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# DAF KESHER

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## DVAR TORAH RAW NATURE

Even though the mitzvah to bring a *bikurim* (first fruits) offering is not applicable until the Temple is rebuilt, according to the Talner Rebbe, shlita (Heimah Yenachamuni Devarim pp. 145-152), a theme running through a number of *bikurim*'s halachot is relevant at all times.

When Yosef Hakohen, who lived in the early Second Temple period, wanted to bring wine and oil as his *bikurim* (first fruits) offering, the Kohanim of the Temple didn't accept it (Mishna Challah 4:11). Later Tannaim reversed this ruling and hold that wine and oil are acceptable (Terumot 11:3), and the Rambam rules like this way. However, what was behind that early ruling that one can only bring grapes and olives, not wine and oil? This is unique in agricultural halachah. For instance, wine and oil are biblically obligated in terumot and maaserot (tithes), whereas grapes and olives are a rabbinic addition. Why (according to the Mishnah in Challah) is *bikurim* unique, and wine and oil not acceptable?

Grapes and oil are unprocessed, answers the Talner Rebbe, whereas oil and wine are the results of extensive human input. Other aspects of *bikurim* also focus on the early stage of produce. *Bikurim*, unlike other agricultural halachot that take effect at the production stage, are designated while they are still connected to the tree, and before the fruit has completely matured. The land itself is also a crucial component of the mitzvah. Only the land owner is obligated in *bikurim*, and only if the tree the fruit came from is still standing is the *bikurim* declaration made. Why does *bikurim* emphasize the land and the earliest stages of the fruit?

Man has a tendency to forget God. This frequently happens in two areas: where man is especially visible and where God is especially invisible. In areas where man puts in his greatest efforts and is most creative, he can forget that God is his Creator who gives him all of his abilities. On the other hand, nature is so ever-present and constant that man needs to be reminded of God's involvement and presence even though He seems invisible.

*Bikurim* acknowledges God's involvement in raw nature. *Bikurim* celebrates the wonders of God in the earth and the tree, in the bud and the fruit as it first develops. We must, of course, later acknowledge God's mastery after we have finished our harvesting work, and bless God over the bread we have baked, after reaping the wheat, grinding the kernels, sifting the flour, and kneading the dough.

Rav Ashi, says the Gemara (Sanhedrin 102b), was surprised to learn a halachah in a dream from King Menasheh, who, before ending his life as a penitent, had been one of the most idol-worshipping kings of the First Temple period. The halachah he learned in that dream was, surprisingly, a detail, that after making the blessing you should break bread over the part of the loaf most well-baked. The Maharal explains that this was a lesson in how to avoid the idolatrous mindset. We must especially remember God where our human involvement is most evident, where our bread is most well-baked. *Bikurim*, with its focus on the part of the growth process where man is least involved – but seems to happen “on its own” – teaches us to remember Him where he seems most invisible.

Also in this week's Daf Keshar: · Source Guide: [Why Was the Torah Written on Stones?](#) · Rav Yitzchak Shurin: Confessing Mitzvot

## SOURCE GUIDE WHY WAS THE TORAH WRITTEN ON STONES?

### The Torah Written on Stones

In this week's parshah the Torah lists a one-time mitzvah, to write the Torah on stones soon after the people of Israel enters the land of Israel.

<p><b>Devarim 27:1-8</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. And Moshe and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying: Observe the entire commandment that I command you this day.</li> <li>2. And it will be, on the day that you cross the Jordan to the land that Hashem, your God, is giving you, that you shall set up for yourself huge stones, and plaster them with lime.</li> <li>3. When you cross, you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah, in order that you may come to the land which Hashem, your God, is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as Hashem, God of your forefathers, has spoken to you.</li> <li>4. And it will be, when you cross the Jordan, that you shall set up these stones, [regarding] which I command you this day on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with lime.</li> <li>5. And there, you shall build an altar to Hashem, your God, an altar of stones. You shall not wield any iron upon them.</li> <li>6. You shall build the altar of Hashem, your God, out of whole stones. And on it, you shall offer up burnt offerings to Hashem, your God.</li> <li>7. And you shall slaughter peace offerings, and you shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your God.</li> <li>8. And you shall write on the stones all of the words of this Torah <i>ba'eir heiteiv</i> (see below for translation).</li> </ol>	<p><b>דברים כז:א-ח</b></p> <p>(א) ויצו משה וזקני ישראל את העם לאמר שמר את כל המצוה אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום:</p> <p>(ב) והיה ביום אשר תעברו את הירדן אל הארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך ונקמת לך אבנים גדולות ושדת אתם בשיד:</p> <p>(ג) וקתבת עליהן את כל דברי התורה הזאת בעברך למען אשר תבא אל הארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך ארץ זבת חלב ודבש כאשר דבר ה' אלהי אבותיך לך:</p> <p>(ד) והיה בעברכם את הירדן תקימו את האבנים האלה אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום בהר עיבל ושדת אותם בשיד:</p> <p>(ה) ובנית שם מזבח לה' אלקיך מזבח אבנים לא תניף עליהם ברזל:</p> <p>(ו) אבנים שלמות תבנה את מזבח ה' אלקיך והצלית עליו עולת לה' אלקיך:</p> <p>(ז) וזבת שלמים ואכלת שם ושמתה לפני ה' אלקיך:</p> <p>(ח) וקתבת על האבנים את כל דברי התורה הזאת באר היטב:</p>
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### Two Questions:

1. What was the purpose of writing the Torah on stones? Isn't there a separate mitzvah for every Jew to write a sefer Torah, his personal Torah scroll? What does this add?
2. The Torah describes the writing of the Torah by adding two words at the end of this section: באר היטב. What do those words mean? *Ba'eir* usually means making something clear (see Devarim 1:5), and *heiteiv* modifies it as "very clear". Exactly what was written on those stones – the Torah made very clear?

### Learn a Ramban with Rabbi Farber

Rabbi Mendel Farber, in his Chumash shiurim, prepared annotated selections from the Ramban for his students (now many of our distinguished alumni). We present one of them here with an added translation.

<p><b>Ramban on Devarim 27:3</b></p> <p>You shall write upon them all the words of this Torah. Said Rabbi Avraham (Ibn Ezra) in the name of the Gaon: they wrote upon them the list of the (613) mitzvot, as they are written in the Halachot Gedolot, like the Azharot (Rav Saadiah Gaon's list of the mitzvot said by many on the night of Shavuot). And the meaning of <i>ba'eir heiteiv</i> is that the writing (is very clear). Our Rabbis said (Sotah 32) that [it was written] in seventy languages. We find in the Book of the Crowns that the entire Torah was written, from "Bereishit" until l'einei kol Yisrael" (the last words of the Torah), with crowns and adornments, and from there they copied the crowns for the</p>	<p><b>רמב"ן על דברים כז:ג</b></p> <p><sup>1</sup> וכתבת עליהן את כל דברי התורה הזאת אמר ר"א בשם הגאון, <sup>2</sup> שכתבו עליהם מנין המצות כמו הכתובות בהלכות גדולות כעין אזהרות, <sup>3</sup> וטעם "באר היטב" (פסוק ח), <sup>4</sup> הכתיבה.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> ורבותינו אמרו (סוטה לב), בשבעים לשון. <sup>6</sup> ומצינו בספר תאגי, שהיתה כל התורה כתובה בהן מבראשית עד לעיני כל ישראל בתאגיה וזיוניה, ומשם נעתקו התאגין בכל התורה. <sup>7</sup> ויתכן</p>
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entire Torah (scroll). It is possible that they were extremely large stones, or that it was miraculous.

שהיו האבנים גדולות מאד, או שהיה  
ממעשה הנסים:

<sup>1</sup>The first question the Ramban deals with is: What was written on the stones?

<sup>2</sup>What was written on the stones according to Ibn Ezra?

<sup>3</sup>According to the Ibn Ezra there is a problem with the words **באר היטב** that you do not have according to the way that Chazal explain what was written on the stones. What is the problem? The answer: according to the Ibn Ezra all the Mitzvos were listed in a short form, similar to the way they are listed in the Sefer Halachot Gedolot. If so, they were not explained in full detail, therefore how do we understand the words “באר היטב” which means “explained clearly”. Why is it not difficult according to Chazal? The answer: according to Chazal they were written in seventy languages, which in essence is a clear explanation of the Mitzvos. They became accessible to all.



Rabbi Mendel Farber

<sup>4</sup>The word **כתיבה** is the answer to what was bothering the Ibn Ezra. Explain! The answer: It was not **explained** clearly, rather, it was **written** in a clear form, easy to be read.

<sup>5</sup>This is how Chazal understood what was written on the stones.

<sup>6</sup>This is a third opinion of what was written on the stones. The little crowns and lines that are on top of the letters – that is the meaning of **באר היטב**. Those crowns and lines explain an in-depth aspect of the Torah that is not available from the words themselves. They represent the roots out of which the Torah comes, an aspect that relates to a much higher level of Torah, available to a chosen few (The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat says that R' Akiva knew the meanings of those signs). The Ramban quotes the “Sefer Tagin” saying that the crowns were written here on the **מוזבה** and were copied from here into the Torah. Amazing!

<sup>7</sup>The Ramban is bothered by the practical method of how it was written. He offers two possibilities. Explain both.



#### Look into this further:

- Why was the Torah written on the stones? One answer seems to be – so the non-Jews can read the Torah. Otherwise, why was it written in seventy languages? (See Sotah 32). The Netziv in Haamek Davar develops this direction; according to him this is the beginning of Israel's mission as an *or lagoyim*, a light unto the nations.
- How would the other approaches to *ba'er heiteiv* (clear writing – Ibn Ezra, with crowns and adornments – Sefer Tagin) answer the question?
- See the **Shem Mishmuel's** beautiful comments on our parshah (Ki Tavo 5671), where he explains why writing a Sefer Torah must be written on *klaf* – parchment that has gone through extensive processing – whereas in our parshah the Torah could be written directly on the stones. He explains: the Torah on the stones corresponds to the purest, most innermost place in our hearts; whereas the Sefer Torah corresponds to the more external aspects of our hearts, that need to be refined and purified (like parchment needs to be worked on) for the Torah to take hold there.
- However, see the Ktav Vehakabalah on verse 8, who suggests that according to the simplest *pshat* one might have assumed that the Torah was written on scrolls and they were affixed to the stones. The meaning of “writing on the stones” might be similar to “writing on the doorposts” of the mitzvah of mezuzah. This perhaps opens up a new direction: that the Torah on the stones is like a great mezuzah at the entrance of the land of Israel. On the doorposts of every house we write two parshiot of the Shema and they remind how we are to live in our homes; at the entrance to the land of Israel we write the entire Torah and it reminds us how our country is to live.
- See the Ramban's next comment, where he and Ibn Ezra differ over the meaning of **למען אשר תבא**.

## CONFESSING MITZVOT BY RABBI YITZCHAK SHURIN

In this week's parsha we learn about the laws of *biur maasrot*. Biur maasrot means removing all of our terumot and maasrot (tithes) by the time designated by the Torah. In addition, the Torah gives us a text to say when we do this. The text, in a nutshell, testifies to our successful completion of this command. We testify that we have done all G-d has asked of us, and that we have not transgressed His command. The Chazal call this statement "*Viduy Maasrot*," confession of the maaser process.



Rabbi Yitzchak Shurin

The question that a number of commentaries raise is that usually the term confession is used for a sin. I confess something I have done wrong. Something I would normally want to hide, I instead admit to. This is confession. However, here I am confessing that I have done and accomplished a mitzvah. This is a very strange idea.

Rav Soloveitchik once said that the Torah here is teaching me a great yesod, a great principle; that in order for a person to be able to confess sinning, he must first be able to confess doing a mitzvah. If he cannot confess that he has the ability to do a mitzvah, he can never confess that he has sinned. In other words, a person must be able to say that I have free will and the ability to bring to fruition all my responsibilities to God, and therefore I can be held accountable for shirking those responsibilities. If I don't know my strengths, I cannot take responsibility for my weaknesses.

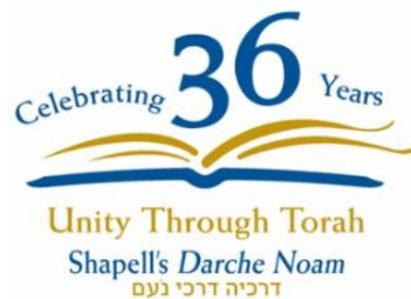
Reb Yerucham once said, "A person cannot change until he knows his flaws, but he does not have the tools to change until he realizes his virtues." This is a message that we should take with us when we enter the Days of Awe.

Shabbat shalom umevorach.

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**This issue is dedicated in loving memory of Joseph Lerman,  
Yosef ben Zolman, z"l**

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