

HIDDEN AND REVEALED:  
THE FORMATION OF A TANAIIC DISPUTE  
REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATIONS

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Abstract

This article examines different traditions of one Tannaitic dispute, regarding the identity of the stones upon which the Torah was inscribed following the Israelites crossing of the Jordan river. Comparing various interpretive traditions, demonstrates that despite its interpretive nature, this topic has acquired an ideological tone, concerning the kind of relation that gentiles should have to the written Torah.

The common underlying assumption among all versions, is that in the act of writing the Torah on the stones, there is an outreach to the nations, giving them a second opportunity to receive the Torah. Delving into the interpretive, methodological, and realistic aspects of these parallels, illustrates how ideological messages shift and traverse among sources, both overtly and covertly. The interpretations given by different traditions varies greatly, ranging from framing this as a one-time event, a missed opportunity never to be repeated, all the way to presenting it as an ongoing invitation for the nations to receive the written Torah.

Through the addition of ideas and by reshaping the text to fit interpretive and ideological principles and perceptions the transmitters of tradition not only respond to the changing surrounding reality, but also express a different ideological attitude.