

## **Empirical Proof – JewishClarity.com – Rabbi Asher Resnick**

**Thesis statement:** We have clear evidence that there is a G-d.

**Question 1:** If G-d's Hand (i.e., an open miracle, like the 10 plagues) were clearly revealed to all of us, wouldn't that convince us all of G-d's existence?

Here is why this makes sense: G-d is defined as — an independent spiritual entity which transcends our physical world. A miracle is an event which cannot be explained or understood in terms of the system of natural physical laws. Therefore, by definition, a miracle would prove the existence of this Independent Spiritual Entity called G-d.

**Question 2:** Ask yourself: Have you ever experienced what you would consider to be a miracle? Or alternatively, have you ever experienced what you felt was an incredible coincidence, or perhaps a series of coincidences?

At some point, coincidences also constitute strong evidence for Divine intervention in the world. Think what you would consider to be a reasonable standard, or threshold level, of evidence to demonstrate G-d's existence.

The experiences of others can also serve as strong evidence for this.

The actual survival of the Jewish people all throughout history, as well as their continued existence in the world today (as we see in “The Seven Wonders of Jewish History”), is a living example of an almost endless series of modern miracles.

In addition to this awareness of miracles in our own lives, as well as all around us, most people also have a strong perception that G-d is actively involved in the world. This expresses itself in our realization that there are messages and significance to the events which occur to us.

As an example, imagine that you were driving through a residential area and following every possible safety precaution. You were carefully scanning the road ahead of you, driving below the speed limit, and had even turned off the car radio to avoid being distracted.

What do you think would be your reaction if, despite all of your best efforts, a child still darted out in front of your car and was (G-d forbid) run over? As much as all of the bystanders would realize there was nothing you could possibly have done to have prevented the accident, and as much as even the passengers in the car itself would try to reassure you that it really wasn't your fault; since you were the person who was actually behind the wheel at the time of the collision, you would almost certainly feel a tremendous sense of responsibility for this tragic occurrence.

One of the most common reactions would be to ask, “Why me?!” We feel that an event of such magnitude could not have happened without containing within it a powerful message and significance for every one of those involved — especially the driver.

A similar phenomenon is found among survivors of mass accidents. The “Why me?” there manifests itself in what is known among psychologists and psychiatrists as “survivor's guilt.” For a survivor of a plane crash to question, “Why was I saved and why did this other person die?” makes no sense at all unless we sense Divine supervision, and therefore meaning, to the actions which occur to us.

## **The Jewish View**

This is exactly what Judaism maintains — that there is no such thing as a random or chance occurrence. G-d is, in actuality, continually sending us meaningful messages. On some level, we are all aware of this — at least in terms of the major events in our lives.

This realization is actually one of the bases of superstition. The mistake which is made with superstition, however, is that power ends up being attributed to some object or to some arbitrary event, rather than to G-d.

## **Summary**

1. The comprehensive system of natural physical laws is either sufficient to explain all of the phenomena which occur in the universe, or it is not.
2. The occurrence of miracles (by definition), as well as coincidences beyond a reasonable probability of chance, testify to the inability of the system of physical laws alone to explain all phenomena.
3. Most people have either themselves experienced miracles, and/or remarkable coincidences, or know others who have.
4. Miracles definitely demonstrate the existence of a G-d — in other words, some entity beyond the physical realm. They don't necessarily define His nature or what He wants from us.
5. Even aside from examples of miracles on a personal level, the history of the Jewish people — ancient as well as modern — is filled with examples of extraordinary national miracles.

## **Appendix: The Limitations of Miracles – What exactly do they prove?**

**Question:** *If miracles are actually evidence for G-d, then how do we understand miracles which seem to substantiate the truth of other religions?*

A student once asked the following question to Rabbi Noach Weinberg, zt"l:

"My sister was traveling with her boyfriend through the American south when they had a terrible car accident. My sister's boyfriend ended up with very painful burns all over his body. A "reborn Christian" came to him in the hospital and told him that if he accepted Jesus as his savior, his pain would then go away. The boyfriend cursed him out until he left. Over the course of the next few days, however, he kept returning and repeating this claim. Finally, out of desperation, the boyfriend said he would accept Jesus; and once he said this, the pain from his burns went away." The student said he had heard this story directly from his sister, and was sure that it was true.

Rabbi Weinberg answered this question with a parable/story:

Imagine that the greatest philosophers and thinkers from all over the world are gathered together for an International Conference at the UN to discuss the question of G-d's existence. Just as the conference is about to begin, one of the participants stands up and, in a loud booming voice, begins to speak. He tells everyone to look out of the windows and see what will happen. To their utter amazement, the entire UN building lifts up off of its foundation, and begins to hover over the ground. He then tells them that he is going to take them on a tour around the city, and the UN building begins moving all over Manhattan. As he continues directing it, the entire building goes into the ocean, and they are actually able to see the fish swimming by right outside the windows. After that, the building lifts off into space, and travels to the moon. Finally it returns to the earth, to New York, and gently settles back down onto its foundation in Manhattan. At this point, the man

declares to everyone in the room that he is G-d, and demands they all worship him. Every one of the participants immediately gets down on the floor and begins bowing down to him, except for an elderly Jewish tailor who happened to be sitting at the back of the room the entire time. To the amazement of all those that were still on the floor, he tells the man at the front of the room, "I have no idea how you did this all of this, but there is one thing that I do know — you are definitely not G-d."

Rabbi Weinberg asked us to think how it was possible for this Jewish tailor to have declared this with such confidence. To address this question, he then repeated this parable/story with one significant difference at the end.

All of the philosophers and thinkers from around the world are gathered together for the International Conference at the UN dealing with the question of G-d's existence. The man stands up and tells them to look out of the windows. The UN building lifts up off of its foundation, hovers over the ground, and then begins moving all around Manhattan. It then goes under the water, into space, and to the moon. Finally, it returns to settle back down onto its foundation in Manhattan. The man then declares to them, not that he is G-d, but that he is a frog. What will the reaction of the participants be now? They will all recognize how ridiculous this is and think (similar to what the Jewish tailor originally pointed out), "We certainly don't know how you did all of this, but we know that you are definitely not a frog."

The point of the parable/story is that while miracles prove there is a G-d, they do not necessarily tell us who He is, or what He wants from us. Our previous definition of G-d was — some type of a non-physical entity which transcends our physical world. And, as we have explained, because the natural physical laws of our universe do not explain all phenomena, some type of a non-physical entity must necessarily exist beyond the physical system. However, whether or not we will be able to interpret what any particular message actually means is an entirely separate question.

The point is — the most that any miracle could possibly establish is that the one performing it has access to powers beyond the physical realm. It cannot, however, contradict what we know to be a reality. And, just as it is obvious that a human being could never be a frog, it should similarly be obvious that a perfect, spiritual, infinite Entity could **never** ever become a human being (let alone die!).

**Question:** *If any strong evidence of phenomena outside of the system of natural physical law points to the existence of G-d, then how do we understand magic, sorcery, astrology, the occult, self-proclaimed prophets, etc.?*

Just as there is a physical reality which we can perceive with our five physical senses, there is also a realm beyond the physical which we can call the spiritual or metaphysical.

There are principles that describe how the physical world operates which we call the "laws of science." If we recognize that there is a system beyond the physical, which we can call the spiritual or metaphysical, then similarly there are laws of the metaphysical realm. That is essentially what magic, sorcery, astrology, the occult, self-proclaimed prophets, etc. are.