

# TEFILLAH TIPS



## Chanukah Tips

As we celebrate *Chanukah*, I feel it is worthwhile to invest a minute or two to understand the most well known song of *Chanukah* – “*Maoz Tzur*- Rock of Ages”.

To identify the name of the author of *Maoz Tzur*, simply read the (acrostic) first letter of each stanza and you’ll see his name – Mordechai. It is quite common to find the name of the author of *Zemiroth* and *Pizmonim* built into the fabric of the song/hymn.

The content of *Maoz Tzur* depicts the long and bumpy exile that the Jewish people have endured. It also beseeches *Hashem* to return us to His house, the *Beit Hamikdash* where we will renew the Temple service once again, light the *Menorah*, and return G-d’s splendor to the world.

Each paragraph deals with a different Jewish experience in the Diaspora. After the introduction, “*Raot Sava Nafshi*” discusses our stay in Egypt for 210 years which culminates with Pharaoh and his army drowning in the Yam Suf. “*Dvir Kadsho*” informs of the Babylonian exile where we stayed for 70 years until returning to Jerusalem with *Ezra HaSofer* (not quoted in the stanza). “*Krot Komat*” refers to our run in with Achashverosh and Haman in Persia which left Haman and his children (*rov Banav*) hanging on a tree. “*Yevanim Nikkbetzu*” deals with the theme of *Chanukah*; namely our encounter against the “cutting edge cultural” Greeks which ended in a military victory for Israel as well as the miracle of the oil. And finally “*Chasof Zroa*” calls upon *Hashem* to literally “Show his Forearm (so to speak)” and finally help us out of our current exile that has lasted over 2000 years and bring comfort to the people of Israel through the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The word “*Tzur*” which refers to G-d is translated as a Rock. The *Torah*, *Talmud*, and *Siddur* refer to *Hashem* in many different ways – but a ROCK???? How can we understand this? The answer is that a rock symbolizes something one can lean on and find support from no matter how unstable he or she feels. This is what *Hashem* is to every single one of us. No matter what predicament we find ourselves in, we have a “Rock” to lean on. In essence, this is the message of *Chanukah* and also the message of *Maoz Tzur*. No matter what land we are in, no matter who our enemies are, the “Rock” is there.

The word *Tzur* is also found in the prayer of “*Ayn Kalokaynu*”. The verse reads “*Ain Tzur Kaylokaynu*” translated, as “There is no Rock like our G-d”. The Talmud interprets the word *Tzur* to mean “Creator/Artist”- teaching that there is “No Artist like *Hashem*”. Who else could create the Swiss Alps, Hawaii, and the Grand Canyon?? Who else could create a human being with a soul inside of him?? Only *Hashem*.

So what is *Hashem*- a Rock; or a Creative Artist? The answer is that he is both! G-d himself is both THE MOST CREATIVE ARTIST that ever touched earth, and also the “ROCK OF AGES” providing strength, support, and an ever-present address to turn to in prayer.

May we all appreciate this insight as Jews worldwide stand together in harmony singing *Maoz Tzur* throughout the holiday of *Chanukah*.

My best wishes for a beautiful *Shabbos* and a light filled *Chanukah*.

Shabbat Shalom,

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