ON SEPTEMBER 1942, Viktor Frankl, a prominent Jewish psychiatrist and neurologist in Vienna, was arrested and transported to a Nazi concentration camp with his wife and parents. Three years later, when his camp was liberated, most of his family, including his pregnant wife, had perished but he, prisoner number 119104, had lived. In his bestselling 1946 book, Man's Search for Meaning, which he wrote in nine days about his experiences in the camps, Frankl concluded that the difference between those who lived and those who died came down to one thing: meaning.

Frankl worked as a therapist in the camps, and in his book, he gave the example of two suicidal inmates he encountered there. Like many others, these men felt hopeless. "In both cases," Frankl wrote, "it was a question of getting them to realize that life was still expecting something from them." For one man, it was his young child, who was then living in a foreign country. For the other, a scientist, it was a series of books he needed to finish. "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way," Frankl wrote in Man's Search for Meaning. As he saw in the camps, those who found meaning in even the most horrendous circumstances were far more resilient to suffering than those who did not. "A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the 'why' for his existence and will

be able to bear almost any 'how,'" Frankl wrote.

> Now Frankl's timeless message seems to be at odds with our culture, which is more interested in the pursuit of individual happiness than in the search for meaning. In 2012, the happiness levels of Americans hit a four-year high, according to Gallup. However, about four in ten Americans have not discovered a satisfying life purpose, regardless of how well their immediate needs are being met, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

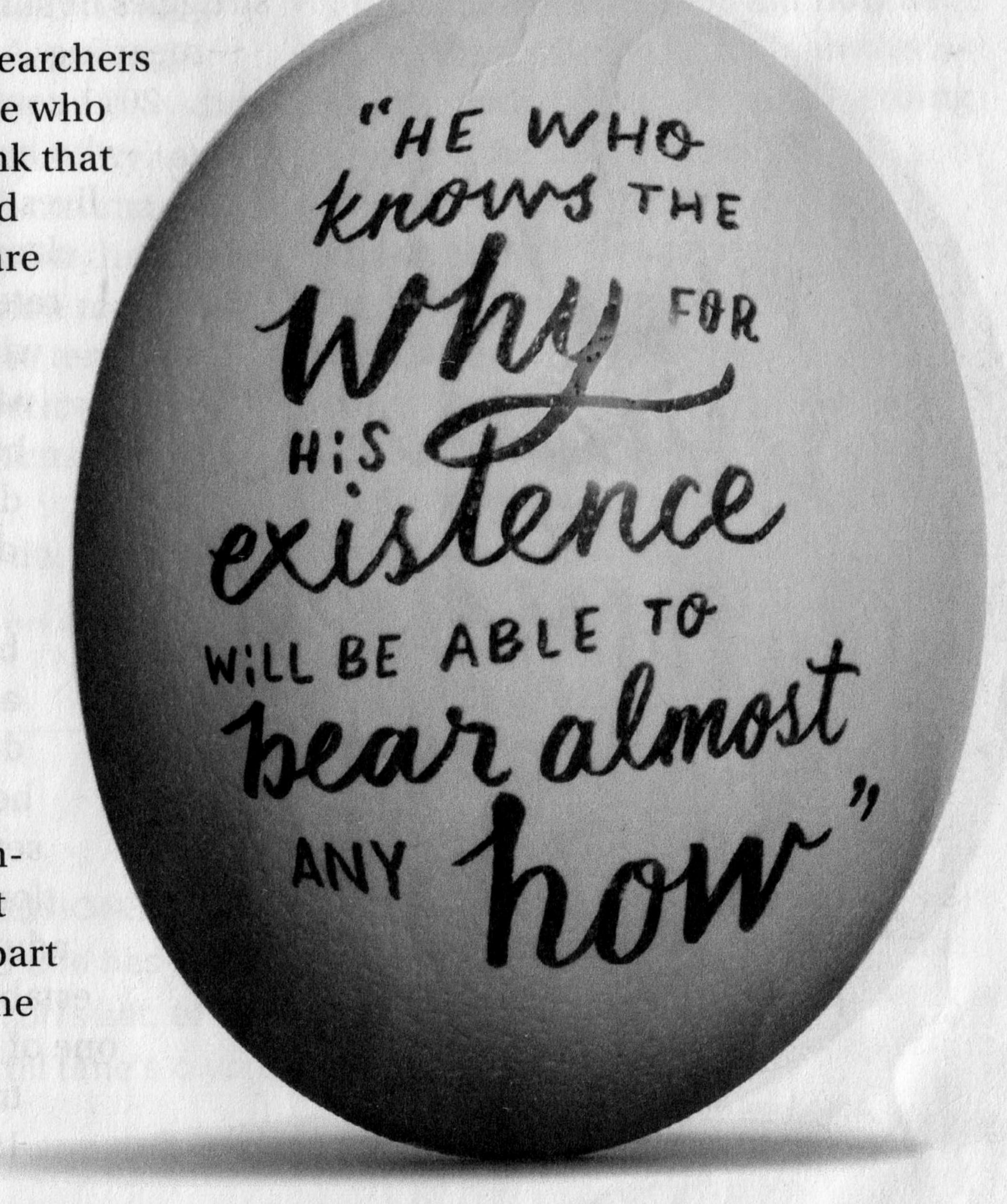
> ESEARCH HAS SHOWN that havling purpose and meaning in life increases overall well-being and life satisfaction, improves mental and physical health, enhances resiliency, builds self-esteem, and decreases the chances of depression. And ironically, the single-minded pursuit of happiness is leaving people less happy, according to recent research. "It is the very pursuit of happiness," Frankl wrote, "that thwarts happiness." It is why some researchers caution against a goal of merely being happy.

In a study published in the Journal of Positive Psychology, psychological scientists asked nearly 400 Americans whether they thought their lives were meaningful and/or happy. The researchers found that happy people get joy from receiving; people leading meaningful lives get joy from giving to others. "Happiness without meaning characterizes a relatively shallow, self-absorbed, or even selfish life, in which things go well, needs and desire are easily satisfied, and difficult or taxing entanglements are avoided," the authors wrote.

Specifically, the researchers discovered that people who are happy tend to think that life is easy, are in good physical health, and are able to buy the things that they want and need. The happy life is defined by a lack of stress or worry. Humans, then, are not the only ones who can feel happy. Animals also feel happy when their needs and drives are satisfied, the researchers pointed out. What sets human beings apart from animals is not the pursuit of happiness but the pursuit of meaning,

according to Roy Baumeister, the study's lead researcher.

The study participants derived meaning from giving a part of themselves away to others. In the words of Martin E. P. Seligman, one of the leading psychological scientists alive today, in the meaningful life, "you use your highest strengths and talents to belong to and serve something you believe is larger than the self." For instance, having more meaning in one's life was associated with activities like buying presents



for others, taking care of kids, and arguing. People whose lives have high levels of meaning often actively seek out meaning even when they know it will come at the expense of happiness. Having children, for example, is associated with the meaningful life and requires self-sacrifice, but it has been famously associated with low happiness among parents, including the ones in this study. In fact, according to Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert, research shows that parents are

"ITTIS

less happy interacting with their children than they are exercising, eating, and watching television.

EANING IS also about transcending the present moment. While happiness is an emotion felt in the here and now, it ultimately fades away, as all emotions do Feelings of pleasure are fleeting. Meaning, on the other hand, is enduring. In the study, people who thought more about the present were happier, but people who spent more time thinking about the future or about past struggles or suffering felt more

meaning. Another study from
2011 confirmed this: People
who have meaning in their
lives, in the form of a
clearly defined purpose,
rated their satisfaction
with life higher—even
when they were feeling
bad—than those who
did not have a clearly
defined purpose.

Which brings us
back to Frankl's life
and, specifically, a
decisive experience
he had before he was
sent to the concentration camps. In his early
adulthood, Frankl had
established himself as
one of the leading psychiatrists in Vienna. By
1941, his theories had

received international attention, and he was working as the chief of neurology at Vienna's Rothschild Hospital, where he risked his life and career by making false diagnoses of mentally ill patients so that they would not, per Nazi orders, be euthanized.

With his career on the rise and the threat of the Nazis looming, Frankl had applied for a visa to America, which he was granted in 1941. By then, the Nazis had already started taking Jews to concentration camps, focusing on the elderly first. Frankl knew that it would be only a matter of time before the Nazis came for his parents. Once they did, he felt he had a responsibility to help them through the trauma of adjusting to camp life. On the other hand, as a newly married man with his visa in hand, he was tempted to flee to safety in America, where he could distinguish himself even further in his field.

At a loss for what to do, Frankl set

out for St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna to clear his head. He was looking for a "hint from heaven." When he returned home, he found it—in a piece of marble lying on the table. It was from the rubble of one of the nearby synagogues that the Nazis had destroyed, his father explained. It contained a fragment of one of the Ten Commandments—the one about honoring your father and your mother. Frankl stayed.

The wisdom that Frankl derived from his experiences in the camps, in the middle of unimaginable human suffering, is just as relevant now as it was then: "Being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone other than oneself.

The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is." By devoting our lives to "giving" rather than "taking," we also acknowledge that there is more to the good life than the pursuit of simple happiness.

THE ATLANTIC (MARCH 2014), COPYRIGHT © 2014 THE ATLANTIC MEDIA CO., THEATLANTIC.COM.

* *

RIDDLE ME THIS

no one has seen me, nor will they see.

Close to sun's set, and far from sunrise; I will live on, till time's own demise. What am I?

ANSWER: TOMOITOW.