**Life After Life (…and During)**

**#1**

**Americans Spent More than $16.5 Billion on Cosmetic Plastic Surgery in 2018, www.plasticsurgery.org, April 10, 2019**

A new report from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) reveals that Americans spent more than $16.5 billion on cosmetic plastic surgery and minimally invasive procedures in 2018, a four percent increase from the previous year.

**The Dangers of Cosmetic Surgery, The Guardian**

Cosmetic surgery is clearly potentially dangerous … "When things go wrong someone can end up disfigured or even dead," Rawson added. "A facelift can lead to your eyes or mouth not opening and closing properly. I've seen patients whose lower eyelid isn't resting against the eyeball after they've had facial surgery. Breast implants can result in oddly shaped breasts. And post-surgical infection is a risk, as is severe psychiatric injury."

**Questions:**

* **Why do people spend so much money and effort trying to appear younger than they are?**
* **Is our preoccupation with looking young even at the expense of our health a sane idea?**
* **Could it be that our insatiable quest to retain our youth is really a misguided search for eternity? Are we perhaps trying subconsciously to live forever?**

**#2**

**Want to Leave a Legacy? Be a Mentor, New York Times, by Jane E. Brody**

How to make a positive impact that would keep you alive in the memories and lives of others...

* **Why do people care about leaving a legacy behind after they’re gone?**
* **Would you agree with the idea that purpose and meaning are linked to a sense of permanence, that our drive for immortality stems from the need to attain real meaning in life?**

**#3**

**Question: If you could take a pill and live forever, would you take it?**

**Man's Search for Meaning, Victor Frankl (Holocaust surivor and founder of Logotherapy)**

What would our lives be like if they were not finite in time, but infinite?

If we were immortal, we could legitimately postpone every action forever. It would be of no consequence whether or not we did a thing now; every action might as well be done tomorrow or the day after, or the year after, or ten years from now.

But in the face of death, an absolute finish to our future and boundary to our possibilities, we are under the imperative of utilizing our lifetime to the utmost...

**Question: What do you think about Frankl's reasoning?**

**#4**

**Question: If G-d created us, why do we age? Why is that built into nature? Why can't we be strong and quick like we are at 25 for our entire lives until it is time to die?**

**Based on Vilna Gaon (1720-1797)**

Gray hairs are messages from Heaven that remind us about the Afterlife.

**Question: What do you think about this statement?**

**#5**

**The Funeral Exercise.**

**The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Steven Covey**

In your mind's eye, see yourself going to the funeral of a loved one. Picture yourself driving to the funeral parlor or chapel, parking the car, and getting out. As you walk inside the building, you notice the flowers, the soft organ music. You see the faces of friends and family you pass along the way. You feel the shared sorrow of losing, the joy of having known, that radiates from the hearts of the people there.

As you walk down to the front of the room and look inside the casket, you suddenly come face to face with yourself. This is your funeral, three years from today. All these people have come to honor you, to express feelings of love and appreciation for your life.

As you take a seat and wait for the services to begin, you look at the program in your hand. There are to be four speakers... Now think deeply. What would you like each of these speakers to say about you and your life? ... What character would you like them to have seen in you? What contributions, what achievements would you want them to remember? Look carefully at the people around you. What difference would you like to have made in their lives?"

**Questions:**

* **What would you like people that are close to you to say about you and your life?**
* **What is the benefit of this exercise?**
* **Most probably you don't feel too comfortable doing this exercise - why is death so uncomfortable to think about?**

**#6**

**Adaptation from Y. M. Tucazinsky's “The Bridge Of Life,” by Yaakov Astor**

Imagine twin brothers in their mother's womb. How natural it would seem to be hunched over with one's head between one legs. How commonplace to float all day in fluid. How mundane not use one's nose or mouth, but rather to have air and food sent down a tube that passes directly into the stomach by way of the navel. And how long the "lifetime" of the nine-month gestation period. How unimaginable the existence of a world extending beyond the walls of the womb.

Imagine that the two brothers possessed different world outlooks. One accepted by way of tradition that there was a future life beyond the womb. The other was a strict "empiricist," who accepted only that which he could see with his five senses. Accordingly, the latter brother acknowledged only the existence of "this world" alone, the world of the womb.

Now, let us imagine that we had the ability to listen in on their conversation.

"Brother," the believer says, "I believe that beyond this world is a magnificent realm which we will one day emerge into. In that spacious realm we will use our mouths for eating and our eyes for seeing unimaginable distances; we will hear with our ears; our legs will straighten out so that we will stand erect and traverse vast stretches of land replete with mountains, oceans, rivers -- all beneath a limitless sky of starry hosts."

"Brother," the empiricist twin replies, "you certainly are poetic. However, I am amazed at your naiveté. Why indulge in such fantasies? Only a fool believes in things beyond the rational mind's grasp."

The first brother replies: "Why then do we have a mouth, eyes, and ears? They serve no purpose in this realm. They must have been designed for use in another world far beyond what we can visualize now."

"You make it sound as if some higher intelligence designed us. Who says? Maybe the eyes and ears just developed randomly. We don't know anything about a higher intelligence or a world beyond. All we know is what we experience now."

"If that is so, my brother, what do you believe is in store for us when we leave the womb?"

"Simple and obvious. Once we are torn away from the tube through which our food and drinks are provided we will fall into a dark abyss of nothingness. We will die, never to return. We might as well have never existed at all."

Before the other brother can reply, the womb suddenly opens and the "naïve" brother slips outside. The remaining brother is shattered. "Brother!" he cries in lament, "where are you? Do you know why you fell to your destruction? Your folly that these contractions were birth pangs caused your downfall. That is why you did not clutch at anything to stop yourself."

And then the lamenting brother hears the shrieks of his departed twin. To him that signals the end, the last gasp of his dying sibling.

Outside, though, at that very moment, are shouts of joy. "Congratulations! *Mazel Tov!*" A new baby has just been born.

**Questions:**

* **If we think that death is the real end - game over - what psychological impact would that have on our lives?**
* **How would our lives change if we knew there is something that comes after?**

**#7**

**Ramchal, Derech Hashem 1:3:3**

*G-d’s goodness decreed that there be a limit to man’s effort required to attain perfection. After his period of effort is completed, he attains his level of perfection and is then allowed to enjoy it for all eternity. G-d therefore created two distinct periods, one as a time of earning and the other as a time of receiving reward. However, the trait of goodness is stronger since the time for earning is fixed according to G-d’s Will, while the time for receiving the reward has no end. Rather, a person will derive pleasure forever from the perfection that he achieved.*