

Good will Prevail

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“Deal with everyone with care’ his father said. ‘Never allow anyone you know think that you have forgotten them, abandoned them; whether man, tree or beast... Not even a flower in a vase... anyone.’ –

The earth is good. It gives us our bread. People help, of course. Bread is the goodness of the earth. And of people...

‘They say my grandma is better than good bread,’ he said.

‘There is nothing better you can say of anyone,’ the man said” (Lice, 2003).

A long time ago, someone who claimed he was not afraid of death was asked to explain what his courage and determination rested upon. He answered something to this effect: *“Why should I fear, when there is no death while life is around, and when death comes, I will not be around any longer – what is there to fear, since we can never meet?”*

All our journeys reach their end, a resting place before new distances. Both emotionally and physically, the death of another person brings about the shedding of aggression, malice, plans. We turn towards ourselves, taking the emotional approach, by which we recognize finality, emptiness, and weakness.

The outer world of noise vanishes, and the inner world of silence, memories and wailing opens before us. We turn towards the emotional past with the dead; we seek connection with a story that was interrupted a long time ago; we yearn for touches left undone, for conversations. We put aside malice, we desire to communicate, we strive to hear. What waits for us on the other side is silence, the grand power of silence.

Our own inability to listen opens the path of faith, which points to the higher purpose for our physical and spiritual being. It offers strength, and grace in the merciful witnessing that some people existed, belonged, loved, and were loved, hoped, and were gone. They left us the gift of witnessing their truth; the truth that there existed such people with whom we could co-suffer, co-empathize, who belonged within the emotional circle of our soul.

In times of crisis such as these, we see problems in communication between individuals, their families, and communities. A situation can be glum due to an earthquake, a pandemic, COVID-19. Problems in understanding may arise from the awareness that the contingencies of our life projections no longer lie in exercising our free will and carefree lifestyles in the reality of physiological balance, but in certitude itself, which carries within it the archetypal relation to proximity and immediacy of mortality.

In his essay “Human Existence is Suffering” in the book *Times of Decision*, Viktor Frankl says that extreme situations do not only lead a person to inner freedom, but also allow him or her to reach inner maturity: “...*By suffering, man matures into his own self – he matures towards truth*” (Frankl, 2007, p. 126; Frankl, 1996; p. 188).

Considering these words while we observe, listen to, and feel the suffering of so many around us, a question arises: “How can we help in extreme life situations?”

Many ill people are forgotten and alone today. And what do we do in such an extreme situation? Social networks are full of information on who gets, or who does not get the virus.

They say: “Oncological patients are dying. --It is normal and expected.”

They say: “The elderly are dying. --They would die anyway.”

They say: “Natural selection is doing what it always does.”

They say: “They wouldn’t last, anyhow. They were sentenced to death.”

Who finds solace in these words, who soothes their fears so? Does the author of these words think for a moment about how the oncological patients feel? How the elderly feel; our parents, our grandmothers, and grandfathers? And, does it ever occur to us that we may suddenly become a part of this group? That sooner or later we *will* become a part of this group?

Speaking about euthanasia, Frankl (1993; p. 90; 1986; p. 46) poses the question:

“Must we not ask ourselves now whether we are ever entitled to deprive an incurably ill patient of the chance to ‘die his death,’ the chance to fill his existence with meaning down to its last moment, even though the only realm of action open to him is the realization of attitudinal values?”

There exists in a person, right to the very end, a certain will to live. The will may be annihilated by a lack of purpose, by loneliness, by poor relationships, by harsh words... In this race for life, there is an attitude which also exists in the discussions on euthanasia, a frightening opinion that the terminally ill are an economic burden on the human society. The criteria of utility to the society is a frightening path towards the destruction of human lives. And when we speak of the elderly, of oncological and other patients, do we never think that we speak about people? That we speak about someone’s mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, brother, sister, beloved, friend?

“Everyone must acknowledge that a person surrounded by loving relatives, a person who is the irreplaceable object of their love, is a person whose life has meaning, though that meaning may be only passive (Frankl, 1993, p. 90; Frankl, 1986; p. 49).

We live in extreme times. Shut away in small spaces, in fear and uncertainty. We are not always good to each other, either. We want to be good, but sometimes we feel so neglected, and used... Then we speak murderous words which we heard a long time ago. Words filled with anger are filled with poison. Perhaps they were spoken to us. What do we do with these words? We unintentionally keep them inside us. Sharp words are not easily forgotten, and they often surface when there is least cause for them. We are burdened. We feel like a victim, and we have

expectations – we expect sympathy. We do not even notice how miserable we have become. We judge others around us, blame them. And the circle is closed.

Then we comfort ourselves with words. “Others die.” “It is something that happens to others.”

Logotherapeutic aid in extreme life situations focuses the person towards a future goal. In the previously mentioned book, *Times of Decision*, in his essay “Aid in Extreme Life Situations”, Frankl (2007; p. 113; 1996; p. 169) says:

“The one who had lost faith in the future, his own future, was doomed in the camp. With the loss of future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis... But the courage to live, or the fatigue with life, only ever depended on whether a person believed in the purpose of life, his own life.”

Therefore, in these uncertain times--just as it was in Frankl’s extreme times--it is important to understand that we all have a task to look after each other. We should forget about the harsh words and playing victim. There are moments in life which are so difficult that we can bear them only by “looking at the why”. More than ever, we are responsible for each other. For those who are ill as well as for the elderly. For the youth. Nobody should feel abandoned.

Abandonment and loneliness in these times are extremely hard. They lead to giving up. If we have the chance, we should raise each other’s awareness about the “why” of our lives, about our life goals, in order to become equal to the task and unwaveringly steadfast in the horrific “how” of the present moment. We, therefore, appeal to the will to meaning.

In extreme situations, Frankl says, meaning had to be so unconditional that it included not only life, but also suffering and death.

“For a life whose meaning rests upon or is lost in the absence of survival, or a life whose meaning depends on the merciful chance, is not worth living. The real point is the unconditional meaning of life.” (Frankl, 2007., p. 114; Frankl, 1996; p. 169).

For someone, it is the work they want or need to do in the future. For another, a person. A person who loves them! It is worth living and not giving up for love. This singularity and irreplaceability give unconditional meaning to life, despite suffering (Frankl, 2020).

A violinist, a virtuoso, whose violin has been broken, remains a virtuoso. He or she has simply lost the instrument on which to play. An ill, or an elderly person remains a life virtuoso. But the instrument on which he played, the melody of his life, may no longer retain its quality.

Be good to each other.

Just be good. The meaning of this moment becomes clear and reachable then. Love!

We can survive for love.

We can do anything together.

Do not forget, we are responsible for each other.

“A compassionate heart cannot exhaust its goodness; it constantly tries to come up with ways in which to help others. And if it does not have worldly riches, it shares a kind word, a pleasant glance, a soft smile, which elevate, comfort, and fortify those crestfallen” (Truhelka, 2010).

--And GOOD shall prevail!

* Translated from the original Croatian article “Samo mi budi dobro” by Ms. Srebrenka Peregrin.

** Editors’ comments: Quoted texts in English are based on the official English translation of Frankl’s book “The Doctor and the Soul.” The German text was translated into English in cases where Croatian translation exists, but no English translation is available for the “Zeiten der Entscheidung” book. These sources are in the references section below.

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