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When the Atheist Prays

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Growing up Buddhist, but turning to atheism in high school, prayer was never a big part of my life. I've probably wished upon more stars for things that I wanted to happen than turn to prayer. As a kid, I came to the conclusion that with all of the awful things that happened in life, God (whichever one I was supposed to believe in) didn't exist, and that the action of prayer was something equally foolish, completely superstitious and ultimately useless. As I got older and find myself wrestling over the purpose and the direction of the rest of my life, I find myself dipping my toes into various spiritual groups to find answers, and no matter what deity or practices that are involved, prayer seems to be a reoccurring theme across the board wherever I go; throughout different religions, 12 step programs, and basic spirituality classes, prayer is a cornerstone on faith and the doorway to miracles.

I can't make an argument for the existence of God in a single article, but as a skeptic and a cynic, I find myself at a place in life where I have taken a leap of faith into the belief that there may be something greater out there. Faith in something greater, and the practice of prayer is indeed a powerful thing that I can't seem to totally understand or explain, but the story of my friends Alison and Dan, and their son Evan, has made me a believer.

Evan was born August of 2009, eight weeks premature. 21 weeks into the pregnancy, multiple Doctors told Alison and Dan that their baby was not going to make it full term, and they were advised to terminate the pregnancy. Evan had kidney failure and he was not producing the amniotic fluid necessary to develop his lungs. Even if Evan did manage to last the pregnancy, Doctors told them that he wouldn't survive a day without having a way to breathe on his own. At that time, Evan already had a name and was actively kicking, so, against medical advice, Alison and Dan ultimately made the decision to continue the pregnancy, and simply cherish every moment they had with their child.

From the moment of prognosis, Alison and Dan made the conscious decision to turn over everything that wasn't in their control; there would be no regrets. Alison focused on building her spiritual strength: attending more events at her spiritual center, focusing on specific prayer rituals, and practicing daily meditation; thus freeing her to take actions she hadn't seen before. She assembled a team of medical professionals, from Eastern and Western medicine, and kept busy with many appointments, sometimes up to five times a week. She shared their story with friends and family, and asked others to pray; being placed on prayer chains across the globe, including countries in Europe and Asia. Fearful and powerless, Alison fought to stay present: using the spiritual practices she had learned to keep her focused, it allowed her to enjoy time with her little one in the womb. She read to him, sang to him and talked to him for many hours. Alison still looks back with a smile and says the pregnancy was the best time of her life.

On the day of his birth, Neonatologists told Alison and Dan that in their entire career, they've never seen a child survive Evan's set of circumstances and their newborn would, with 100% certainty, die before the night was over.

Evan was born with a collapsed left lung and malformed right lung; requiring the help of a machine to breathe. Knowing what they'd known the entire pregnancy Alison and Dan cherished every second they had with their son that night; for Alison, it was only a brief moment in the operating room, where she would place her lips on her baby boy, tell him she loved him and was proud of him, then watch as he was rushed away. They focused on gratitude and rigorous prayer that fearful night into the next morning.

During the course of the night, with no medical intervention or explanation, Evan's left lung repaired itself. Three days later he was breathing on his own.

Surviving that night would be only the first of many hurdles Evan will have to encounter in his lifetime. He, with his parents by his side, has spent more than half of his life in the hospital; enduring countless procedures and operations, but you would never know it by looking at him. Evan is a sweet, seemingly healthy little boy, that never stops moving; and he almost always has a smile on his face. Not only is he so full of life, but light and love just seem to spill out of this three year old little guy.

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In March of this year, Alison gave life to Evan a second time by donating her kidney to him. The surgery was full of complications and again, they were offered very little hope for a successful transplant. But with them, even just a little hope was all they needed. Having done this before, the family turned to generating a greater awareness of Evan's fight: creating tee shirts and bracelets to be worn, and an avatar to display on social media platforms, the day of transplant. With tens of thousands of people praying for him that day: in church prayer circles, at places of worship, on Facebook walls and Twitter timelines, via Causes.com; people of different faith, and practices, and even atheists like me that couldn't even comprehend or fully understand prayer, came together and each in our own unique ways prayed for Evan.

And through nothing short of a miracle, it was a success. Sure, thanks to the advancement of modern medicine and procedures today, their family was fortunate enough to get top notch medical care, but there was something special that happened that day. Even the surgical team told Alison and Dan that they felt something different in the room. They couldn't explain it, but knew there was more to this transplant; something bigger than expensive medical equipment and an experienced team of professionals. Highly educated people of science couldn't put it into words the feeling in the air.

I can't explain the magic and the power behind prayer, partially because intellectually, it just doesn't make sense to me; and, I can easily get wrapped up in trying to define what it is I'm praying to. Prayer goes against every rational part of my brain, and it frankly seems quite foolish to think that having faith, and turning to prayer, will magically solve my problems. But from the story of my friends Alison and Dan, I can now understand that this simple spiritual plan of action through prayer allows me to turn to the universe, have gratitude for all that I do have and simply hope for the best. I am able send out good intention and positive thought, and without explanation receive instant relief. I now know that sometimes prayer is all I can do; and in return, I come to a place where I know that whatever happens, no matter what, everything is going to be okay.

For more information how to join Team Incredible and find out more about Evan's story, check out: <http://prayersforevan.org/>

