



לקוטי שיחות  
PROJECT  
LIKKUTEI  
SICHOS



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 17 | Tzav | Sichah 2

Constant Fire

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## 1.

### WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH THE *MENORAH*?

In his commentary on verse,<sup>1</sup> “A constant fire shall burn upon the Altar; it shall not be extinguished,” Rashi quotes the words, “A constant fire,” and explains:

The fire which the Torah calls “constant” is that with which they would light the lamps {of the *menorah*}, about which it says,<sup>2</sup> “to light a constant lamp.” It, too, should be kindled {using fire} from the Outer Altar.

Simply understood, it seems<sup>3</sup> that Rashi addresses the word, “constant,” which seems redundant. If the verse was aiming to emphasize that the fire upon the Altar must burn without interruption, the verse could have simply said, “A fire shall burn upon the Altar; it shall not be extinguished.” (As the previous verse says,<sup>4</sup> “The fire upon the Altar shall burn on it, it shall not be extinguished.”) What does the word “constant” add? Therefore, Rashi understands that the phrase, “a constant fire” refers to the fire of the *menorah*, which is called “a **constant** lamp.” Thus, the verse teaches that the *menorah* must be lit (using fire) from the Altar.

However, we need to clarify:

- a) The entire *parshah* speaks about the Altar and related matters, including the fire upon the Altar. What is a law about the fire of the *menorah* doing here {according to Rashi’s interpretation}, especially, according to *pshat*?<sup>5</sup> We could answer {the question about the apparent redundancy, without having to introduce the subject of the *menorah*} **simply**: The reason that the verse adds the word “constant” is in order to further emphasize the

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<sup>1</sup> *Vayikra* 6:6.

<sup>2</sup> *Shemos* 27:20.

<sup>3</sup> See *Be'er Maim Chaim* and *Maskil L'Dovid* on *Vayikra* 6:6.

<sup>4</sup> {*Vayikra* 6:5.}

<sup>5</sup> {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

**constancy**, expressed in the positive sense.<sup>6</sup> The fire must be constant, without cessation. As we see, in fact, *Ibn Ezra*, one of the foremost commentators who also adopts the method of *pshat*, explains the verse in this way: “Constant” refers to the constancy of the **Altar’s** fire {and *not* the *menorah’s*}.

Although Rashi’s comments are sourced in rabbinic *Midrash*,<sup>7</sup> it is known (as discussed on numerous occasions) that even when Rashi quotes a *Midrash* in his Torah commentary, this explanation is necessary according to *pshat*. This is particularly evident when Rashi does not introduce such an explanation with the expression, “**our Rabbis expounded**,” or the like. This demonstrates that **this** explanation is absolutely warranted in order to make sense of the *pshat* of the actual verses.

b) Moreover, Rashi himself explained earlier:<sup>8</sup>

The Torah mentions many burnings here: “on the flame,”<sup>9</sup> “and the fire of the Altar shall be kept burning on it,”<sup>10</sup> “the fire upon the Altar shall be kept burning on it,”<sup>11</sup> and, “a constant fire shall burn upon the Altar.”<sup>12</sup> All of these have been expounded in tractate *Yoma*,<sup>13</sup> where our Rabbis disagree about the number of pyres that were arranged there.

Meaning, the verse, “a **constant fire** shall burn” refers to (one of the) pyres on the **Altar**. How, then, could Rashi, in his commentary on our verse, explain this verse as referring to the fire of the *menorah*?

c) Even more baffling: In this verse itself, Rashi immediately remarks that the concluding clause, “it shall not be extinguished,” refers to the fire upon the Altar.

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<sup>6</sup> {That the fire *should be constant*, rather than *it should not cease*.}

<sup>7</sup> *Yoma* 45b; *Toras Kohanim* on the verse (6:2) “And the fire upon the Altar.” Rashi words his commentary here more similarly to the words of the *Gemara* in *Yoma* (see Rashi on the *Gemara*, *ibid*).

<sup>8</sup> *Vayikra* 6:5.

<sup>9</sup> {*Vayikra* 6:2.}

<sup>10</sup> {*Vayikra* 6:2.}

<sup>11</sup> {*Vayikra* 6:5.}

<sup>12</sup> {*Vayikra* 6:6.}

<sup>13</sup> *Yoma* 45a.

## 2.

### SUGGESTION

Perhaps we could answer (similar to the understanding of some of the commentators):<sup>14</sup> Rashi does not reject the plain meaning of the phrase “a constant fire” — that the entire verse is speaking about the pyre on the Altar. Rashi, however, seeks to explain that the adjective “constant” (here, in the context of the Altar) *also* teaches us something about the *menorah*, since the verse uses the same description, “constant,” regarding the *menorah*. That is, the fire of the *menorah* needed to be lit from the Altar’s fire.

However, understanding Rashi in this way is difficult for the following reasons:

- a) If this were true, Rashi should have prefaced his explanation with “our Rabbis **learn from here**,” or, “from here they learn,” or some similar phrase.
- b) {In his caption} Rashi also quotes the word “fire” from the verse. Also, in his commentary, he explains along with the word “constant” also the word “fire,” saying, “The fire which the Torah calls ‘constant.’” Meaning, “constant” describes the word “fire” stated in our verse.
- c) Rashi’s lengthy wording, “Even it shall be **lit** {using fire} **from the Outer Altar**,” indicates that Rashi inserts his explanation into the flow of the verse, “shall burn upon the Altar.”

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<sup>14</sup> *Divrei Dovid* (authored by the *Taz*, Rabbi Dovid Halevi Segal 1586-1667) commenting on this verse.

### 3.

#### EXACT WORDING

Some commentators<sup>15</sup> resolve the contradiction between Rashi's above-mentioned comments {as to whether "a constant fire" refers to the Altar pyre or to the *menorah's* lamps}, in the following manner: The *Gemara* in tractate *Yoma* does **not** explain the verse, "A constant fire shall burn upon the Altar" as referring to the pyres that needed to be set upon the Altar. Rather, the previous verses teach us about all the pyres. Rashi intended his remark, "All of them have been expounded in tractate *Yoma*... about the number of pyres that were there," as a reference only, as to where and in what context our Rabbis expound these verses.

But it is well known how precise Rashi is with his wording. Thus, this answer is not at all smooth. For if Rashi only wanted to provide a reference to the source where these verses are expounded, it would have been sufficient for Rashi to have said, "They are all expounded in tractate *Yoma*," as he does in numerous places throughout his commentary.

Therefore, we must conclude that the phrase, "where our Rabbis disagree about the number of pyres that were there" is relevant to Rashi's explanation.

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<sup>15</sup> *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* on *Vayikra* 6:6.

## 4.

WHY CAN'T IT TEACH US ABOUT BURNING ALWAYS?

The explanation: Rashi already explained the meaning of the word, “constant,” in the context of the *menorah*:<sup>16</sup>

Each and every night is referred to as “constant.” As in the verse,<sup>17</sup> “a constant *olah* offering,” when it is offered only once each day. Similarly, regarding the *minchas chavisin*,<sup>18</sup> it says “constant,” yet only half was offered in the morning and half in the evening....<sup>19</sup>

As such, it is difficult to suggest that according to Rashi, the word, “constant,” in our context is **adding** to that which the verse says, “(A fire shall burn...) **it shall not be extinguished**,” regarding the fire burning continuously, at all times. On the contrary! “It shall not be extinguished,” means that the fire must always burn, whereas “constant” could possibly mean burning continually either only during daylight or only during nighttime. Furthermore, even within this category, the meaning of “constant,” in this context, could be similar to its meaning in the phrase the “constant *olah* offering,” i.e., not even all day or all night {i.e. “continual”}.

Therefore, Rashi understands that by saying “a constant fire,” the Torah refers to a different fire, regarding which the verse says, “to light a constant lamp” {i.e., the *menorah*}. This fire must be lit from the Altar’s fire.

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<sup>16</sup> *Shemos* 27:20.

<sup>17</sup> *Shemos* 29:42; *Bamidbar* 28:6.

<sup>18</sup> {A *minchah* brought when a *kohen* was inaugurated to Temple service; when a *kohen* was inaugurated to serve as *Kohen Gadol*; and daily, by the *Kohen Gadol*.}

<sup>19</sup> *Vayikra* 6:13; see also *Rashi, Chagigah* 26b.

## 5.

### IT ALL DEPENDS ON HOW MANY FIRES WERE ON THE ALTAR

On this basis, we can also appreciate why when Rashi earlier quotes, “many burnings here...”: (a) he is not content to say that “the Torah mentions many burnings here” (and assume that we will go ahead and enumerate them ourselves), but rather, he cites all of these instances (including the verse, “a constant fire”); and, (b) he uses lengthy wording: “The Torah mentions many....” Rashi could have just written (using concise wording): “four burnings here: ‘on the flame...’; and, (c) after he says, “All of them have been expounded in tractate *Yoma*,” Rashi adds, “where our Rabbis disagree about the number of pyres that were there.” All three of these additions make sense since Rashi here seeks to emphasize that the explanation of the verse, here, depends on the varying opinions regarding the number of pyres.

Since “The Torah mentions... **here**,” it makes sense, according to *pshat*, that **all** the burnings mentioned are in the context of “here” (i.e., the Altar). Thus, according to the authority who maintains that four pyres were burning every day on the Altar (and consequently, the verse, “A constant fire shall burn upon the Altar” is also included among verses that discuss the Altar pyres. According to this authority, Rashi needs to add no explanation to this verse. [And according to Rashi’s consistent position, one would have to understand the word, “constant,” albeit with difficulty, according to the way *Ibn Ezra* understands it, or the like.]

However, according to the dissenting authorities (who maintain that only two or three pyres were burning on the Altar), Rashi clarifies that this can also be proven based on *pshat*. Because, as mentioned (it makes more sense to suggest that) “a constant fire” refers to the *menorah*, and that “it shall burn {i.e., be lit} (from {fire}) upon the Altar.” This is the explanation according to *pshat*. The “burnings” on the Altar were “many” (more than one), but not four.

## 6.

### WHICH ONE IS THE ROOT CAUSE

Among the wondrous *halachic* insights in Rashi's commentary:

In many *halachos* which are composed of two interdependent facets, a question may be asked: Which facet is the primary one and the cause, and which is the consequence?

For example: On Shavuot, the *shteihalechem*<sup>20</sup> are offered. The *halachah* requires the *shteihalechem* to be offered as a “new *minchah*,”<sup>21</sup> i.e., from the new harvest. Additionally, before offering the *shteihalechem*, we are not allowed to offer any other *minchah* from the new harvest in the Temple.<sup>22</sup> A question arises: What is the primary facet and cause? Is it a law of the *shteihalechem*? Meaning, does the ***shteihalechem*** have to be the **first** *minchah* from the new harvest, and *consequently*, we are forbidden to offer any other *menachos*<sup>23</sup> from the new harvest prior to offering it? Or is it essentially a {broader} law concerning all *menachos* — they all require a “permitter”<sup>24</sup> to allow *menachos* to be offered from the new harvest, and the *shteihalechem* has to come first {as their “permitter”}? Meaning, the *shteihalechem* is the first offering from the new harvest {as a consequence} **because** doing so **permits** offering the other *menachos* from the new harvest.

This question has practical applications in several cases, among them:

If a person transgressed and offered a *minchah* from the new harvest before the *shteihalechem*, would the prohibition against offering further *menachos* from the new harvest still stand?

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<sup>20</sup> {Lit., “the two breads,” the *shteihalechem* consisted of two loaves offered in the Temple on *Shavuot* in conjunction with two lambs.}

<sup>21</sup> {Commonly translated as “a meal offering,” a *minchah* consisted primarily of grain. Regarding *shteihalechem*, see *Vayikra* 23:16.}

<sup>22</sup> See *Menachos* 68b, ff; 83b.

<sup>23</sup> {Pl. of *minchah*.}

<sup>24</sup> {“*Matir*,” in the Hebrew original. A *matir* is an *avodah* (Temple service) that had to be performed first in order to permit the remainder of the offering to be placed on the Altar and/or consumed by people.}



If the reason is that the *shteí halechem* needs to be the **first** from the new harvest, in this case, the *shteí halechem* no longer be the first. Thus, the prohibition would fall away, and anyone can now offer a *minchah* from the new harvest.

However, if the reason is because it is forbidden to offer any *minchah* from the new harvest until the *shteí halechem* permits it, the prohibition would stand even after a person offered a *minchah* from the new harvest. As long as the *shteí halechem* was not offered, the **permitter**, allowing other *menachos* from the new harvest to be brought, has not yet been offered.

Similarly, in our context:

The *menorah* candles must be lit {with fire} from the Outer Altar. Is this a law concerning lighting the *menorah*, i.e., the fire of the *menorah* must come from the Outer Altar? Or, is it an obligation that (is mentioned in the Torah in the section about the Altar, and thus, it) devolves upon the Altar? Meaning, must the fire be taken from the Altar to light the *menorah*?

One of the practical differences would be: If for some reason there is no fire upon the Altar, does this preclude the lighting of the *menorah*?

If this is an obligation that devolves upon the *menorah*, then when the Altar has no fire, we cannot light the *menorah*. However, if this obligation devolves upon the Altar, then when the Altar has no fire, the obligation falls aside. Thus, the lamps of the *menorah* may be lit from a different fire.

According to the *halachic* sources, it seems that this obligation is a law concerning the lighting of the *menorah*, that the flame must come from the Outer Altar.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Temidin*,” ch. 3, par. 13, and *Raavad*, *ibid*.

But Rashi here implies that this obligation concerns the Outer Altar. Rashi diverges from the wording of our Rabbis wording. Our Rabbis say,<sup>26</sup> “The “constant fire” that I told you about {i.e., the fire of the *menorah*} should be lit only from {a fire that is} on top of the Outer Altar.” But Rashi says, “**Even it** shall be lit {using fire} from the Outer Altar.” This implies that the **fire of the Altar must also** (just like the other “burnings”) **be** the one from which the fire of the *menorah* is lit.

Moreover, this is the implication of a plain reading of Scripture, as discussed above, since Torah places this scriptural source in the section discussing the (fire of the) Outer Altar, and not in the sections discussing about the *menorah*.

## 7.

### THE LESSON

The lesson in *avodas Hashem*:

The utensils in the *Mishkan* and in the *Beis Hamikdash* are divided, generally, into two categories: The utensils that were inside — the **Inner** Altar, the *Menorah*, the *Shulchan*,<sup>27</sup> {and the utensils that were outside} — the **Outer** Altar, etc.

In a person’s *avodah*,<sup>28</sup> these categories allude to two types of *avodah*: *Avodah* that a person performs with himself<sup>29</sup> (inside), and *avodah* influencing other Jewish people, to bring also that which is “outside” close,<sup>30</sup> and *avodah* with his portion in the world (outside).<sup>31</sup> This is similar to the Outer Altar on

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<sup>26</sup> Yoma 45b

<sup>27</sup> {The table upon which the *lechem hapanim* (showbreads) were placed.

<sup>28</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>29</sup> {E.g., introspection and refining one’s character.}

<sup>30</sup> {E.g., bringing other Jews closer to observance.}

<sup>31</sup> {E.g., transforming their environment into a G-dly place.}

which, specifically, the sacrifices of **all Jews** were offered, the location at which worldly matters were refined.<sup>32</sup>

More specifically, lighting the *menorah* alludes to the Torah,<sup>33</sup> as the verse says,<sup>34</sup> “A *mitzvah* is a lamp and Torah is a fire.” Regarding this it says, “to light a constant lamp” (analogous to the constant obligation to study Torah, in contrast to *mitzvos*). This is even more salient for people whose occupation is Torah study. These people exist on the level of a “constant lamp” — always connected to Hashem.<sup>35</sup>

A person whose primary occupation is Torah study may claim: “I can emulate a lit *menorah*, like ‘a constant lamp.’ I do not need to perform *mitzvos*, even ones whose obligatory time will expire. And I certainly should not engage at all in worldly matters or even with another Jew who, in comparison with the {spiritual} standing (and level) of a full-time Torah scholar, is considered ‘outside.’”

This, then, is the lesson. The *menorah* (is, and) must be lit from the Altar.

Certainly the Inner Altar, i.e., the lofty *avodah* that a Jewish person performs with himself, exists. But the lamps of the *menorah* were not kindled from the Inner Altar, even though they stood near each other.<sup>36</sup> The Inner Altar represents the internal *avodah* (of the heart).<sup>37</sup> The *menorah* must be lit {using fire} from the **Outer** Altar.

Furthermore: Rashi’s remarks indicate that the fire, while still burning upon the Outer Altar, was already linked to the fire on the *menorah*. In a person’s *avodah* this translates to the following: If a full-time Torah scholar wants to be “lit,” and glow with the “fire” and the light of Torah, he needs to first feel responsible that “the **candle of Hashem** {which is} the soul of man”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Tzemach Tzedek’s *Sefer HaMitzvos*, “*Mitzvas Binyan Mikdash*,” ch. 2; et al.

<sup>33</sup> See *Torah Or*, 88b; *Or HaTorah*, “*Terumah*,” p. 1491 ff.; et al.

<sup>34</sup> *Mishlei* 6:23.

<sup>35</sup> See *Or HaTorah*, “*Tetzaveh*,” p. 1552 ff.

<sup>36</sup> See *Yoma* 45b.

<sup>37</sup> See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Devarim*,” 78d, 86d.

<sup>38</sup> *Mishlei* 20:27.

burns and shines also within a Jew who may be standing on the “outside.” Only then can the scholar ignite his own “candle of Hashem” with the light of the Torah.

This relationship between the *menorah* and the Outer Altar (engaging with the “outside”) is so vital that our verse alludes to it with the word, “constant.” Being “constant” — a full-time Torah scholar’s constant engagement in *avodah* — can only come about by overcoming the challenges and difficulties of the “outside” by engaging with, and influencing, other Jews. Then, in his study of the Torah, the scholar will attain the virtue of being “constant.”

— Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Tzav*, 5729 (1969)