

Parashat Ki Tavo 5773, 2013

Rabbi David Etengoff

The Month of Elul – The Crossroads of Our Existence

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Shifra bat Chaim Alter, and Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam.

The final verse of this week's *parasha* presents us with an exegetical challenge: "And you will guard, protect and observe the words of this Covenant, and you will perform them; all of this *l'ma'an taskilu* in all that you will do." (*Sefer Devarim* 29:2) The commentators disagree as to the meaning of the phrase "*l'ma'an taskilu*." The word "*l'ma'an*" is very straightforward; it simply means "in order that." The word "*taskilu*," however, is the point of contention. Onkelos (35-120 CE), Targum Yonatan ben Uziel (exact date uncertain), *Talmud Bavli*, *Avodah Zarah* 19b, and the Ibn Ezra (1089-1167), translate "*taskilu*" as "*tatzliku*" – to be successful. As such, these sources interpret our verse as stating: "And you will guard, protect and observe the words of this Covenant, and you will perform them; all of this in order that *you will be successful* in all that you will do." In contrast, the Targum Yerushalmi (exact date uncertain), the Seforno (Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Seforno, 1475-1550), and the Kli Yakar (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz, 1550-1619) opine that "*taskilu*" is to be taken at face value, i.e. from the word "*sechel*" (logic), and references some form of understanding. Thus, they translate our verse as: "And you will guard, protect and observe the words of this Covenant, and you will perform them; all of this in order that *you will understand* all that you will do."

Fascinatingly, Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel Wisser (1809-1879), known as “the Malbim,” adopted variations of both interpretations for our phrase “*l’ma’an taskilu*”

– with its precise meaning to be contextually defined:

“*Haskalah*” (enlightenment, understanding) has two possible meanings and references: *Haskalat hasechel* refers to the understanding and enlightenment of the soul in all spiritually based matters. [In contrast, *haskalah*] may refer to success (*hatzlacha*) in all physical actions that pertain to the body [and its ongoing maintenance].

According to the Malbim, our verse now means:

If you will fulfill all of the words of the Torah, then you will understand [and be able to build upon this understanding] in everything that you will do. This refers to obtaining [comprehension] in spiritual matters as well as success in practical actions as they pertain to all manner and variety of physical needs.

Once again, we find ourselves in the midst of *Chodesh Elul* - the crossroads of our existence. In this month, and at this time of year, we must determine whether or not we will continue as we have done in the past, or transform ourselves and become better than who we are today. This process takes time, considered introspection, and brutal self-honesty. As in all matters of this nature, we must call upon our Creator and beseech Him for His support, guidance, and love. In turn, we need to demonstrate our connection to Him and His holy Torah. Moreover, by building upon the Malbim’s analysis of our verse, we now realize we must “guard, protect and observe the words of this Covenant, and perform them,” so that we will be understanding and successful in all our spiritual and physical endeavors. May Hashem grant us the discernment, wisdom, and strength to do so. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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