

TEFILLAH TIPS

Shavuot Tips

The *Amidah* / silent prayer that we recite during every *Tefillah* throughout *Shavuot*, after the opening three blessings reads as follows – “*Ata Bichartanu mikol ha-amim..... vekidashtanu bemitzvotcha...- G-d You have chosen us from all other nations in the world. You have loved us, desired our service, and elevated us above all other cultures and tongues. And You have sanctified us with your Mitzvot...*”

The phrase “*You have sanctified us with your mitzvot*” needs clarification. How does the performance of *mitzvot* sanctify us? We refer to this formula regularly in many blessings we recite each day. For example, “*asher kidishanu bimitzvotav – That He has sanctified us with His mitzvot*”. If we understand this concept, it can add meaning to every *Yom Tov* that we celebrate, not to mention the *mitzvot* we perform and the *brachot* we recite daily.

One approach of “*You have sanctified us with your mitzvot*” is that since *mitzvot* are commanded by G-d, and G-d is the King of Kings, our performance of these *mitzvot* is a connection to eternity and divinity. Therefore, every *mitzvah* elevates us because it is living life with G-dly direction.

The *Etz Yosef* advances a different thought: “G-d’s laws are unlike the laws of human kings and governments. When a government passes a law, it is legislated for the benefit of the nation as a whole. For example, one pays taxes for the benefit of the society. The laws of Hashem, *mitzvot*, are not only for the benefit of society, but for the growth, purification, and benefit of the person fulfilling the law as well. Our sages taught – “*lo nitna Torah elah letzoref et habriot- The torah was given in order to refine humanity*”. In effect – *im kesef tilveh* – thou shalt lend money, not only fulfills the *Torah* commandment to do so, and not only creates a sharing and caring society, but benefits and uplifts the person spiritually as well. The same is true for *tzedakah*, *kashrut*, *Shabbat*, and *Mikveh*...

This provides special meaning to us as we prepare for *Shavuot*. It is on *Shavuot*, 3324 years ago, that we cried out *naaseh venishmah* – *we will fulfill and listen*, and the *Torah* was transmitted to Moshe and the nation of Israel at Sinai. Since that moment in time, the world has never been the same, because a world and a life with *Torah* as its guide is an illuminated life filled with eternal wisdom, meaning and blessings.

Take Home Tip: When studying *Torah* on *Shavuot* night consider this lesson that *Torah* and *Mitzvot* refine us and provide unique growth for everyone that grasps onto it – *etz chaim hee lamachazikim bah*.

Chag Sameach,

Rabbi Ephraim Epstein, for Tefillah Tips

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