

## Search for Meaning Main Text

Hello, this is AJ, welcome to the next lesson. This lesson is called “Search for Meaning.”

And I’m going to read a small section from a book called *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl. This is a quite powerful book. Viktor Frankl was a psychologist in Germany before World War II. And he and all of his family were taken by the Nazis and they were put in concentration camps. Viktor Frankl survived, his entire family was killed.

Now he survived, but he suffered terribly in the concentration camps. And I’m sure all of you have seen movies or are familiar with all the horrible terrible things that happened in the German Nazi concentration camps.

But what’s amazing about Viktor Frankl is that he took these terrible experiences and he created a meaningful life from them. He did not quit. He did not become angry and bitter. He did not learn to hate people. Instead, he learned to love and to help people and he wrote this incredible book called *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

Because what he learned in the concentration camp was that our experiences are not the most important thing, it’s the meaning we create from our experiences. That’s what gives our lives power or what destroy us. And so in this book he talks about all the different prisoners that were in the concentration camp with him and he talks about which ones remained strong and which ones eventually gave up, quit and they died, which ones became depressed, which ones lost all hope and which ones continued to have strong minds and to still have hope.

So, really, he looked at this experience to learn more about human nature in this terrible, terrible situation. And he decided that the difference was the meaning that people gave to their experiences. And a lot of coaches, a lot of psychologists, talk about this experience, this idea. That the meaning we give something is more important than the experience itself.

For example, you can have a child that is abused by its parents, treated terribly and you can have another child that’s abused by its parents, treated terribly and they grow up and they have totally different lives. One child starts to drink or becomes an alcoholic or a drug addict and they have a terrible life. The other child becomes very successful and caring and loving and helps people and grows and heals the pain.

What's the difference, they both had the same situation, the same kinds of experiences? Well the difference is the meaning that they gave to their experience. Some people have a terrible experience and they decide that all people are bad. That's the meaning they give.

Now Viktor Frankl... That would be an easy conclusion, right? You're in a concentration camp in Germany and you're seeing the worst possible behavior from human beings. They're murdering and killing people. They're torturing them. If you're a prisoner it would be very easy to decide the meaning of this is all people are terrible. Humanity is horrible. And, indeed, many people did decide that and they became bitter and angry and they lost hope.

Viktor Frankl decided the opposite. The meaning he gave was that human beings are powerful and strong, they can survive anything. He focused on the prisoners who survived, who continued to love and to help people. That's what he saw in this experience. Same experience, but he focused on something different. He found a different meaning. He found hope. He found courage. He found love in this terrible situation.

And this is something we do in every part of our lives. Not just these big terrible things, but everything in our life we always decide the meaning. Any experience you have you will choose a meaning for it, consciously or subconsciously, usually subconsciously, right? Usually we are not aware of the meaning we're giving it at the time, but we have to be careful about that.

For example, let's talk about something much less serious than concentration camps and death in Germany. Let's just talk about English learning. Now most of you had rather negative experiences learning English in school. You had probably very boring teachers. I'm sure you had terrible, terrible textbooks.

Maybe some of you did very badly on tests in your English classes. Most of you probably had bad experiences trying to speak English. You studied and you felt like you should be able to speak English, but you had trouble. It's difficult for you or it is difficult for you.

So what's the meaning of these experiences? Many, many students decided that the meaning is this "Ah, English is so hard, it's impossible." Some students decide the meaning is "Ah, I'm not good at English. I'm terrible at English." Right? That's the meaning that a lot of students, a lot of learners, give to the experience. But other students decide a different meaning. They decide "Well, those methods were not powerful. Those methods didn't work, so I'll find a different way to learn."

Same experience, right? Both groups of students had the same terrible experiences in school. One group decides "English is too hard. I'm not good at English." A different group decides "It's not me, it's just the method. I just need to find a different method." So they keep trying different methods, different methods and then they succeed.

They succeed because they gave the bad experience a different meaning. They decided “It’s just the method. It’s not me. It’s not English. It’s just the learning method in school, so I will find a better way.”

So you need to look at these meaning and decide on your meanings. Decide and choose positive meaning. Decide and choose meanings that are real and accurate, don’t make something worse than it is.

Let me read a quick section from Viktor Frankl’s book. And in this section he’s talking about the meaning of success and how to find success. Here it is.

“Again and again, I admonish my students, both in Europe and in America, don’t aim at success. The more you aim at it and make it a target the more you’re going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued, it must ensue and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one’s dedication to a cause greater than one’s self or as the byproduct of one’s surrender to a person other than one’s self.

“Happiness must happen and the same holds true for success. You have to let it happen by not caring too much about it. I want you to listen to your conscience and do what your conscience commands and to do this with the best of your knowledge and ability. Then you will live to see that in the long run...in the long run...success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten about it, precisely because you focused on something bigger than yourself.”

Okay, that’s a nice little paragraph there. So what’s he’s saying is he’s talking about meaning again. And he says you need to find a meaning bigger than just you. If you just focus on your personal success, like getting a good score on a test or getting a better job, you will actually find it difficult to succeed. You will not get that success easily.

But if you find a different meaning, if you focus on a goal that’s bigger than you, bigger than just you, if you focus on contributing and connecting to other people and helping other people and using your success to help people and to do something bigger than just you, you will actually succeed more.

So what’s he’s saying is if you choose a goal bigger than just yourself, if you choose to help more than just yourself, you will also benefit more and that, in fact, you’ll get more success than if you’re selfish. So that’s a nice idea -- and we’ve talked a little bit about it in past lessons, but I want to talk about it again -- finding a bigger meaning for your life, not just you. And that goes for everything you do, so when you’re learning English, again, finding a meaning for your English learning that’s bigger than just you.

Yes, absolutely, think of all the great reasons that you will benefit, personally, from improved English. Sure. Those are great goals, those are great reasons, but you must also find reasons bigger than just you. How will you use your English ability to help other people, to help your company and your coworkers, to help your family, to help your friends, to help other people who are learning English?

That's what you've got to do. You've got to find a bigger meaning. That bigger meaning will guarantee your success. You'll succeed faster if you have a bigger meaning. If you only have small, personal, selfish goals you might succeed, but you'll succeed more slowly.

And this is true in all areas of life, not just learning English. The more you can find a bigger meaning for your life beyond just yourself the more power and passion and success you will have. It's kind of strange, it's a paradox. A paradox is something that seems to be opposite. It means to opposite things that are true at the same time, paradox. So the more you think about other people the more you will benefit yourself.

So, for example, in business, if you think more about your customers and helping them and helping their lives you will benefit more. You will get more customers and more money and you'll become richer and richer by helping other people, by thinking about other people. If you think only about money for yourself then customers will not trust you and you'll actually make less money, so it's the same idea.

So that's why I focus so much as a teacher and as a businessperson on helping my members, helping my students. That's what excites me. It's a bigger purpose than just me and that gives me the energy and the drive and it helps me succeed at a much higher level. So I hope you'll do the same with your English learning, with your career, with everything in your life. Try to find a bigger, deeper meaning beyond just yourself.

Well, that's the end of our lesson "Search for Meaning." I hope you enjoyed it. And, if you get a chance, absolutely, please, read the book *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl. It's a powerful book.

I will see you next time.