

What a Jew Believes - Practicing Faith in a Skeptical World
Session 1 - Wednesday , January 22nd 2020

G-d - Does He Exist, And What does He Want From Me?



Part One - Can One Prove the Existence of G-d?

It is possible to prove that $2 + 2 = 4$ in an absolute way, but there is no such proof as to the existence of God. All the thousands of proofs still leave within man's hands the free will to believe or not to believe. Belief is built internally [i.e. by the individual's deliberate choice].

1. Rav Shlomoe Wolbe

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון, והוא ממציא כל נמצא, וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו.
הוא שְהַנְבִיא אֹמֵר (ירמיה י י) "וְהָאֱלֹהִים אָמֵת". הוא לְבַדּוּ הָאָמֵת וְאֵין לְאַחַר אָמֵת כְּאִמְתּוֹ. והוא שְהַתּוֹרָה אֹמֶרֶת (דברים ד לה) "אֵין עוֹד מְלַבְדּוֹ". כְּלוּמַר אֵין שָׁם מְצוּי אָמֵת מְלַבְדּוֹ כְּמוֹתוֹ:

(1) The foundation of foundations and the basis of all forms of wisdom is to know that there is a first existing being. And He brings into existence every existing thing. And all the existing things in heaven and earth, and what is between them, could not exist except through the reality of His existence.

This is what the prophet states, "For the Lord God is true" (Jeremiah 10:10). He alone is the truth and nothing else possesses reality like His reality. And this is what the Torah states, "Besides Him there is no other" (Deuteronomy 4:35), meaning, there is no true existing being like Him besides Him.

2. Mishneh Torah, Foundations of the Torah 1:1,4

Hume, however, had got rid of the cosmological argument-and remember that this was: If every event had a cause, then what about the very first event? What was the cause of that? The cosmological argument, therefore, said: If every event had a cause, then at the very beginning of time, at the beginning of the causal sequence, there must be something which was a *causa sui*, a cause of itself, and that must be God. And Hume said: Well, why must it be? Why must a series have a beginning in time? Maybe the universe just happened. Maybe there was no first cause.

3. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

There are those who say that the world came into existence by chance, without a Creator Who caused and formed it. I wonder how any rational person in a normal state of mind can entertain such a notion. If one holding such an opinion would hear a person expressing a similar view in regard to a water-wheel that revolves in order to irrigate a portion of a field or garden, and were to say that he thinks it had been set up without any intention on the part of an engineer who labored to assemble and install it, using all his tools so as to obtain this useful result, the one listening would be astonished, and consider the man who made such a statement extremely foolish! He would promptly charge him with lying and would reject his assertion. Now, if such a statement is rejected in regard to a small and insignificant wheel ... how can anyone permit himself to harbor such a thought concerning the immense sphere that encompasses the whole Earth?

4. Rabbeinu Bachya, Chovot Halevavot (duties of the heart)1:6

[The Teleological Argument] is an argument that nearly all thoughtful and sensitive people discover for themselves at some stage in their childhood. Throughout most of history it must have seemed utterly convincing, self-evidently

true. And yet, as the result of one of the most astonishing intellectual revolutions in history, we now know that it is wrong, or at least superfluous. We now know that the order and apparent purposefulness of the living world has come about through an entirely different process, a process that works without the need for any designer and one that is a consequence of basically very simple laws of physics. This is the process of Evolution by Natural Selection, discovered by Charles Darwin

5. Richard Dawkins, The Improbability of God, Free inquiry Magazine, vol. 18

But has modern science, from the beginning of the 20th century, proved that there is no God, as some commentators now claim? Science is an amazing, wonderful undertaking: it teaches us about life, the world and the universe. But it has not revealed to us why the universe came into existence nor what preceded its birth in the Big Bang. Biological evolution has not brought us the slightest understanding of how the first living organisms emerged from inanimate matter on this planet and how the advanced eukaryotic cells—the highly structured building blocks of advanced life forms—ever emerged from simpler organisms. Neither does it explain one of the greatest mysteries of science: how did consciousness arise in living things?

But much more important than these conundrums is the persistent question of the fine-tuning of the parameters of the universe: Why is our universe so precisely tailor-made for the emergence of life? This question has never been answered satisfactorily, and I believe that it will never find a scientific solution. For the deeper we delve into the mysteries of physics and cosmology, the more the universe appears to be intricate and incredibly complex.

Why did everything we need in order to exist come into being? How was all of this possible without some latent outside power to orchestrate the precise dance of elementary particles required for the creation of all the essentials of life? The great British mathematician Roger Penrose has calculated—based on only one of the hundreds of parameters of the physical universe—that the probability of the emergence of a life-giving cosmos was 1 divided by 10, raised to the power 10, and again raised to the power of 123. This is a number as close to zero as anyone has ever imagined. (The probability is much, much smaller than that of winning the Mega Millions jackpot for more days than the universe has been in existence.) The incredible fine-tuning of the universe presents the most powerful argument for the existence of an immanent creative entity we may well call God. Lacking

convincing scientific evidence to the contrary, such a power may be necessary to force all the parameters we need for our existence—cosmological, physical, chemical, biological and cognitive—to be what they are.

6. Why Science Does Not Disprove God, by Amir Aczel

Certainly the existence of life as we know it, and even of less elaborate systems such as stable stars, would be threatened by just the tiniest change in the strengths of the fundamental forces. The laws that characterize our actual universe, as opposed to an infinite number of alternative possible universes, seem almost contrived-fine-tuned, some commentators have claimed—so that life and consciousness may emerge. To quote Dyson again: it is almost as if “the universe knew we were coming. The emergence of life and consciousness, I maintain, are written into the laws of the universe in a very basic way. True, the actual physical form and general mental make-up of Homo sapiens contain many accidental features of no particular significance.

7. Physics and the Mind of God: The Templeton Prize Address, by Paul Davies

To paraphrase an argument from Milton Steinberg, *“The believer in God must account for the existence of one thing, the existence of evil. The atheist however must account for the existence of everything else.”*

8. Telushkin and Prager “The Nine Questions People ask about Judaism”

Part 2 - What Does G-d Want from me?

I therefore want to sum up what I have said. The greatest revolution of Tenach [Bible] was not monotheism, but the concept of a personal God. A God Who is a person, Who is self-conscious, Who is the ultimate reality of the personal, telling us that our self-consciousness is not an illusion, not an accident, not an epiphenomenon, but an objective reality because the universe as a totality is personal because God is the face of the personal on the universe.

Number two: That creation is indeed teleological. That all those events from Big Bang through 15 million years and the gradual coalescence of stars, planets, etc. and the emergence of life, culminated in the emergence of self-conscious beings, who, being self-conscious were capable of imagination, reflection, creativity, choice-and were also capable of the thing that only self-conscious beings are capable of, which is knowing that we are lonely.

Now we see that there is a genuine depth, analogy, between God's creation of nature and humanity's creation of society. They are both concerned with the redemption of solitude. With the overcoming of loneliness.

If something is totally alien, so different from me that we have nothing to talk about, then there can be no relationship. And that is why the Torah says there is some commonality. God creates man in His image, in His likeness. On the other hand, if there were no difference, if there were no otherness to the other, there would be no point in the relationship either.

That is the only bond. Not power. Not dominance. Not control. Not coercion. Because if you only relate to me because I force you to, then I have not redeemed my loneliness any more than if you were just a computer doing what I program you to do. It is only if I allow you the freedom, but we create a bond between us, and the only bond we can think of that honours that is the bond that we call 'marriage', which is that relationship between two independent beings each of whom respects the integrity and freedom of the other, who nonetheless pledge themselves in a bond of mutuality, allowing each the space to be themselves but saying: "I will always be there for you". And that is the relationship which Hosea calls ish as opposed to the relationship called ba'al, i.e. God as power. God as ish is God as a relationship. And here we come to the simple equation in Judaism: faith is a marriage. That is the only adequate analogy we have for it and that is exactly what the prophet said it was.

Of course, Hebrew has a particular word for this, and the word is brit, and it means a covenant. And a covenant is any mutually obligating bond between two individuals, usually of unequal power, who nonetheless come together in committing themselves to one another by saying: "I will always be there for you. You will always be there for me. And whatever happens I won't walk away." That is what brit means and that is what faith is in Judaism.

That is why God, always in the Torah, equates idolatry with adultery. Idolatry means serving gods, which means having a relationship outside marriage, which means adultery.

And so I have tried to explain that the uncertainty to which faith is an answer has got nothing to do with the origins of the universe. Nothing to do with the things that are scientific but science has not yet understood. It is the uncertainty of the future which we redeem by knowing that we face it not alone.

I know of no more moving description of faith; no more revolutionary description of faith than that as the covenant of love between God and the human race.

9. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

אבא שאול אומר ואנוהו הוי דומה לו מה הוא חנון ורחום אף אתה היה חנון ורחום

Abba Shaul says: Ve'anveihu. Be similar, as it were, to Him, the Almighty: Just as He is compassionate and merciful, so too should you be compassionate and merciful

10. Talmud Shabbat 133b

אָמְרוּ לוֹ: רַבֵּינוּ, בְּרַכְנוּ. אָמַר לָהֶם: "הֲיֵי רְצוֹן שְׁתֵּהָא מוֹרָא שְׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם כְּמוֹרָא בְּשַׁר וּדָם". אָמְרוּ לוֹ תַלְמִידָיו: עַד כָּאן? אָמַר לָהֶם: וּלְוַאי, תִּדְעוּ כְּשֶׁאָדָם עוֹבֵר עֲבִירָה אוֹמֵר: "שְׂלֵא יִרְאֵנִי אָדָם"

His students said to him: Our teacher, bless us. He said to them: May it be His will that the fear of Heaven shall be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood. His students were puzzled and said: "That's All?" He said to them: Would that a person achieve that level of fear. Know that when one commits a transgression, he says to himself: I hope that no man will see me.

11. Talmud Berachot 28b

Behold, what our sages, of blessed memory, have taught us is that man was created solely to delight in G-d and to derive pleasure in the radiance of the Shechina (divine presence). For this is the true delight and the greatest pleasure that can possibly exist. The place of this pleasure is, in truth, in Olam Haba (the World to Come). For it was created expressly for this purpose.

12. Mesilat Yesharim

Passionate belief has more than one source. It arises from studying Torah, trusting in tradition, pondering the elaborate structure of the world and the vicissitudes of history, and personal experience. I do not believe that we need to choose between these sources. I believe they are all interrelated, interdependent. Within this symphony, some elements dominate, but as a whole, they create the feeling of belief. You do not need to choose only one path.

There is nothing of which I am more certain, more convinced, that I experience more deeply, feel more strongly than my faith. There is nothing that the believer feels more strongly than his faith. Not at every moment and not with regard to every detail but his very bond to the Almighty, this deep internal bond this exists at all times. It gives man might, fortitude and contentment.

Anyone who has lost his existential connection to the Almighty has experienced a complete collapse - a total unraveling. To lose a connection with the Almighty is to lose one's *raison d'être*, to lose the essence of life; it is catastrophic.

If the loss befalls a particular society woe to that society! What is life without this bond?

13. Rav Aaron Lichtenstein