

TEFILLAH TIPS



Elul Tips // LeDavid Hashem Ori

As we begin the month of *Elul* and the forty day march towards the Days of Judgment, we recite Psalm 27 after the daily blasts of the shofar - "*LeDovid Hashem Ori Veyishi.. – G-d is my light and my salvation*".

Our sages explain that *Ori* – my light, refers to *Rosh Hashanah*, and *Yishi* – my salvation, refers to *Yom Kippur*, thereby explaining why we recite the psalm this time of year in preparation for the High Holidays. The Vilna Gaon alternatively explains that *Ori* – my light, refers to the *Torah*, and *Yishi* – my salvation, refers to *Mitzvot* because it is only through *Torah* and *Mitzvot* that Jews enjoy the rewards of light and salvation.

The opening verses read – "*G-d is my light and salvation, therefore, I need not be afraid. When my enemies arise to devour me, they will stumble. If they encamp against me, it is in **this** that I trust. The one and only request that I have of You G-d, is that I may dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to see Your countenance and frequent Your sanctuary*".

When reading these opening lines it is not clear – in what does King David trust? What is the "**this**" he refers to?

Rashi explains that the "**this**" refers to the opening verses – "G-d is my light, my salvation..." The Malbim states that the "**this**" is the upcoming verse where King David requests to sit in the house of the Lord continuously. So which is it – the magnificence of G-d's grandeur or the great request of King David to be close to the Creator?

It appears to me that both interpretations are not only correct, but complement one another as well. Rashi teaches that trust in G-d's loving-kindness and His greatness at all times of life brings security and serenity to King David. The Malbim teaches that to merit the closeness, light, and salvation of the Creator, one must seek and pursue a life prescribed by G-d and the *Torah*. Since this is the way of King David, it was **this** that he trusted.

In our preparations for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, and the recitation of the *LeDavid* prayer twice a day in Shacharit and Maariv, let's walk in the footsteps of the great King David. Let's try and strengthen our trust in the *light* of our Creator – *Ori Veyishi*, through study of *Torah* and heartfelt prayer, while we invest energy towards living with the feeling of continuously being in His presence. This will surely prepare us amidst the entire nation of Israel for a good and peaceful New Year.

Holiday/Yom Tov Plans

One of the most popular phrases heard on the Jewish tongue this time of year is, "*What are you doing for Yom Tov*"? Are you going to your parents this year? Are your grandchildren coming to town or are you heading there? What are you serving this year? Did you take the kids shopping for new Yom Tov clothing? The hustle and bustle of the Jewish holiday season is coming whether we are ready or not, so it's time to make those Yom Tov plans.

This year in addition to all of the holiday preparations, let's also make sure that **WE** prepare **OURSELVES** for the great Days of Awe and inspiration. Without preparation, there will be no celebration.

How can we prepare ourselves?

I will leave the recipes and the guest lists to your own discretion, but to prepare spiritually, I will advance a few suggestions:

Take a Spiritual Accounting (in Hebrew, a *Cheshbon Hanefesh*).

Let's look carefully at ourselves and examine our day to day actions, rituals, interactions with others and our individual character traits etc.. Where are we succeeding and where are we falling short? Although there is always room for improvement, where is it blatantly clear that efforts must be made? Do I need to expend more effort on prayer, am I getting along well enough with my family, am I studying enough Torah, am I distributing enough Tzedakah...? This is the time of year to ask ourselves these vital questions.

Choose a bite size project and strategize how you will tackle it.

The Talmud in Sukkah states: *If you try to grasp too much, you will not grasp anything.*

Therefore it is best to choose small, approachable and achievable spiritual goals and strategize clearly how you will accomplish them. What day(s) of the week, at what time(s) of the day, will I do _____. Big accomplishments are really the sum total of a lot of little ones. So think little and aim big!

Get a Chavrutah – Partner for your project.

King Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes, "Two is better than one". Find a study partner, a Mitzvah partner, a colleague, a friend, or a family member and go at it **together**. There is strength in numbers, and the members of your group can support one another and celebrate each other's triumphs and achievements.

Keep Track!

It is necessary to keep track of your successes and shortcomings otherwise it all becomes a blur. Choose a time each week to review how you are progressing in your preparations for Yom Tov.

Jews wait with anticipation all year for the holidays; it is a time of joy, family and celebration. So much goes into the physical preparations for these great days. This year, let's aim to prepare **internally** and **spiritually** as well. It could affect positive change of your entire holiday celebration and quite possibly your life overall.

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