

Does Judaism Have Saints?

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I often say that anything you want in another religion I can get you in Judaism...wholesale. We have barrels of angels and neighborhoods in heaven. We have meditation and magic. But do we have saints who can intercede for us before God?

Yep...we have 'em...both male and female. In a discussion of sin and repentance, we find the concept of saintly intercessory capabilities:

The Holy One, praised be He, said to Israel: If you see that the merit of the fathers reels, and the merit of the mothers trembles, go and cling to grace [as it is said]: "For mountains may reel and hills tremble [but my grace shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken]." (Isaiah 54:10)

"For mountains may reel": this is the fathers' merit, "and hills tremble": this is the mothers' merit.

After that, "But my grace (chesed) will not reel, says the one who has mercy on you, the Eternal." (Y. Sanhedrin 10:1)

This excerpt from a more extensive passage is exploring the concept of *zechut avot*, "the merit of the fathers" (although we can see that the idea includes both fathers and mothers). The concept is that the patriarchs' and matriarchs' merits serve as a sort of trust fund on which we can rely when we petition God.

The first paragraph of the *Amidah* reminds God that we have this trust fund. When we say, "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob," we're claiming this relationship we have with the patriarchs and with God and notifying God that we may be about to make a "withdrawal".

Discussion Questions

1. How does the Jewish notion of saints differ from other faiths' ideas about saints? How? What do the differences tell us about the sages and about our views about our relationship with God?
2. The word *chesed* can be translated as grace or loyalty kindness. Again, how does this relate to other faiths' notions of "grace"?
3. From this passage, it seems clear that the merit of the mothers as well as the fathers is part of our "trust fund". Does this make the inclusion of the mothers (i.e., Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel) in the *Amidah* seem more justified? If so, how? And if not, why not?

As always, I'm looking forward to your insights!