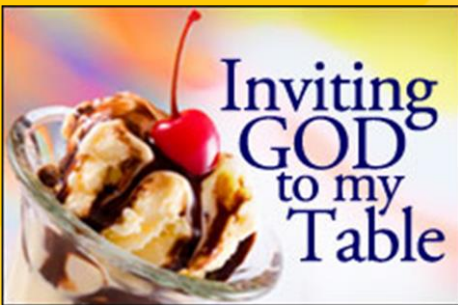


PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



Inviting God to My Table

Hurricane Andrew and my lesson in gratitude.

by [Bonnie Cohen](#)

I remember the words from civil defense broadcasted over the radio: "DON'T PANIC!" Hurricane Andrew was here and there was no time to spare. How was I going to save three young children from a house that was quickly being torn apart from a force that could not be reckoned with? My mind raced for solutions in that dark, cramped bathroom surrounded by others, whom, by the look on their faces, shared my fear.

As dawn approached our Kendall, Texas home, Hurricane Andrew left its scar -- physically and emotionally -- on all of us who huddled together that night. I felt that death released its hold and I was euphoric. I held my loved ones a little tighter that early morning and even a warm glass of scarce water brought a smile to my face. As the song goes, "Please don't let this feeling end" became my mantra and prayer. My sense of gratitude was overwhelming.

As to be expected, that feeling waned as the weeks went by. The warm glass of water that was sufficient days earlier now had to have ice. The closeness that we felt towards each other was now competing with the mound of debris that had to be cleared. The slippery slope proceeded from tepid water all the way to a Sugar Free Grande Soy Latte with two pumps of vanilla. The "what have you done for me lately" mentality towards the Almighty slowly entered my psyche without any warning. My wants eventually became my

needs.

As if God needed to remind me of my prayer, I have been tapped on the shoulder numerous times since that horrific night. As to be expected after each reminder, the mound of debris, which initially challenged the sense of gratitude, was replaced by the nuances of everyday of life. The question remained: was it possible to retain or come close to those feeling of gratitude without too many reminders being sent my way?

THE POWER OF BLESSINGS

During one of my sessions in a weekly Torah class, my rabbi spoke about reciting blessings before one engaged in eating. According to Jewish thought, without first acknowledging the source of all substance, we are taking something that does not really belong to us. He sure had my number. I had become proficient about expressing gratitude to others but my gratitude to the Almighty was usually reserved for Shabbat, Holidays, or unless a reminder was sent my way.

For a moment, I put the brakes on my fast-moving life and really look at what I am being given.

It seemed easy enough -- why not invite God into my life more often? A few softly spoken words before I ate, how difficult was that? How wrong I was. In the initial weeks it seemed that I forgot to say the blessings many more times than I said them.

It has taken several months for it to become almost second nature to express gratitude for what I am given. Just when I thought that this was a piece of cake, a new stumbling block arrived on the scene. When the pangs of hunger were present, God competed with the tuna sandwich on toasted rye bread with the sandwich winning hands down. The blessing was said in record time without any thought or consideration of whom I just invited to my table. Adding a few quiet moments of reflection (*kavannah*) before I say the blessing has helped a great deal. I can see that this particular hurdle is always going to be a work in progress.

Inviting God to my table doesn't come close to those feelings of euphoria after experiencing a life-threatening experience. What it does offer, as with all prayer, is the opportunity to stop, look and listen. For a moment, I put the brakes on my fast-moving life. I am able to really look at what I am being given. And finally, I can listen to my heart and relish in the feeling of gratitude. Even though the feelings of gratitude do wane, another meal, with Gods help, is right around the corner.

So, when I order in a restaurant and my food arrives, I pause, say the blessings, feel gratitude, smile a little longer, and, yet knowing I am only human, can still can ask for that extra glass of ice.