

Ontological Proof – JewishClarity.com – Rabbi Asher Resnick

Part I – Classical Presentation of the Ontological Proof

Thesis: Since we can conceive of and discuss the concept of a perfect, infinite G-d, He must exist.

Premise: Human beings can only conceive of or discuss something if they have had either direct experience with it, or with its component parts.

Can Man Create Something from Nothing?

In the physical realm, all that human beings can ever do is to manipulate, transform, and rearrange pre-existing materials.

There is an important distinction between creation and transformation. The Hebrew word “*barah*,” which the Torah used to describe the initial act of creation, referred to a creation of something from absolutely nothing, which, of course, was possible only for G-d.

The word “*yotzare*” (“formed”) or “*oseh*” (“made”), on the other hand, refers to a process of transformation, which is when one forms already existing materials into new combinations or shapes. This is all that people are able to do.

Can Man Create an Idea?

The same is true in the realm of ideas. Try to create an idea. All that we are capable of doing with ideas is to take images, thoughts, and concepts with which we have already had some type of experience, and arrange them into new and original combinations.

While this new construction may be an arrangement we have never previously experienced (such as a unicorn), each of its component parts, (i.e., both the horse and the horn) will always be things with which we were directly familiar. As an example, try to imagine a dragon in your mind and you will see this clearly — i.e., “elephant-like” legs, “fish scale” skin, vulture wings, etc.

“Perfect” and “Infinite” — Understandable Concepts

We can all conceive of and discuss the idea of a perfect, infinite Creator. No one will claim to be **conceptually** unable to deal with the question of G-d's existence, or that they are incapable of understanding what the terms “perfect” or “infinite” actually mean.

Therefore, this Infinite, Perfect Creator must really exist, **and** we must all have had some type of direct personal experience with Him.

Part 2 – While the following approach is not a proof in the classical sense, many people find it to be more compelling.

What is a Need?

Human beings have many different physical needs. For every physical need, there exists something tangible which can satisfy that need (or lack).

Our hunger is for food. The discomfort of cold is the lack of heat. Fatigue is simply the need for sleep. And so on...

On a physical level, we only lack things which actually exist. This certainly makes a lot of sense — how could a person be **missing** something which wasn't real?

The same situation apparently exists in the non-physical realm as well.

What am I Living For?

All human beings need meaning. Most people have had a frightening moment when they felt confronted with the question of — “What is life all about?”

Everybody needs an answer to this — in other words, some purpose or reason for their life or for what they are doing.

People go to college for a job. A job is necessary for money. The money is needed for food. Food is required for physical sustenance. Physical sustenance is a prerequisite to long life. But what is the “long life” **for**? We all need an **ultimate** purpose or goal in our lives. The question, “What am I living for?” is obviously both relevant and fundamental for every single human being.

Could it really be possible that the need for meaning is so fundamental and so widespread, and in actuality there exists no such thing as meaning at all?!

Boredom is an interesting phenomenon to consider. There is a limit to how much time people can stand being idle — after a while tremendous restlessness begins. Even when all of one's physical needs are taken care of, it is clear that people need something more, something beyond the physical — even just to continue living and existing on a physical level.

Can it be that all of this craving for meaning and purpose in one's life is merely an illusion?

The Reality of Spirituality

We all recognize that **spirituality** exists. The fact that there is a word for it testifies to at least a basic familiarity that we all have with the concept. If it didn't actually exist or we had never had any contact with it, how would we be able to speak about it at all?

So, what then, is spirituality?

Doesn't beauty, for example, have a real existence to it? Isn't there something more to a sunset than merely its light rays? What about the feeling of love? What about the experience of awe? There are, in fact, many instances in our everyday life experience where we all relate to spirituality as an objective reality.

The reality of both meaning and spirituality are possible only with the existence of G-d.

1. Meaning is the fulfillment of one's purpose, and purpose is only possible in something that was created. A person fulfilling his purpose means that very purpose which he was created for. Only with a Creator to create us for a particular goal or purpose, is it possible for us to fulfill that purpose, and thereby attain meaning.

2. When we speak of spirituality existing, we mean in a **real** sense, not simply as a figment of our imagination, or a confusion of our senses. And if there is such a thing as an Objective Spiritual Reality, then this can be viewed as the most basic aspect of what we mean when we refer to "G-d".

If, on the other hand, there were no G-d, then both meaning and spirituality would merely be illusions. There would be only physical existence — atoms and electrons — devoid of any meaning or significance.

The fact that we all **crave** meaning and spirituality in our lives shows that none of us seriously consider the possibility that they are just illusions. This can be seen particularly in the extreme case — where people will even try to kill themselves if they feel they have lost all hope of attaining meaning in their lives.

The Reality of — G-d

Since we see that all of our needs correspond to real objects, and all people strongly need both meaning and spirituality in their lives, it seems that both meaning and spirituality must really exist. And if meaning and spirituality exist, then G-d must also exist.

Intuitively and experientially, we recognize that meaning and spirituality really do exist. We make judgments about which things are more meaningful than others, actively work to seek out spirituality, and savor those times when we actually do attain either one of them. In some manner or another, both of them play a role in virtually every aspect of our lives. And, finally, we recognize that they have an ultimate manifestation (i.e., G-d) which is the essential goal and purpose of our lives.