

# The Search for Meaning in Life

When Jewish neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl was arrested by the Nazis in World War II and put in Auschwitz, the famous death camp, he was stripped of everything – property, family, possessions and a manuscript he had spent years researching and writing on finding meaning in life.

The manuscript had been sewn into the lining of his coat.

“Now it seemed as if nothing and no one would survive me; neither a physical nor a spiritual child of my own,” Frankl wrote. “I found myself confronted with the question of whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of any meaning.”

A few days later, the Nazis forced the prisoners to give up what little clothing they still wore.

“I had to surrender my clothes and in turn inherited the worn-out rags of an inmate who had been sent to the gas chamber,” Frankl said.

“Instead of the many pages of my manuscript, I found in the pocket of the newly acquired coat a single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, which contained the Jewish prayer *Shema Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.)

“How should I have interpreted such a ‘coincidence’ other than as a challenge to *live* my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?” he related.

Frankl later reflected on his ordeal in *Man’s Search for Meaning*, which became his best-selling book, saying, “There is nothing in the world that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is meaning in one’s life ... He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.”

Frankl discovered a great truth. The principle of the *Shema Yisrael* he quoted is found in Deuteronomy 6:5. Jesus referred to it in an incident in Matthew 22, when He was confronted by a lawyer seeking to test Him. The lawyer asked: “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”

Jesus answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:36-39 NKJV)

And therein is the meaning, the fulfillment of life. Associates in Life Care and Century Park, by their profession and personal commitment, have discovered the impact of that statement and its practice. They find purpose and inner peace by the service they provide – to our residents, patients, their families, and to one another.