

Rabbi's Column

As I write this, details are still being released concerning the shooting at what is reported to be a First Baptist Church in Sutherland, Texas. The Pastor's family was among those who suffered losses. May God grant strength and comfort to all those in mourning, and may God grant continued healing to those injured and their families. May God further grant an end to people imagining that a resolution to their difficulties can be found in killing civilians.

I wanted to circle back for a bit to discussing the Amidah. This is the prayer where we spend some private time in the middle of the services bringing up various items for which we are grateful in our ongoing discussion with God. The first paragraph is known as the Avot (fathers/ancestors). On the surface, this paragraph merely clarifies that the God we are talking to is the same one known to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. (This is the order in many modern prayerbooks. I think it will eventually be changed to be even more inclusive and show less favoritism - even if it wrecks the rhyme scheme.) What might we be thanking God for when we mention our ancestors?

I can think of a few things. Feel free to add more that make sense to you.

A sense of belonging.

A tradition of rebelling against tradition.

A strong foundation which can be relied upon to support us as we question how being Jewish is put into practice.

Role models for interacting with God.

More paragraphs will be discussed over the course of the year.

In terms of the Torah, we quickly transition this week from Abraham to Isaac. This transition is fraught with difficulties and coincidences that are held to be completely orchestrated by God. A lesson we could learn from this is to look at our transition moments for those coincidences without which the transition would not have proceeded as smoothly. I feel that this is even more essential a few years after a rough transition, so that our memories are filled with the positive aspects of this change, and not focused on the difficulties which can be easily found in any switch from an old to a newer status.