

“This is my G-d, and I will beautify Him; the G-d of my father, and I will exalt Him.” (15:2)

Rashi explains that a person’s spiritual position is his legacy, transmitted to him from his ancestors: “I am not the genesis of my holiness. Rather, it is bequeathed to me from my forefathers in whom it was firmly entrenched.” Rashi’s explanation does not seem to coincide with the text. If our spiritual stature has its roots in our forebears, it should have first stated, “the G-d of my father,” and then, “my G-d”.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, z.l., explains that avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty, demands both of these perspectives. To serve Hashem, one must serve as an individual, using his own unique abilities. Only by doing so can he attain true spiritual growth. Yet, we are also blessed with a mesorah, tradition/heritage. We are part of a mesorah, handed down throughout the generations. We may not deviate one iota from this chain of transmission.

From a tangential perspective, it seems that these two vehicles for serving Hashem are conflicting. This is, however, not the case. Mesorah is an intrinsic component in avodas Hashem. It is one of the most basic and vital foundations of our faith. Yet, one who does not incorporate his own abilities within the parameters of mesorah cannot achieve growth. In other words, our avodas Hashem must consist of a synthesis of individualism and mesorah. One must sense that he is serving “my G-d,” employing his own uniqueness, his own kochos ha’nefesh, abilities and expertise, in serving Hashem. At the same time, he must remain acutely aware that G-d is “the G-d of our forefathers”. His individuality must coincide with the ways of his forebears. We travel on our own road, each individual in accordance with his own path of spiritual ascendancy. We must be extremely vigilant that we are expressing our own individuality, and simultaneously that we do not become carried away forgetting about the G-d of our forefathers. Hashem is “my G-d,” and I will serve Him to the best of my abilities. Yet, I must remember that He is the “G-d of my forefathers,” and I must continue to serve Him in the manner conveyed to me by my forebears.