

**\*\*\*BOOK REVIEW\*\*\***

**EXISTENTIAL JOURNEY:  
VIKTOR FRANKL AND LEO TOLSTOY  
ON SUFFERING DEATH AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING**

Author: Micah R. Sadigh, Ph.D.  
Publisher: Wyndham Hall Press  
Year of Publication: expected January 2014  
Reviewer: Marshall H. Lewis

*Viktor Frankl and Leo Tolstoy on Suffering Death and the Search for Meaning* applies Franklian philosophy and psychology to that great classic of Russian literature *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy. As such, it represents an advanced existential analysis of the novel read through a Franklian lens. The application of logotherapy to literary analysis is a rare and creative direction for the field that, I believe, can provide new insight into logotherapy and into those works read through its rubric.

Sadigh's book is divided into three parts. The first provides a brief introduction to the basic premises of existentialism, premises that are important to understanding both Frankl and Tolstoy. He provides summaries of the issues surrounding the concept of the individual, subjective truth, freedom and responsibility, authenticity, existence and essence, and suffering and death. Sadigh's presentation of these key ideas is clear and concise in a way that will appeal to academics and laypersons alike. In fact, his writing style is so approachable that it makes this formidable topic seem easy – something that most readers can rarely say about writings in existentialism.

In part two, Sadigh examines the lives of Frankl and Tolstoy. The two chapters that comprise this part of the book are biographical introductions to each of these giants of personal meaning. Careful attention is given to their personal and historical backgrounds, their philosophies, and their accomplishments. Sadigh demonstrates the development of their thought and highlights the unique contributions of each to their respective intellectual fields. While logotherapists may be expected to have a good understanding of Frankl's biography, Sadigh's presentation of it is fresh and provides a good review. By setting Frankl's biography alongside Tolstoy's, the reader is able to gain a fuller appreciation of each. Specifically, one is able to come to

understand how each of these thinkers arrived at similar conclusions about meaning in life despite cultural and generational differences.

Part three is the analysis of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* itself. Having been well prepared by the first two sections, the reader is able to join Sadigh in an analysis of some depth through Sadigh's use of Frankl's thought as a reading heuristic. Interestingly, Sadigh prefers to refer not to the "death of Ivan Ilyich," but to the "trial of Ivan Ilyich." This is because of Sadigh's Franklian view that the book is not a novel about death, but about the encounter between a person and life. In other words, in the final analysis the novel is about the question that life asks of a person and the answer that a person must ultimately give.

In my opinion, Sadigh's existential analysis is faithful to the concepts and sensibilities of contemporary hermeneutics. That is, while he clearly defines his vantage point for reading the book as that delineated by Frankl's thought, he does so in a way that honors Tolstoy's vantage point as well. Throughout his commentary, Sadigh remains close to Tolstoy's text. He avoids reducing this complex literary masterpiece to a mere example in the service of logotherapy. Sadigh allows the ideas of Frankl and Tolstoy to dialogue with each other throughout his analysis. Therefore, logotherapists will be able to see Frankl's philosophy presented "in action," as it were, through interaction with the ideas of another great thinker.

Logotherapists will recall that Frankl made reference to *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* when he spoke to the inmates at San Quentin State Prison. The novel obviously made an impression on his memory. While we cannot know what Frankl thought when he read Tolstoy, Sadigh's book brings us one possible such insight. In my opinion, Sadigh makes a significant contribution to both Frankl and Tolstoy studies. I found the reading of this book to provide both light and delight.