

God of Our Fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of You?

Two of the primary sources of **Sacred Narratives** in **Rabbinic Judaism** are **the Torah** (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy*) and the **Siddur** (*Prayerbook*). The **Siddur** establishes the **order of Jewish worship** at synagogues. It was developed during the first four or five centuries CE, although the components of that worship were drawn from earlier periods – *including the times sacrifices were offered at the Second Temple*. The **structure for Jewish worship** was developed during the **Talmudic period** (3rd to 6th centuries). The morning service (*Shachrit*) is the most complex of the three daily services. The two main focal points are:

- (1) **The Shema**, a selection of three paragraphs from the Torah (Deuteronomy 6; 11 and Numbers 15) affirming God's unity and associated blessings before and after.
- (2) **The Amidah** is the oldest prayer in the Siddur and it was written over 2000 years ago -- *seven blessings* (on the Shabbat) and *19 blessings* (on weekdays).¹

The Amidah opens with these words:

*"Blessed are You, Lord our God and God of our fathers,
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob."*

According to **Martin Buber** (1878-1965), a famous German-Jewish religious philosopher, biblical translator and interpreter, and master of German prose style,² some people find their **Emunah** (*faith, belief, or trust in God*) as a result of **studying and thinking on their own**. Other people **believe in God** because **their parents taught them to**. Neither kind of Emunah by itself is perfect.

- If you **believe in** God only because **you have thought up arguments that prove He exists**, someone may challenge your arguments and *cause you to lose your Emunah*.
- If you **worship** God simply because your parents taught you to, your Emunah also is not perfect. It is **based on love for your parents** and not on love for God.

Also, according to Buber, Emunah is perfect only if it combines both aspects -- **what our parents have taught us and what we have decided on our own**.

- When we say, "**our God**," we show that *our own studying and thinking have led us to believe in Him*.
- When we say, "**God of our fathers**," we show that *we believe in Him also because of tradition*.

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Buber also explained why we say, “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob” and not simply “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” The wording of the blessing shows the following.

- **God of Isaac** shows that Isaac came to his own belief in God. He did not accept God merely because his father Abraham did, but his personal belief strengthened the belief he inherited from Abraham.
- **God of Jacob** shows that Jacob came to his own belief in God. His personal belief also strengthened the belief he inherited from his parents and grandparents.³

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz (1937-2020) was a very famous Israeli Chabad Chasidic rabbi, teacher, philosopher, social critic, author, translator and publisher. The follow are his comments.

- One can go from believing nothing to believing everything, from utter skepticism to utter credulity and a desperate effort to convince oneself of a thousand and one notions that may be not only spurious but actually even forbidden.
- Acceptance of the Torah and the mitzvot turns into a kind of magical rite, belief in the Sages becomes blind reverence for other people who are not really worthy of such uncritical acceptance, and faith becomes hopeless fatalism.
- Judaism emphasizes the connection between **emunah** (*faith*) and **emet** (*truth*). A Jew is obligated not only to learn the law, but to also engage in the world of discussion of the Talmud and its commentaries, where critical thinking plays a crucial role.
- Unlike Christianity or various cults, Judaism does not fear questions nor run away from them. It is not even afraid to leave questions open indefinitely.
- Judaism’s great strength is that it encourages questioning and does not demand blind acceptance of dogma.⁴

The most significant difference between modern Christian religions and different forms of institutional Rabbinic Judaism is this:

*Rabbinic Judaism does not have **institutional salvation** beliefs/doctrines.*

This brings me to the “**God of You.**”

How did you come to your belief or disbelief in God?

Examining our beliefs brings transparency to belief systems. I will continue this series -- Beliefs About God in the Jewish Culture of Jesus – in my next email. It will provide more information designed to help readers answer the “**God of You Question**.”

Beliefs About God in the Jewish Culture of Jesus: Part 3

Shalom,
Jim Myers

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¹ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/siddur-jewish-prayer-book/>

² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Buber-German-religious-philosopher>

³ *Basic Judaism for Young People Volume 3: God* by Naomi Pasachoff Copyright 1987 Behrman House, Inc., Publishers, West Orange, NJ; pp. 3, 6-7.

⁴ *TESHUVAH: A Guide for the Newly Observant Jew* by Adin Steinsaltz © 1982 by The Domino Press, Jerusalem Israel. Translation © 1987 by The Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc., New York, NY; p. 49.