'll be home for Christmas
You can count on me
Please have snow and mistletoe
And presents under the tree
Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light beams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams.

Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light beams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams
If only in my dreams.

There will be work to get to there from here. One step is for our entertainment to eliminate the violence and sex that permeates most shows. Then concentrate on stories dealing with teachers, coaches, social workers, priests, community workers and businessmen with a social conscience.

There are many good shows without people being killed. When I grew up in the 1950s, the Lone Ranger, the Cisco Kid, Roy Rogers and Gene Autrey never killed anybody. The current ones with violence and sex take less imagination to write and produce.

High school and college students put on excellent stage plays every year. I would like to see them on television instead of the reality shows.

I advocate little coverage for our celebrities. They are no more important than we are. Use the coverage for more significant items such as global warming and abolishing the war on drugs and significant discussions on public policy.

Abolish poverty in the US and the world. It will cost much money and it is complicated are not suitable excuses. The US wastes trillions in wars without end in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Apollo 11 had two million moving parts. The Normandy landings (D-Day) were the most complicated operations in human history. Start raising living standards. One step to abolishing poverty is to pay the poor kids to attend school. Imaginative people will come up with great ideas.

In business school, students learn the management by exception rule. If revenue or expenses are too high or too low, a manager finds out why. Since 25% of the world's prisoners are in the US and some states spend more on prisons than they do education, it time to look at less expense punishment options. Unless the prisoners have life sentences or are on death row, they will eventually be released. I would like to see an effort to teach them a trade, social skills, self esteem and drug rehabilitation.

Since about half the world's defense budget originates in the US, it is time for the business school professors and students use management by exception here again. They will find that the defense budget is only marginally linked to security but is directly linked to maintaining the military industrial complex whose reason to exist faded when the Soviet Union voted itself out of existence in 1991.

Since the so-called war on drugs is a failure, it is time to regulate most currently illegal drugs in a manner similar to alcohol and tobacco. This step would cut our prison population and free up law enforcement.

Establish summer camps in rural areas for all kids. Since the US has more military bases than it knows what to do with, close down most and use them for the children.

Pro-life and pro-choice groups can reduce abortions by making sure that the society provides parenting classes, quality day care, safe neighborhoods, streamlined adoption procedures, health insurance and full employment.

Local civic groups and governments can insist that developers provide green space for parks and flood prevention.

Citizens have an inalienable right to clean air, clean water and uncontaminated soil.

Economic measurements have to change. Use models such as the Genuine Progress Indicator which measures social and environmental costs. The gross domestic income and gross national income do not indicate economic well being. Simon Kuznets, economics Nobel Prize winner, broke with the US Commerce Department over this issue.

It is time to abolish nuclear weapons. This is not just the position held by pot smoking hippies. George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn made this plea

in the Wall Street Journal on January 4, 2007. One miscalculation will lead to nuclear war, nuclear winter and life's extinction on earth.

What world do I advocate? I invite you to go to Youtube and play Crystal Blue Persuasion by Tommy James and the Shondells:

Look over yonder what do you see
The sun is a-risin' most definitely
A new day is comin' people are changin'
Ain't it beautiful crystal blue persuasion
Better get ready gonna see the light
Love, love is the answer and that's all right
So don't you give up now so easy to find
Just look to your soul and open your mind
Crystal blue persuasion, mm-hmm
It's a new vibration
Crystal blue persuasion, crystal
Blue persuasion
Maybe tomorrow when He looks down
Every green field and every town
All of his children every nation
There'll be peace and good brotherhood
Crystal blue persuasion
Crystal blue persuasion...

People throughout the world are working on all these goals right now. Do not be discouraged because there are few engaged individuals. Remember Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."