

OMG! Oh My God! Is typically how we hear the name of God invoked in the 21st century. I hear from many of you that a dialogue with God is not part of your normal activities. It's typically when tragedy strikes or sickness surrounds us that people seek out connection with a higher power. This is true for so many people.

The other day Morty, who has been out of work in Sonoma county for months now, was on his way to a very promising job interview. He arrived early, but to his dismay could not find a free parking spot, after circling a few times he grew impatient knowing he was very close to being late. He thought to himself, God if you help me out with a free parking space, I will attend High Holy Days this year... another couple of circles, there wasn't a spot in sight. He upped the ante. God if you help me out with a free parking space, I will come regularly to services, and make sure my kid gets to religious school... no space. God if you help me out with a parking space I will attend HHD services, get my kid to RS on time and make a donation. Just then he turned the corner in the lot, and someone was backing out. Never mind God- I found one on my own.

This struggle between human's role in the universe and God's role in the universe can be described in a multitude of different ways. So why are we actually gathered here tonight, to ring in the Jewish New Year? Why are we not popping champagne bottles kissing each other rather than congregating to pray together? What's the connection between an apple that drops and one that is dipped in honey.

I think the connection has to do with a famous quote found in our Shabbat prayer books,
Pray as if everything depended on God.
Act as if everything depended on you.
Every time during Shabbat when we arrive at this point in the service I am struck with the profound wisdom of this quote. It

is strategically placed right before the crescendo, in our service where we face Jerusalem and pray through the Amida, the standing prayer, the most central important prayer in any service. The Amida is traditionally recited three times a day it embodies aspirations of both the community and its individual members.

Pray as if everything depended on God.

Act as if everything depended on you.

I love the duality of this phrase. It doesn't let you off the hook. It doesn't say your yotze (the box is checked, your totally good, its our Hebrew word meaning "you have doen what is required") if you simply pray with all your heart and soul. And it doesn't say that your yotze, if you live every day as a completely righteous person. It's "This and." Many of us would like to focus on one of these aspects rather than the other... I want you to focus, stretch yourself to try BOTH!

Pray as if everything depended on God.

Act as if everything depended on you.

Prayer is much more abstract, it is filled with intention and there for it is completely unenforceable. Elana Stein Hain, a senior fellow at the Hartman institute explains its impossible for anyone to know what your kavannah is , your intention in prayer. It's actually always impossible for others to know someone's intention. Have you ever been sitting in a meeting with someone, you think is right there with you only to realize that they are deep in thought about something else.

So tonight we are gathered to hear the sound of the Shofar. When you hear the shofar does it sound like a sad cry, raise your hand....triumphant horn, an alarm clock, end of

school bell, siren of alarm, baby crying... raise your hand. Elana explains this shofar is a Jewish ritual, but this ritual is an ambiguous performance in the public sphere. Therefore it is unenforceable to tell people how to think/pray during the ritual (even though some prayer books tell you what you should have in mind when hearing the shofar) Remember the commandment around the Shofar is to “Hear” the sound. No one can actually determine if you fulfill this commandment.

Ritual as well as prayer is ambiguous. No one owns what it means. We don't actually know if it's real. Standing at the kotel... is that real, standing in prayer and imagining myself before god, I don't know if that is real. At Passover we pray by retelling the exodus story, imagining ourselves as if we left Egypt. I would argue that over and over we perform rituals we don't understand the meaning behind. Rabbi George and I included!

Pray as if everything depended on God.
Act as if everything depended on you.

If we walked around each day acting as if everything depended on us. What would be doing? Would your Monday look the same if you knew the weight of the world was on your shoulders? I imagine if we held the keys to the entire food supply there would be less hungry people. How can we take this phrase to heart? What can we DO in the coming year to act as if everything depended on you.

We are the sustainers, for most of us, we inherited a world that was in a much better place than ever before. We are inherently lucky, we have been served on a silver platter and now it is our turn to give! If we look at the Jewish community we grew up in, (I am speaking to those my age and 25 years

older) we saw a Jewish community with a ton of infrastructure. Numerous Jewish agencies, and deep roots into the American society. We also grew up having a thriving progressive Judaism that shared many of our values.

But now we are the grownups. This is a famous phrase shared by Dianne Smith a long time CST congregant, and past board president. I personally find this phrase frightening. If I am a grownup, then the future of the Jewish people and community rests on my shoulders. How can I make a difference? I am worried about bills and commitments, and the expense of sending my kids to college. So being an adult scares me. But I realize there is no one else to sustain the Jewish community I value so deeply. I have a unique opportunity to pay it forward, to stand with my ancestors who came before me and to make a difference. Right now we need to act as if everything depends on us... because it does!

We must act now! We must fight for social justice, we must work each day to repair the world through tikkun olam, we must put our hands, and feet, and energy into sustaining the Jewish community that we so deeply love. It does not rest solely on the older generation's shoulders... its up to each of us. Most non-profit organizations today are struggling. The younger generations for a myriad of reasons are not giving in the same ways they have in the past. Synagogues and Jewish communities across the country are struggling. Its up to you this year. How will you Act in the coming year?

Pray as if everything depended on God.
Act as if everything depended on you.

So as we are sitting here tonight entering into the ten days of Awe, why are we gathered in prayer? No matter what our intentions, especially since no one can evaluate another's

intentions we are here starting the New Year in the Act of prayer.

Prayer is a ritual, a state of mind, which interacts with how we act tonight and through the year. The bridge between praying and acting is a sense of mindfulness. Through prayer we are taking a moment to tell ourselves what it is we want and need. Through prayer we look inward and outward to clarify our hopes and expectations. As we stand together for the Amidah the crescendo of our Evening Rosh Hashanah service, let us think about how we can truly Pray as if everything depended on God, AND Act as if everything depended on you. Please rise.