



The God of Whom? Including the Matriarchs in the Amidah

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Dr. Diamond is the author of a chapter on the rabbinic period in the *Schocken Guide to Jewish Books*, and entries in the *Reader's Guide to Judaism* and *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. He is the author of *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2003). The book provides a thorough reassessment of the role that asceticism plays in rabbinic Judaism, suggesting that asceticism is more pervasive than is generally thought. Dr. Diamond has written on prayer, asceticism, and issues of environmental law and ethics. He is currently editing a commentary on *Yerushalmi Pesahim* written by the late Professor Louis Ginzberg, as well as a book on prayer. The prayer volume will address the problem of cognitive dissonance for the contemporary worshipper and will offer readings of traditional liturgy that use midrashic methodology to find meaning and relevance in these prayers for the modern Jew. Dr. Diamond has taught in a variety of settings, including Stern College, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the 92nd Street Y, and several Ramah camps. Dr. Diamond was ordained at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University and received his doctorate in Talmud from JTS.

A. The traditional text of first *berakhah* of the Amidah

<p>Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, the Almighty, the Great, the Powerful, the Awesome, most high Almighty, Who bestows beneficent kindness, Who possesses everything, Who remembers the piety of the Patriarchs, and Who brings a Redeemer to their children's children, for the sake of His Name, with love.</p> <p>Sovereign, Helper, Deliverer and Shield. Blessed are You, Adonai, Shield of Abraham.</p>	<p>ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב האל הגדול הגבור והנורא אל עליון גומל חסדים טובים וקונה הכל וזוכר חסדי אבות ומביא גואל לבני בניהם למען שמו באהבה :</p> <p>מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן: ברוך אתה יהוה מלך אברהם</p>
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B. The Avot formula is a citation of a Scriptural phrase that appears in the context of the Exodus narrative

1. Exodus 3:15

<p>And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: יהוה, the God of your fathers' [house]—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, This My appellation for all eternity.</p>	<p>ויאמר עוד אלהים אל־משה כה־תאמר אל־בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה־שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכוּרִי לְדֹר דָּר:</p>
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2. Exodus 4:5

<p>that they may believe that יהוה, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you.</p>	<p>למען יאמינו כי־נראה אליך יהוה אלהי אבותם אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי יעקב:</p>
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C. The inclusion of the Patriarchs is rooted in the concept of *zekhut Avot*, the merit of the Patriarchs

1. Exodus 2:23-25

<p>A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God.</p> <p>God heard their moaning, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.</p> <p>God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.</p>	<p>וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעֻקוּ וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה:</p> <p>וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־ בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב:</p> <p>וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים:</p>
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2. Jerusalem Talmud, Chapter 1 Halakhah 1

<p>This is what is stated in Scripture:</p> <p>“A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out” (Exodus 2, 23) – because of the adversity that befell them.</p> <p>“God heard their moaning” (loc. cit., v. 24) – because of their cries.</p> <p>“And God remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob” (loc. cit.) – because of the merit of the Patriarchs.</p> <p>“God looked upon the Israelites” (loc. cit., v. 25) – because they repented.</p> <p>“And God took notice of them” (loc. cit.) – because the end time [=the time for liberation] had come.</p>	<p>הדא ה"ד:</p> <p>"ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וימת מלך מצרים ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה ויזעקו" (שמות ב, כג) – מתוך צרה.</p> <p>"וישמע אלהים את נאקתם" (שם כד) – מתוך צווחה.</p> <p>"ויזכור אלהים את בריתו [את אברהם את יצחק ואת יעקב]" (שם) – מתוך זכות אבות.</p> <p>"וירא אלהים את בני ישראל" (שם כה) – מתוך תשובה.</p> <p>"וידע אלהים" (שם) – מתוך הקץ.</p>
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3. Leviticus Rabbah, Ch. 29

<p>So, too, the Holy Blessed One said to Israel: "My children: If you seek to prevail before me [לזכות לפני] in judgment, declare before me the merit of the Patriarchs [זכות אבות] and you will prevail before me in judgment."</p>	<p>כך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל בני אם אתם מבקשים לזכות לפני בדין ביום הזה תהיו מזכירין זכות אבות ואתם זוכין לפני בדין.</p>
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D. The concept of *zekhut Imahot*, the merit of the Matriarchs, also appears in rabbinic literature

1. Song of Songs 2:9

<p>My beloved is like a gazelle Or like a young stag. There he stands behind our wall, Gazing through the window, Peering through the lattice.</p>	<p>דומה דודי לצבי או לעפר האילים הנהגה עומד אחר כתלנו משגיל מן החלונות מציץ מן החרכים:</p>
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2. Song of Songs Rabbah Ch. 2

<p>"Gazing through the window" – this refers to the merit of the Patriarchs; "Peering through the lattice" – this refers to the merit of the Matriarchs.</p>	<p>"משגיל מן החלונות", זו זכות אבות, "מציץ מן החרכים", זו זכות אמהות.</p>
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3. Exodus 12:13

<p>And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will protect you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.</p>	<p>והיה הדם לכם לאת על הבתים אשר אתם שם וראיתי את הדם ופסחתי עליכם ולא יהיה בכם נגף למשחית בהכתי בארץ מצרים:</p>
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4. Song of Songs 2:8

<p>Hark! My beloved! There he comes, Leaping over mountains, Bounding over hills.</p>	<p>קול דודי הנהגה בא מדלג על ההרים מקפץ על-הגבעות:</p>
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5. Midrash Sekhel Tov, Exodus, Ch. 12

ופסחתי עליכם	"ופסחתי עליכם"
<p>R. Josiah says: Do not read ופסחתי, "I will protect you", but rather ופסעתי, "I will step over you". This teaches us that the Word of the Holy One, the Spirit of God, leaped over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. And thus Scripture states: "Leaping over the mountains" (Song of Songs 2, 8) – in the merit of the Patriarchs who are compared the mountains of old [based on a midrashic interpretation of Deuteronomy 33, 15]; "Bounding over hills" (loc. cit.) – in the merit of the Matriarchs, who are compared to the hills immemorial [based on a midrashic interpretation of a different phrase in the same verse in Deuteronomy].</p>	<p>ר' יאשיה אמר אל תקרי ופסחתי אלא ופסעתי, מלמד שהיה דבר הקודש רוח אלהים חיים מדלג על בתי אבותינו במצרים, בזכות האבות והאימהות, וכה"א "מדלג על ההרים" (שה"ש ב ח); על זכות האבות שנמשלו בהררי קדם: "מקפץ על הגבעות" (שם שם). בזכות אימהות שנמשלו בגבעות עולם.</p>

E. The inclusion of the Avot in the first *berakhah* of the Amidah is based on the midrashic tradition that they were the first to pray Shaharit, Minha, and Ma'ariv; according to one tradition, they were the ones who instituted these prayers

1. Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 26b

<p>It was stated: Rabbi Yose, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, said: the prayers [i.e., the Amidot of Shaharit, Minha, and Ma'ariv] were instituted by the Patriarchs. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: the prayers were instituted to correspond to the daily offerings.</p>	<p>איתמר, רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא אמר: תפלות אבות תקנום. רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר: תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום.</p>
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F. Our sages present Hannah as a model for how the Amidah should be prayed

1. Samuel 1:10-17

<p>In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while.</p> <p>And she made this vow: "O LORD of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the LORD for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head."</p> <p>As she kept on praying before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth.</p> <p>Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. Therefore, Eli thought she was drunk.</p> <p>Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?"</p> <p>And Hannah replied, "Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the LORD.</p> <p>Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress."</p> <p>"Then go in peace," said Eli, "and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him."</p>	<p>(י) והיא מרת גפֿשׁ ותתפלל על־יקוק וגבֿלה תבֿכה: (יא) ותדר נֶדֶר ותאמר יקוק צבאות אמ־ראָה תראָהוּ בְעֵינַי אֲמַתְךָ וזכ־תִּנְנִי וְלֹא־תשכַּח אֶת־אֲמַתְךָ וְנִתְּתָה לְאֲמַתְךָ זָרַע אֲנָשִׁים וְנִתְּתִיו לְיִקְוֹק כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו וּמוֹרָה לֹא־יַעֲלֶה עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ: (יב) וְהָיָה כִּי הִרְבֵּתָה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי יִקְוֹק וְעַל־שִׁמְרֵ אֶת־פִּיהָ: (יג) וְחֲנָה הָיָה מִדְּבַרְתָּ עַל־לִבָּהּ רַק שִׁפְתֶיהָ נִעֲוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמַע וַיִּחַשְׁבֶהָ עָלַי לְשִׁכְרָה: (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ עָלַי עַד־מַתִּי תִשְׁתַּכְרִין הַסִּירִי אֶת־יְיָגָה מֵעַל־י: (טו) וַתַּעַן חֲנָה וַתֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲדֹנָי אִשָּׁה קִשְׁתָּ־רוּחַ אֲנִי וַיִּין וְשִׁכַר לֹא שָׁתִיתִי וְאֲשַׁפָּה אֶת־נַפְשִׁי לִפְנֵי יִקְוֹק: (טז) אֶל־תִּתֵּן אֶת־אֲמַתְךָ לִפְנֵי בַת־בְּלִיעַל כִּי־מֵרֵב שִׁחִי וְכַעֲסִי דַבַּרְתִּי עַד־הַנֶּה: (יז) וַיַּעַן עָלַי וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי לְשִׁלוֹם וְאַל־הִי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִתֵּן אֶת־שְׁלַתְךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתָּ מֵעַמּוֹ: </p>
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2. Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 31a

<p>Rav Hamnuna said: How many significant halakhot can be derived from these verses of the prayer of Hannah! As it says: “And Hannah spoke in her heart, only her lips moved and her voice could not be heard, so Eli thought her to be drunk” (I Samuel 1:13). The Gemara elaborates: From that which is stated here: “And Hannah spoke in her heart,” the <i>halakha</i> that one who prays must focus his heart on his prayer is derived. And from that which is stated here: “Only her lips moved,” the <i>halakha</i> that one who prays must enunciate the words with his lips, not only contemplate them in his heart, is derived. From that which is written here: “And her voice could not be heard,” the <i>halakha</i> that one is forbidden to raise his voice in his Amidah prayer as it must be recited silently.</p>	<p>אמר רב המנונא: כמה הלכות גברותא איכא למשמע מהני קראי דחנה. “וְחָנָה הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל לִבָּהּ” — מִכָּאן לְמִתְפַּלֵּל צָרִיף שְׂיִכְוִין לְבוֹ. “רַק שִׁפְתֶיהָ נִעוּת” — מִכָּאן לְמִתְפַּלֵּל שֶׁיִּחְתּוֹךְ בְּשִׁפְתָיו. “וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמַע” — מִכָּאן שְׂאִסוּר לְהִגְבִיחַ קוֹלוֹ בְּתַפְלָתוֹ.</p>
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G. A proposal for an *Imahot* formula to be recited as part of the Amidah; composed by Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Diamond with help from Rabbi Julia Andelman

1. The formula (to be added immediately after the Avot):

<p>[God who] rejuvenates Sarah; responds to Rivkah’s petition; brings comfort to Rachel; and expresses love for Leah.</p>	<p>מעדן שרה נדרש לרבקה מנחם רחל ואוהב לאה</p>
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2. The verses upon which the formula is based

a. Sarah (Genesis 18:10-12)

10 Then one [of the angels] said, "I will return to you next year and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. 12 And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment/be rejuvenated [היתה לי]—with my husband so old?"	(י) ויאמר שוב אשוב אליך כעת חיה והנה בן לשרה אשתך ושרה שמעת פתח האהל והוא אחרי: (יא) ואברהם ושרה זקנים באים בימים חדל להיות לשרה ארח כנשים: (יב) ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר אחרי בלתי היתה לי עדנה ואדני זקן:
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b. Rebecca (Genesis 25:20-23)

19 This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac. 20 Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. 21 Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren; and the Lord responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived. 22 But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of [לדרוש] the Lord, 23 and the Lord answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.	(כ) ויהי יצחק בן ארבעים שנה בקחתו את רבקה בת תואל הארמי מפדן ארם אחות לבן הארמי לו לאשה: (כא) ויעתר יצחק ליקוק לנכח אשתו כי עקרה הוא ויעתר לו ה' ותהר רבקה אשתו: (כב) ויתרצו הבנים בקרבה ותאמר אם כן למה זה אנכי ותלך לדרש את ה': (כג) ויאמר ה' לה שני <גיים> גוים בבטןך ושני לאמים ממעריך פרדו ולאם מלאם יאמץ ורב יעבד צעיר:
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c. Rachel (Jeremiah 31:14-16)

14 Thus said the Lord: A cry is heard in Ramah— Wailing, bitter weeping— Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted For her children, who are gone. 15 Thus said the Lord:	(יד) כה אמר ה' קול ברמה נשמע נהי בכי תמוררים רחל מבכה על בניה מאנה להנחם על בניה כי איננו: (טו) כה אמר ה' מנעי קולך מבכי ועיניך מדמעה כי יש שכר לפעלתך נאם ה' ושובו מארץ אויב: (טז) ויש תקוה לאחריתך נאם ה' ושובו בנים לגבולם:
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<p>Restrain your voice from weeping, Your eyes from shedding tears. For there is a reward for your labor —declares the Lord: They shall return from the enemy’s land. 16 And there is hope for your future —declares the Lord: Your children shall return to their land.</p>	
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d. Leah (Genesis 29:31-35)

<p>31 The Lord saw that Leah was unloved [שנואה], and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. 32 Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben; for she declared, “It means: ‘The Lord has seen my affliction’; it also means: ‘Now my husband will love me [יאהבני].’” 33 She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, “This is because the Lord heard that I was unloved [שנואה] and has given me this one also”; so she named him Simeon. 34 Again she conceived and bore a son and declared, “This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons.” Therefore, he was named Levi. 35 She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, “This time I will praise the Lord.” Therefore, she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.</p>	<p>(לא) וירא יקוק כי שנואה לאה ויפתח את רחמה ורחל עקרה: (לב) ותהר לאה ותלד בן ותקרא שמו ראובן כי אמרה כי ראה יקוק בעניי כי עתה יאהבני אישי: (לג) ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר כי שמע יקוק כי שנואה אנכי ויתן לי גם את זה ותקרא שמו שמעון: (לד) ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר עתה הפעם ילזה אישי אלי כי ילדתי לו שלשה בנים על כן קרא שמו לוי: (לה) ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר הפעם אודה את יקוק על כן קראה שמו יהודה ותעמד מלדת:</p>
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Rabbi David Golinkin's Arguments against Adding the Imahot to the Amidah

1. Maimonides' view is that one may not add or detract from the first and last three blessings at all.
2. With regard to other changes elsewhere in the liturgy, he disallows them although he accepts that after the fact one's prayer is valid.
3. Furthermore, some understand Maimonides as specifically invalidating a prayer, even after the fact, in which the theme of a blessing has been changed, which, it is argued, would be the case if the Matriarchs are added.
4. The blessing as presently constituted uses biblical language; in fact, **אלוקי אברהם, אלוקי יצחק, ואלוקי יעקב** is a biblical phrase that appears twice in Exodus, as are the two phrases that follow, **האל הגדול הגיבור והנורא**, "God who is great, powerful and awesome," and **א-ל עליון**, "God most high", the first uttered by Moses in Deuteronomy and the second part of blessing given to Abraham by Melchizedek in Genesis. It would be inconsistent with the language of the Amidah to create and insert a non-biblical phrase.
5. The verse that is cited is a reference to God's covenant with the Patriarchs. Nowhere in Tanakh is it mentioned that God formed a similar covenant with the Matriarchs.
6. The Conservative prayerbooks do in fact contain changes from the traditional liturgy, but this permitted only if:
 - a. The prayer is patently false. One of his examples is changing the language describing the sacrifices from a hope for their restoration to a description of the past. This is false because "since they did not wish to ask for something contrary to their worldview."
 - b. The prayer is offensive, such as the blessing "who has not made me a woman."

A RESPONSUM CONCERNING THE ADDITION OF THE IMAHOT (MATRIARCHS) TO THE AMIDAH (SILENT DEVOTION) (1)

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Rabbi Prof. By Rabbi David Golinkin

Question: There is a custom today to add the Imahot to the first blessing of the Amidah . Is it permissible to do so according to Jewish law?

Responsum: Before we reply, let us present two of the versions of the Imahot currently in use:

a) *Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* , New York , 1998, p. 3b:

*Barukh attah hashem eloheinu velohei avoteinu,
Elohei Avraham elohei Yitzhak velohei Ya'akov,
Elohei Sarah elohei Rivkah elohei Rachel velohei Leah,
Ha'el hagadol..*

Melekh ozer upoked umoshee'a umagen

Barukh atah hashem magen Avraham upoked Sarah.

b) *Siddur Va'ani Tefilati* , Jerusalem , 1998, p. 68:

*Barukh attah hashem eloheinu velohei avoteinu v'imoteinu,
Elohei Avraham elohei Yitzhak velohei Ya'akov,
Elohei Sarah elohei Rivkah elohei Rachel velohei Leah,
Ha'el hagadol..*

V'zokheir hasdei avot v'imahot

Umeivee ge'ulah l'amo yisrael l'ma'an shemo b'ahavah.

Melekh ozer umoshee'a umagen

Barukh attah hashem magen Avraham v'Sarah.

I) Introduction

One of the slogans of the Conservative movement is "Tradition and Change".⁽²⁾ There is no doubt that some Conservative Jews feel that there is something missing in the Avot blessing (the first blessing of the Amidah) and want to change it by adding mention of the Imahot . This is legitimate, for many changes in Judaism have resulted from the way that people feel.

However, in order to actually change the Amidah , which is the central prayer of the prayer book and of the Jewish people, it is not enough to want to change the wording but it is essential to prove that this is permissible from a halakhic point of view and appropriate from a liturgical and theological point of view. The applicable principle is "hamotzi meihavero alav har'ayah" - "one who demands something from another bears the burden of proof". Authentic liturgical and halakhic changes are made on the basis of halakhic sources and historical precedents. Indeed, we have proven elsewhere that it is permissible for women to be counted in the minyan , serve as shelihot tzibbur , receive aliyot , decide halakhic issues, put on tefillin , and more - all on the basis of halakhic sources and historical precedents.⁽³⁾ A change made on the basis of desire alone is not an authentic halakhic change that is based on tradition and which develops that tradition.

II) The Proponents of the Imahot Versions Presented Above ⁽⁴⁾

The proponents of this change make three central claims with which we would like to respectfully disagree:

1) They claim that some versions of some blessings of the Amidah from the post-talmudic era differ from our version which was accepted at the conclusion of the Geonic period (ca. 1000 c.e.). This is true, but it is not really relevant to our subject. Our question is not "Is it permissible to change a word or an expression in the Amidah ?" but rather "Is it permissible to change the opening and closing formulae of the Avot blessing?"

2) They further assert that the Rabbinical Assembly has already changed certain expressions in the Siddur such as the omission of the words "v'ishei yisrael" ("and the fire offerings of Israel") in the Amidah ; the change of "we will make and offer [sacrifices]" to "they made and offered [sacrifices]" in the Mussaf Amidah ; and the change of the early morning blessings referring to Gentiles, slaves, and women from the negative to the positive. Therefore, it is permissible to change the opening and closing formulae of the Avot blessing. However, as I have written elsewhere, "the question is not whether we may change the siddur , but whether specific changes are permissible, necessary or desirable".⁽⁵⁾ Indeed, it is permissible to change "we will make and offer [sacrifices]" and the early morning blessings on the basis

of halakhic and liturgical precedents, as we shall see below. But such changes do not teach us anything about changing the Avot blessing which must be examined on its own merits.

3) There remains, therefore, only the third claim of the proponents - the halakhic claim. They argue that the proposed change is permitted by Maimonides. This claim will be examined in the next section.

III) Maimonides' Approach to Changes in the Wording of the Prayers

The proponents rely on Maimonides (Laws Concerning Blessings 1:6): "And if one altered the wording [of any blessing], as long as he mentioned God's name and sovereignty and the theme of the blessing, even if not in Hebrew, he has fulfilled his obligation (yatza) ". Indeed, the proponents admit that in the previous law (1:5), Maimonides ruled that "the wording of all the blessings, Ezra and his court enacted them, and it is not appropriate to change them nor to add to one of them nor to detract from one of them, and anyone who changes the wording coined by the Sages in the blessings is simply erring". Moreover, the proponents acknowledge that in the "Laws Concerning the Shema" (1:7) Maimonides expresses an even more adamant position against changes in the wording: "The basic principle is: anyone who changes the wording coined by the Sages in the blessings is mistaken and he must go back and bless [the blessing] as coined".

However, the leniency quoted from the "Laws Concerning Blessings" 1:6 proves nothing with regard to our topic. It is clear from the language used by Rabbi Meir and Rav in the Talmud (Berakhot 40b), by Rav Hai Gaon (Otzar Hageonim to Berakhot, Peirushim, p. 56), by Maimonides himself, and by the Shulhan Arukh (Orah Hayyim 167:10 and 187:1) that one who changes the wording fulfills his obligation (yatza) only after the fact .⁽⁶⁾ But those who wish to add the Imahot to the Amidah wish to do so three times daily ab initio (before the fact), not after the fact, and there is no doubt that Maimonides would have strenuously objected to such a practice.

Furthermore, the proponents did not cite Maimonides' "Laws Concerning Prayer" 1:9: "And the three initial [blessings of the Amidah] and the three concluding [blessings of the Amidah], one may not add to them nor detract from them, nor make any change in them at all" .

Many important commentators have already discussed the internal contradiction between Maimonides' "Laws Concerning Blessings" 1:6 and 1:5 quoted above.⁽⁷⁾ The Vilna Gaon was of the opinion that Maimonides actually changed his mind (Beiur Hagra to Orach Hayyim 68:1).

Rabbi Joseph Caro, on the other hand (Kesef Mishneh to Maimonides ad loc .), says that there is no contradiction between 1:5 and 1:6. In 1:6 which says that one has fulfilled his obligation after the fact "he says the wording of the blessing enacted by the Sages, but he adds or subtracts something, or he uses a paraphrase of their wording. [In such a case], there is no error, but it is not appropriate to do it".

In 1:5 where Maimonides rules that he "is simply erring", he is changing the intent of the blessing, as for example, saying "blessed be the the Place [God] who created this" instead of Hamotzi ("Who brings forth bread from the earth"), and similar cases, "and since he errs, he has not fulfilled his obligation".

In the "Laws Concerning the Shema" (he "is mistaken and he must go back and bless [the blessing] as coined") Maimonides is dealing with one who ended with Barukh, or began in a place where the Sages enacted not to end or not to begin and the like. But in the "Laws Concerning Blessings" (1:6) we are dealing with a case of a change in the blessing in which "he did not use the exact language, but still said the theme of the blessing in different words , and did not change the beginning or the ending".

The proponents claim that the inclusion of the Imahot in the Avot blessing "does not change the theme of the blessing". We shall argue below that it does change the theme of the blessing. But even if one were to argue that it does not, this would only prove that it is permitted to change the wording after the fact and not ab initio .

In summary, the proponents have not quoted a single halakhic authority or a single liturgical precedent which proves that it is permissible to change the opening and closing formulae of the Avot blessing. Moreover, the proposed changes in the beginning and ending of the Avot blessing constitute "a change in the theme" since it attempts to change and rewrite biblical theology.

IV) Changes in the Conclusion of the Avot Blessing

The proposed change in the conclusion of the Avot blessing is unprecedented in the last 2,000 years since the time of the composition of the Amidah .

1) In general, the conclusions of the blessings of the Amidah have not changed in 2,000 years, aside from a few exceptions made in the Talmudic period.⁽⁸⁾

2) The conclusion of the Avot blessing has never changed in any prayer rite in 2,000 years. The formula Magen Avraham appears in the prayer rites of all Jewish communities and in all manuscripts and Genizah fragments examined thus far.⁽⁹⁾

3) The formula Magen Avraham is based on the verse "Do not fear Avram, I am a magen (shield) for you; your reward is very great"(Genesis 15:1).

4) The Amora Resh Lakish who lived in Eretz Yisrael in the middle of the third century already knew and expounded on the traditional beginning and end of this blessing (Pesahim 117b).

5) The wording " magen Avraham upoked Sarah " found in Siddur Sim Shalom is quite surprising, as Rabbi Harlow has already emphasized (p. 23). The word "poked" appears in the Bible ten times and in every case it means "visits the sins" or "visits the guilt" as in the verses "who visits the sins of the parents on the children" (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9). ⁽¹⁰⁾

E) Changes in the Beginning of the Avot Blessing

The proposed change in the beginning of the blessing is also without precedent in the last 2,000 years, Moreover, the proposed change contradicts Biblical theology as well as biblical Hebrew which is the basis of the most of the phrases in Avot and it also attempts to rewrite biblical history.

1) The first blessing of the Amidah is called Avot in five different places in rabbinic literature (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 4:5; Yerushalmi Berakhot, Chapter 4, fol. 8c = Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah, Chapter 4, fol. 59d; Rosh Hashanah 32a; Megillah 17b). Indeed, the name of this blessing reflects the content and purpose of this blessing, as we shall presently see.

2) The first sentence of Avot is not simply biblical Hebrew ; it is a biblical verse (Exodus 3:15) "Our Lord, the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (and cf. Exodus 3:6, 16 for similar phrases). Indeed, the Mekhilta , the tannaitic midrash to Exodus, emphasizes this fact (D'pisha, Parashah 16, ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 60):

And what is the source for saying [in the Amidah] "Blessed are You our Lord, our God and God of our forefathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob"? As it is written: "And God further said to Moses: Thus say to the Children of Israel: Our Lord, the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:15).

3) This opening verse of the Amidah reflects a fundamental belief of the entire Bible - that God made a covenant with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:18 and with Isaac in Genesis 26:3-4. God then said to Jacob in his dream at Bet El (Genesis 28:13-14): "I am the Lord, God of Abraham your father and God of Isaac, the land upon which you are lying, I shall give it to you and your descendants". And so we declare every morning in the Hodu prayer taken from I Chronicles 16:16-17: "Who made a covenant with Abraham and an oath with Isaac, and He established it for Jacob as a statute, for Israel as an eternal covenant". The Sages who wrote the Amidah innovated nothing here. They chose the opening for Avot from Exodus 3:15 and the conclusion from Genesis 15:1 in order to declare the founding fathers of our nation and their covenant with God at the beginning of The Prayer par excellence .

4) On the other hand, the phrase "God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel, and God of Leah" is not biblical Hebrew because God did not make a covenant with the Matriarchs. Indeed, the expression " Imahot" , which appears 76 times in rabbinic literature and the expression "Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah" which appears 15 times in rabbinic literature (mostly in late midrashim) do not appear in the Bible at all. ⁽¹¹⁾ There are those who say that we ought to include the Imahot in the Amidah in the wake of the Sages who created the concept of the Matriarchs but who were unable to include them because of their patriarchal ideology.⁽¹²⁾ However, there is a simpler explanation. The Sages did not include the Matriarchs - a concept which they themselves had created - because Avot deals with the plain meaning of the biblical text and they did not want to rewrite history.

5) Indeed, it is surprising that Conservative Jews, who belong to "the Historical School" as Professors Schechter and Ginzberg called it, are interested in this case in rewriting history. To what can this be compared? To rewriting the Gettysburg Address to read:

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers [and mothers] brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men [and women] are created equal. ⁽¹³⁾

The United States was founded by men and Lincoln meant the fathers of the nation and not the mothers. Anyone who would add the bracketed phrases to his speech would be distorting history and distorting Lincoln's own intent. And if this is true of a text written in 1863, how much the more-so is it true of the Amidah written by our Sages 2,000 years ago and reflecting the theology of the Torah written over 3,000 years ago.

6) If we add Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah to Avot, why not add "Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David" as we do in the Ushpizin in the Sukkah, or "Moses, Aaron, David and Solomon" as we do in the Mee Sheberakh for the sick? Because these fathers were not the founding fathers of our nation. And if we add Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, why not add Bilha and Zilpa, for there are midrashim which state that there were six Matriarchs! ⁽¹⁴⁾ The answer is simple: Avot does not deal with midrash but rather with the plain meaning of the biblical text according to which there were three and only three founding fathers of the Jewish people.

7) Finally, the proponents also relied on an egalitarian Mee Sheberakh as a precedent. Rabbi Harlow has already responded (p. 24) that the Mee Sheberakh is a late custom with no fixed text, ⁽¹⁵⁾ and this does not prove that one may change the text of the Amidah. I would add that traditionally Mee Sheberakh prayers are also not egalitarian - some use the father's name and some use the mother's name. ⁽¹⁶⁾

VI) When May One Change the Formulation of the Statutory Prayers?

In our opinion, it is permissible to change the formulation of the statutory prayers for two reasons, and only if one also has halakhic sources and liturgical precedents to support such a change:

1) In order not to recite something which is patently false: This idea is already found in a well-known Aggadah (Yoma 69b and parallels). Indeed, this is why Conservative prayer books beginning in 1927 changed the wording of Mussaf. They began to say "they made and offered (sacrifices)" in place of "we shall make and offer (sacrifices)", since they did not wish to ask for something contrary to their worldview. Indeed, from a halakhic point of view, this is also permissible, since the halakhic requirement regarding Mussaf is that it should include something new which was not already said in Shaharit (Yerushalmi Berakhot Chapter 4, fol. 8c), and this requirement is also met by the Conservative formulation of Mussaf. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Similarly, Professor Ephraim Elimelech Urbach and Rabbi Hayyim David Halevi changed the wording of Nahem for Tisha B'av after the Six Day War in order to avoid saying something patently false about "the city [of Jerusalem] that is ruined despised and desolate". ⁽¹⁸⁾

2) In order not to actively offend: this was the motivation of Rabbi Morris Silverman in 1946 to change the blessings which thank God "who has not made me a Gentile, a slave and a woman" to thanking God for making us "Israelites, free and in God's image". This change was done on the basis of halakhic authorities who were lenient in the matter, and on the basis of changes made in these blessings in the past. ⁽¹⁹⁾

VII) Is an Egalitarian Liturgical Style the Ideal?

Champions of the Imahot wish to convert the language of our tradition into egalitarian language. But this type of language impoverishes our tradition. According to this logic, we will have to change the "Sabbath Queen" found in Shabbat 119a and elsewhere to the "Sabbath King"; "Come O Bride, Come O Bride" found in Lekha Dodi and also based on Shabbat 119a to "Come O Groom, Come O Groom"; "Hattan Torah" to "Kallat Torah" on Simhat Torah; ⁽²⁰⁾ "Avinu Malkeinu" found in Ta'anit 25b to "Imeinu Malkateinu" ⁽²¹⁾; and the Mee Sheberakh for the sick to the son of the father instead of the mother. ⁽²²⁾ Such changes water down the tradition and make everything in Judaism homogenous and parve. On the contrary, there are expressions in the masculine and expressions in the feminine and this diversity enriches the Jewish tradition.

VIII) The Difference Between Liturgy and Prayer

Rabbis Debra Reed Blank and Harlan Wechsler - both of whom oppose this proposed change - have already explained that there is an enormous difference between liturgy and prayer. Liturgy is a more or less uniform text that expresses the classical ideas of the nation/religion. It is intended to connect us to the past rather than to be relevant and up-to-date. Prayer, on the other hand, is the personal expression of the worshipper which is supposed to change and the Sages set down fixed places for such prayers: in the middle of the Shome'a Tefillah blessing, just prior to the conclusion of each of the middle blessings of the Amidah , at the end of the Amidah , and in Tahanun .⁽²³⁾

Therefore, most of the important national events of the last 2,000 years were not added to the daily Amidah . There is no hint in the Amidah of the Crusades, the Expulsion from Spain , the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648-49, and the Shoah . These things found their way into other parts of the liturgy, but not into the Amidah that is recited three times a day. The Crusades are recalled in Av Harahamim and in piyyutim , other tragedies were memorialized in their own piyyutim , the Babylonian Yeshivot were immortalized in Yekum Purkan , and the State of Israel in the Prayer for the State and in the Mee Sheberakh for IDF soldiers. Could one claim that these are not central events in our people's history? They are not found in the daily Amidah because the Amidah is liturgy that expresses biblical and rabbinic theology and not prayer that expresses the personal needs of every individual worshipper.

IX) Piyyut as an Authentic Solution

I have been impressed by the sincere desire to include the Imahot in the Amidah and to make the Amidah more relevant. The problem is not the goal but rather the method . The method of changing the beginning and ending of the Avot is contrary to halakhah , contrary to our liturgy and contrary to classical theology as explained above, and stems from the fact that the idea apparently originated with Jews who are not well-versed in Jewish law and in Hebrew.⁽²⁴⁾

But there is an authentic way to insert changes and innovations into the Amidah and that is through the use of piyyutim . From the talmudic period onward, liturgical poets continually composed piyyutim in which they expounded the weekly portion and even related to contemporary events.⁽²⁵⁾ This approach was especially popular in the Land of Israel until the end of the Geonic period. The authentic and traditional way to add the Imahot to the Amidah is to compose a short piyyut or several short piyyutim which will be recited in the middle of Avot or in the middle of other blessings of the Amidah .⁽²⁶⁾ In this way, the Imahot can be added without changing the ancient wording of the Amidah itself.

Rabbi Dr. Einat Ramon , the Dean of the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary in Jerusalem , has composed such a piyyut and it is found in an Appendix to this teshuvah .⁽²⁷⁾ I hope that such piyyutim will be adopted by synagogues who wish to incorporate the Imahot into the Amidah in a halakhic and authentic fashion.

David Golinkin
Jerusalem
Rosh Hodesh Adar 5767

Notes

1. This responsum was originally written in Hebrew for the Va'ad Halakhah of the Rabbinical Assembly of Israel on the 19th of Tevet, 5761. This English translation has been thoroughly revised and updated. All brief citations below refer to the Bibliography at the end of the Responsum.
2. See David Golinkin , *Halakhah for Our Time: A Conservative Approach to Jewish Law* , New York , 1991, pp. 3-4.
3. See David Golinkin , *The Status of Women in Jewish Law: Responsa* (Hebrew), The Schechter Institute, Jerusalem , 2001.

4. "The proponents" below refers to the responsum of Rabbi Joel Rembaum.
5. Golinkin, p. 43 and cf. *ibid.* , pp. 41-43.
6. The Mishnah Berurah emphasized this in both places in Orah Hayyim . For the use of yatza as meaning "after the fact", see Golinkin, Rosh Hashanah , p. 300 and Hayyim Yehoshua Kossovsky, *Otzar Leshon Hamishnah* , Volume 2, Jerusalem, 1957, pp. 869-870.
7. See, for example, Ya'akov Blidstein, *Tefilah B'mishnato Hahilkhatit shel Harambam* , Jerusalem , 1994, Chapter 6.
8. For a summary, see Yitzhak Moshe Elbogen, *Hatefilah B'yisrael B'hitpathutah Hahistorit* , Tel Aviv, 1972, pp. 32-47. For the Bonei Yerushalayim blessing, see *ibid.* , pp. 41-42 and for Birkat Kohanim/Sim Shalom see Golinkin, Rosh Hashanah , pp. 69-76.
9. Golinkin, Rosh Hashanah , p. 61, note 1b; Yehezkel Luger, *Tefillat Ha'amidah L'hol Al Pee Hagenizah Hakaheeret* , Jerusalem , 2001, pp. 40-53; and cf. the discussion by Menahem Katz in: Ze'ev Griss et al, eds., *Shefa Tal, Be'er Sheva*, 2004, pp. 28-30.
10. Also see Jeremiah 11:22; 23:2; 29:32; 44:29; 46:25; 50:18.
11. See Kaunfer, p. 95.
12. This is the opinion of Rabbi Ramon, 2001, p. 4 and 2005, pp. 160-161.
13. Roy Basler, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings* , Cleveland and New York , 1946, p. 734.
14. *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 6, 4, 2, ed. Vilna, fols. 33c-d and parallels; *Esther Rabbah* 1:12, ed. Vilna. fol. 4a and parallels. And cf. Kaunfer, p. 99.
15. For 140 different versions of Mee Sheberakh , see a series of five articles which appeared in *Kiryat Sefer* , Vols. 33, 36, 37, 40.

16. See David Golinkin , "The Use of the Matronymic in Prayers for the Sick" in: Aaron Demsky, ed., *These Are the Names* 3 (2002), pp. 59-72.

17. Golinkin, pp. 45-46 and David Golinkin , ed., *The Responsa of Professor Louis Ginzberg* , New York and Jerusalem , 1996, pp. 52-53.

18. Golinkin, pp. 44-45 and cf. Rabbi Hayyim David Halevi, *Aseh Lekha Rav* , Part 2, Nos. 36-39 vs. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, *Yehaveh Da'at* , Part 1, No. 43 who opposes any change in the Nahem prayer. For Prof. Urbach's version, see *Ha'avodah Shebalev* , Jerusalem, 1982, p. 233 and see now Yael Levine Katz, *Tehumin* 21 (5761), pp. 71-90.

19. Golinkin, pp. 42-43 and cf. the recent article by Joseph Tabori, *Kenishta* 1 (2001), pp. 107-138.

20. Golinkin . , p. 47.

21. See the article by Rabbi Marx.

22. See above, note 16.

23. Rabbi Blank, pp. 62-63; Rabbi Wechsler, p. 80. For the places in the Amidah where an individual may add private prayers, see David Golinkin , *Rediscovering the Art of Jewish Prayer* , New York , 1996, pp. 20-21 and the literature cited there in notes 45-47.

24. See for example the *Kol Heneshama* prayer book of the Reconstructionist Movement, Pennsylvania , 1995, p. 91. The Avot blessing is called there " Avot V'Imot " instead of V'imahot !

25. For a survey of the important forms of piyyut , see Hayyim Herman Kieval, *The High Holy Days* , second edition edited by David Golinkin and Monique Susskind Goldberg, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 22-37 and Ezra Fleischer, *Shirat Hakodesh Haivrit B'y'mei Habeinayim* , Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 137 ff. It is true that there were halakhic authorities who opposed piyyutim, but many others allowed them - see Kieval, p. 34; Blidstein (above, note 7); and Ruth Langer, *To Worship God Properly* , Cicinnati, 1998, Chapter 3.

26. A Kerovah is a piyyut which adds a line or lines of poetry to every blessing of the Amidah . See an explanation in Kieval (above, note 25), pp. 32-33, 185-188 and see examples in Ginzei Kaufman , Budapest , 1949, pp. 81-92. If one wanted to compose a Kerovah including the Imahot , one could mention Sarah in the " Al Hazadikim " blessing because according to the

Midrash, Sarah converted the women (Bereishit Rabbah 39:1); Rachel in the " Teka B'shofar Gadol " blessing because she is the Matriarch associated with the Ingathering of the Exiles (Jeremiah 31); Hannah in the "Shome'a Tefillah " blessing because she was the one who prayed to God with great feeling (I Samuel 2:1-10); and so on.

27. Rabbi Ramon's Piyyut is used according to the hazzan's prerogative at Schechter and in every Amidah at the Morristown Jewish Center in Morristown , New Jersey . For a detailed explanation of Rabbi Ramon's approach to this topic, see Ramon, 2005.

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- Kaunfer - Rabbi Alvin Kaunfer, Judaism 44/1 (Winter 1995), pp. 94-103
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- Rembaum - Rabbi Joel Rembaum in: Proceedings of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement 1986-1990 , New York, 2001, pp. 485-490 = David Fine, ed., Responsa 1980-1990 , The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement, New York, 2005, pp. 43-48
- Ross - Tamar Ross in: Nahem Ilan, ed., Ein Tova , 1999, pp. 264-277
- Wechsler - Rabbi Harlan Wechsler, Conservative Judaism 50/1 (Fall 1997), pp. 80-81

Appendix
A Piyyut about the Imahot
for Inclusion in the Avot Blessing
by Rabbi Dr. Einat Ramon

to be inserted after the words "I'ma'an shemo b'ahavah" :

Navo'ah oholei Sarah, Rivka, Rachel v'Leah.

Utehi gemilut hasdeihen lefaneinu b'khol eit u'v'khol sha'ah.

Translation:

Let us enter the tents of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. May their acts of loving-kindness be an example to us at all times.

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