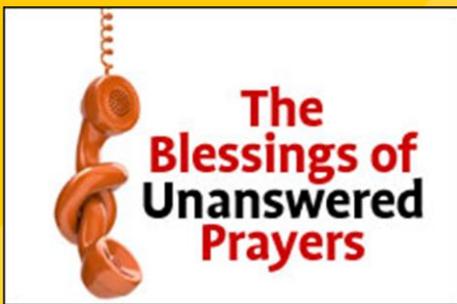


PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



The Blessings of Unanswered Prayers

Is there a prayer expiration date? Was breathing a passing grade?

by [Lauren Bottner](#)

I have been prayed for more times than I know. I was unaware of the words being spoken, prayers offered, the fervent pleas for my recovery from an eating disorder, for courage to fight one more time for health, passionate petitions for my life. There were circles of strangers who gathered to recite Psalms on my behalf. Rabbis in Israel who murmured my name as they bowed at the Western Wall. My Hebrew name, Dafna Ariel bat Miriam appearing on the list of members in need of healing. There were forwarded emails and urgent calls wrapped around the globe as a community of Jews united in their efforts to save a child.

I tried everything else first. I went to doctors, to therapists, to friends, to treatment centers. I tried pills, meditation, yoga, and hospitals. I read books and asked questions, consulted experts who promised to fix. I looked everywhere else first because prayer didn't cross my mind. For me, prayer was for Saturday mornings and lighting the shabbos candles, but as a method for healing? It seemed like a waste of time.

I had no idea where to start, how to uncover holiness, or even if I really believed my appeals would be heard.

I was partly to blame for the disconnect I had with prayer. There is a difference between forming words while bowing at the appropriate moment and meaningful prayer. I could read Hebrew but I didn't understand a word. Reading the translations left me indifferent, dark shadows versus flames of being heard or strength located to hold me upright. I had no idea where to start, how to uncover holiness, or even if I really believed my appeals would be heard. But like so many who wander the midnight streets, I was willing to try.

So, I asked, and I received. I gathered pages of prayers written by family, friends, those I loved, and those that loved them. I sifted through words of healing, painful petitions and knee-bended supplications, generous donations of soul anchoring me to this world. I was the beneficiary of faithful strangers, pleas recited in circles, songs sung for life.

So how do you measure success? Is there a prayer expiration date? Was breathing a passing grade? Does the fact that prayers for my life were once again being circulated mean that earlier prayers didn't work, went unanswered? Or is it possible that the response can be discovered in the help offered, shoulders rested upon, tears cried? Is it possible that the earlier prayers I sought were answered with the prayer circles that came later? That the result is found in still being alive? Are you willing to give all of the credit to experts and medication and therapy? Will you praise God as the healer of the sick? Is the answer somewhere in between?

And for whom were the prayers? I can close my eyes and beg for what I think I need or for your health or her sanity, but I am too small to see the ripples. The answer that I really require might have nothing to do with my friend and everything to do with my connection with the Holy, my connection with my soul. Maybe my pleas are answered by the arms that carry me when I tire, by the friends who listen to worries, by family who show up even if I am absent. Perhaps the prayers of years ago were answered as balm for the praying, back door answers bolstering those who bore the burden of fear.

I cannot understand the power of prayer and I cannot judge the answers. I do not question the whys of my journey or demand explanations for pain. As a single leaf, I am blind to the magnificence of my oak tree. I do not know for whom or how or why. I do not comprehend the power of voices rising together, or the potency of ancient words to cure. I can't convince you with remote prayer statistics or research study data. But I do believe. And perhaps the prayers were answered in this: I finally found my own words. I found my own prayers.

There are times my words become hollow letters strung together. But I show up anyway and say a prayer of thanks.

I learned how to lean on ancient blessings and communal words. I learned how to locate the holiness in the spaces between, and how to read the verses of the heart. I practice caring less about specific

words and more about the quest for connection, the desire for the holy. It is in the praying I find God, that I find myself. I learned that hugs are blessings and hands are answers. I found the sanctity in laughter and the holiness in family.

I still don't know how prayer works or when my prayers will be answered. I don't always know what I need or for whom to pray. There are times my words become rote, hollow letters strung together, and times when I doubt. But I show up anyway and each morning I say a prayer of thanks. I pick up my fork and savor the joys. Thank you for blessing me with unanswered prayers. Thank you for not giving me what I asked for as I begged for an ending. Thank you for responding to the plea behind my words, for knowing the answer I needed was resilient love instead of a burial plot.

Thank you for blessing me with unanswered prayers. Thank you for life.