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The Heating of the Heart

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1.

RASHI' INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM *NICHMERU*

“Yosef rushed because his compassion had been *nichmeru* for his brother.”¹ Rashi quotes the word “*nichmeru*” (in his second gloss) and explains:

Had become heated. In the lexicon of the Mishnah,² {we find a related word:} “on the *komar* {heating utensil} of olives.” And in Aramaic, {we find a related word}³ “because of *michmar bisra* {the meat becoming warm}.” And in Scripture {we also find},⁴ “our skin *nichmeru* {was scorched} like an oven.” The word *nichmeru* in that verse means, “became heated” and “became full of wrinkles” — “because of the fever of famine.”⁵ Such is the nature of all skin: when heated, it wrinkles and shrivels.

We can appreciate why Rashi needs to bring a proof for defining the term *nichmeru* as “had become heated,” since the novice student of Scripture⁶ encounters the verb *nichmeru* here for the first time. Therefore, Rashi needs to clarify its meaning and explain it with proofs and sources.

But we need to clarify:

a) Why does Rashi need **three** references? **Obviously**, (as discussed many times) Rashi brings additional references when each of them alone is insufficient, and the others are complementary.

In what way is each of these proofs alone insufficient in **our** context?

b) The **order** of Rashi's remarks is very difficult to understand — first he says, “in the lexicon of the Mishnah”; he then says, “in Aramaic”; and only then, “in Scripture.” Ostensibly, the proof from **Scripture** should have been first

¹ *Bereishis* 43:30.

² *Bava Metzia* 74a.

³ *Pesachim* 58a.

⁴ *Eicha* 5:10.

⁵ {The conclusion of the verse, *Eicha* 5:10.}

⁶ {“*Ben chamesh lemikra*,” in the Hebrew original, meaning, “a five-year-old beginning to study Scripture.” This is a term borrowed from *Pirkei Avos*, which teaches that the age for a child to begin studying *Chumash* is at five. Rashi wrote his commentary on *Chumash* to solve problems that a 5-year-old student would encounter in understanding the simple meaning of a verse.}

(moreover, this proof has an advantage — the form of the verb is precisely the same as in our verse: “*nichmeru*”). The proof from the lexicon of the Mishnah (if at all necessary) should come next, and the proof (drawn from the Gemara) from Aramaic should follow.

c) Why does Rashi bring a proof from the lexicon of the Mishnah — “*komar* of olives” — in *Bava Metzia*, and not from “*komar* of grapes,” which surfaces **earlier** in the Gemara, in tractate *Yevamos*?⁷

d) Similarly, regarding Aramaic itself, Rashi should have quoted the phrase, “*bushlei kamra* {burned by the heat}” which appears earlier, in tractate *Berachos*,⁸ rather than the phrase, “*michmar bisra*,” which appears later, in tractate *Pesachim*.

e) Additionally, we need to clarify regarding quoting the term from Scripture. Rashi quotes a verse from *Eicha*, but we find the term “*nichmeru*” earlier, in *Melachim*⁹ and in *Hoshea*.¹⁰ These sources not only appear earlier in the order of Scripture, but they are also more apt proofs because of the subject of the verbs, which parallels the subject of this verb as used in our verse. The expressions, “her compassion was *nichmeru*” in *Melachim*, and, “My mercies have been *nichmeru*” in *Hoshea*, both refer to feelings of the heart, similar to “his compassion had been *nichmeru*” in our *parshah*. In contrast, the expression, “**our skin** *nichmeru* {became heated} like an oven,” in *Eicha*, refers to skin — a completely different subject.

f) When Rashi quotes the proof, “our skin *nichmeru* {became heated} like an oven,” he also quotes the continuation of the verse, “because of the fever of famine.” Seemingly, this continuation is irrelevant and (thus, it is) superfluous in terms of clarifying the proof. As, in fact, we see regarding the other proofs (from the lexicon of the Mishnah and Aramaic) — there, Rashi does not quote the continuation of the topic and discussion.

⁷ *Yevamos* 97a.

⁸ *Berachos* 40b.

⁹ *Melachim I* 3:26.

¹⁰ *Hoshea* 11:8.

g) Even more difficult to understand is the conclusion of Rashi's interpretation: "Such is the nature of all skin: when heated, it wrinkles and shrivels." Why is this relevant?

h) At any rate, this explanation ("such is the nature... shrivels") should immediately follow the word "wrinkles." **Rashi**, surely, should not have interrupted **in the middle** of his commentary by mentioning the continuation of the **verse**, "because of the fever of famine."

2.

ANOTHER RASHI AND MORE QUESTIONS

We will clarify all the above by prefacing with an explanation of Rashi's remarks in his previous gloss, in which he comments on the words, "his compassion had been *nichmeru*":

Yosef asked Binyamin, "Do you have a brother of the same mother as yourself?" He replied, "I had a brother but I don't know where he is." "Do you have sons?" He replied, "I have ten." Yosef asked him, "And what are their names?" Binyamin replied, "Bela, Becher...."¹¹ Yosef then enquired, "What is the significance of these names?" He replied, "They all allude to my brother and the troubles that befell him. I called him *Bela* because he was swallowed up {*nivla*} amongst foreign nations; *Becher* because he was the firstborn {*bechor*} of his mother."

(Rashi then continues to enumerate the meaning of all **ten** names, and concludes with the source of his interpretation, "as related in tractate *Sotah*."¹² Rashi then concludes:) "When Yosef heard all this, his compassion was *nichmeru* immediately."

A question instantly arises: Why does Rashi first clarify (in his first gloss, (at great length) the reason that Yosef's compassion was *nichmeru*, before he clarifies (in his second gloss) the **definition** of the word *nichmeru*?

¹¹ *Bereishis* 46:21

¹² *Sotah* 36b.

Simply, the order should have been reversed: First, it is necessary to know (**what** happened) **what** the **word** *nichmeru* means, and afterwards, it makes sense to discuss the reason that it happened.

Additional questions:

a) What difficulty in *pshat*¹³ compelled Rashi to quote the lengthy exposition of our Sages? Seemingly, the concepts in the verse are simple to understand. When Yosef saw Binyamin, his only “full” brother (who was the only brother not party to his sale, etc.) after not seeing him for many years, “his compassion was *nichmeru*.”

b) Even were we to presume that Rashi saw some compelling reason that - in addition to this — Yosef and Binyamin also engaged in some conversation, as our Sages recount — Rashi could have merely quoted the beginning of the narrative (“He asked him, ‘Do you have a brother?...’”), and referenced the source (“as related in tractate *Sotah*”), and a student studying Rashi’s commentary could have gone and gleaned all the details. What does this lengthy exposition (especially the clarification of **all** the names, etc.,) contribute to our understanding of the *pshat* of this verse?

In other words, Rashi only explains *pshat*; where is all this additional commentary implied in *pshat*?

c) More importantly, how did the topic of Binyamin’s sons, discussed in *parshas Vayigash*, even enter the picture here?

d) Why does Rashi add and emphasize “**immediately** (his compassion was *nichmeru*)” and what is the source of this explanation (since Rashi does **not** quote the word, “rushed,” from the verse)!?

¹³ {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.” When the plain meaning is understood clearly, Rashi does not comment. Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

3.

MR. POLITICIAN

The explanation:

When understood superficially, the reason that it says that “his compassion was *nichmeru*... and he wanted to cry” was because Yosef beheld Binyamin. However, this cannot be the case because this reaction should have happened immediately after, and as a continuation to the earlier verse, “Yosef saw Binyamin with them”¹⁴ (at the beginning of the section). Moreover, the verse states that Yosef was moved to tears quickly — “Yosef **rushed**.”

Or, at the very least — his response should have occurred in proximity to, and recorded as a continuation of the verse, “He raised his eyes and he saw his brother Binyamin, his mother’s son,”¹⁵ (at the end of the section, when the brothers arrived with Yosef in his house).

However, even after the second time that the Torah recounts that, “he saw,” he first responded, “Is this your younger brother?,” and then said, “May Hashem be gracious to you, my son.” Only after all these events, “his compassion had been *nichmeru*.” This tells us that seeing Binyamin was **not** what evoked Yosef’s compassion and his urge to cry.

The reason for this is obvious and **self-understood**: Yosef was viceroy for so long, such that “without you, no man shall lift his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt,”¹⁶ — “only regarding the throne shall I be superior to you.”¹⁷ Yosef certainly conducted himself assertively and confidently (especially toward his brothers, to whom he intentionally showed himself to be resolute and stubborn). Therefore, although seeing Binyamin, “his brother, of the same mother,” certainly aroused powerful emotion — {nevertheless} before he disclosed his identity to his brothers, and particularly, in the presence of other people — Yosef

¹⁴ Bereishis 43:16.

¹⁵ Bereishis 43:29.

¹⁶ Bereishis 41:44.

¹⁷ Bereishis 41:40.

(as viceroy) certainly stifled his feelings, etc., and did not emote externally. As we see that even afterwards — when he felt the urge to cry — he went into another room and cried there.

[For this reason, throughout the entire *sedrah*, we never find Yosef showed overcome by emotion, etc., and particularly, not crying, or the like.¹⁸ Even though throughout his meeting and conversations with his brothers, Yosef saw and heard many things that certainly evoked strong feelings, etc., {such as hearing of} his father’s pain, etc., Yosef still conducted himself resolutely.]

4.

SO MUCH FEELING

Therefore, we must conclude — from the continuation and connotations of the passages — that something transpired after “(Yosef) saw Binyamin... and he said, ‘May G-d...,’” that affected Yosef even more profoundly than him seeing Binyamin.

But Scripture does not specify clearly what happened. Therefore, we must say that what occurred was a **continuation** of the narrative, “May G-d be gracious to you, my son.” Meaning, this event was related to the **blessings** Binyamin had received from Hashem, which were linked to (and thus would affect) Yosef. In particular, the linkage of Hashem’s blessings must have been with respect to Binyamin as Yosef’s brother (since it caused that “his compassion for his **brother** had been *nichmeru*”). Therefore, Rashi must mention the entire lengthy discussion, beginning with, “Do you have a **brother of the same mother as yourself?**” (as Rashi mentions in the introduction, “a brother of the same mother,” specifically).

¹⁸ Rashi on *Bereishis* 42:24 explains that Yosef “*turned away from them and wept* — because he heard them regretting having sold him.” However, in that case: (a) Yosef’s compassion was not “*nichmeru*” and he did not cry so severely; therefore, (b) he only needed to **turn** away from them — “so they should not see him crying” (Rashi), but he did not need to go to his room, and wash his face, as he did here.

But this matter must also somehow have been connected with Binyamin's children, since it follows the clause, "May G-d be gracious to you, my son." As **Rashi explains**, this is like the verse regarding Yaakov, "whom G-d has graciously given your servant,"¹⁹ which alludes to offspring. However, Binyamin's fathering children itself would not have sufficed to stir these feelings; rather, it had to be something that would elicit a powerful sense of brotherhood between Yosef and Binyamin, to the extent that "his compassion had been *nichmeru* for his brother." Therefore, Rashi says that Yosef and Binyamin conversed about something that aroused feelings of brotherhood in an extraordinary way, to the extent that it would **perforce** evoke in Yosef (even given his resolute demeanor) the urge to cry.

With this in mind, we can appreciate, as mentioned above, why Rashi needed to quote the entire lengthy story: "He asked... he said to him...", as well as the significance of each of the names individually. "Be gracious to you," unqualified, implying "in its entirety" — with all the details — caused Yosef's compassion to be aroused. Every detail was relevant to bringing out the extraordinary brotherhood and feeling between Binyamin and Yosef. Although Binyamin was only nine (or ten) years old when the brothers had sold Yosef, still, for **all** the following years, he never stopped thinking about his brother on his mother's side — Yosef — and his troubles. In fact, in order to express his anguish {over his brother's fate}, Binyamin went to the extreme of naming all his children after Yosef. Furthermore, his distress was expressed in the names of all his ten children, and **each** of the names, in particular, refer to a specific and individual aspect of yearning, anguish, etc. "They all allude to my brother and the troubles that befell him." Binyamin did this so that whenever he would mention the name of his children, he would be reminded of his brother on his mother's side.

In light of this, we can certainly appreciate why Yosef could no longer maintain his resolute demeanor, and as Rashi points out with precise wording: "**immediately**, his compassion was *nichmeru*."

¹⁹ Bereishis 33:5.

5.

THE EXPLANATION BEFORE THE DEFINITION

On this basis, we can also appreciate why Rashi first explains the reason behind *nichmeru* (and at such great length) before defining the word *nichmeru* itself. For specifically this explanation (necessitated by *pshat*) clarifies and conclusively **defines** the word *nichmeru*: Since something must have elicited such intense emotion in Yosef, much stronger than when “(Yosef) saw his brother Binyamin,” as discussed, it is consequently understood that the word *nichmeru* means “became heated.” In other words, it denotes intense feelings, and not as *Targum Onkelos* defines the word *nichmeru*: “*isgolelu* {stirred}” (i.e., a regular arousal).

6.

ACTUAL HEAT

Rashi, however, does not suffice with this proof. Although from the pragmatic understanding of the passages, it is understood that the clause “his compassion was *nichmeru*” means a more intense arousal than *isgolelu*, it does not necessarily prove that *nichmeru* semantically means specifically “became heated” (as opposed to a different but similar definition). Therefore, Rashi provides further proof regarding the semantic **definition** of the word.

On this basis, we can readily understand why Rashi does not cite the verse, “her compassion was *nichmeru*” in *Melachim*, or the verse, “My mercies have been *nichmeru*,” in *Hoshea*, as proof: He does not reference those verses specifically because the pragmatic meaning of those verses also concern heartfelt feelings as does our verse. Therefore, those verses offer no conclusive proof, no clear illustration, that *nichmeru* here means {semantically}, “became heated.” (Even were we to conclude that the general **subject** there also indicates that *nichmeru* refers to an intense emotional arousal, still) in what way is the

{semantic} **definition** of the word clearer there than in our context? [In fact, the proof that this is not the case is that *Targum*'s translation of the word in both of those sources is — “*isgolelu*” — the same way *Targum* renders the term here.]

Therefore, Rashi must provide support from a source where the same term is used but in a different context — where the subject shows us that the semantic definition is specifically “became heated.”

Rashi first offers support from the lexicon of the Mishnah (which is written in “the Holy Tongue”²⁰ **similar** to the lexicon of Scripture) “on the *komar* of olives.” *Komar* is the name of the utensil in which the olives are **heated**. Thus, we understand that the definition of *komar* — *nichmeru* is heat.

7.

AND MICHMAR BISRA

However, the support from *komar* by itself is not **conclusive**, because we can still ask: If we find no **clear** source that *komar* is an idiom of heat, who says that this utensil is called a *komar* because of its heating functionality? Perhaps this is just the name of a utensil (and is not indicative of its ability to warm)?

Therefore, Rashi offers another support from “Aramaic” — “*michmar bisra* {the meat becoming warm}.” There, we see clearly that *michmar* refers to something becoming hot. The Aramaic thus clarifies the meaning of this word as used in the lexicon of the Mishnah (just as the Gemara, in general, explains the Mishnah), which **resembles** the terminology of Scripture. Meaning, *komar* is of the same root word as **heat**, since this is the function of the utensil.

²⁰ {Biblical Hebrew.}

8.

KOMAR AND KAMRA

On this basis we can also appreciate why Rashi does not quote the proof from the term *komar* in earlier sources in Gemara:²¹

The term “*komar* of grapes” (in *Yevamos*) is mentioned in continuation to what the Gemara says:

“Moving gently the lips of those who are asleep.”²² This is like a *komar* of grapes {left to warm before they are pressed}: Just as in the case of a *komar* of grapes, when a person places his finger on it, immediately it moves {as the wine bursts through and the whole pile shakes}, so, too, with respect to Torah scholars: {When a teaching is repeated in their name in This World, their lips utter the words in the grave.}

Therefore, (even with the assistance of the proof from *michmar bisra*) the proof from “*komar* of grapes” is not strong enough to conclusively establish that the word is an idiom of heat. This is because the context and content of the Gemara leaves room to suggest that the utensil is called a *komar* (not because of its heating capacity, but) because the grapes are **pressed** in it. For this reason, the wine seeps out and is released from the grapes (and thus we could assume that this is the connotation of the term *komar*).

Also, the usage of the Aramaic term “*bushlei kamra*” in tractate *Berachos* does not prove that this term is used specifically in context of the heating effect. For there, the word is used to describe dates {meaning, that is what those dates are called}, and thus, this source does not prove that the term *kamra* (even if it is an adjective meaning something related to heat)²³ can be used in the active or passive verb form.

²¹ Furthermore, one can say: (a) Tractate *Bava Metzia* is the main place where the matter and subject is discussed, whereas in tractate *Yevamos*, the topic arises only tangentially — “Just as in the case of a *komar* of grapes...” (b) The principal application of a *komar* is with olives, whereas grapes are not typically heated (*Bava Metzia*, loc. cit., *Tosafos*, s.v., “*tani*”).

²² *Shir HaShirim* 7:10.

²³ See Rashi on *Berachos* 40b, s.v. “*bushlei karma*.”

9.

NICHMERU LIKE AN OVEN

The wording in our verse is “*nichmeru*.” Rashi, therefore, also wanted to include a proof-text that includes the identical wording. Therefore, Rashi also provides the source, “And in Scripture,²⁴ ‘our skin *nichmeru* {became heated} like an oven.’” The word *nichmeru* in this verse, also means “became heated” (according to Rashi).

However, since the word *nichmeru* in this verse could also be rendered as “blackened” (as, in fact, some commentators interpret it), Rashi quotes the end of the verse to prove the validity of his definition, “because of the fever of famine”:

True, famine can cause a person’s skin to blacken. However, since the verse connects it {the effects on the skin}, again, at the end of the verse (in addition to the first comparison — “like an oven”) with “fever” i.e., fever and heat,²⁵ logic dictates that *nichmeru* here means, “became heated.”

10.

THAT’S WHY IT’S LAST

However, if in the verse, “our skin *nichmeru* like an oven,” *nichmeru* means “became heated,” i.e., that the skin only became warmed (because of the famine), a question emerges: How does this express the great suffering that the prophet bemoans? Rashi answers: *Nichmeru* here denotes and means not only “became heated,” but also, “and became full of wrinkles,” because “such is the nature of all skin: when heated, it wrinkles and shrivels.” Thus, when the verse says that the skin became heated, it does not need to clarify why heating skin causes such terrible suffering, because, “such is the nature of **all** skin: when they

²⁴ {*Eicha* 5:10.}

²⁵ Rashi on *Eicha* 5:10.

heat it, it wrinkles and shrivels.” That is, the student already understands on his own how excruciatingly painful this is.

On this basis, we can understand why Rashi offers this proof last, even though this is a support from “the lexicon of the Scripture,” and the only proof where the same form of the word appears as in our *parshah, nichmeru*: In this verse, *nichmeru* means also “became wrinkled, etc.” In fact, this is the principal meaning of the verse. Therefore, this verse cannot prove that *nichmeru* has the specific definition (and meaning) of “became heated.”

11.

THINKING ABOUT THE SOUL

From the “wine of Torah”²⁶ in Rashi’s commentary:

Regarding the verse, “Yosef rushed because his compassion had been *nichmeru* for his brother,” Chassidus²⁷ explains that the Jewish people are called by Yosef’s name, as it says,²⁸ “who leads Yosef {referring to the Jewish people}²⁹ like a flock.” The Jewish people (Yosef) need to arouse great compassion for the level of *Binyamin*, “the son of my pain.”³⁰ Every Jew needs to ponder the great depth of his soul’s descent, being lowered to the very depths, and to awaken mercies for the G-dly spark within his soul.

This concept is alluded to by the various details in Rashi’s commentary on the words, “for his compassion had been *nichmeru*.” Additionally, the order of Rashi’s commentary, in which the reasoning and explanation {behind the use of *nichmeru*} precedes the definition of the word *nichmeru* — “became heated” — is also precise. Firstly, a person must contemplate “my brother and the troubles that have befallen him.”³¹ Meaning, the person must first consider the

²⁶ {The deeper ideas in Torah.}

²⁷ *Likkutei Torah*, “Behar,” 40d; *Or HaTorah*, “Bereshis” (vol. 6), 1108a.

²⁸ *Tehillim* 80:2.

²⁹ *Rashi and Metzudas Dovid* on *Tehillim* 80:2.

³⁰ {*Bereishis* 35:18.}

³¹ {See Rashi quoted at the beg. of Sec. 2.}

exaltedness of the G-dly soul in its own right. The soul stands at the level of “my brother” — always connected with G-dliness. Following this, {Rashi says} “the troubles that have befallen him” — a person must contemplate the soul’s descent, to the extent that “he was swallowed up amongst foreign nations...,” i.e., {the G-dly soul was swallowed} in the body and the animal soul, and even worse.

When a person reflects over the state of the soul in this way (i.e., on all **ten** levels, as alluded to by the ten names {of Binyamin’s sons}, and he contemplates their significance), he will experience *nichmeru* — “became heated.” His heart will burn with the heat of a fiery flame. He will feel true bitterness over his sorry state.

This will awaken, On High, Hashem’s compassion. The advantage of the trait of compassion over *chesed*³² is regarding heat:

As we see in our world: The attribute of *chesed*, on its own, conveys kindness and goodness, as it is the nature of the good to do goodness. However, kindness is compared to water, i.e., the giving is “cold.” In contrast, the attribute of *gevurah*³³ is hot and fiery. For this reason, anger and fury and the like, derive from *gevurah*. The attribute of compassion, however, although its constitution is also one of kindness and goodness, also contains the heat of *gevurah*. For when a person sees **another person’s pain**, his heart is warmed with a fiery flame, and this causes him to give *chesed* to the one in pain, but with warmth — with more passion than *chesed* alone. For this reason, the attribute of compassion mediates between *chesed* and *gevurah*, because it has aspects of both of these.³⁴

³² {Kindness.}

³³ {Severity.}

³⁴ (Mitteler Rebbe’s) *Biur HaZohar*, “*Bamidbar*,” 86a ff.

12.

OIL

Komar of olives, which (as discussed) refers to the warming of olives and their oozing oil, alludes to the arousal of compassion and its impact.

In a person's *avodah*, this corresponds to the following:³⁵ Olives are bitter.³⁶ This refers to the embitterment of spirit which develops in a person who contemplates his spiritual state, as discussed. When a person does this in the manner of a *komar* of olives — his bitterness is heated — he feels strongly how unhealthy and deplorable his state of being is, and he arouses compassion for his soul. (This is also alluded to by the idea of crushing the olives).

Then, the “Good Oil” (Hashem's supernal *chochmah*)³⁷ — Heavenly compassion — will be revealed to him from Above. This brings a revelation of G-dliness in his soul. His innate powerful love for Hashem is manifested in the emotions of his heart. This is alluded to by the concept of *michmar bisra* {the flesh becoming warm}.³⁸

Subsequently, this feeling descends into his “skin” — a garment. Meaning, the feeling reaches his capacities and faculties that are detached from his core; they, too, experience this “heating” from the revelation of G-dly light. Since this whole process proceeds from the attribute of compassion, which is in the middle vector,³⁹ it also transforms the fever of famine into a fever of holiness. As the prophet foretells, “...not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but {a thirst} to hear the words of Hashem.”⁴⁰

— Based on talks delivered on *Shabbos parshas Mikeitz*, 5735 (1974)

³⁵ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Behaaloscha*,” 30b, 31a-b, 35a-b, 36b.

³⁶ See *Eruvin* 18b.

³⁷ {Wisdom.}

³⁸ “Flesh” alludes to the emotions of the heart because flesh is manufactured by blood, which abides {principally} in the heart (*Likkutei Torah*, “*Pinchas*,” 77d).

³⁹ {The *sefiros* are split into three vectors. The attribute of compassion (*tiferes*) is in the middle vector, which mediates between the right vector — *chesed*, etc. — and the left vector — *gevurah*, etc. This ability of the middle vector to mediate between the other two, is due to it having a higher source.}

⁴⁰ *Amos* 8:11.