In 1975, Raymond Moody caused a major stir in scientific circles when he published *Life After Life*, a book that chronicles hundreds of near death experiences - a term that he coined. In a near death experience, the patient is clinically dead, but is then revived and able to describe what “death” was like. Almost all of the cases share an eerie similarity. Typically, there was no heart rate, no respiration, and no brain wave activity, yet the person was conscious, aware and watching as attempts were made to resuscitate him. Often the patients described a sense of popping out their bodies and hovering near the ceiling, looking down on the accident scene, while their bodies were pronounced dead. When revived, they were often able to relate detailed information about what transpired while they were “dead.” Some repeated conversations verbatim. Others recounted in vivid detail the medical procedures attempted on their lifeless bodies - all done while they lay there unconscious, stone dead.

Since the publication of the book, thousands of near death experiences have been reported, and the subject has undergone much discussion and scientific study. The evidence seems irrefutable. Over and over, people come back and recount seeing things that they couldn’t possibly have seen and knowing things that they couldn’t possibly know because they were dead when they happened. To many, these findings challenge their understanding of life.

**An Electric Toothbrush**

*The Lancet*, a prestigious medical journal, reported on a recent landmark study that recorded a number of near death experiences that are highly illustrative. One involved a thirty-six-year-old woman who suffered an aneurysm and was bleeding inside her head. The normal procedure would call for the surgeon to open her skull and cauterize the area, burning together the ripped veins to stop the bleeding. The problem was that in her case, the injury was so deep in her brain that if they went in that far, the incision itself would cause so much residual bleeding that she would die from the blood loss. There was nothing they could do for her. They sent her home to die.

One surgeon offered hope. He had developed a technique to drain all of the blood from her head. By doing this, they could then go in and seal the damaged veins without causing bleeding. Once her skull was sewn back up, they would re-insert her blood. The procedure was experimental - there were no guarantees - but there were no other options, either. She consulted with other medical professionals. She met with her family and clergy. And she decided to go ahead with the operation.

On the day of the procedure, they put tape over her eyes and placed audio devices in her ears to ensure that her brain would not receive any stimuli that would cause it to draw blood. They placed her under anesthetic and submerged her body in a bath of ice to bring down her core temperature. When her body was cold, they drew out all of the blood

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**Fast Fact:**

The brain is composed of 5 main regions, each having a different function. One of the regions is called the Brain Stem. The Brain Stem controls basic involuntary functions, such as the heartbeat and breathing.
The heart beats without a break more than 101,000 times a day. With each heartbeat, it pumps 2.4 ounces of blood, which amounts to 1.3 gallons per minute. During the average lifetime, the heart beats 3 billion times and pumps 53 million gallons of blood, without ever stopping!

The Heart of the Matter:

The evidence seems irrefutable. Over and over, people come back and recount seeing things that they couldn’t possibly have seen... because they were dead when they happened.

The doctor didn’t laugh. What she described had an uncanny resemblance to what happened in the operating room. Part of the procedure involved inserting into her thigh a medical instrument that from afar looked like an electric toothbrush. During the procedure, the doctor realized that her veins were too small, and he couldn’t insert this instrument. He said to the nurse, ‘It doesn’t fit.’ She said, ‘Try again.’ He tried again, but it still didn’t fit. She said, ‘Try again.’ He tried again, and that time he was able to get it in.

The disquieting part was that all this happened when this woman was unconscious, her body in a bath of ice, with no brain wave activity!

What Does This Mean?

These cases challenge man’s understanding of life. Even non-religious people are beginning to recognize that “I” am not my body. I merely occupy this body. While the ability to see yourself in a form different than you are in now requires stepping away from the way we normally think, it is intuitive. Most of what makes us human, those feelings and sensations that separate us from the animal kingdom, aren’t physical in nature and don’t depend upon our body for their existence.

Any joy that we experience isn’t physical. Our bodies feel pleasure; our souls feel joy. Happiness, satisfaction, and serenity - conditions that we value above everything else in life - have little to do with the body. They don’t come to us through the body, and they aren’t dependent upon our physical state.

The emotion you feel when holding your newborn daughter for the first time in the delivery room. Can we even describe such an experience? The heart feels it, or more accurately you feel it, but it isn’t physical. These are inner conditions that almost defy description. But they are real, and you feel them.

When your body dies, you will live on. You - with all of your feelings, thoughts, and memories - step out of the coat called the body. Being able to see yourself in the broader sense, as you truly are, is one of the keys in understanding the focus and purpose of all of the mitzvahs.

This is an exclusive excerpt taken from the new Shmuz on Life book: Stop Surviving and Start Living, written by Rabbi Shafier. R’Shafier’s book has haskamat from gedolei yisroel. His book is now available online at www.TheShmuz.com or you can call 866 613 TORAH. Also available on his website are free shiurim CDs. Please note that this excerpt can not be reprinted for personal use.