

Adding the Imahot to the Amidah

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Blessed be You...who remembers...the valor of the mothers...for you are the God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel and God of Leah, and you visit their children's children with the reward of their work in love...Blessed be You...who visits Sarah...

Source texts: **BRIGHT BLUE** in the verses below indicates words quoted directly in the language added to the blessing. **GREEN** in the verses indicates words which show that the relationship with the mothers was **covenantal**. On this note see also Savina Teubal's *Sarah the Priestess* on why all of the *Avot* had to have wives related to Sarah.

בראשית כא א ויהוה פקד את־שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר וַיֵּעַשׂ יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה
כַּאֲשֶׁר דָּבָר: ב וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה לְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן לִזְקָנִיו. . . (GEN. 21:1-2)

ישעיה נא ב הִבִּיטוּ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֲבִיכֶם וְאֶל־שָׂרָה תְּחוּלְלֶכֶם
כִּי־אַתֶּם קִרְאתִיו וְאַבְרָכְהוּ וְאַרְבֶּהוּ: (ISA. 51:2)

ירמיה לא יד כה | אָמַר יְהוָה קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע. . רַחֵל מִבֶּבֶה
עַל־בָּנֶיהָ. . . טו כה | אָמַר יְהוָה מְנַעִי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינַיִךָ מִדְּמָעָה
כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לַפְּעֻלָּתְךָ נָא־יְהוָה. . . טז וַיִּשְׁתַּקֵּה לְאַחֲרֵיתֶךָ
נָא־יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם: (JER. 31:14-16)

רות ג יב יִשְׁלַם יְהוָה פְּעֻלָּתְךָ וְתִהְיֶי מְשַׁכְּרֶתְךָ שְׂלֵמָה מֵעַם יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־בָּאת לַחֲסוֹת תַּחַת־כְּנָפָיו: (RUTH 2:12)

רות ג יא וְעַתָּה בְּתִי אֶל־תִּירָאִי כֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ. . . כִּי
אִשֶּׁת חֵיל אַתְּ: ד יא וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעָם. . . יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה
הַבָּאָה אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ כְּרַחֵל וְכִלְאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׂתִיָּהֶם אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַעֲשֵׂה־חֵיל. . . (RUTH 3:11, 4:11)

well as the book of RUTH, where Boaz makes a covenant with Ruth using the phrase *eishet chayil* (3:11). His words also explicitly evoke God's covenant with Abraham ("Do not fear"). Though *cheil* in 4:11 refers to Boaz, the blessing in this verse evokes an inclusive model in which Ruth and Boaz as a unit are compared with Jacob, Leah and Rachel. The placement of Rachel before Leah in Jewish liturgy is based on this verse. 4) The word *cheil* "valor" shares the same root letters as *t'cholelkhem* "the one who bore you" in ISA. 51:2. This verse explicitly states that the mothers were equal partners with God alongside the fathers ("for as one I called them"). The claim that they were not (e.g. in R. David Golinkin's *t'shuvah* against adding the *imahot*) is inconsistent with this verse. 5) This version of the *imahot* does not deal with Bilhah and Zilpah, who are included among the matriarchs in some *midrashim*.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי
יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל עֲלִיוֹן, גּוֹמֵל
חֲסִדִּים טוֹבִים, וְקִנָּה הַכֹּל,

וְזוֹכֵר חֲסִדֵי אֲבוֹת (וְחֵיל אִמָּהוֹת)

וּמִבִּיא גּוֹאֵל לְבָנֵי בְנֵיהֶם, לְמַעַן שְׁמוּ בְּאַהֲבָה.

כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרָה, אֱלֹהֵי רַבְקָה, אֱלֹהֵי רַחֵל,
וְאֱלֹהֵי לֵאָה

וּפּוֹקֵד אֶת בְּנֵי בְנֵיהֶן בְּשָׂכָר פְּעֻלָּתָן בְּאַהֲבָה
מְלֵךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמִגּוֹן.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מִגּוֹן אַבְרָהָם (וּפּוֹקֵד שָׂרָה).

or

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, (פּוֹקֵד שָׂרָה) וּמִגּוֹן אַבְרָהָם.

BRIGHT BLUE in the blessing indicates added language. **Parentheses** indicate parts that someone following a stricter halakhic interpretation might leave out.

The formula *ki atah* which introduces the *imahot* follows the pattern of Sefardi additions to other blessings of the *Amidah*. The placement of this phrase occurs where it is customary and halakhically permitted to add *piyutim* and changes for the High Holidays. The phrase *cheil imahot* can be moved after *Elohei Leah* to follow the same structure, viz. *v'zokher cheil imahot ufoked et b'nei v'neihem*. The first of the alternate closing lines preserves the order of the original, while the second better preserves the sound. Both ways of adding to the *chatimah* have liturgical precedent. Similar to the original, all added language is rooted in specific covenantal verses.

Biblical verses used as sources for the wording of the blessing are found in the facing column.

1) The most important feature of the way the *imahot* are added to this blessing is that *poked* "who visits" (GEN. 21:1) is coupled with *bis'kharfulatan* "with reward for their work" (Jer. 31:15). While in GEN. 21:1 *poked* is wholly positive, in most other Biblical contexts (with the exception of PS. 65:10), the root *P.K.D.* indicates the fulfillment of a negative promise, i.e., to bring chastisement for sin. *Poked* invokes those negative connotations when it appears without qualification, as it does in many versions of the *imahot*. Connecting *poked* with the covenantal promise from Jer. 31 resolves that ambiguity. 2) The term *sakhar* "reward" also indicates covenantal promise in two other contexts, most importantly in GEN. 15:1 ("Do not fear Avram, I am your shield, your reward *s'kharkha* is very great"), and in RUTH 2:12 (as *maskurtek*; it is similarly joined there with *pa'alekh* "your work"). Gen. 15:1 is the source for the closing line, "Blessed be You *magen* shield of Abraham." 3) The phrase *cheil imahot* "valor of the mothers" evokes the poem *Eishet Chayil* "A woman of valor" from PROV. 31, as