



Amy Domini

Blown away

Why connecting with community and a higher power is like a deep breath of optimism amid adversity.

RECENTLY, I FOUND IT NECESSARY TO BE PART OF WHAT is euphemistically called “an intervention”: intervening in someone’s life to try to stop self-destructive behavior and get the person on the road to recovery. Sadly, the person involved, someone who is dear to me, drank for two straight days before I figured out that we had a problem. It is remarkable how easy it is for a determined addict to cover their tracks.

But this is not a tale of gloom. My friend is in a program at present. That program will help to allow sobriety to return. It may also assist in building a resolve to conquer the demons that clearly have had dominance of late. After that comes a lifetime of work, and that’s what I have been studying. That’s where the hope comes in.

From what I can find, a key aspect to recovery is acknowledging that there is logic to the universe that is beyond the individual. This logic is often called God, and a lot of recovery programs speak of giving yourself over to God. It is also called science, harmony, your higher power and a good many other things. Apparently, when the addict acknowledges this larger logic, he or she is able to more easily defeat the smaller demon.

This reminded me of a concept I’d recently heard about. Rabbi Arthur Wascow is a man whose religion has led him to a lifetime of fighting for the disempowered. He spoke of YHWH, or Yahweh. The original Hebrew word is never to be pronounced. This is made clear by giving it no vowels, rendering the letters unpronounceable. But it is also a core teaching that the word is too sacred to speak aloud. The rabbi had his audience attempt to sound those letters, YHWH. What came out sounded like blowing.

It is a beautiful concept, that the deity is expressed as breath, which is essential to life. Taking it further, all animals breathe. Actually, plants breathe as well. And then the winds that form as the planet turns sustain the life below. Even the more distant sun and other stars fit into this magical breath. As Rabbi Wascow spoke, I could easily see a single, breathing universality.

Sometimes, in a yoga class, I’ve spent time making that YHWH sound, pacing my own motion, even heartbeat to it. I never had thought of it as universal. That is probably because it is also

centering. It helps the yoga practitioner to deepen their pose as it exercises the lungs. Do all the ancient wisdoms hold the sound of breath as a central concept?

I thought of all this as I thought of my dear one. My first action after the act of getting help had been to put my lips together and blow. Now that I’ve done some reading and some thinking, I wonder if I had known I was uttering a prayer of sorts.

The past few days, I’ve learned a lot about how to help when the treatment ends. It is important that many of us lend support. We

will organize ourselves to take on tasks, perhaps reading groups, perhaps drawing classes, perhaps sailing. We will find means of being present. We know that an addict cannot solve addiction, but can live with it and without the alcohol. We will help make that new life fun. In doing so it will make my life more fun. It will enrich me.

I know that a lot of people, probably most people, have trouble with the concept of a “personal” God, or some deity that deals with you one to one. That’s a part of recovery that doesn’t seem easy to swallow. But the concept of a universal breath seems very easy to give one’s self to. Wikipedia says that YHWH is probably related to a prayer that means “that which creates” (I took out gender).

If addiction recovery has to do with strong community and the embracing of that which creates, then it seems achievable. If it is achievable, then I can breathe. I find myself pursing my lips, blowing softly, feeling the relief and hope. I’m sad for my friend and the relations involved, but passing through this has caused me to do a good deal of thinking. I think it was time.

People sometimes ask why I don’t invest in liquor company stocks. I don’t know, maybe I’m being a bit puritanical. But the pervasiveness of alcohol in our society comes with high human cost. And when you add social pressure, slick advertising and relentless cheerfulness, drinking can lead to addiction and misery. Myself, I’d rather take a deep breath. ■

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