

RECOMMENDATION OF THE IMAHOT COMMITTEE OF THE LIBRARY MINYAN

The Imahot Committee of the Library Minyan was charged with the responsibility of studying the question of incorporating the names of the Imahot, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah, into the recitation of the first paragraph of the Amidah. During this process, we came to recognize the profound issue lying at the question's core: that both individuals opposed to and in support of this change are passionately and conscientiously concerned about their relationship to tradition.

With that in mind, however, we on the Committee also came to understand that the proposed change is halachically permissible and may be undertaken by the Minyan membership at this time. We have also come to believe that the arguments for inclusion of the Imahot in order to include explicitly the strands of tradition they represent more fully reflects the living reality of men and women in Jewish life today and, thus, is a deeper affirmation of the living relationship of all Jews to the Covenant of Israel. We have also learned anew the meaning of the tradition as a living tradition and remember that the very process of examining such questions is a holy act and blesses the name of HaShem.

Having executed the charge of the Minyan to study the Imahot question we hereby propose to the membership

That the ban upon individual shlichei tzibur (leaders) from including the Imahot in the recitation of the first paragraph of the Amidah be lifted,

That individual shlichei tzibur be permitted to include the Imahot in the recitation of the first paragraph of the Amidah, and

That it be the position of the Minyan that inclusion of the Imahot in the recitation of the first paragraph of the Amidah be encouraged.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION IN REGARD TO LITURGICAL
IMPLEMENTATION OF IMAHOS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION IF ADOPTED

The Imahos Committee is recommending that the names of the four matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel) be included in the first benediction of the Amida (Avos), on either a mandatory or an optional basis during public recitation. This proposal will be determined by a mail ballot. The Executive Committee believes that successful implementation of such a recommendation will depend on uniformity of wording and a readily available text from which participants in the Kahal can read the proper words being chanted. While no specific text adopted by the Library Minyan should necessarily be considered permanent, some specific wording should be adopted prior to implementation of the proposal, if adopted, so as to avoid pandemonium and/or a general inability to participate in communal chanting or singing. Therefore, the Executive Committee strongly recommends that the following motion be adopted:

RESOLVED, that the proposals of the Imahos Committee (if such proposals are adopted) shall become effective upon adoption by the Ritual Committee of a specific liturgy to be used.

It is anticipated that the Ritual Committee will be able to make a recommendation within a period of several weeks after adoption of the basic proposal, if it is adopted.

Summary of Drash Given to the Library Minyan
on Adding the Emahot to Recitation of the Amidah

Hanan Alexander

First, I suggested that both those both for and against this change in the liturgy held their views on the basis of love of Torah and desire to improve Jewish life. In the discussion of the issue therefore, it is important that we recognize we share mutual goals even if we disagree sometimes over the details of how to achieve them.

Second, I pointed out that it is, of course, correct that there have been changes in Jewish liturgy before. The question here is not whether there have been changes but rather what changes have there been and is this particular modification justified.

Following these two introductory remarks I considered four (4) possible reasons why this change might be desirable. Ethical reasons, legal reasons, literary reasons and communal reasons. One argument, I had hear in favor including the names of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah in the Amidah after the names of their husbands was to give appropriate recognition to these great historical Jewish women. This seemed to me misguided for two reasons: 1) Those of us who take a literary approach to understanding the Bible do not necessarily believe that there were ever any historical women by the names of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah to be remembered any more than there were any men named Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. It misconceives the nature of the Bible therefore, to understand these as references to specific people. 2) This having been said, the question that would come to my mind is whether these particular women, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah are in fact, the best, or most appropriate women to be remembered. Indeed, it is not altogether clear from the text that the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob was, in fact, the God worshipped by every one of these women. If we are to identify heroic women in the Bible we may wish to refer to other figures, such as Deborah.

The second ethical reason given why we ought to consider this change is my judgement more compelling. According to this suggestion women who participate in Jewish prayer on a regular basis or find it difficult to discover role models for themselves whether those models are literary or historical within the

liturgy and feel, for that reason, cut out of the conversation between the Jewish people and God. Attempts to include references to women in the liturgy, therefore, help to include women in the process of Jewish communal worship and provide role models that women can use to reflect on their own position within the Jewish community. This, it seems to me, is a very important reason for finding ways to include references to women within the liturgy, though not necessarily a reason for this specific change.

The second set of reasons why we might make such a change have to do with the Jewish legal sources concerning the recitation of the Amidah. A very cursory reading of those sources suggests that during the Misnaic period, in fact, the possibility of changing passages throughout the Amidah was still open but that by the 6th or 7th century, that is to say, by the end of the period during which the Gemorrah was composed, the first three and the last three paragraphs of the Amidah solidified and became canonized in such a way that according to the later authorities change of these six paragraphs was forbidden. Thus, while there is some precedent among the earlier authorities for a change in the first paragraph of the Amidah, the later Talmudic authorities ruled against such a possibility.

Next I considered the literary structure of the first paragraph of the Amidah and pointed out that almost every line in Amidah involves a literary allusion to some specific set of passages within the Bible. And indeed, the statement, "Elohay Avraham, Elohay Yitzchak, v'Elohay Yaakov" appears twice in the Bible in passages in the Book of Exodus having to do with redemption. There is, however, no similar literary allusion to the God of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah anywhere in the Bible. I suggested therefore, that we might want to find a more well-attested literary formula by means of which to give expression to our egalitarian impulses.

Finally, I considered the question of community and argued that the form with which we pray to God is not only an expression of our own relationship with God but also an expression of the community within the Jewish people to which we belong. My concern in this connection was to ask what other communities there are that have made these changes. With whom would we be affiliating ourselves if we chose to pray this way and with what portions of the Jewish people would we be disaffiliating ourselves? I, for one, want my children to be able to walk into any shul and be able to daven. I would like them to be able to recognize the liturgy with which we pray in our synagogue as being used all over the world. I suggest that the way in which we answer this latter question is by submitting query to the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly in order to find out whether they view this as permissible and therefore, within the boundaries, at least, of that relatively significant Jewish

community known as Conservative Judaism.

To sum up, I suggested first that the question for us is not whether change has been made in the past in Jewish liturgy, but rather whether this change is justified. Second, while we may have no ethical obligation to refer to these four Jewish women in particular, we do have an obligation to open up the liturgy in such a way that women can identify with references within the prayer book. Third, I suggested that while there might be support for this specific change among Mishnaic authorities, later Talmudic authorities would frown upon changes in the first paragraph of the Amidah. Fourth, I suggest that there is no literary formula of the form of "the God of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah" and that if we are to follow the style of the liturgy we should look for an appropriate literary formula that is well-attested in biblical or other sources for this purpose. Finally, I suggested that in order for us to remain part of a larger Jewish community we ought not answer this question by ourselves but rather submit a query to the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly to see if they see such a change within the bounds of a larger community.

SUMMARY OF DRASH GIVEN 2/88
BY JOEL GROSSMAN

As Maimondes explains, regardless of sex, we are all commanded to pray, and I pray because I am commanded to do so. In the first paragraph of the Amidah, we do not say G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because the G-d of Abraham is not the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Isaac is not the G-d of Jacob. The G-d Joel Grossman for yesterday is not the G-d Joel Grossman for today because I am changing. Each of us shares characteristics with Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah that are central to our personalities. My wife Fran and I tried unsuccessfully for years to conceive a child before we were blessed with David. During our struggle with infertility, I prayed not to the G-d of Abraham, but to the G-d of Sarah. Abraham had no infertility problem; he could sire a child by his wife's serving woman. Faced with Sarah's problem, I prayed to her G-d just as she did for G-d's pity. We have a daily need to identify with the imahot and learn from the profound relationship each of them had with G-d. We should change the Amidah to recognize our long overdue debt to the imahot.

SUMMARY OF DRASH GIVEN 2/88
BY DEBORAH E. LIPSTADT

The inclusion of the avot has important historical connotations, and the Amidah is among the oldest prayers in the siddur. The inclusion of the imahot in the Amidah lacks important historical connotations. Change to the opening blessing can threaten our link to other Jewish communities around the world; however, it may be time for us to turn and say that we are making this change to transform ourselves, to become aware of the failure of our tradition to tell the story of our mothers, and to say that too often we leave out people who are different, who break ranks, and who do not accept our norms. L'taken olam b'malchut shaddai [To repair the world in vision of heaven] is what we are really all about. If this discussion of inclusion of the imahot in the Amidah makes us think about what our vision of heaven is and how to repair our world with that vision, then irrespective of what we decide, our discussion will truly have been l'shem shamayim.

Summaries of Drashot

Rachel Adler

Liturgy, by its nature, is an evolving form. The tradition has struggled to mediate between the obligation to speak genuinely and truthfully to God and the obligation to regularly perform the ritual of prayer as its language, gestures and rules are communally defined. Truthfulness demands that we mention both matriarchs and patriarchs, since the Genesis narratives teach that God made Him/Her/Self known both to men and to women in the process of forming a people. Truthfulness also requires our learning to address God in feminine as well as masculine language. Since the divine image is reflected in both males and females, exclusively masculine language has the idolatrous implication that maleness essentially characterizes God.

Jonathan Omer-Man

The issue of prayer must be approached holistically, not narrowed to a discussion about the imahot. The two primary modes of prayer are expressive and transpersonal. Expressive prayer focuses upon the needs, feelings, and identity of those praying. Transpersonal prayer is an alignment with what is cosmic and eternal. Transpersonal prayer is mystical and ecstatic. There is something wrong with our prayer in both modes. We thwart transpersonal prayer in our services. Our expressive prayer excludes women. Change must occur, but we must be careful to distinguish between liturgy which we can create out of our expressive selves and liturgy which is timeless and sacred and not to be tampered with.

Jackie Ellenson

Factual accuracy is not essential to prayer. It is as a metaphoric language that prayer points toward ultimate truths. Consequently, we can pray to be gathered from the four corners of the earth while aware that the earth is not flat, but we cannot use prayers which presume the superiority of Jewish males and consequently degrade or exclude others, because they conflict with our deepest moral understandings of what is true. Adding the imahot is a symbolically important first step, but truthfulness demands that we also extend our God-language.

Gail Dorph

Our question needs reframing. We need to be addressing questions such as the nature and meaning of prayer in general and communal prayer in particular and questions such as why do we, who speak English, a language that has a neuter gender, continue to talk about God and people using the pronoun, he. Historically, liturgical change has never been taken lightly, nor put to a town hall type vote. In fact, it has usually signalled the formation of a new movement in Judaism. Is this what we intend? If so, inclusion of the Imahot is not a sufficient change for it is merely cosmetic. There is no doubt that much of liturgical language is patriarchal, inserting the Imahot will not fix that problem. The Siddur is very precious. Before making changes, we must be aware of what we can lose as well as what we hope to gain.

Hanan Alexander

To sum up, I suggested first that the question for us is not whether change has been made in the past in Jewish liturgy, but rather whether this change is justified. Second, while we may have no ethical obligation to refer to these four Jewish women in particular, we do have an obligation to open up the liturgy in such a way that women can identify with references within the prayer book. Third, I suggested that while there might be support for this specific change among Mishnaic authorities, later Talmudic authorities would frown upon changes in the first paragraph of the Amidah. Fourth, I suggest that there is no literary formula of the form of "the God of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah" and that if we are to follow the style of the liturgy we should look for an appropriate literary formula that is well-attested in biblical or other sources for this purpose. Finally, I suggested that in order for us to remain part of a larger Jewish community we ought not answer this question by ourselves but rather submit a query to the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly to see if they see such a change within the bounds of a larger community.

Minyan Monthly Article: Of Matriarchs and Patriarchs.
Rabbi Joel Rembaum

The issue of the addition of the names of the Matriarchs to the first blessing of the *Amidah* has been before the Library Minyan for quite some time. Many learned, thoughtful and thought provoking presentations have been made relating to this subject as the Minyan engaged in a valuable learning experience. The purpose this program of study has been to prepare the Minyan membership to determine what would be the best course of action regarding this liturgical change.

In the course of my *D'rashah* on the history of change in Jewish liturgy, in general, and in the *Amidah*, in particular, I noted that while the basic structures of prayer have remained rather fixed for the past eight centuries or so, variations in the specifics of the prayers are not unknown to our tradition. The Conservative Movement has introduced a number of modifications in the wording of key prayers, some of which are, in fact, far more controversial than the addition of the names of the Matriarchs to the *Ayat* blessing of the *Amidah*. Most striking are the changes introduced in the Musaf services in the Silverman *Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook* and continued in the Harlow *Siddur Sim Shalom*. In these *siddurim* references to the sacrifices in the Temple are expressed in the past tense, rather than the traditional future tense. This subtle change reflects a theological shift of major consequence. No longer do Conservative Jews pray for the restoration of the sacrificial cult in the Temple, a hope that has been part of the Jewish Messianic dream for 1900 years. A reference to the Matriarchs is far less radical an alteration of the liturgy.

I also suggested that there is a position taken by Maimonides in the *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Berakhot*, 1:6 which would allow for modifications in the language of blessings as long as the traditional theme of the blessing were retained. The addition of the names of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah to the *Ayat* blessing would in no way alter the theme of the blessing, since the fulfillment of divine promises to the Matriarchs were also important aspects of the unique covenantal link between God and the Children of Israel. In this regard the addition of the phrase, *U-faged Sarah*, "and remembers Sarah," to the concluding blessing of the *Ayat* prayer would be most appropriate, since this phrase is consistent with the liturgical intent of the *Amidah*, as well as other aspects of our liturgy.

For the reasons cited above, and others, it is my opinion that the

addition of the names of the Matriarchs to the *Ayat* blessing is an appropriate and meaningful change. As *Marah D'artah* of the congregation I find no halakhic justification for disallowing such a modification of the liturgy. It was my feeling, however, that since this was a liturgical development of consequence, especially given the centrality of the *Amidah* in our liturgy, and a new direction in the development of Conservative Jewish liturgy it was appropriate to seek the counsel of the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, the supreme halakhic authority for the Conservative Movement. I prepared a *Sh'eilah*, a halakhic inquiry, regarding this matter. Before I submitted it, however, I spoke to the chair of the Law Committee, Rabbi Joel Roth, and sought his advice as to how best to proceed. I was especially concerned that with the usual backlog of questions faced by the Law Committee a long time would pass before my question would be considered. I also asked his opinion regarding the need to bring the issue to the Law Committee, in the first place.

Rabbi Roth's opinions were most enlightening and helpful. He told me that there were other Conservative congregations that had, in fact, instituted changes similar to the one we are considering. He also felt that a congregational rabbi should feel authorized to function as a *posek*, legal decisor, on such matters. He suggested, however, that I submit the inquiry because liturgical change is an issue that the Law Committee has not dealt with regularly, and it would be to the advantage of the entire Conservative Movement to put the matter of liturgical change on the Committee's agenda. Rabbi Roth assured me that should we decide to include the reference to the Matriarchs in the *Amidah* the Law Committee's response would not necessitate any change in Minyan policy since in such cases the Committee's conclusions function as advice and not as edict.

The hour of decision has arrived! The Library Minyan must now determine if further discussion of the issue is needed or if the matter of the *Imahot* is to be brought up for a vote. As I have indicated, I support such a change, but I do so with a significant caveat. The Library Minyan has always been able to make changes by remaining extremely sensitive to the various theological, spiritual, psychological and esthetic needs and outlooks of its variegated constituency. Worship is a serious matter that touches deep feelings. What makes sense from the perspective of Jewish law or reason may not make sense from the perspective of Jewish emotion. I will find the inclusion of the Matriarchs in the *Amidah* to be spiritually enriching. Others may not. Should the change not be approved by the

Minyan, I will continue to enjoy worshipping in the Minyan. Others may not. The ramifications of such differences must be given serious consideration as a decision is reached.

The Temple Beth Am Library Minyan is like a diamond. A delicately placed "cut" can add to its already radiant beauty. A misplaced "cut" could shatter it into pieces. Great care is needed as we approach the decision that lies before us.

On Eligibility to Vote on the Emahot Issue

As stated elsewhere in these materials, voting on this issue is limited to members of the Library Minyan.

Membership in the Library Minyan requires three things: payment of dues to Temple Beth Am, regular attendance, and service to the Minyan.

The first of these is easy to measure and therefore determines inclusion on the Minyan list, which, in turn, determines who will receive a ballot. The second two criteria are much more difficult. Although regular attendance is defined in the Minyan's bylaws to mean at least twice a month, no one takes roll. Certainly even among the most regular attendees, there are weeks and months when, for various reasons, they do not meet this criterion. Similarly, service to the Minyan is not easily determinable. Not everyone can read Torah, daven, serve in a ritual function, give a drash, be on a committee, or assist with child care at any given time. People who are new to the Minyan may not know the various opportunities that exist. And even those who do serve regularly are entitled to an occasional sabbatical!

Therefore, we have not attempted to limit anyone's participation in the decision on this issue by invoking the second and third criteria.

Nonetheless, we feel it is important to state that the form of the Amidah to be utilized by the Library Minyan is of substantial significance to those who regularly attend services. Acting on the Honor System, the Library Minyan asks those who receive this ballot to respond only if they are strongly committed to the Minyan and express that commitment by attending services regularly and performing some service to the Minyan, or who are planning to make these commitments in the foreseeable future.