

Why Prayer Matters to Me.

I've been thinking a lot about why prayer matters so much to me. Is it the direct connection I think I have with God? Is it the nurturing of my soul that happens when I'm deep in prayer? Or is it the comforting feeling that I get when starting my day by reciting the Shema? I'm not sure I have the answer, but what I do know is that prayer is important to me.

I cherish the time I set aside for prayer almost every morning. I try to close out the noise around me and concentrate on connecting with God through prayer. To be totally transparent with you, it's a rare morning that I come close to feeling truly connected to God. Most mornings I go through my prayers with minimal thought until it's time to pray for those in need of healing. That's when I pause and think about those who may appreciate my prayers, whether or not they know that I'm praying for them.

As some of you know, I was praying hard for my friend Jim Parke over the past 18 months. He was the godfather of buildOn and without him buildOn would, most likely, not exist. Jim was battling stage four lung cancer and was winning the battle. I honestly thought my prayers were helping Jim with his battle. Unfortunately, I was wrong. Jim passed away in the early spring and I've wondered ever since then if my prayers helped Jim or not. While I'll never know if they helped Jim, I do know that they helped me feel like I was doing something to help him. Maybe that was selfish. I don't know.

What I do know is that prayer is becoming more important to me every day. I still carry the Union Prayer Book that I received during my Bar Mitzvah with me when I travel. It's a bit tattered but contains one of my favorite prayers which I recite before going into meditation. In part it reads, "As a child yields itself to loving arms, I yield myself to Thee, asking for nothing, complaining about nothing. What if my labor is hard, what if my lot is humble, what if my dreams turn into futile tears, if only there is the peace of Thy nearness in my heart... How healing and strengthening is this communion with Thee, O God! If only I could always abide in it. But I must go forth..."

I've shared this prayer with my Muslim colleagues at buildOn while praying with them in Mali, West Africa. We've used prayer as a way of bringing us together. We've talked about why prayer is important to each of us and how it helps unite us behind our mission. Some of my most powerful prayer experiences have happened in Mali while in a remote village helping to build a school.

Will these prayers ever be answered? I'm not sure. What's important is that prayer matters to me. Adonai S'fatai Tiftach-open my lips, precious God, so that I can speak with You again.

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