

PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



Ultrasound

Each one of us in that waiting room had something in common: in silence, we awaited an anguished moment of terrifying truth.

by [Esther Bard](#)

Divine Providence has assembled us in an unlikely group this ordinary Wednesday morning. I am among eight men and women, without much in common at first glance, each awaiting a turn in the ultrasound room at Shaarei Tzedek.

And yet, we have everything in common. Each one, in privacy and silence, awaits an anguished moment of terrifying truth.

I am perfectly healthy. I am here completely by mistake. The doctor who sent me for this thing must be some kind of idiot. He likes to order tests, you know the sort. What kind of place is this, anyway? There are no cups in the dispenser near the water fountain, even though my instructions were to drink a cup every half hour before this stupid test.

I will make no complaints and drink as best I can, straight from the fountain.

A lady sitting next to me keeps leaning over and asking me questions. She is anxious to talk about her ailments, but I cannot bear to become her compatriot. I take out a torn book of Psalms, avoiding her eyes. Some of the people waiting are in carelessly closed hospital pajamas, lying on long beds, their faces ashen. They do not try to still their groans.

I feel really sorry for these people, but I'm not supposed to be here. My doctor is one of those alarmists who wants the chart to look complete, and so he ordered this ultrasound. Really, this whole procedure is unnecessary, a big waste of time. Right?

My name has not been called, a short reprieve. I look around. What am I doing here with these people?

For me it is a second Rosh Hashana. I know that I must pray before I am called in, with all my might, before it will be too late. Amidst the abrasive noise my heartfelt prayers have never flowed so freely: *God, You know the innermost secrets of my body. You already know what the ultrasound people have yet to discover. Please please God, let them find nothing. Please please God, let everything be okay.*

Could you please calm down? They probably don't tell you anything right away, no matter what they see. Maximum, they talk about polyps, not tumors, right? And anyway, they tell you nothing, they just give you a computer disc and send you back to the referring doctor. Oh my God. I don't even have a telephone card to call my husband.

A young doctor with a kind face opens the double metal doors. She reads two names from her papers, calling the appointed defendants into the courtroom. My name has not been called, a short reprieve. I look around. What am I doing here with these people?

A man in the waiting room speaks rapid Yiddish into a cell phone. I gather that all his plans for the day have gone awry. Everything is late, a big *balagan*. The man accompanies a little boy about ten years old, who is very pale and walks along with a mobile intravenous apparatus. The boy is not distressed; he is extremely calm.

The young doctor re-emerges from behind the metal doors. This time, she calls my name. My heart almost stops with fear. She beckons me inside. I am gestured into one of the dark little rooms, where only the screen is lit up. Someone tells me to lie down on the bed, and I numbly follow orders. My moment has come, but there is no solemnity or even silence. The doctor who examines me is also talking to several young interns about a different case. Very quickly she completes the test.

"Everything is fine, completely normal," she tells me in accented English. "You have nothing to worry about." She sees that I am too moved to respond. "I wish that everyone who came here had such perfect results, my dear." She adds, more gently, "You're one of the lucky ones."

They tell me to wait outside for 20 minutes till the disc is ready. I cannot bear the tension of the waiting room and I take the elevator to the cafeteria. Amazingly, people are laughing, drinking coffee, buying newspapers, utterly oblivious to the dramas taking place moments away, in a different dimension of time and space, truth and pain. I count my change, overjoyed that I can think again about such simple, beautiful matters as getting home in time to give my daughters lunch and buying a phone card to tell my husband, thank God, everything is okay.

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