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Mentioning The Matriarchs In Shemoneh Esrei

After we say **אלוקינו** (Our G-d), we say **ואלוקי אבותינו** "And the G-d of our forefathers." First we say that Hashem is our G-d, and then we mention that Hashem is the G-d of our Avos as well. The first term **אלוקינו** implies the universal acknowledgment that Hashem is G-d, and it implies that Hashem is G-d of all the nations of the world. The second term **ואלוקי אבותינו** is more specific, in which we declare that Hashem is the G-d of our forefathers.

Shouldn't we first say that Hashem is the G-d our forefathers? Why don't we first say **אלוקי אבותינו** and then **אלוקינו**? The whole reason that Hashem is "Our G-d" is because we are His nation, through our forefathers. If so, we should first say how Hashem is G-d of our forefathers, and only after that we should say that he is our G-d. So why do we say it the other way around?

Another question is that after we say **ואלוקי אבותינו** we say that Hashem is G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchok, and G-d of Yaakov. Wasn't this already contained in the words **ואלוקי אבותינו**? Why we must get specific and say that Hashem is G-d over each of our three forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, when we just said that He is the G-d of our forefathers?

The answer that the commentaries give is that the word **אבותינו** does not mean our "forefathers", but that it can mean both our patriarchs and our matriarchs. Thus, **ואלוקי אבותינו** includes both our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, as well as our matriarchs - Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel and Leah.

The fact that we make specific mention of the Matriarchs in *Shemoneh Esrei* is a novelty; let us explain why.

Our Avos were the ones who established the three *tefillos*.^[1] [1] The *Imahos* (our Matriarchs) did not establish the *tefillos*. If so, why do we include the *Imahos* in *Shemoneh Esrei* (in the words **אלוקי אבותינו**, as we explained from the commentators), when the *Imahos* had nothing to do with the *Tefillos*? [The answer lays in the following].

Tefillah Can Change Reality

We know that Chazal say that Leah was originally destined to marry Esav, but she cried so much in prayer to Hashem that she merited to marry Yaakov instead. The actual soul-mate of Leah was really Esav! Leah did not only daven that she should get a good *shidduch*. She *davened* so that she could change the entire course of her destiny. She changed her very essence!

From Leah's *davening*, we learn an awesome lesson, a great revelation about what *Tefillah* can do. Leah was really destined for Esav. In those days, everyone said, "The older one [Leah] will go to the older one [Esav], and the younger one [Rachel] will go to the younger one [Yaakov]." But because Leah *davened* so much, she merited to alter her very destiny, through *Tefillah*. She revealed a whole new aspect through *Tefillah*: that through *Tefillah*, a person can revolutionize reality and change destinies.

Two Ways of Recognizing Hashem

In the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we mention two different ways of how to recognize Hashem. One is through **אלוקינו** and the other way is through **ואלוקי אבותינו**. Avraham Avinu could not say **אלוקינו** because he did not come from any of the forefathers; his father was the wicked Terach. He had no real "father". He achieved a recognition of Hashem even without having any one to father him, and all of us in our souls have a power of "Avraham Avinu" within, which can recognize Hashem even without having a father to teach us.

The other kind of recognition of Hashem is expressed through **ואלוקי אבותינו** - when we express how Hashem is the G-d of our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. Yitzchok Avinu was the first to be able to say **ואלוקי אבותינו** because he had Avraham Avinu as his father, and thus the recognition of Hashem came due to his father's upbringing.

So there are two forms of recognizing Hashem. One kind of person recognizes Hashem because he already has a source from which to recognize Hashem; this is like the recognition of Yitzchok Avinu, who was able to recognize Hashem because he was raised by Avraham. When a person learns Torah in-depth, he can come to deepen his recognition of Hashem from his learning, and this is the recognition we express in **ואלוקי אבותינו**.

But there is another kind of recognition of Hashem: even when a person has no previous source from which to recognize Hashem from, even when he is surrounded by darkness, he can still find the inner strength to recognize Hashem. This is the kind of recognition which Avraham revealed; he had no father to show it to him. He recognized Hashem even though he came from unsavory beginnings. This is the kind of recognition which is expressed in **אלוקינו** - that even though Avraham didn't have any forefathers of his own to guide him, he was still able to recognize Hashem.

In actuality, we need both forms of recognition - we need both the understandings of **אלוקינו** and **ואלוקי אבותינו**. Esav had a great father Yitzchok; he was able to say **ואלוקי אבותינו** which means that he had the recognition of Hashem based on his upbringing. But he was missing the recognition of **אלוקינו**. He was trained to recognize Hashem from having a good upbringing, but he did not know how to recognize Hashem amidst darkness. He was like a *Yisrael mumar*, "an apostate Jew".

At the giving of the Torah, the recognition of **אלוקינו** was revealed to the Jewish people, and only the Jewish people possess it.

What We Inherited From Our Avos and From Our Imahos

Our *emunah* - our recognition of Hashem - was implanted in us through Avraham Avinu. But from Leah *Imeinu*, we received a different kind of inheritance. Leah was the one who truly revealed the power of *Tefillah*, that through *Tefillah*, one can change her current reality. Through *Tefillah*, she annexed herself to become a fourth Matriarch, to become one of those who could say **ואלוקי אבותינו**. In a way, Leah resembled Avraham Avinu, who came to recognize Hashem entirely from within himself, as Chazal say, "Avraham Avinu learned Torah from himself."

The novelty concept which Leah introduced to the world - altering your current reality - was revealed

as well to the other nations of the world. A non-Jew can convert and become a completely new being, a whole new reality, because of what Leah introduced onto the world – the power to alter one’s current situation. A convert goes from being a non-Jew to become a Jew, to change your very reality, which was what Leah revealed.

This concept has the following ramifications.

Repairing Our Internal Evil of the Eirav Rav Through Revealing G-dliness

When the Jewish people left Egypt, the “*Eirev Rav*” came with them. Whenever the redemption is imminent, the *Eirev Rav* is always present.

There is a part in us which is affected by non-Jewish influences, a part in us which is not yet rectified. We all have a part in us which was inherited from our Avos, but we also have a part in us which contains *Eirev Rav*’s influences.

Even Avraham *Avinu* was fathered by the wicked Terach, which implies that there are traces of evil in the Jewish people, which we need to get rid of. In order to rectify the evil within our soul, we need to reveal G-dliness and let it fill our entire being, and let it penetrate into the evil and unrefined parts of the soul.

How? Through revealing Hashem from within ourselves, just like Avraham *Avinu* recognized Hashem from within himself! This is the power that can dispel all our inner evil.

The *Eirev Rav* clings to our soul – how? All of us have times in which we have doubts in our *emunah*. That is all due to the *Eirev Rav*’s influence. Sometimes our soul doesn’t accept *emunah* as an answer - this is the *Eirev Rav*’s influence on the soul.

How do we rectify it? Through revealing our power of “Avraham *Avinu*” within us. Avraham *Avinu* revealed G-dliness in the world by converting those who did not believe. So too, we can convert our own, personal “non-Jew” within us, by revealing G-dliness in ourselves.

In the future all will know about Hashem, but as for now, each person has a personal avodah to rid of his personal “*Eirev Rav*”. That part of the soul can be rectified within oneself, when one lets the light of *emunah* shine upon his entire soul. [Soon, we will explain how].

When one reveals this power in his soul, he essentially reveals “Leah *Imeinu*” in the soul. Leah avoided Esav. This hints to the fact that when one uses “Leah *Imeinu*” within his soul, he ducks Esav - the “non-Jew” within the soul.

To illustrate, we have a windpipe and an esophagus. Through our windpipe we breathe, and through our esophagus we consume food and nourish our body. These are our two sources of vitality. One kind of vitality we receive from our outside, and another kind of vitality we receive from within ourselves. This applies to our spirituality as follows. Our outer vitality comes from the *mesorah* (tradition) of *emunah* which we received from our forefathers, passed down from generation to generation. Our inner vitality comes from *emunah* that we reach from within ourselves.

If we have thoughts from within ourselves that are going against the way of our fathers, it is a sign that are thoughts are incorrect. All of the knowledge and belief we have received from our forefathers; but even if we believe in the words of our forefathers, we need to get to it from within ourselves as well. If one only has *emunah* because that’s the *mesorah* of our forefathers - then he has *emunah* only because he knows that it is our tradition, but he is missing the other kind of *emunah*, which are represented by our *Imahos*. Our *Imahos* represent the kind of *emunah* which we uncover

from within ourselves, because our Imahos did not come from good homes, yet they reached their *emunah* within themselves. From all our Imahos, it was especially Leah who reached *emunah* from within herself.

The inner kind of *emunah* is that even if you were to have been raised in a non-Jewish home, you would still be able to arrive at *emunah* from within yourself.

If a person truly works on his *emunah*, through deep reflection, in times of quiet (as the Chazon Ish writes to do), he should ponder simple facts of *emunah* and conclude them on his own, and not simply because he knows that he must believe in them. He should reflect on *emunah* privately and come to feel them within himself.

Of course, we don't mean to imply that *mesorah* isn't good enough for us. We definitely need to believe in our *mesorah*! It is just that if we don't seek to ingrain the *emunah* we know about, then we don't feel our *emunah* as real. For that reason, it is not enough for us to believe in the truths we received from our *mesorah* simply because it's our *mesorah*; we need to come to realize the truth from within ourselves, so that all the *emunah* we know about can become ingrained in us and palpable to us.

There are many mistakes and misconceptions that people are making today, things that are not in line with the *mesorah* we received from our forefathers. But a person on his own can realize how many of these mistakes are not in line with our *mesorah*, and not simply because he knows "it's against the *mesorah*". These days, if someone doesn't realize from within himself and conclude on his own how all that we know from our *mesorah* is true, it's highly doubtful if he will be able to keep anything from our *mesorah* at all!

When we have both the *mesorah* of *emunah* from our forefathers as well as the ability to realize within ourselves what the truth is, the concept here becomes clearer. If someone only acts from his individuality and he doesn't believe in *mesorah* unless he can understand it, then he is not going in the way of the Jewish people. On the other hand, if someone only believes in *mesorah* but he doesn't try to ingrain it deeply in himself and realize how our *mesorah* is true, he is missing the power of Avraham Avinu.

In Conclusion

So on one hand, we need to nullify our understanding to the *mesorah* of our fathers (***Elokei Avraham\Yitzchok\Yaakov***), yet we also have a power to understand truths from within ourselves (***V'elokei Avoseinu***).

When we combine these two powers we inherited - our ability to nullify ourselves to the *mesorah* of *emunah*, [which comes from our Avos], as well as our ability to recognize the truths from within [the ability of Avraham Avinu, which was also reflected by our *Imahos*, and especially Leah]- then we can reach the perfected level of *emunah*, and then we will shine the understanding of both ***Elokeinu*** as well as ***Elokei Avoseinu*** upon our soul.

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