

Living this Life
Rabbi PJ Schwartz
May 8, 2020

In 2033, the Gordita Crunch is sold virtually by fast-food goliath Nokia Taco Bell. Mega-airline corporation Frontier Spirit United offers 30-minute flights from New York to Los Angeles with the option of Economy Minus. And the afterlife has become a \$600 billion industry.

In the new Amazon television series Upload, Nathan Brown's memory code is sent to the digital afterlife of Lakeview, the crème de la crème of heavens designed like a New England hunting lodge in perpetual autumn. Within this binge-worthy series are questions about our mortality, our relationship to the afterlife, and the purpose and meaning of life itself. And even though the quasi-heaven of a digital afterlife may have its perks, my questions about my own mortality, and my meaning and purpose in life, are very much grounded in the now.

In just a few short weeks—or days, anytime now, really—my life will change dramatically. My purpose will change. I'll become a father. And in the months leading up to his impending birth, he already has become a teacher and motivator for me. I want to do everything I can to ensure that he will get the best I have, in this life. As of late, I have shared that as overwhelmed and scared as I appropriately am, I am excited to “get into trouble” with my boy. To play, to run, to explore the world through his eyes. To share with him my heart and to be there for him. His upcoming birth truly is the *shalom*, the sense of wholeness and completeness, that Michelle and I have been wanting.

And I know I will blink, and his life will flash before my eyes. I don't want to miss it. So, since November, I have been on a weight loss journey. I am so close to reaching my first goal weight. I have lost almost 55 pounds of stress, of anxiety, of weight literally holding me down from being able to play, run, and explore the world through my child's eyes. I am not done on this journey, for which he has been my motivation for making sure that I can live the life well lived and well loved.

To be uploaded into a digital afterlife might be for some, but for me, I am still downloading information from this life. I think we all are—and it's why Judaism's concept of the afterlife is somewhat ambiguous. We are commanded to focus on the present and do our best in it.

The Book of Ecclesiastes, *Kohelet*, tells us that meaning is found in the small day-to-day joys of life. Holocaust survivor and psychologist Viktor Frankl asserted that embracing and maintaining our essential freedoms is the meaning to our lives. The mystics would tell us that the purpose of our lives is to become closer to God and to help make the world whole again. Our Torah commands us to choose life—to live life—with all of its challenges. Our Jewish hope is for long life in this world, in the here-and-now, where we are partners with God to make a positive difference in a world God entrusted to human hands.

Living in the present moment, especially during these trying times, is challenging. All of us are somewhat confused as to what day it is and are thinking toward the future and what it may look like. We don't know what the "new normal" will be. Yes, we have the insight of what other countries have done to reopen, but we

won't know until we know. In the meantime, let's focus on the now, on the moments we can control and the moments we can look forward to, as we live our lives, today and the days that follow.

In the now, I am looking forward to welcoming my son into this world. While it might not be the way any of us imagined, I will still get to hold him in my arms, have countless sleepless nights, and witness the miracle of life.

The poet Marcia Falk writes:

Nothing. You began as nothing and you will end as nothing.

And in between—everything, and nothing.

In between—joy and sorrow, beauty and decay.

Everything yours to partake of, yours to bear.

Yours to see, to know, to give birth to—and to let go.

None of it is yours to have. Not even you are yours to have.

You belong to a wholeness so great you cannot even conceive of it.

No, it is not a belonging; nothing owns you.

You are simply part of it. You came out of it and you will return to it.

You do not ever leave it; you are part of it forever. And this is your moment to be alive.

Shabbat Shalom.