



JEFF ASTROF

TV PRODUCER, SHOWRUNNER, WRITER OF "FRIENDS"

Jeff Astrof is a television writer/producer/showrunner who, over a 30-year career, has worked on many shows, the most famous of which was "Friends." Other shows for which he has written include "Grounded for Life," "The New Adventures of Old Christine," "Ground Floor," and "Angie Tribeca" (and he knows you've only heard of "Friends"). He co-created a show called "Trial and Error," which is available for streaming on Amazon Prime. His current show is "Shining Vale," starring Courteney Cox, which airs on Starz.

He is blessed to be one of a small group of shomer Shabbat sitcom writers (we need one more for a minyan), and was the first producer to have Warner Brothers shut down a show for Sukkot. To the best of his knowledge, he is also the only sitcom writer to be doing daf yomi.

The God Gene

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I've never doubted the existence of God. It wasn't because of my religious upbringing. Growing up, my point of reference for the Almighty was the off-screen character who gave Charlton Heston the Ten Commandments in the movie of the same name. Nor was my belief forged by deep intellectual curiosity. I was content not questioning how trees made apples, where ideas came from, and why people in Australia don't fall off the planet (yes, "gravity" — but why does gravity work?). I was told I had "*The God Gene*." I guess like detached earlobes and being able to curl my tongue, I was born with a predisposition to believe in a Higher Power. Since I wasn't born with the "tall gene" or the "athletic gene," I was happy that my DNA at least had *this*.

One would think having a genetic predisposition to believe in God would lead me to explore my deeper purpose. But one would be wrong. I saw the Creator of the Universe like the Wizard of Oz — to be approached with fear and trepidation and only for my most important needs. In fifth grade, I asked God to make the new girl like me. Some 13 years later, I returned to ask to get hired as a writer for a TV show called "Blue Skies." For the record, I went one for two — it was rumored Becky Goldberg *did* in fact think I was cute, but I did not get an offer on "Blue Skies." In God's infinite wisdom, the Almighty instead put me on a new show called "Friends."

Then I met my wife. Unlike me, Shawni was spiritual and saw God not as a rich, fickle uncle, but as a Loving Father. (My wife choosing to marry me is reason enough to believe in God, but I digress.) One weekend, we went to a seminar by an organization called *Arachim*, which offered "proof " of God. Over the course of three days, we heard lectures from rabbis, scientists, and various experts showing countless examples of God's handiwork, from the miracle of two cells merging to create a person, to, yes, how a seemingly dead sliver of wood is pre-programmed to decompose and be reborn into a tree that makes apples. Perhaps the One who programmed the seed gave me this God gene? Perhaps, behind it all, God has a Larger Plan.

On the other hand, in an infinite universe, couldn't there be one planet where people and apples can evolve without being part of a Larger Plan? Is there a role for randomness? I think not. As the Watchmaker Analogy goes, if you found a pocket watch in the desert, you wouldn't assume it was formed by millennia of randomly blowing sands — you'd assume it was created. How much more so for beings as complicated as people?

So how do I find my deeper purpose? Turns out, God put it in a Book and gave it to Moses — in front of three million people so no one would question God's existence. In fact, they made a movie about it... starring Charlton Heston.