

PETZUA DAKA – SPELLING ITS MEANING

Yevamos 75a asks, who is ‘petzua daka’? The mishna definition of a person with mutilated beitzim, appears to understand the Torah as listing two distinct disorders, petzua daka and cherus shofchah, the latter being a severed organ. However, on 75b the gemora brings Rava, who combines the two phrases into one. He describes three types of damage (wounded, crushed or severed) to three parts of the organ (member, testicles or cords), פְּצֹוּע בְּכָלוֹן, קָרוֹת בְּכָלוֹן, זָךְ בְּכָלוֹן. In the mishna, the word ‘daka’ is understood as a noun referring to ‘beitzim’, with an adjective ‘petzua’ meaning ‘wounded’. Rava’s reading treats the four words as one phrase with a single noun ‘shofchah’ qualified by three adjectives – the adjective ‘daka’ meaning ‘crushed’.

YERUSHALMI

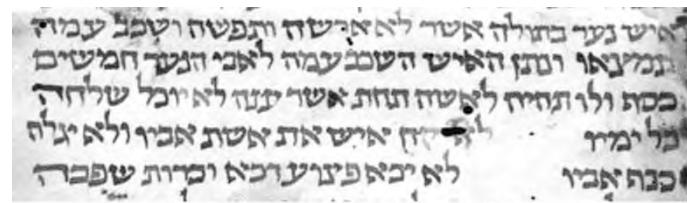
There is a machlokes in Yerushalmi (Yevamos 8:2) how to translate the word ‘daka’. The first explanation is based on a root דָּקָה meaning sustaining blows, as the organ is knocked on each side by the legs and thighs. R’ Chagi translates ‘daka’ as meaning ‘lowly’, based on root דָּקָא, the organ being at the lowest part of the body. These two meanings are mirrored in the Bavli, initially following R’ Chagi as a noun referring to the organ, and Rava translating ‘daka’ as an adjective meaning damaged.

דָּקָה OR דָּקָא?

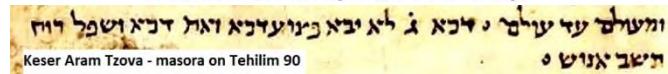
The only spelling difference found between sifrei Torah in Ashkenaz and Sefard was the spelling of ‘daka’ with aleph or heh. Ashkenaz universally wrote דָּקָה and Sefard wrote דָּקָא, up until a few hundred years ago. There are many ancient Sifrei Torah or Tenach manuscripts in libraries throughout the world and, with few exceptions, one will find Ashkenaz, Yerushalmi and Temani sefarim bear an aleph, but Sefard copies have heh. Interestingly, Ibn Ezra comments on this word, according to one reading, that the word ‘daka’ is unique, indicating it should be written with ‘heh’. Early Italian printed Chumashim (Bologna 1482, Naples 1491, Brescia 1494 and Pisaro 1511) follow the Ashkenaz custom with aleph. The first printed Mikraos Gedolos, Venice 1525, had it with aleph, and so also the Amsterdam 1727 edition, but the Warsaw 1860 print was changed to heh. After the Spanish expulsion, when Ashkenaz was flooded with immigrants, both versions could be found in sifrei Torah in Europe. One can still see the confusion in printed editions – Artscroll gemora translation has both on the same page! Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch brings that the Vilna Gaon instructed that any Sefer Torah in Vilna should be amended to read with heh, like the Sefardim, as he considered that the correct version. On the other hand, the Baal Hatanya ruled to retain the Ashkenaz custom with aleph, and to alter any Sefer Torah to read with aleph. Other Rabbonim ruled that we cannot adjudicate which is correct and it is forbidden to alter any Sefer Torah – one may not pasel a kosher sefer Torah by erasing a letter which may have been kosher, as we do not know which is correct.

THE MASSORA

One would have expected many more Torah spelling variances between communities arising over such a long period, but differences have always been resolved on the basis of tradition passed down through the massora apparatus. This was a system that caught potential errors by creating rules recording exceptional cases, which controlled the correct text. Forming part of Torah sh’Baal Peh, it was forbidden to be written and had to be memorised. Memory aides, simanim, were used, and in our case, masora recorded that there are three instances of the word ‘daka’ in Tenach. When it became permitted to write the masora, a gimel was inserted in Tenach margins against the word ‘daka’, indicating how it should be written, linking the three occurrences. Some manuscripts added location references to explain the siman, and these longer notes constitute the Masora Gedola at the top and bottom margin of the page. Although all versions of the masora agree on the siman gimel, there is a divergence in the explanatory text, with the Spanish versions adding that one of the occurrences has ‘aleph’ and two have ‘heh’, but other versions of this masora have all three with ‘aleph’. In most cases, such discrepancies were resolved by early masora experts and in particular, Rabbi Meir Abulafia (Ramah) who lived at the time of the Rambam, authored *Masores Seyag LeTorah*, which determined all the uncertainties and achieved almost universal acceptance. In the case of ‘daka’, he found the two versions of masora and was convinced that the ‘aleph’ version was mistaken and ruled for it to be written with a ‘heh’. This ruling was accepted throughout Spain, but Ashkenaz retained its custom to write with ‘aleph’.



Ancient Ashkenaz Sefer Torah fragment recovered from bindings



Keser Aram Tzova - masora on Tehilim 90
ושלך עד עלייך נזא לא יבוא נזועניא ואל דניא ואטפל לך
תשב אוטו



Madrid 1 - showing both versions of the masora



Ms Jeselsohn 5 with notes added by Rabbi Menachem D'Lonzano, the Or Torah.
see original masora circled above and line added in darker ink below.



במי היה כתוב בה ונתכן בא – ג, ב כתיב א' ד' כתיב ה'
Masora notes on right and left
British Library Add 15251

LATER AUTHORITIES

With the advent of printing, the printed text had a strong influence on how sifrei Torah were written and as there were many errors in the prints, Rabbi Menachem di'Lonzano, the foremost expert in this field, wrote his *Or Torah* (Venice 1618), which has remained the definitive guide. This was incorporated into the work of *Minchas Shai*, which established the accuracy of our current text. In his comments on 'daka', Rabbi Lonzano brings the two versions of the massora, without adjudicating which is correct, leaving the matter open. Some want to read into his indecision, that he wanted Ashkenaz custom to remain with an 'aleph', whilst others point to the fact that he headed his comment with 'daka' with a 'heh'. *Minchas Shai* brings the ambiguity of *Or Torah*, but he determines the issue based on the ruling of *Ramah* to write 'heh', and that is what Ashkenaz generally follows today. I would add that Rabbi Lonzano's personal *Tenach* manuscript, with his hand-written marginal notes, has recently been discovered. Known as *Jeselsohn 5*, (after Zurich collector David Jeselsohn), it was written in 1477 by Rabbi Moshe Zabaro, author of *Meleches Hasofer* on hilchos STAM, and an expert sofer. I have reproduced the 'daka' passage and you will note that the masora at the bottom of the page has the 'heh' version of the masora. Rabbi Lonzano's annotations can be identified as his ink is blacker than the original fading brown. The 'daka' masora is added at the bottom in darker ink and it may well be that Rabbi Lonzano inserted it himself, which would indicate his preference for the 'heh' version, even though he did not give a decisive ruling in *Or Torah*.

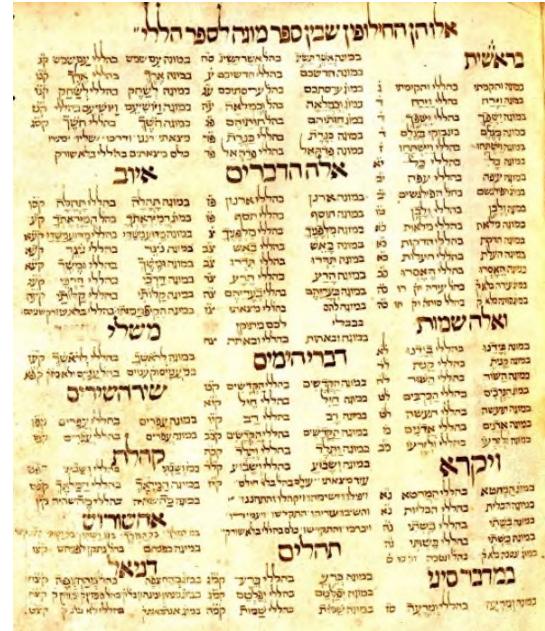
WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL VERSION?

Rabbi Chaim Berlin suggests that the difference between the Bavli translation in Yevamos 75b as three adjectives, as explained above, and the Yerushalmi translation, reflects a difference of spelling of ‘daka’ already in Talmudic times. Ashkenaz generally followed Eretz Yisrael custom, so it followed the text of Yerushalmi, whereas Spain followed Bavel tradition of ‘daka’ with ‘heh’. The earliest Tenach manuscripts were written in the seventh century with the transition from scrolls to book-form, when it became permitted to add nekudos and masora to the page. Two of the earliest sefarim, which served as model codices, were known as Hilleli and Mugah, not extant today. However, their nusach has been preserved in marginal notes in later manuscripts which record what they found in these early sefarim. One such note in British Library 15251 tells us that in Mugah, ‘daka’ was originally written with ‘heh’ and it was altered to ‘aleph’. Jerusalem NLI-7153 has a note saying Mugah had a ‘heh’. We have evidence that Hilleli was written with ‘heh’, as a copy of Hilleli was made in 1241 (now JTS401-3). A list of differences between Mugah and Hilleli has been published by Dr. Michael Rappaport in his article ‘The Hilleli and Mugah Manuscripts’, in *Munich 392*, and ‘daka’ is not mentioned, so that evidences that Mugah was originally written with ‘heh’. The Yerushalmi version with ‘aleph’ is well-known, such as Keter Aram Tzova. However, Spain remained faithful to the Bavel version.

MIGDAL OZ

In the course of preparing this article, I came across a surprising addition to the masora by Migdal Oz, Rabbi Shemtov ibn Gaon, the Rambam commentator. As a sofer, he wrote a Tenach (Sassoon82) in 1312 which incorporated a vast collection of masora notes in the margins. In connection with ‘daka’, after writing the three-aleph version, he adds: “Maaravai write petzua daka with ‘heh’ and have a masora comment that this word is written twice in Tenach with ‘aleph’ and once with ‘heh’”. Maaravai generally refers to Eretz Yisrael custom, as opposed to Bavel, so this addition, although reflecting the machlokes, implies the exact opposite of what has been suggested above. In Tehilim 90:3 he only includes the ‘heh’ version, and although the text of petzua daka has ‘aleph’, this appears to be a subsequent alteration. Further evidence that it was originally a ‘heh’ is from manuscript JTS388, which claims to be copied from the Migdal Oz volume, and is written with ‘heh’.

In summation, the variation of spelling of daka has its origins in earliest times, and may be the basis for the different interpretations in Bavli and Yerushalmi. Today, all communities write new sifrei Torah with ‘heh’, except for Lubavitch (plus some chassidus) and Temanim, who retain ‘aleph’.



Munich 392

The image shows a page from the Migdal Oz Tanach. At the top, there is a handwritten note in Hebrew script. Below the note, the main text of Leviticus 19:13 is written in large, bold Hebrew letters. The text reads "לא יבא פנוי זדנה אורה שפנה" followed by "למייס חזר". To the right of the main text, there is another handwritten note in Hebrew script.

DAF TOPICS by Yakov Schonberg, from OHR HAMERCAZ, the Mercaz Daf Yomi weekly newsletter.

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