

אבות

First Blessing – “Fathers”

The first prayer of the *Shemoneh Esreh* (Eighteen Benedictions or the Amidah) is called “Avot,” which means “Fathers.” This is because the opening prayer of the Amidah addresses HaShem as “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” This is taken directly from Exodus 3:6, 15, in the story of the Burning Bush. Moses was taking care of the sheep of his father-in-law, Yitro. Suddenly the Angel of Adonai appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush. What was amazing was that even though the bush was on fire, it did not get burned up! So Moses came closer to see what was happening. Then the voice of HaShem came from the burning bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And Moses answered, “I’m here!” Then God said, “take off your sandals, because the ground upon which you are standing is holy.” Then God identified Himself. He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look upon the presence of God. Then God told Moses that He was about to liberate the people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, and that Moses would be the one to lead the people in the exodus.



What is interesting is the way that God identified Himself. He didn’t say “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” but rather “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” repeating the name *Elohim* (God) with each of the names of the Fathers. What does this mean? It emphasizes that God has a personal, covenant relationship with each generation. In every generation God deals directly with those who are His people. So when we pray the first prayer of the Amidah, we must concentrate on the wonderful truth that God is our God in exactly the same way that He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

This opening prayer goes on to describe the greatness of our God: He is Great, Powerful, Awesome, and Almighty. What is more, He acts in covenant faithfulness and Kindness and is Owner of everything. He remembers His covenant promises which He made to the Fathers, promises which are all summed up in bringing a Redeemer for His people. This Redeemer is Yeshua HaMashiach Whose very name means that He will save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21).

This first prayer ends with words of blessing for all that our God is: “King, Helper, Savior, and Shield. Blessed are You, Adonai, Shield of Abraham.” In exactly the same way that God made promises to Abraham and took care of him, so God takes care of us and is our King, Helper, Savior, and Shield. That is why, when we pray this prayer, we bend our knees and lean forward at the beginning and end when we say “Blessed are You.” We do this to show that we are willing to obey God and honor Him as our King.