

# “There’s more to life than being happy”

There's More to Life Than Being Happy  
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“It is the very pursuit of happiness that ruins happiness.”  
 In September 2003, Viktor Frankl, a prominent Jewish psychiatrist and neurologist, was arrested and transported to a Nazi concentration camp with his wife and parents. Three years later, when his camp was liberated, he was miraculously reunited with his family. In his memoirs, which he wrote some days after his escape from the camp, Frankl wrote that the difference between those who had died and those who had survived was not their physical health, but their will to live. When he was high school senior, one of his parents had been taken to the camp. “In his will to live, there was a conviction, a purpose, a goal. Frankl wrote that he had survived because of this conviction, purpose, and goal.”

As he saw in the camp, those who found meaning even in the most horrendous circumstances were far more resilient to suffering than those who did not. “The meaning and purpose of life is not a luxury,” Frankl wrote in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. “No one can demand it—no doctor can prescribe it, no priest can demand it, no parent can demand it.”

Frankl worked as a therapist in the camp, and in his book, he gives the example of two medical inmates he encountered there. Like many others in the camp, these two men were hopeless and thought that there was nothing more to expect in life. Frankl concluded that the difference between them was not their physical health, but their will to live. “It was a question of finding them the reason that life was still worth something to them. This meaning in life was not a luxury, a reward, or a goal. It was a sense of purpose that he wanted to find. Frankl wrote:

“This conviction and eagerness which distinguished each individual and gave a meaning to his existence had a bearing on reactions toward it. It did not mean that the individual who had the conviction of finding a purpose in life, or of finding a meaning in his existence, was more resilient to suffering than the individual who did not. It was a question of finding them the reason that life was still worth something to them. This meaning in life was not a luxury, a reward, or a goal. It was a sense of purpose that he wanted to find. Frankl wrote:

“To say, as the Library of Congress and Frank of the Month Club would have it, that the individual who has the conviction of finding a purpose in life, or of finding a meaning in his existence, is more resilient to suffering than the individual who does not, is to say that the individual who has the conviction of finding a purpose in life, or of finding a meaning in his existence, is more resilient to suffering than the individual who does not. It was a question of finding them the reason that life was still worth something to them. This meaning in life was not a luxury, a reward, or a goal. It was a sense of purpose that he wanted to find. Frankl wrote:

“Nazi people get a lot of joy from meaningful activities. In other words, people who find meaningful things to do, or who find a purpose in life, are more resilient to suffering than those who do not. It was a question of finding them the reason that life was still worth something to them. This meaning in life was not a luxury, a reward, or a goal. It was a sense of purpose that he wanted to find. Frankl wrote:

“Partly what we do as human beings is to take care of others and contribute to others. This is not a luxury, a reward, or a goal. It is a sense of purpose that he wanted to find. Frankl wrote:

“Meaning is not only about transcending the present moment, it is also about transcending the present moment. It is a sense of purpose that he wanted to find. Frankl wrote:

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This is why some researchers are cautioning against the pursuit of mere happiness. In a [new study](#), which will be published this year in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, psychological scientists asked nearly 400 Americans aged 18 to 78 whether they thought their lives were meaningful and/or happy. Examining their self-reported attitudes toward meaning, happiness, and many other variables -- like stress levels, spending patterns, and having children -- over a month-long period, the researchers found that a meaningful life and happy life overlap in certain ways, but are ultimately very different. Leading a happy life, the psychologists found, is associated with being a "taker" while leading a meaningful life corresponds with being a "giver."

What sets human beings apart from animals is not the pursuit of happiness, which occurs all across the natural world, but the pursuit of meaning, which is unique to humans, according to Roy Baumeister, the lead researcher of the study and author, with John Tierney, of the recent book *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*. Baumeister, a social psychologist at Florida State University, [was named](#) an ISI highly cited scientific researcher in 2003.

The study participants reported deriving meaning from giving a part of themselves away to others and making a sacrifice on behalf of the overall group. 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 meaning out even when they know it will come at the expense of happiness. Because they have invested themselves in something bigger than themselves, they also worry more and have higher levels of stress and anxiety in their lives than happy people. 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 less happy interacting with their children](#) than they are exercising, eating, and watching television.

"Partly what we do as human beings is to take care of others and contribute to others. This makes life meaningful but it does not necessarily make us happy," Baumeister told me in an interview.