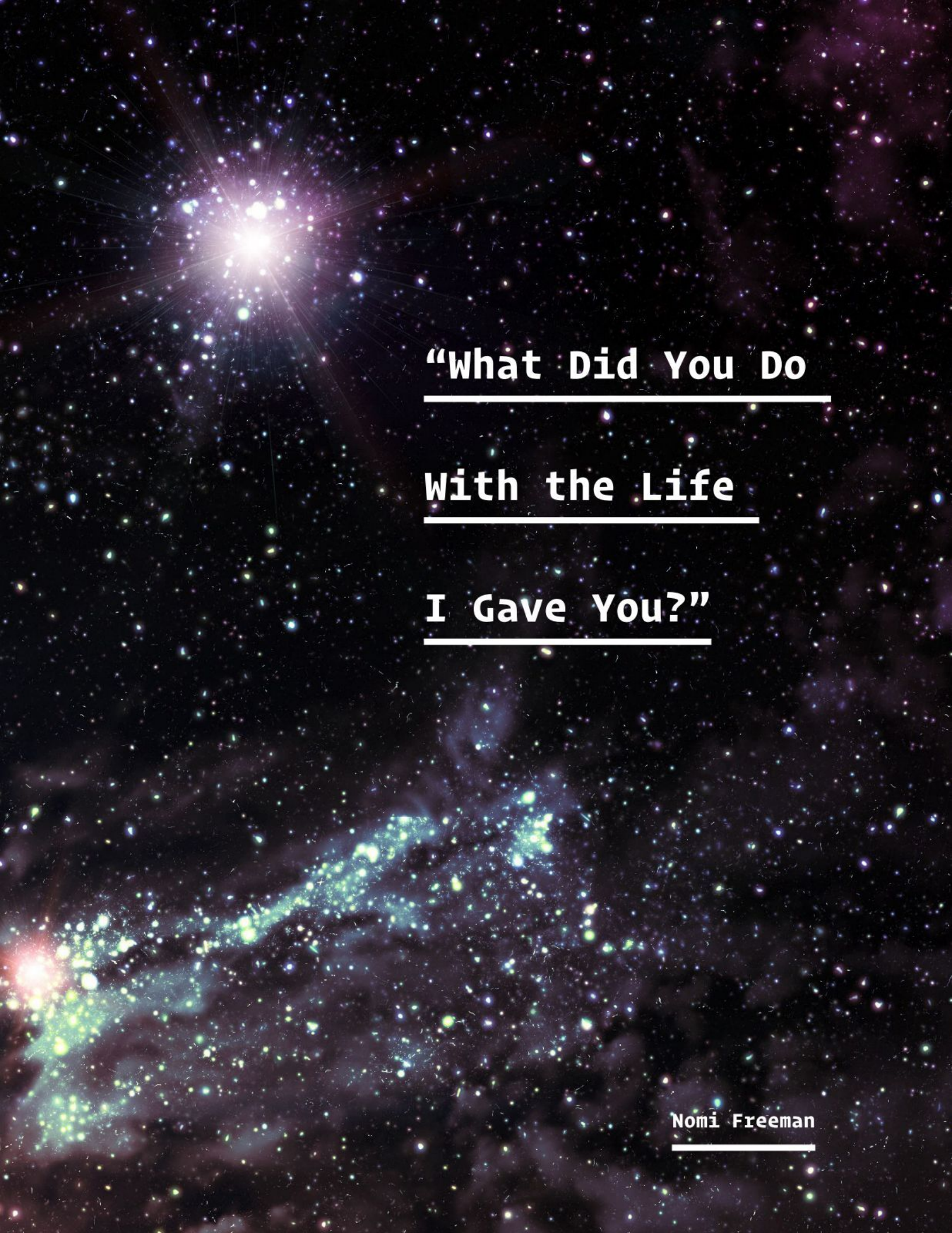




“What Did You Do With the Life I Gave You?”

Nomi Freeman

A near death experience (NDE) occurs when a person is clinically dead–no breathing, no heartbeat, no brain activity–and yet returns to life with an account of an experience. Nomi Freeman has studied thousands of NDEs, with an emphasis on those of Jewish people.

Liba

Liba, then 20, wanted to dive into the swimming pool from a diving ladder. When the very heavy person ahead of her dove into the pool, the structure collapsed. Liba fell ten feet to the cement below, cracked her head open and died.

Liba found herself floating above her body and above the swimming pool, watching everything below. She saw people running and screaming, calling for an ambulance. Liba herself was relaxed, not bothered by anything, just observing the scene.

Liba felt herself rising higher and higher, and the body on the ground and the pool became smaller and smaller. She traveled through a tunnel towards a point of light and emerged into a world of light.

Liba found herself in front of a court. They were judging her, not to decide whether her life was good or not, but to establish whether to keep her up in the spiritual world or to send her back to this physical world.

She understood that the entities on the right side of the tribunal were in favor of her going back down to her life, and those on the left side were saying, "No, she's dead, let her stay here." She could understand only the ideas being conveyed but not the words. They debated back and forth, and then a powerful light entity in the middle gave a bang with a gavel of sorts. With that, she understood that she was staying up there. She was only 20 years old but it was fine with her.

"At that point," Liba told me, "somebody came in, another light, very powerful and brilliant, shining stronger than the sun, but I was able to see who was in that light. It was my grandmother!

"She entered the court and started pleading and crying for them to allow me to go back to my life. She was speaking in Yiddish. I remember she said, '*Ober di kinder!*' which means 'But the children!' referring I guess to my parents."

The tribunal actually paused and took the time to listen to this grandmother and consider her opinion.

You have to wonder, what gave my Bubby the courage and the permission to enter such a place?

Bubby lived in America during the time of the Holocaust, and whenever immigrants arrived,

escaping Europe, often with no family and no money and not knowing any English, she would go to the port and welcome them. Even though she could not help them financially or provide them a house or a job, she provided comfort with words, and made them feel they had a friend in the new country. She was extremely kind and generous with people and she would give them her time and her love.

After a woman gave birth, she would go to the house and cook for her and take care of the other children, so the mother could recover. If somebody was sick, she would bring them chicken soup. If somebody needed something, she would go and get it for them. In her old age, when all of her children were grown and married, her husband used to come home at night knowing that if his wife wasn't home, there would be warm dinner waiting for him in the oven; she was often out helping somebody.

It appeared that this is what gave the grandmother this great light and the ability to enter the court. Even though the tribunal had established that Liba was dead and she was staying up there, they reconsidered the case. Then, for the second time, the light entity in the middle banged a "gavel" on the "table" and then, Liba says, "I was pulled downwards, like sucked by a vacuum cleaner, all the way down, through the tunnel, into my body, and I opened my eyes in the hospital to find a doctor sewing up my head."

The tribunal does not show up in all near death experiences. Based on the interviews and reading that I have done, this seems to be a uniquely Jewish touch.

While Liba Weiss allowed me to share her story with her real name, Eli felt differently, so Eli is a pseudonym:

Eli

Eli was 17 years old when he died suddenly. He found himself in a darkness so thick it was tangible, like the plague of darkness in Egypt. Eli describes how he felt as his soul left his body as, "The darkness was solid and I became afraid." This is not a typical element of the near death experience. In general, people have feelings of joy, freedom, calm, and peace, and it was unusual that Eli felt fear.

He continues, "When I went to yeshiva, in second grade, I had a Rabbi teacher who told us if you were ever in trouble, say, *'Baruch Shem kvod malchuso l'olam va'ed.'* I started saying these words over and over again without a mouth, in my spirit form, when suddenly in the darkness I saw very far away a pinpoint of light. I started zooming towards it at an incredible speed. As I approached, the dot of light grew larger and larger; it was the entrance to the world of light. There I was, in the presence of the Loving, Living Light… I knew intuitively that I was in the presence of the *Shechinah*, my Creator. If you want to have an understanding, a glimpse of what it feels like to be in the presence of the *Shechinah*, make a bundle of joy with all the happy experiences you've ever had in your entire life, then multiply it by a million.

"Soon I met other souls. Even though I had never seen them in my entire life, I knew who they were. They were my grandparents who were killed in the Holocaust. I had not even seen pictures of them, but my soul recognized their souls and we exchanged greetings and love.

"Some time later, I found myself in front of a tribunal. They made me feel comfortable. There was no fear in their kindly presence. In front of this tribunal, I saw my life review."

The Life Review

The life review is a very powerful and transformational part of the near death experience.

Eli said, "I saw my entire life, the 17 years, and it was a good life; the tribunal was happy with me. Certain events were highlighted. When I was in school, I stood up to the bullies, to protect the younger and weaker children, and this showed as the best thing I ever did.

"I realized what had happened and I started to scream. What about my father and mother? What about my sisters? I am only 17 years old. There is so much I want to accomplish with my life!

"As I finished saying those words, I opened my eyes to find myself back on earth."

After coming back to life Eli had powers now to see more than he did before. He said, "Every person around me had an aura, and I found myself seeing the colors of the energy field of every person. Most people's auras were red. There was one man whose aura was totally dark. There was another man, an old Yemenite Jew, very old and very little, whose aura was pure silver, shining light."

As many do to avoid ridicule, Eli kept his NDE a secret. He increased his observance of Torah and mitzvos. Today, 40 years later, he is a very successful professional, but, he says, "My friends laugh at me. They say, 'You know, if you put a few more hours in your office, you do a little more business, you will have more money. You are always running to help people, why?' I laugh back at them," says Eli. "I tell them I do that because I am not stupid. I know that every mitzvah I do is a diamond that belongs to me forever. They don't know of my experience but I know because I saw the value of a mitzvah when I was up there."



Rabbi Yoseph Y. Geisinsky

Rabbi Yoseph Y. Geisinsky is a Chabad Shliach in Great Neck, New York. In 2013, he had a heart attack that left him clinically dead for 40 minutes. Doctors usually do not continue resuscitation efforts after about 20 minutes because they know it's over, but here, one of the doctors was a friend of the family. He insisted they keep trying to resuscitate. Rabbi Geisinsky's experience was very, very unusual. As he tells it in *Beis Moshiach* magazine:

"After I fell unconscious, I felt myself rising to the supernal worlds, just like I've heard has happened to other people in my condition. My father, of blessed memory, and other deceased family members came to greet me.

"At a certain point, I was greeted by one who introduced himself as the Angel Michoel. He took me to the chambers of various tzaddikim. I saw that each tzaddik sat in his own chamber and taught Torah.

"…I asked the Angel to take me to the chambers of the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe. He agreed and I stood facing Reb Yisroel Baal Shem Tov and then the Alter Rebbe.

"The Angel then said to me, 'We must return to the heavenly court where your trial is taking place. They have not yet made a decision.' The Angel explained that when they haven't arrived at a clear decision, they leave a little bit of life-force within the body so that outright resurrection of the dead won't be necessary if they [the heavenly court] decide to allow the person to stay alive.

"We went to the heavenly court where I saw the members of the court discussing my case. One said this and another said that. They turned to me and asked me what I had to say. Should you return down to the world or remain here? Trembling, I responded, 'I am a chossid, a chossid of the Rebbe. Whatever he says, I'll accept.'

"They said, 'If so, let the Lubavitcher Rebbe come and state his opinion about the fate of Yosef Yitzchok ben Chaya Luba.' I stood there, frightened, waiting for my sentence.

"Then I saw the Rebbe appear, in all his glory, with all those present according him the greatest honor. The Rebbe said, 'I am working so that Moshiach comes and brings the complete Geulah. I sent my Shluchim all over the world so they will finish the job. I need my chassidim at their posts. So Yosef Yitzchok ben Chaya Luba needs to return to life in a physical body to complete his work.'

"It was then that I heard the announcement that Yosef Yitzchok ben Chaya Luba – to life. I awoke from my coma. Apparently, everything I saw took place during the 72 hours that I was unconscious."

The Doctors

Many cardiologists have had patients who had NDEs. One cardiologist stood up after one of my talks on this subject and told the story of a patient with cardiomyopathy whose heart would stop and then restart. This patient, a young teenager, had spoken a few times about the experience of being in a large white shining place and then coming back from there.

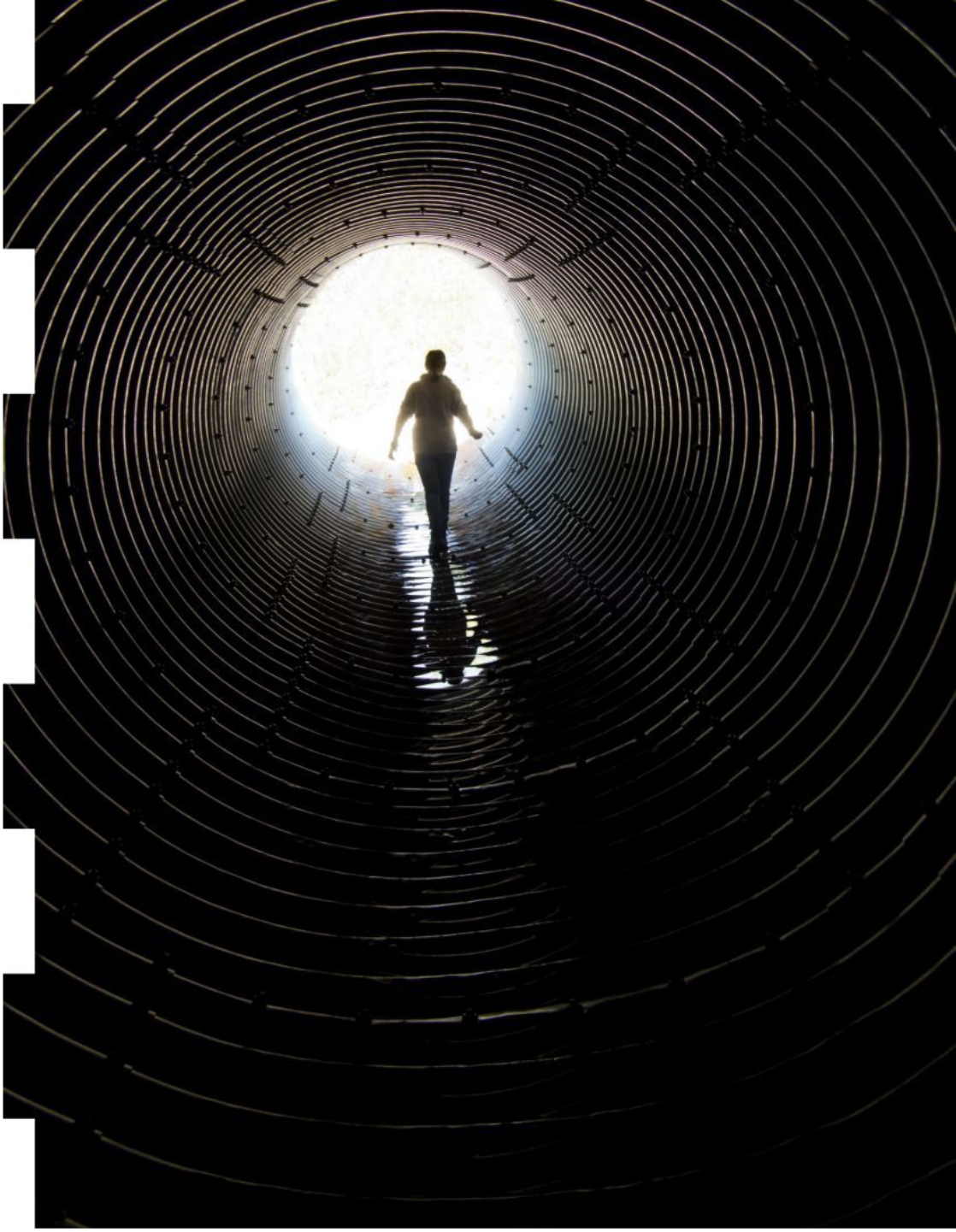
Another doctor stood up and said, "Well, I am also a cardiologist, and I never had a patient tell me of any near death experience."

If you are a cardiologist and you want to know if your patients have had an NDE, you need to make them feel very comfortable to tell you about it. Many remain silent for fear of being doubted or laughed at.

A woman who was present later told me, "I'm a neuroscientist, and I know the explanation of the near death experience. You know, this is what happens to your brain..." She gave a detailed explanation that I did not follow, for why people see themselves in a tunnel, going towards a point of light, then she concluded, "But, science or not, I know it's real, because my mum had an NDE." She went on to tell the story of her mother's heart attack and her sense of being high up, floating above the trees, watching her body collapsed on the sidewalk. She was then drawn back into her body.

Many researchers have collected information about their NDEs, starting with Raymond Moody. They all found generally the same pattern, with these six stages: hovering above the body; experiencing joy and unconditional love; traveling through a tunnel; emerging in a world of light; meeting relatives; life review.

Two cardiologists interviewed patients who had



gone into cardiac arrest and been resuscitated. Dr. Pim van Lommel of Holland had over 300 patients who had been brought in for cardiac arrest, had flatlined and been resuscitated. Out of the 300, 42 reported an NDE that included most of the six stages.

Just a couple of years later, Dr. Michael Sabom of Atlanta, Georgia, did the same research. Out of 250 patients who had gone into cardiac arrest, 50 reported an NDE. The research results of the Dutch cardiologists and the American cardiologists were similar.

Who Needs NDEs?

Why would Hashem take someone up and then send them right back down?

I don't know why Hashem does things the way He does but it seems to me, it's a possibility, that since today we don't have the presence of very holy spiritual leaders and prophets, we are getting messages from Above in another way, through NDEs. People come back completely changed. Their lives are not the same. They became much more spiritual, kinder, more loving, and more compassionate.

Many, after an NDE, change their way of life. Gordon Allen was an entrepreneur. He appeared on the cover of financial magazines. He had so many millions, he didn't need to work at all, but he enjoyed making money. He was sometimes ruthless in pursuit of the dollar. He came down with pneumonia and by the time he got to the hospital he died as they were wheeling him in.

Once out of his body, he said, "the very first thing that came over me was this absolutely profound sensation of love … that love was so totally unconditional it was overwhelming to me and that was beautiful and wonderfully accepting … this very profound love was followed by a sense of purposefulness that whatever's happening has a point to it."

He was told that he had terrific talent and drive that he was wasting on the wrong things. He was sent back into his body and as soon as he came out of the hospital the first thing he did was to call the business associates he had dealt with somewhat ruthlessly.

He could tell that they were afraid when they first heard him on the phone. He asked their forgiveness for not acting lovingly towards them. (They couldn't believe their ears.)

And then he left business, adopted a much simpler lifestyle, and became a therapist so he could help others. (You can help others in business too. There's no reason to leave your business.)





Above: Mrs. Nomi Freeman.

Right: Nomi's father, Rabbi Avrohom Polichenco, giving the Rebbe the key to Yeshivas Buenos Aires, which he founded together with Rabbi Berel Baumgarten and Reb Chaym Lapidus in honor of the Rebbe's 70th birthday.

Not Just Seeing But Experiencing

As they were watching their life story unfold, many have found it was very different than watching a movie, because now they felt every emotion they had caused another person. For many, that was the strongest message of the life review, a true understanding of any pain they had caused anyone, and also an appreciation of any comfort or joy they had given to others.

One man told of feeling the fear he had caused others. He was merciless and demanding, especially to his wife. After his NDE, when he felt that very fear and pain, he changed his behavior to the point where many people in his life said, "I don't recognize you. I don't know what happened to you after your heart attack. You are a different person."

Interestingly enough, he said, "My wife could not handle my change, even though it was for the better, and we almost got divorced."

I think we've found an enabler who never would have married a gentleman!

But I'm pretty sure that if you want to change for the better, your spouse will accept it happily.

It's not only the people who had the NDEs who change. It's those of us who hear of their experiences, too. We see what's really important, including the importance of the so-called little things…

"Small" Kindnesses

One woman who had an NDE said, "I saw my entire life and one thing was highlighted, as if to say, 'This was your achievement.' What did I do? One

time I was in a shopping center and there was a little girl who had lost her mother and was crying. I picked her up and calmed her down. I told her, 'Don't worry, sweetie, we are going to call your mommy and she will come and take you home. Everything is going to be okay, you'll see.' The little girl stopped crying and was calm and they called the mother who soon came and took her home."

It didn't cost her a penny. It took but a few minutes. And yet this showed in her life review as, "That is your life's accomplishment. That's what you did right." Imagine if she had said to herself, Look, I'm late, I have no time for this right now, I'm sure her mother will show up any second.

Another woman, Dr. Dianne Morrissey, told of having worked in a nursing home as a teenager. Nobody wanted to give a certain elderly resident cookies because she was toothless and would drool and become messy and want to kiss whoever had given her the cookie. She explains, "This woman had no family and no visitors. I sort of adopted her as if she was my grandmother. I did not care about the drooling. I gave her the cookies whenever I was there and that made her so happy. In my life review, when I saw this, I felt that every angel in the entire spiritual world was showering me with thanks and love for this simple act of kindness. I felt as if G-d Himself was bathing me in infinite unconditional love [because of it]."

What about those of us who have not been kind?

Can We Repair Our Own History?

If I do something wrong and then I stop doing it, what will happen at my life review? Must I suffer, watching myself involved in all sorts of negative behaviors that I stopped doing? This is one of the questions I often hear.

I know about a Jewish woman who got very sick and died while driving her car. When she reached Shamayim, she didn't have a life review played out in front of her. Instead, she saw a man with a long white beard holding a book and, she says, "I knew instinctively that this book was the story of my life. He handed me the book and I looked inside; it had white pages written on with gold ink. Then I noticed that there were entire paragraphs missing from the book, as if they had been erased.

"I looked up and I asked the man, 'Excuse me, why are some paragraphs missing from my life story?' He smiled and said, 'Those were things you did wrong but you took steps to correct them, so they were erased."

Some NDEers have told me that there are only two things you can take with you, your loving good deeds and your Torah learning.

People have also shared with me that having been in the room when a neshamah has passed to the other world, they have felt or seen things.

One said that when her mother passed she saw a purple light emanating from her mother's body and rising heavenward. Another told me that shortly after her sister passed away, she was alone in a dark room with no windows when a light flashed through her room. A third said that when her mother was dying in the hospital, she had a sudden, clear vision of her mother as a small child, running toward her parents, and then the nurse came, examined her mother and told her that her mother had just passed.

It's important for us to know that it's not just actions that we see in our life review, it's our intentions too. In the next world, intentions are as clear as actions.

Conclusion: My Father

The question I most frequently get asked is, "Did you have an NDE?" I did not.

My father died at the young age of 55 of a misdiagnosed ruptured appendix. I am an only daughter. I was very close to my father. I never had the chance to say goodbye because I did not know he was going to die.

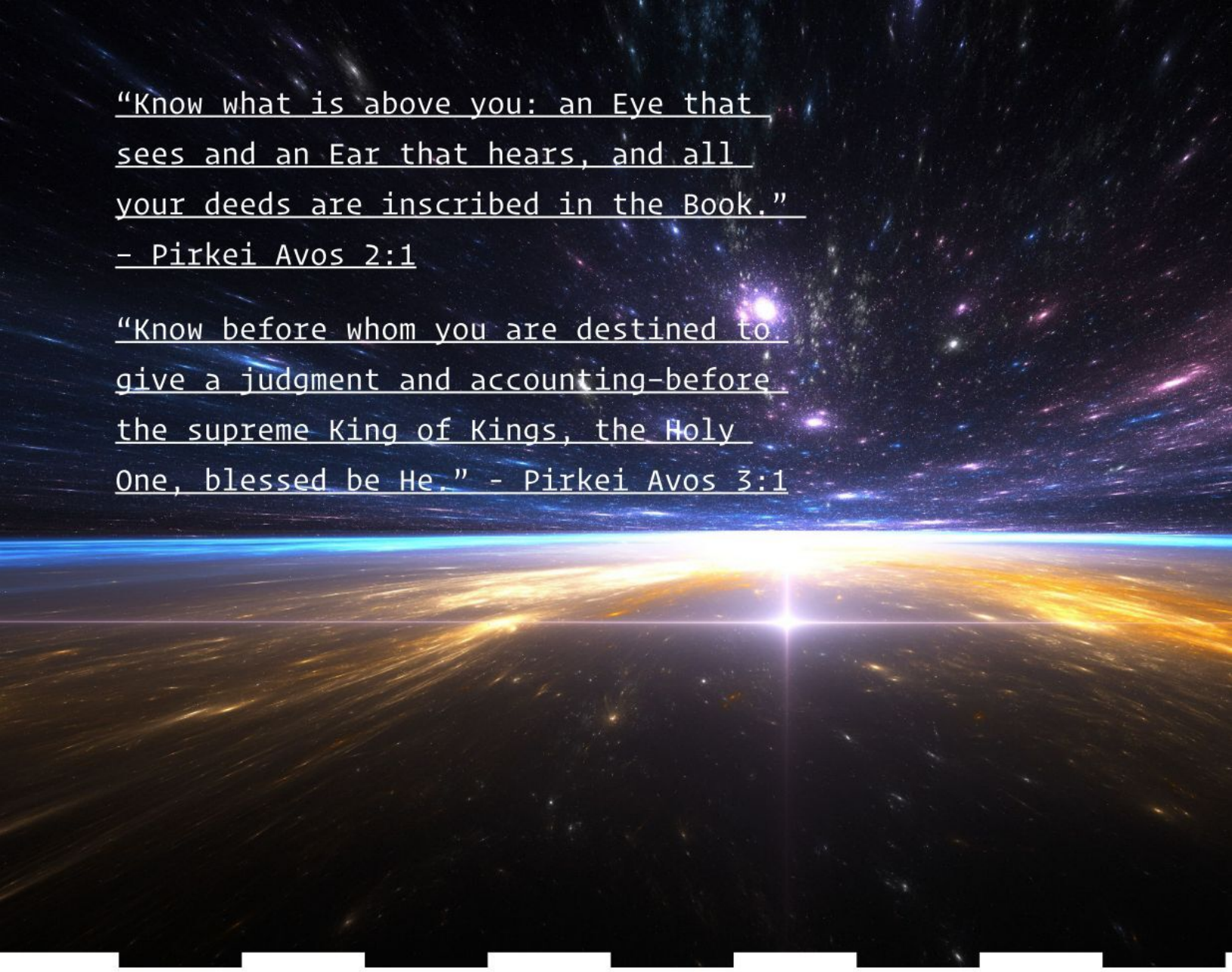
At his *sheloshim*, 30 days after the burial, I stayed at my father's grave and I made a request to see him again. This was not appropriate. I did not know then that you're not supposed to trouble the soul of the departed to make that long and troublesome journey just to say hello and goodbye to us. But not knowing that, and craving some closure, I stood at his grave and asked to see him again.

I knew stories of people who had dreams of parents and grandparents who had passed. I went to sleep that night with the hope of having a dream in which I would see my father.

That never happened. My father did not come in my dream, not that night, not the second night, and not the third. After a week I said, "Okay, this is not happening. I have other things to think about right now, for example, I have to raise my children," and I forgot about it.

A few months later, Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Raichek came to Vancouver, where we lived at the time, to speak to our community. He spoke on one occasion for the men and another for the women. All the women in the community were sitting in the synagogue in a huge half-circle of chairs, with the Rabbi in the open end. I sat right across from the Rabbi, listening to his words of Torah.

In the middle of Rabbi Raichek's lecture, without any warning, my father showed up. It was a very high ceiling. My father was hovering closer to the ceiling than to the floor. I also was aware that he was not a physical presence; he was a spiritual presence, yet I saw him



very clearly. I knew that if I stood up from my chair and walked across the hall and stretched out my hand, there was nothing there to touch.

I realized that my cheeks were wet. I did not know what to do. As soon as I absorbed the idea that my father had come, he gave me his message, mind to mind, and he called me by my name. He said, "Nomi, do as many mitzvos as you can, because Moshiach is coming soon."

He wanted me to realize the value of a single *mitzvah*, and that once we get to the other world we will wish we had done more. He wanted to make sure I his daughter would be as wealthy as can be, with as many *mitzvos* to my name as possible. That was his message: Do as many *mitzvos* as you can because Moshiach is coming soon.

So what is there to gain from knowing about NDEs? Some of the exclusive few who have had an NDE, when in the presence of the Infinite, Loving, Living Light, were asked a question, a very powerful question. It's going to keep us thinking for a long time…

"What did you do with the life I gave you?"

I'd like to leave you with this thought, that at some point, everyone is faced with this question. As for me, I would like to be able to see that I heeded my father's message.

Nomi Freeman is the daughter of the renowned Argentinean Kabbalist, Professor Avraham Polichenco, o.b.m. She is well known for her seminars on spiritual development and has lectured internationally, and has spent the last few years researching NDEs and speaking to people who have had them. Nomi is married to Rabbi Tzvi Freeman and is a mother and grandmother. She may be reached at nomifree@gmail.com.





Natan Speaks

Following are excerpts of a talk by an Israeli boy named Natan. To see him speaking, visit nsheichabadnewsletter.com and click on "Meet Natan."

First of all I was very sick that day. And the day before I was dizzy. Now, on Monday, I didn't feel well, I was shaking, I went to rest in bed, covered myself with a blanket. I was shivering, in a lot of pain. I simply felt like I suddenly left my body and saw myself in bed. I was two meters above my bed. And I didn't understand, if that was me there, when did I get here, what am I doing here, and who is the one above my bed? I wasn't able to understand it. I started to float, like I was going up in the air but without an elevator. I rose up and left the room and went higher and higher. I saw Planet Earth below. I entered a sort of tunnel, really huge, and at the end of the tunnel I saw a very small light.

Inside the tunnel you could see ... a lot of souls. I started walking and the light got bigger and bigger and finally you reach the light. That light, it was good. You feel safe, and love—it's impossible to explain ... The light spoke with me. It didn't say words. It was like telepathy. It's talking to you and asking you questions. It asked me if I wanted to die. I understood that if I crossed the line, then I wouldn't be able to go back. I answered that I didn't know; I had no idea what to do.

...I entered a huge hall and there were lots of people dressed in nice clothes. I was wearing torn clothing, soiled with blood, and I felt very ashamed. All the people were there for me, and they were happy... I saw Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and he shook my hand. I saw a lot of people I know who died…

...There was a very high stage. On the stage there was a high light in the middle and small lights on the right and left. The light on the right says the bad things you did, and the light on the left says the good things you did. They don't tell you but you know what the lights are. And then suddenly it was quiet, the noise of the hundreds of people became silent. The bad light started to tell everything bad I had ever done in my life. Every single thing. They are strict about every little thing you did in your life; they show it all to you. It talked to me about every single second. Why did you say this and why did you do that? You feel ashamed; it's a huge embarrassment. All the people are looking at you while you are shown the bad things you did.

And then the good light began to recite every good thing I did. [And I began to] understand how much reward you receive for the smallest things you do. Really. I thought, wow, it's so great I wore *tzitzit* that day! All the people cheer for you … there is that light that I saw in the beginning, and you realize that the reward you have coming to you is bigger the stronger the light gets.

...Then two people with wings took me in their arms.

My transgressions and my mitzvot were placed on the two sides of the scale. The smallest things count.

I saw millions of things when I was up there and I can't describe them all…

How to describe a soul? A soul is sort of like wind. There are no arms or legs. No eyes or mouth. You don't see any body, but you know who the person is and you can hear their voice.

They told me I had to decide if I want to return or stay, and after three hours I'd have no more choice and have to stay. So in the beginning, when I first saw Gan Eden, I said, "I want to stay here." But then ... I said I'd prefer to return. Why? Because I felt that I could do more *mitzvot* and earn more reward if I went back down. So they sent me back down. First they told me some things that I need to repair. I used to barely wear *tzitzit* but now I wear them all the time...

When I was up there I didn't know who the Moshiach was but I knew he had to be somebody alive. When he comes, everyone will be surprised. It's going to happen in the very near future. I felt that it was imminent... Moshiach will … smell each person, and smell who is pure, he will sense who is holy and performed acts of kindness. … he will be able to feel what's really inside a person... ... It has already begun, but Hashem didn't reveal it yet...

Not real arms–I could sense [rather than feel] them. They took me to Lower Gan Eden. They showed me a gate and they opened the gate, and inside I saw people learning Torah. The light there was very strong, massive. The light I saw in the beginning was nothing compared to that light. Nothing at all. It's something good, something beautiful, a feeling like you just want to stay there with them and learn Torah and never leave.

But for everything good there is the other side. The angels with the wings wanted to take me into Lower Gan Eden. But the angels of destruction said, "Not so fast. We want to take him somewhere else."

They took me to a place with a scale. My transgressions and my *mitzvot* were placed on the two sides of the scale. The smallest things count. At first it looked like there were more transgressions but then there were more *mitzvot* and I was really happy.



Meeting G-D

By Rabbi Alon Anava as told to Musia Gurevitch

I grew up in Ra'anana, in the center of Israel, in a very secular family. I went through the regular Israeli school system and the army. I had two sisters and a brother; we were close. My father did well financially, my parents had a good relationship with each other and I had a good relationship with them. I had everything I wanted.

In Israel, the left-wing, anti-religion movement is huge and powerful. I didn't believe in G-d, and would do anything to spite the religious Jews I had been brainwashed to resent. If someone would come to do *mivtza'im* with me, I was a brick wall; I refused to do anything connected with G-d.

When I was 23, I left Israel and settled in Manhattan, partying most of the time and taking random jobs to keep me going. A few years in, I began my own moving company which was very successful. I had a beautiful apartment and a fast car. I was living the American dream.

In 2001, when I was almost 27, some friends of mine were throwing a "Passover party." It really had nothing to do with Passover, but we called it that. Towards the end of the party, someone handed me a drug that was being passed around. I didn't know what it was but smoked it anyway and suddenly felt terrible. Not just like I wanted to throw up, but like I was about to die. I needed to go home. My girlfriend and I got into a taxi. I started choking and opened the window for some fresh air. I looked outside and the whole world froze. It was like when you press pause on a movie; everything stood still except for my mind which was racing.

I knew in a second that I was about to meet this famous G-d that I'd denied every day of my life. I suddenly and fully knew that everything I had been collecting, my car, my house, my travels, I would be leaving behind, and the things I could take—*mitzvos*—I hadn't spent a moment acquiring.

I knew I was going to die.

I closed my eyes and said, *"Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad."*

Then my body collapsed in the back seat of that cab, and suddenly there was no sound, no body, no feeling, and no sense of time. I was floating up in the air like a cloud, or a balloon. A voice told me, *You are dead. Look down.*

I looked down, and saw my body lying on the backseat of the cab near my girlfriend. I realized that I was dead, that I was no longer a person but a soul. I became a part of everything I passed. I felt rather than saw my girlfriend's entire life—every thought, event, feeling. Not in chronological order, just thousands and thousands of overlapping strands from the past, present and future. I felt her freaking out about my body lying next to her, and her having to tell my parents that I'm dead. Then I left her and kept rising higher and higher, following my body in the cab through Manhattan. When the cab drove under a bridge, I went through the bridge. I dove into it, became one with it. I didn't see shapes and colors and shadows; everything transcended physical limitations and I saw that everything physical is really an illusion.

I came out of the bridge and kept going higher, following my body through the streets, through the buildings and through thousands of people and I saw the truth, that *Ein Od Milvado,* there is nothing but Hashem.

Suddenly, without any warning, I felt like something grabbed me from behind, and I woke up in a pitch black place. It was very scary and unbelievably painful. It felt like 100,000 pounds were on top of me, crushing me. This lasted an incredibly long time and at some point it became obvious to me what was happening. *Shamayim* is not like this world where there are layers of lies and perceptions, *Shamayim* is only *emes,* truth, so all became clear. I realized I was going through pain because I had no connection to Hashem, and no *mitzvos*. As I said, there is no time in *Shamayim*; I had no concept of a minute or a year or ten years, but for me this agony felt like it lasted millions of years.

Then the cliché that turned out to be true: I saw "the light at the end of the tunnel," just a tiny dot of light far away from me. I knew that if I could somehow get to this light I would be saved from the dark torture. I screamed to Hashem, "I'll do whatever You want, please save me!" and the light came closer and got bigger until finally all that was in front of me was a never-ending screen of blinding white light. And I knew that right behind the light is Hashem.



Rabbi Alon and Mrs. Devora Anava and family.

I felt like a hand grabbed me and yanked me in; instantly, I became one with the light. The secrets of the world, endless information, the entire genius plan that Hashem had designed for our world was laid before me, and it all made perfect sense. Every moment, every event on earth was joined in a complete panoramic picture, and there was an enormous pleasure connected to it.

But, I was not allowed to enjoy. I got thrown into another huge dark room, filled with millions of souls watching me, and I was standing there completely naked. Not of clothing but of *mitzvos*—the garments of the soul. I couldn't lift my head, because I felt like Hashem was before me and I knew that I had rejected Him. I didn't feel Hashem's anger at my naked soul, but rather His miserable disappointment. I cannot describe the deep shame I felt.

I was brought into a courtroom. I looked to my left and saw thousands of prosecuting angels, for every sin I did, and I looked to my right and I saw two defense attorneys; one was blind and one was crippled. They showed me my entire life in slow motion and the prosecutors pointed out, "Here you lied, here you stole." I watched my sins pile up.

Then they took all the good things I ever did and added them up. They were kind and tried to give me as much credit as possible. I was circumcised, that's a big *mitzvah*. My grandfather put *tefillin* on me once, there you go. A dollar fell out of my pocket that a poor man found; okay, charity! A smile here, a nice word there, but I was a lost case, 99% bad.

Then it was time for judgment.

They told me, "You have two options; you can choose. Either we'll bring you back to the darkness where the *malach hamaves* will take care of you. Or, you can go return to the world under three conditions.

First, you have to live your life as a Jew. Second, you have 14 years of debt, of *teshuvah*, to make up for how you lived from the day you turned bar mitzvah to 27. Third, you must tell as many people as possible what you saw up here."

Was it much of a choice? The best way I can think of to describe it is like by Har Sinai, when the Jews were "forced" to accept the Torah. They saw what Hashem is, they felt His love for them, and it wasn't even an option to refuse the Torah.

The second I accepted the deal, I felt an impact, like Hashem pushed me back into my body and forced



me to do *teshuvah*. My soul returned to my body, and my eyes flew open on earth.

I was in the hospital, and very confused, I didn't remember what had happened to (physical) me at all. All I knew is that I had to do a *mitzvah*. I was desperate to do a *mitzvah*!

I was released from the hospital and immediately I called Itzik, an Israeli friend of mine who was slowly becoming religious, and asked him to help me put on *tefillin*. He was shocked, because I was a tattooed, pierced, long-haired pleasure-seeker who had always refused to do anything Jewish. He said I couldn't put on *tefillin* on that day, because it was Shabbos. I begged him to help me do something religious. He invited me to the Pesach Seder that night, and I went. I was very confused and I felt changed, but I didn't know why.

Two weeks later, I woke up in middle of the night and everything resurfaced with complete clarity. I remembered every detail of my experience after death. I quizzed the girl who was with me in the cab on her entire life; I knew everything from the moments my soul was free of my body. She asked, "How do you know all that?" I was afraid to admit the truth. I was sure nobody would believe me if I revealed what I had experienced.

I was very lost, and I called the same friend and asked him the one thing I'd never dreamed I would ever ask: Itzik, how do I become religious? Slowly but surely, I did *teshuvah*. I disappeared from everything and everyone I knew, and spent two years changing myself. I worked on becoming a good person, on my honesty and respect and kindness. Eventually, I met Rabbi Moshe Harizy through Shabbat.com; he sent me to yeshiva where I started learning how to live as a Jew.

I went to a Breslav *yeshiva* and a Sefardi *yeshiva*; I went around from place to place, but nowhere felt exactly right for me. I was invited to spend Shabbos in Crown Heights and after one Shabbos there, I knew this was the place for me. A month later, I joined Hadar Torah Yeshivah and slowly became a regular Lubavitcher *bachur*. I met my dear wife, Devora Fishman, a *baal teshuvah* like me, and we got married in 770 on the auspicious date of 14 Kislev [date the Rebbe and Rebbetzin got married], in the year 2003, and together we are raising a family, *b"H*.

In the beginning I was very embarrassed to share my story, because it is so hard to believe. After I got married, I started speaking once in a while to groups of people, but on a very small scale. I did remember that third condition and I knew I wasn't quite fulfilling it.

And then my brother-in-law died suddenly. I flew to Israel, and as I stood saying Tehillim in the cemetery, it hit me. I know where he is, I know what's going on. I know the effect my Tehillim is having right now, but nobody else does. I realized that I had to come out full force and share my experience.

From when I made my decision, it was *Ufaratzta*. This became my personal Shlichus. I recorded my story and it went viral over social media. Since then, I travel around the world speaking about it. I try to share the lessons I have learned with as many Yidden as possible.

The take-away is to realize how precious every moment is. Use every second to add goodness to the world. Don't rest on your laurels as there is always more to do. Don't worry about being rich or famous, don't worry about changing the world, Hashem loves every small *mitzvah* dearly, especially *ahavas Yisroel*. Look beyond the *peyos*, the black hat, the tattoos, the wig. Look beyond the superficialities and love every Jew for their *neshamah*. •