

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I have an uncle who proclaims he is a devout atheist. My family is not so observant, but we all believe in God. What can I say to my uncle to prove to him there is a God?

Sabrena L.

Dear Sabrena,

The first rule is not to challenge your uncle. When you challenge him or try to “prove” something to him, or anyone in that position, you simply put him on the defensive and he is not going to listen. This is true even in private and even more so in front of other family members; he certainly won’t back down in their presence.

The next thing for you to understand is that the rabbis describe the Jewish people as “*ma’aminim b’nei ma’aminim*”, we are all “believers, the children of believers”. This means that deep down, often way beneath the surface, all Jews really believe in G-d. (We must, as an exception to this rule, never judge those who have lived through the horrors of the holocaust).

In illustration, a number of years ago there was a teenage boy sitting in the waiting room of an Israeli hospital, reciting *Tehillim* (Psalms) for his mother’s successful surgery. In walks an elderly kibbutznik, who approaches the boy and asks him what he’s doing. The boy replied his mother’s having an operation, and he’s praying. The old man replied in disgust – *Tehillim*?! Is that why we fought for this country, so a young fellow like you would continue these medieval practices? Get up and live in the real world and throw that book out the window! The boy asked the old man what he was doing there, to which he replied he came to pick up his son’s body. The boy asked what that meant. He explained that his son was so sick, the doctor was sure he would die, but is performing an operation as a last resort. He sighed and said he was sure he would die, and came to get his body. The boy exclaimed, your son is still alive, take the *Tehillim* and pray for your son! The man replied he doesn’t believe in this superstitious, medieval stuff.

The boy moved to the other side of the room, and continued to pray. After some 45 minutes, the doctor comes into the room, approaches the old kibbutznik, and said, ‘you’re not going to believe this – it’s a miracle! The operation worked and your son’s going to live! To that the man jumped out of his seat, raised his hands, and exclaimed “Shema Yisrael A-do-nai E-l-oheinu A-do-nai Echad”!!

Rabbi Noach Weinberg of Aish Hatorah often tells this story, and that 50 out of a hundred self-proclaimed atheists, he has found, have stories of miracles in their own lives.

The best thing you can do for your uncle is to be ok with him as he is. Once you feel that way, ask him some questions about his life. Has anything out of the ordinary, even miraculous, ever happened in his life? What has he experienced in his life that brought him to his belief? Once your uncle trusts you and can confide in you, just scratch the surface, and you’ll probably find his belief in G-d right under it.