



## **BLAKE COHEN**

### **BUSINESSMAN, MUSICIAN, ENTREPRENEUR**

Blake Cohen was born and raised in Denver, Colorado. He studied jazz at The Berklee College of Music in Boston and played jazz professionally in New York City for seven years before returning to his native Colorado where he currently lives with his wife and two children. After teaching at Jewish day schools in New York and Denver, Blake joined the family real estate business. He has been busy with land speculation and urban infill for over ten years. In 2014, he co-founded SALT Lending, the first company in the world to make cash loans secured by cryptocurrency, and is working on a new fantasy investing startup.

In addition to his professional career in real estate, Blake keeps his love of playing music alive playing with several bands and by playing music with his boys. Blake has a new podcast called, "Third Rail Judaism" and is also developing a television show based on the family of Isaac Bashevis Singer, as well as a film about a fictional football league.

He tries to make time every day to study Torah, keep fit, and watch films and television with his wife while enjoying her delicious cooking and discussing the "higher matters" with her.

# Uncertainty, Free Will, And God's Plan

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I would like to posit that absolute proof of God is impossible, and that the very ambiguity regarding the evidence for God is both confirmation of God's existence and a necessary feature of God's world. To understand why, we must first understand why God created the world.

According to Jewish tradition, God created the world and humankind for a specific purpose. It goes something like this: God desired to share God's infinite love. The best way to do that was to create beings (humans), and allow them to take part in, in a sense, to "partner" with God in perfecting the world. More, God had to allow us to do so through our own efforts.<sup>1</sup> Think of it this way: As parents, we love our children and want the very best for them. However, simply handing them everything, rather than teaching them how to earn or achieve through their own efforts, would ultimately be to their detriment. Rather, we need to teach our children what goals are worthy of pursuing, then give them the tools to pursue those goals on their own. This will ultimately lead them to the greatest sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Our relationship to God is similar to that of a child to a parent. In the Old Testament, God details what we should pursue, and how. But our ability to achieve God's will has a necessary precondition: free will – the capacity to choose our own behavior and course of action. Why does this require free will? Because we can only accrue merit and achieve that sense of purpose and fulfillment if we have the power to decide for ourselves how we act and whether to follow God's instructions.

So what does all this have to do with proof of God? In a world where God's existence is irrefutable or self-evident, free will could not exist. To behave in any way that did not accord with God's will would be irrational, even insane. No one would defy God's commandments; the stakes would be too high, with the reward for obeying too great and the punishment for refusal too devastating.<sup>2</sup>

In order for free will to prevail, evidence of God's existence must be ambiguous, balanced on a knife's edge. A thorough, good faith investigation into the question of whether God exists must necessarily be inconclusive and leave room for doubt.

The fact that we find ourselves in just such a state of affairs – with an absence of absolute proof and the rationality of belief or uncertainty perpetually hanging in the balance – is remarkable. There is no logical reason why proof of God or its opposite should not be achievable. Therefore, the very difficulty, even impossibility, of absolutely proving, or disproving, the existence of God, is itself evidence of God!

## **Footnotes:**

1. This is not a new approach to the reasons why God created the world and humankind. I have encountered it in some of the following books: Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, *The Knowing Heart*, Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen, *Permission To Receive*, and Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Handbook Of Jewish Thought*.
2. Many great Jewish thinkers have discussed this too. It is closely related to the previous concept of why God created the world.