

# EXCERPT FROM *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING*

Viktor E. Frankl

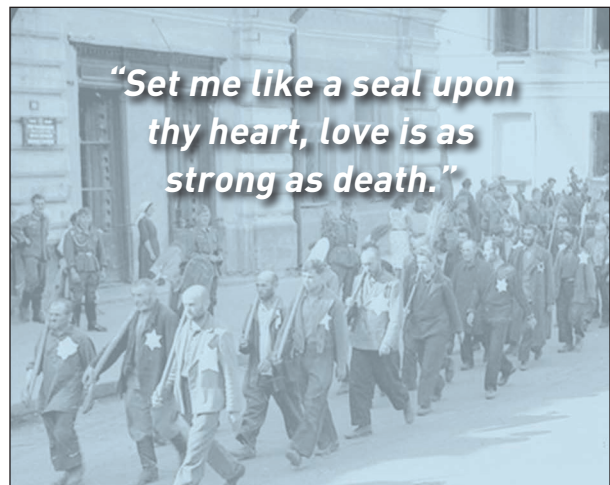
In front of me a man stumbled and those following him fell on top of him. The guard rushed over and used his whip on them all. Thus my thoughts were interrupted for a few minutes. But soon my soul found its way back from the prisoner's existence to another world, and I resumed talk with my loved one: I asked her questions, and she answered; she questioned me in return, and I answered.

"Stop!" We had arrived at our work site. Everybody rushed into the dark hut in the hope of getting a fairly decent tool. Each prisoner got a spade or a pickaxe.

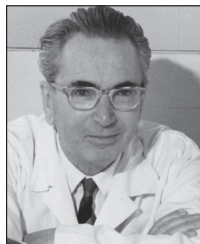
"Can't you hurry up, you pigs?" Soon we had resumed the previous day's positions in the ditch. The frozen ground cracked under the point of the pickaxes, and sparks flew. The men were silent, their brains numb.

My mind still clung to the image of my wife. A thought crossed my mind: I didn't even know if she were still alive. I knew only one thing—which I have learned well by now: Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not he is actually present, whether or not he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance.

I did not know whether my wife was alive, and I had no means of finding out (during all my prison life there was no outgoing or incoming mail); but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I would still have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of her image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as vivid and just as satisfying.



Under guard of the Wehrmacht soldiers, Jews wearing Jewish stars with shovels ("spades") marching through the city on the way to forced labor, Russia, Mogilev, 1941.



## About the Author

Viktor E. Frankl, born in Vienna, Austria 1905, was a practicing psychotherapist, university professor, and author. His most widely read work, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Beacon Press, 1959), is an account of his experiences in various concentration camps, including Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and Dachau. In the book, Frankl explores the transcendent experience amid extreme suffering as well as the nature of moral freedom. His wife, Tilly, to whom he refers in the passage, died in Bergen-Belsen. Viktor Frankl died in Vienna in 1997.