

# Freud colleague insists Nazis not beyond hope; upholds Jewish values

By DEBORAH HART

Last Monday evening's Dialogue at Temple Bnai Jeshurun between Rabbi William Berkowitz and Viennese psychoanalyst Viktor Frankl, an associate of Sigmund Freud, and founder of Logotherapy, which seeks meaning in life, began in controversy over the question of collective guilt of Germans and Austrians for the Holocaust, dealt with such issues as bio-ethics, and ended with a strong affirmation by Dr. Frankl of Jewish values.

Controversy erupted as Dr. Frankl, himself a survivor of Auschwitz, responded to Berkowitz' first question, concerning his reactions to and relations with Germans today. Explaining that he doesn't subscribe to a theory of "collective guilt" of Germans and Austrians, Frankl cited examples of Nazi kindness to Jews, adding: "Human beings must be given a chance to change for the better. You can't condemn any human being for eternity." He went on to say that there were no "Nazi murderers" in his "personal environment" and asked, "Why shouldn't I return to Vienna?"

There were cries of protest from a segment of the overflow audience as Frankl continued, asserting that neo-Nazism is more of a possibility here than in Austria.

## Kreisky's name booed

His critics grew angrier, and when Frankl offered as proof of Jewish security in Austria, the fact that Jewish-born Bruno Kreisky is Chancellor, there were shouts of "Kreisky isn't Jewish!" Much booing ensued, and Frankl, visibly stunned and then angry, responded: "I'm not wasting my time for you, if you don't want to listen to me."

At this point, Berkowitz intervened, reminding his non-paying audience that "as guests in my house, you have to behave. . . . If the whole philosophy of dialogue is only to say what you want to hear, it wouldn't be a true platform." It was suggested that those who wished to leave, could. None chose to, and Frankl, mollified, agreed to continue.

Switching to the topic of Jewish survival in concentration camps, Berkowitz asked if it were linked to religious faith.

"By and large," responded Frankl. "I found that again and again, survival depended on 'self-transcendence.'"

Asked if Jewish values could be taught, and if so, would they improve society, Frankl replied that today, there is an existential vacuum — a worldwide phenomenon — and added that values can't be recreated, they must be *lived*.

Responding to Berkowitz' comment that "you'll never achieve" if you're only "goal oriented," Frankl agreed, saying that "success and power should only be viewed as means to a worthwhile end." He discussed sex, as an expression of love that goes beyond mere body function, emphasizing the experiencing of the uniqueness of one's love object.

## More than mental health

As for the importance of the Sabbath, Berkowitz commented, to much laughter, that he had to work on Shabbat, and then asked Frankl what the day of rest meant to him.

Responding, Frankl said, "I hate generally, to put religion down to the level of preserving mental health. Religion is much more than a means to prevent people from contracting gastric ulcers. Society may learn a lot. There is more to life than just working, and the Sabbath is a reminder of this."

Of psychiatry and religion, Frankl says they are still moving on "entirely different levels. . . . Theology is the higher dimension. Psychiatry must remain *open*." He adds: "Therapy must be usable by agnostics, too."

## Turn tragedy into triumph

Concerning bio-ethics, specifically the doctor-patient relationship and the problems of dealing with the terminally ill and "pulling the plug," Frankl emphasizes the importance of pastoral counselling. Of the doctor's responsibility for "telling the truth," he says: "No case can be assumed . . . it is up to the personal conscience of the doctor," and adds: "You can't change a situation by an *attitude*, but you can turn tragedy into triumph. . . . Suffering can have meaning, if it changes you for the better. . . . Man can grow, up to his last breath."

Frankl reminisced briefly about Sigmund Freud, noting that the famous doctor had a phenomenal memory, as he recalled Frankl's home address, years after having received a manuscript from him.

He also recalled Rabbi Leo Beck, a fellow inmate at Auschwitz, as "a great human being. He helped my family through a crisis."

Berkowitz concluded the Dialogue with the information that Dr. Frankl's concentration camp number, which adds up to 16, in Gematria means "to be responsible, committed."