**Magen Avraham:**

**The God of our Ancestors**

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| אֲדנָי שפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ:   בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלהֵינוּ וֵאלהֵי אֲבותֵינוּ. אֱלהֵי אַבְרָהָם. אֱלהֵי יִצְחָק. וֵאלהֵי יַעֲקב. הָאֵל הַגָּדול הַגִּבּור וְהַנּורָא אֵל עֶלְיון. גּומֵל חֲסָדִים טובִים. וְקונֵה הַכּל. וְזוכֵר חַסְדֵּי אָבות. וּמֵבִיא גואֵל לִבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמו בְּאַהֲבָה:   מֶלֶךְ עוזֵר וּמושִׁיעַ וּמָגֵן:   בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מָגֵן אַבְרָהָם | Adonai, open my lips so my mouth will declare your praise.  Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, and the God of our ancestors, the God of Avraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The great, mighty and awesome God. God who is supreme. Who acts most piously. Who is the creator of everything. Who remembers the pious acts of our ancestors. And who brings a redeemer to their descendants for the sake of His name, with love.  A king who helps, and saves and protects.  Blessed are You, Adonai, the shield of Abraham. |

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**The Opening Meditation**

The Amidah opens with six words that are not actually part of the Amidah but that were attached to it in a later period by the rabbis. Interestingly, these six words are part of Psalm 51, a psalm recited by David when Natan the prophet came to rebuke him for what David had done with Bathsheba. David asks God to help him approach God in repentance. Indeed, the words which follow are an appropriate introduction to the Amidah: "You do not want me to bring sacrifices; You do not desire burnt offerings. True sacrifice is a contrite spirit; God, You will not despise a contrite and crushed heart." God does not actually want these specific words. What God wants, and what we need to give, is the proper feeling, the emotions, that are meant to accompany these prayers.

We open the Amidah by reminding ourselves that we are approaching God with contriteness, asking for forgiveness, asking for mercy. We are not perfect human beings; we have made mistakes; even King David made some mistakes. We hope that through our recitation of the Amidah we can begin to mend our lives.

Two note of instruction:

* These six words are part of the Amidah. The steps taken forward before the Amidah should be taken before and not while these words are being recited.
* One should be careful not to talk between "*goel yisrael*" the conclusion of the berakhah right before the Amidah and these words. Any announcements should be made before that final berakhah is recited, including telling people what pages the Amidah are on. Indeed, it is best to make as many of the announcements as possible before the "barchu."

**Our God and the God of Our Ancestors, the God of Avraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob**

The words, "The God of Avraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" are taken from Shemot 3:6 (and elsewhere in that chapter). After telling Moses to remove his shoes, the first thing that God says to Moses is "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Avraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

* Why are these God's first words to Moses?
* Why do you think the authors of the Amidah chose to begin the Amidah by first referring to God as "our God" and then as "God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob?
* Why not just say "God of our ancestors"? Why do we need to repeat, God of Avraham, etc? Why not "God of Avraham, Isaac and Jacob"?
* How can you make the God of your ancestors into your God?

**The Imahot (Matriarchs)**

The original blessing mentions only the "patriarchs" the "fathers" of the Jewish people. The "matriarchs" the mothers were not traditionally part of this prayer.

In recent years some Conservative synagogues and institutions have begun to include a mention of the "imahot" in the Amidah. Some rabbis have said that this inclusion is legitimate and even necessary and there have been other voices in the Conservative movement who have said that the tefillot should not be changed, at least not in this way.

At Camp Ramah in New England we have instituted a compromise. Sometimes we say the imahot and sometimes we do not. In your personal prayers you are free to choose to do as you wish. If you wish to always include the imahot, then you should add them to yourselves on days when the rest of the kehillah is not saying them. If you do not wish to say them ever, then you should just not recite those words when the kehillah recites them. In this way the kehillah can act in compromise but each person can act according to their beliefs.

Below are some of the claims as to why we should include them and why we should not:

**Why should we say the Imahot?**

1. Changes in the wording of the Amidah have occurred throughout history, even before the modern period. There have even been changes that have reflected different ideologies. Therefore, it is legitimate to change the wording of the Amidah. Furthermore, the addition of the imahot is not a "major" change in the blessing, one which changes the entire subject.
2. The imahot, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, are important figures in Bereshit. They are not "just" the wives of the patriarchs or the mothers of their children. They are significant factors in the unfolding of God's covenant.
3. We live in a world in which women are considered equal to men. Our prayer should reflect that world. Women should serve as religious role models not just to other women, but to men as well.

**Why should we not say the Imahot?**

1. While change in the Amidah has occurred and is occasionally legitimate, the addition of the imahot changes parts of the berakhah that may not be changed, specifically the conclusion "magen Avraham" and the opening words of the berakhah. Furthermore, it changes the intent of the berakhah which is not allowed.
2. Nowhere does it say that God made a covenant with the "imahot." God does make covenants with Avraham, Isaac and Jacob but the stories of Bereshit never portray God as making a covenant with their wives. While we may live in an egalitarian society, the society in the Torah was not. And if we were to include the imahot because they are important figures, why not include David, Joseph, Aaron, Solomon? What about Bilhah and Zilpah?
3. If one wishes to acknowledge the role of women in the Bible and to make more frequent mention of them in the siddur, the Amidah is not the correct place to do so. The Amidah is fixed liturgy—these exact words must be recited. "Prayer" is something that comes from one's heart and therefore one is free to add in prayers, or to recite religious poetry, when one's heart desires.