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Accepting the Unknown

Viktor Frankl describes suffering as an unavoidable part of life. Generally, it is. It is impossible to identify “good” without having a “bad” to compare it to. Therefore, suffering *has* to exist, even if just to help identify the positive. This kind of comparison identification isn’t specifically explained in Frankl’s book, but it is heavily implied. Take the quote: “[I]f there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an eradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete.”, Frankl uses suffering and death to complete and define life and joy. Frankl describes suffering as unavoidable and explains the freedom of acceptance. “The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails [...] gives him ample opportunity [...] to add a deeper meaning to his life.” Frankl tells us that accepting and embracing suffering is the best way to deal with and process it.

Buddhism also acknowledges that suffering is widespread, it is one of their core truths. Buddhism also follows an end of suffering, believing in a wheel of rebirth into different bodies. Hinduism relies more on the idea of suffering as a punishment for disobeying the laws of Karma. Hinduism follows the understanding of suffering as a temporary experience, also following the concept of suffering being not entirely negative.

Out of the two Indian traditions we are studying, Frankl aligns slightly more with the Hinduistic side. While both traditions and Frankl believe suffering to be inevitable, Buddhism doesn’t acknowledge suffering as having specific positive benefits. Frankl and Hinduism see suffering something to accept and find positives in.

Personally, I agree. Suffering not only helps define good but also acts as a lesson. It is never fun, but looking into how the hard things in life can help you grow is liberating. It isn't always possible to "look for the positive". Sometimes that darkness isn't avoidable, but when it is possible to look at your life and accept the difficult, that is the time when we see the most growth. Being a "good human being" isn't easily defineable. We are looking for black and white in a world of grey. Every human being has a different perspective and different experiences, good is not something we can all agree on with different viewpoints. Furthermore, a "good human existence" is also almost impossible to define.

There is no clear answer to most of the big questions we as human beings wonder. Buddhism may tell us to turn away from suffering and reach our full potential, and Hinduism may tell us that our suffering is a punishment for breaking the laws of good, but the matter of suffering is still up to individual perspective. Frankl's concept of acceptance can be applied to our interactions with suffering, but I think it is also wise to use it in accepting the idea of not knowing.