

When someone tells me they do not believe in God, I usually ask them to tell me about the God they do not believe in. I usually get some version of the George Carlin description of God: An invisible man who lives in the sky, with a list of ten things he expects of us, and if we don't live up to those ten expectations then he sends us to a horrible place full of fire and brimstone, but he loves us. And as Carlin so brilliantly added, he needs money. I tell them I don't believe in that God, either.

But let's start tonight with the most traditional Jewish view of God, a God who is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. This God created the universe, albeit not in the usual misunderstanding of seven twenty-four hour days, and since the creation of the universe, not a blade a grass bends in the wind, not a sparrow falls from the sky, the moon does not wax and wane nor the sun rise and set, unless He wills it and knows it. This is the God that took us out of Egypt, and I believe in a century or two will also be known as the God who took us out of Auschwitz and established the State of Israel. Let us all, for the sake of this sermon, accept this description of God as completely accurate. There is still, my friends, one thing that is beyond the capability of even this omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God.

He cannot make you believe in Him. This is not some modernist or postmodernist theology. Our ancient sages recognized this when they said, "Everything is in the control of Heaven except the awe of Heaven."

Imagine this, which actually happened. You are in New York City, in Times Square, one afternoon in late June. You look up at scrolling news and read that Michael Jackson has died. Along with virtually everyone in Times Square, you

gasp in surprise and stop for a moment to make sure you have read it correctly. That is exactly what happened on June 29, 2009. For a moment, Times Square gasped and stopped. For Michael Jackson.

Now imagine the same scene on the same day at the same time. The news feed reads, “God has revealed Himself to the world!” I do not think a single person here would gasp and stop. I don’t think a single person in Times Square would gasp and stop. I think everyone would think their own version of “What kind of *narischkeit* is this?” and keep going.

What if God actually did reveal himself—not just in Times Square, but to everyone in the world at the same time and in their own languages? Would that make everyone believe in God? I would be willing to bet a nickel that more people would say it was an illusion created by the American religious right than a true theophany, a true self-revelation by God.

What could God do to convince the world He is real? Heal all the sick? There would be people who insisted there was a scientific, rational explanation for it. And even if God did that today, what about tomorrow? Would no one ever get sick again? Many people, not synagogue-goers, of course, but many others are all about “What have you done for me lately?” And if no one ever did get sick again, before long all of us would stop considering it miraculous, because things that happen every day don’t seem to us to be miracles, do they? That’s why Judaism has to remind us that every day God’s miracles are with us, because we have grown jaded and stopped seeing them as miracles.

For these and other reasons, I have concluded there is nothing short of revoking our free will that God could do to bring us all to be believers in Him. So how does one believe in God?

Perhaps the best way is to have a baby, which filled me with a sense of awe and a certainty that something much greater than Arlene and I had been part of the miracle of creating a child.

Another is to study anything that makes you more aware of the seemingly infinite levels of complexity built into the universe. I particularly recommend Professor Steven Barr's *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith*, in which he gives example after example of order built into the universe that is impossible for most of us to know about. The question is whether such levels of order are random or designed. The question is in which do you place your faith, randomness or a designer? If you choose a designer, you've chosen God.

But perhaps it is enough to merely acknowledge your own intelligence and ask the question, "Does intelligence come from non-intelligence?" Or as Dennis Prager likes to say, "...we didn't go from paramecia to Bach, blindly – something did it."

No, my friends, God cannot make you believe. Any non-coercive attempt would be explained away or ignored, and there is no value in coerced belief. But with open eyes, open minds, and clear hearts, anyone can come to believe in the Lord our God. As it was said by a German theoretical physicist who helped create quantum mechanics, "The first drink from the cup of natural science brings atheism, but at the bottom of the cup, God awaits."¹

¹ Werner Heisenberg