



PARASHAT
KI TAVO

When you enter in

DEUTERONOMY 26:1-29:8

כִּי-תָבוֹא

KI TAVO

TORAH LESSON BY
RABBI MOSHE GOLDSMITH



“THERE ARE HEARTS OF STONE, BUT THERE ARE STONES THAT ARE HEARTS” (RAV KOOK)

BLESSED WITH LIVING on Itamar in the Shomron⁹ Mountain Range, I have the glorious privilege of seeing every day the mountains mentioned in the Torah—*Har Grizim* and *Har Eval*, the famed Mountains of the Blessing and the Curse which rise above the city of Shechem.

This week’s Portion describes Joshua leading the people of Israel into the Promised Land. This essay will focus on two of three, events that took place on the mountains mentioned above. These events have been overshadowed by the establishment of the *Covenant of Mutual Responsibility*, which is incumbent on all members of the house of Israel. The two events referred to above are the construction of the Altar on Mt. Eval and the Inscription of the Torah on the Stones (See Deuteronomy chapter 27).

When the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and entered the land of Israel, they were commanded to take stones from the River and erect a monument in their encampment at Gilgal. These stones were meant to serve as a memorial for generations to come, a milestone in the history of Israel, commemorating the longed-for event of crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. In addition to these stones, Joshua had also placed stones along the temporarily-split riverbed, where the feet of the Cohanim¹⁰ had stood, while watching the nation crossover.

Immediately upon entering the land, Joshua began following the instructions in our Portion, commanding the writing of the entire Torah on stone, and the building of an altar on Mt. Eval. According to our tradition, the stones which were taken out of the Jordan River were the ones used for the inscription of the Torah and the building of the Altar. These stones were later brought to the Israeli encampment at Gilgal and used for the monument mentioned earlier.

The idea of Writing the Torah on stone did not originate with Joshua—the Ten Commandments were written in stone, and—a fact not as well known—Moshe Rabeynu wrote the Torah on stone in the land of Moav before he passed

⁹ Shomron - Samaria

¹⁰ Cohanim – the priests.

away. Our sages add that the entire Torah was written by Moshe in Hebrew as well as in the seventy languages of the Nations. Similarly, Joshua wrote the Torah on Mt. Eval in seventy languages for the Seventy Nations.

A small passage of the Talmud, in the tractate Sotah 35B, involves a discussion between Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yehudah. The Rabbis discuss two possibilities for understanding how the Torah was written on the stones. According to Rabbi Yehudah, the Torah was written on the stones and then covered over with plaster. Rabbi Shimon asks Rabbi Yehudah, “If this is the case, how did the nations learn the Torah?” Rabbi Yehudah answers, “G-d gave them the insight to call on their professional scribes who peeled off the plaster and took the Torah with them (thus giving all the Nations access to the written Torah). “For this reason,” according to Rabbi Yehudah, “they were punished, because they should have studied the Torah instead of transgressing it.”

Rabbi Shimon holds that the Torah was written on top of the plaster so that all the nations could see it clearly. On the lower part of the huge stones on which the Torah was written, the following verse was written again for emphasis—**“so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against Hashem your God.”** (Deuteronomy 20:18) This verse explains Israel’s legitimate and moral right to go to war against the Seventy Nations. If the Nations do not accept Israel’s call for peace (see verse (ibid 20:11)), which includes taking upon themselves the moral code of Noach, Israel will wage war against them. We derive from this that had the Nations given up their barbaric practices, they would not have been driven from the land.

It is important to emphasize that before Joshua began the wars against the 31 kings to capture the land of Israel, the Torah was put on display before the Nations. Hashem wanted them to be inspired by the Light of Torah and to abandon their idolatrous ways. For the same reason, as mentioned before, Moshe wrote the Torah in 70 languages before he passed away. Moshe had begun the process of reaching out to the nations and later, on the other side of the Jordan, Joshua was told to do the same on Mt. Eval.

It should be noted that this is not the first time the nations had been given the opportunity to accept the Torah. On Mt. Sinai, we learned, Hashem offered the Torah to every nation on earth but each refused to accept it. Clearly, it was Hashem’s Divine Plan that the conduct of the nations would be rectified by their eventual acceptance of the Torah.

Indeed, the spiritual light of the Torah, which descends from the highest places above, has the power to unify all realms of creation, including the Inanimate, the Plant, and the Animal Kingdoms. This unity is symbolized by the inscription of the Torah in stone (Inanimate), as was done by G-d on Sinai, and by the writing of the Torah by Moshe on stone, as well as on parchment (animal) before his death; and by Joshua, who continued Moshe's tradition, upon entering the Land of Israel. The plant kingdom is represented in the ink which derives from plants and is used for the writing of the Torah.

Despite great advancements in science and in our knowledge of the universe, what we know and understand is dwarfed by our ignorance of the true nature of the cosmos. As religious belief declines, man's arrogance climbs, imagining that he knows all there is to know. Yet there is a vast spiritual treasure, which remains hidden from him because he chooses to remain ignorant.

The Hebrew word for stone is "*Even*" (אבן) and it contains the first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The word *alphabet* comes from Aleph (א) Beit (ב). The letter Nun (נ) has the numerical value of fifty. This represents the fifty gates to understanding the Torah which is communicated through the *Aleph Beit*.

Stones are referred to as letters in our esoteric teachings. "*Even*" also stands for the relationship between parent and child. *Aleph* is the first letter of the word for Mother and Father in Hebrew, and *Beit Nun*, "Ben", is the child.

Jacobs departure from the land of Israel is described as follows: "*He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.*" (Genesis 28:11)

Before going into exile, Jacob needed to connect with the stones of the land of Israel, which represent the everlasting spiritual and physical bond connecting him to his ancestors, his family and the land of Israel.

"For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor its dust."
(Psalms 102:15)

According to Rabbi Yehudah, as mentioned earlier, although the Torah was displayed to the nations, it was still covered with plaster. Possibly, we were being given to understand that one must work hard and diligently when studying Torah: it is endlessly deep and we must peel away the layers that could block us from its deepest truths.

Rabbi Shimon, on the other hand, holds that the Torah was written clearly, and he presents us with another approach—one must bring people to the Torah slowly by first teaching them the basic concepts that are easy to comprehend. Meanwhile, unfortunately, both approaches failed to bring the Nations to repent and rectify themselves.

In conclusion, the events on the Mountains of Grizim and Eval involved the weaving together of three fundamental cords: the Torah, the Land, and the People. The intertwining of these threads created a powerful rope that was meant to pull the Nations out of the mud of idolatry.

Although, our prophet's vision of the end of days did not materialize in the periods of the first and second commonwealths, we are today beginning to see clear signs of its fruition. Never before in our long history have we seen such a growing wave of interest in Israel, its people, and its Torah.

As described by our prophets:

“Now it will come about that in the end of days the mountain of the house of the Hashem will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. And many people will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Hashem, to the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.” For the Torah will go forth from Zion and the word of the Hashem from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:2–3)

“Thus says G-d of hosts, ‘In those days, ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that G-d is with you.”’ (Zachariah 8:23)