THE AMIDA: First Berakha, ABOT. Acknowledging the God of Our Ancestors

The Amida begins: “Blessed are You, HaShem, our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Yitzchak and God of Ya’akob.”

Before we ask for anything, we make clear who we’re talking to.

OUR GOD AND GOD OF OUR FATHERS

There are two ways to know God.

The first is through our parents. They told us about His miracles, His protection, His love for the people of Israel. We didn’t have to start from zero, the way Abraham did. Even if our parents weren’t especially religious, if they handed us our Jewish identity, we owe them our first idea of the God of Israel. So we say “God of our fathers.”

But that only gets us so far. Each of us has to find our own way to God. That’s why “our God” comes first.

A century and a half ago, before Pasteur, plenty of people still thought life could simply arise from matter. Darwin himself pictured the first life forming on its own in a “warm little pond.” Today we know that even the simplest cell is staggeringly complex. In that sense, we know more about the Creator than our parents did.

The faith we inherit is a starting point, not a finish line.

GOD OF ABRAHAM

Naming the patriarchs tells us something important. We are not

praying to a god of our own making. We are praying to the God they prayed to. And each of them taught us something different about Him.

Abraham discovered three things.

1. God has no body. Maimonides explains that early humanity understood the sun and stars as God's servants. Over time, people started worshipping them instead, and God was forgotten. Abraham brought the invisible God back.

2. God is One. This isn't just arithmetic. Abraham lived under Nimrod, a tyrant who did as he pleased and always had a god to blame it on. One God means one standard of right and wrong, binding on everyone, Nimrod included. That's what made Abraham dangerous. The idea of one God changed ethics more than it changed theology.

3. God cares. The ancient gods fought each other and did favors only for a price. Abraham taught that God watches over us the way a father watches over his child, asking nothing in return. It may have been his most revolutionary idea. And it's why the rest of this berakha isn't about God's unity. It's about how He protects us.

GOD OF YITZCHAK

Yitzchak added something more: God, like a father, also has authority. At the Akeda, Yitzchak was no child. He was a grown man who understood exactly what was happening, and he didn't resist. Abraham discovered God's love. Yitzchak discovered that God is also in charge. That's why we call Him "Abinu Malkenu," our Father, our King. We love a father. We obey a king.

GOD OF YA'AKOB

Deception shadowed Ya'akob's life. Esav deceived him. His mother had him deceive his own father. And Laban deceived him

over and over, as we read this week. Yet Ya’akob became the man of truth.

The prophet remembers him that way:

תִּתֵּ֤ן אֱמֶת֙ לְיַעֲקֹ֔ב חֶ֖סֶד לְאַבְרָהָ֑ם
אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּ֥עְתָּ לַאֲבֹתֵ֖ינוּ מִ֥ימֵי קֶֽדֶם׃

“You will give truth to Ya’akob and kindness to Abraham, as You promised our fathers long ago” (Micah 7:20).

So when we say “God of Abraham, God of Yitzchak and God of Ya’akob,” we’re not reciting a list of names. We’re remembering what each one taught us: God loves us, we owe Him our obedience, and He wants us to pursue justice and truth.