

PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



Prayin' Alive

by [Ayelet](#)

I was ready to write my friend off as dead. I decided to pray for her instead.

My relationships far exceed merely the person whom I befriend. When I get to know someone, generally I become a part of their extended family as well. So my friendship with Shaindy is no exception.

The mother of one of my best friends, Shaindy was once a talent manager who loved to travel and spend nights out on the town listening to good music. A woman who dresses with flair and style, Shaindy is a spunky little woman with a big personality.

Several months ago, I got a call telling me that Shaindy had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Things didn't look good for this 60-something woman who had been smoking two packs a day for the past 45 years.

When I spoke to her on the phone, Shaindy sounded weak and lifeless. I could barely understand her very hoarse voice. I felt helpless, unable to assist a friend in her final moments. There was nothing I could do for her from over 5,000 miles away. I didn't have the funds to send her things to ease her suffering, nor at the time was I able to

to travel to see her. I couldn't take her to doctors or sit by her bedside. My guilt was immense, as I realized that this would be the last time I would ever speak to the friend I had known and loved for so many years.

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Shaindy told me to go kiss the Western Wall for her, and then we said our good-byes. I felt sad at the end of our friendship, and with a heavy heart, I went to go fulfill Shaindy's last request of me.

I then set out to find a way to get the Mourner's Kaddish prayer said for her, since she had no one in her family who would do it on her behalf. Having the Kaddish said -- three times daily in a minyan -- helps to ease the deceased person's transition into the next world. If no family member can fulfill the duty, another may be appointed to say it instead.

I found a friend of mine, Darryl, who would be able to say the Kaddish prayers, and we began to make the arrangements. Suddenly Darryl turned to me angrily and said, "Wait a minute! Why are we planning Kaddish for a woman who is alive?! Go and pray 40 days for her instead!" And with that, he walked away.

Forty Plus Forty

The "40 days" is a known Jewish mystical tradition, whereby a person performs a specific mitzvah -- such as praying at the Western Wall, or refraining from gossip, or learning portions of Torah -- every day for 40 days straight.

Although the person doing the 40 days gets merit for their efforts, the spiritual ramifications can end up benefiting a multitude of people, including the one who inspired it, and sometimes even family members and communities.

I realized that Darryl was right. Rather than planning Shaindy's death, why was I not planning her life?

I began my 40 days for Shaindy, and each week I'd call to see how she was doing. To my surprise, the first 40 days went by and Shaindy was hanging in there, sometimes even feeling better. So, I figured, why not? I did another 40 days, and Shaindy's condition was actually improving dramatically.

Then another 40 days, and another...

Perhaps I should have had more faith in my own prayers, and trust in God that He's out there listening, but each time I sat incredulously, glued to the phone, as Shaindy sounded better and better. The truth is, I expected to one day hear the dreaded news I was anticipating would surely come. But it never happened. Shaindy was recovering, and her diagnosis was no longer the grim report it had once been. Now we were operating on a basis of hope, rather than fear. But even I, who thinks of myself as a having an abundance of faith in God, was shocked by this dramatic turn of events.

Sometimes I find myself praying, whether I use a traditional prayer book or my own words, and although I feel a connection to God and I know that He is listening, I wonder if I can really make a difference.

Imagining the Impossible

In Hebrew, the word for prayer is *L'heet'pallel*. One source of the word comes from the biblical story of the reunion of Jacob and Joseph. After 22 years of separation, Jacob sees his son Joseph, whom he believed to have passed away. Jacob says that he never imagined -- "*pallal*" -- that he would see Joseph alive again.

Through prayer, I can imagine myself taking the energy of our righteousness ancestors, and the strength within me through Torah, and build my character traits. I can believe that I can become a person who can forgive, who can give the benefit of the doubt to others. I can imagine myself as the best me I can be.

So how does all of this imagining change anything in reality?

I envision myself becoming a person who I want to become, and I say the words of prayer to begin placing my process into action. This not only affects my world and my life, but the lives of those around me.

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When I trust in myself and in God that it's possible for me to elevate my life to the next level, I can believe that anything is possible. Anything, including the healing of a very sick friend.

I spoke to Shaindy recently, and it was easy to understand her this time. Her voice is now strong and full of life. She laughed as she told me that her doctor called her a miracle patient. The growth he had found seemed to have suddenly disappeared, with no explanation. She has her old spunk and energy back and can go out and listen to her favorite music -- something that would have seemed impossible only a few months ago.

And every time I see Darryl, I'm sure to give him an update on Shaindy. I am no longer planning anything but her life.

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