

Emotionally Stirred

Upon the verse (-Genesis 43:30), "And Joseph hastened, for his mercy was stirred (*nichmiru* - נִחְמְרוּ) toward his brother (Benjamin), and he wanted to weep; so he went into the room and wept there," Rashi (-[Link](#)) has two comments upon the word *nichmiru*:

- (i) For his mercy was stirred: He (Joseph) asked him (Benjamin), "Have you a brother from your mother?" He replied, "I had a brother, but I do not know where he is." "Have you any sons?" He replied, "I have ten." He (Joseph) asked, "And what are their names?" He replied... He (Joseph) asked, "What is the significance of these names?" He replied, "All of them are connected to my brother and the troubles that befell him (Rashi lists all ten names, and how they each represent a life even of Joseph) Immediately, his (Joseph's) mercy was stirred.
- (ii) Was stirred: Heb. *Nichmiru*, was heated. In the language of the Mishnah (-Sotah 74a), "on a heating (*komer*) vessel of olives," and in Aramaic (-Talmud; Pesachim 58a), "because of the heating (*michmor*) of the meat," and in the Scriptures (-Lamentations 5:10), "Our skin is parched (*nichmiru*) because of the heat of hunger." So is the way of all skin; when it is heated, it shrivels and shrinks.

Questions: (i) Why is Rashi first explaining the story, and then explaining the word. First we need to know what this new word in the Torah means! (ii) Why does Rashi feel the need to give us the entire story as a reason for Joseph's compassion being stirred, when just Joseph's seeing his only full brother --who had nothing to do with Joseph's selling-- after all these years is reason enough! (iii) Why is Rashi bringing three proofs for a simple meaning to a word? (iv) Why did Rashi first bring two proofs from the *Oral Torah* (language of the sages) and not from the Scriptures? (v) Why does Rashi then end his proof from the Scriptures with, "So is the way of all skin; when it is heated, it shrivels and shrinks"?

Rashi feels that it is impossible to say that the reason why Joseph's mercy was stirred was just because he saw Benjamin, for then it would have happened immediately when he first saw Benjamin in the palace, and not now, much later, when they were sitting down for dinner with at Joseph's house! And as to why just seeing Benjamin after all these years was not enough to stir his emotions is plainly understood. Being that Joseph was (-Genesis 41: 40 & 44), "appointed you over the entire land of Egypt," "and besides you, no one may lift his hand or his foot in the entire land of Egypt," hence, Joseph must definitely have behaved in courage and strength, and how much more so towards his brothers, with whom Joseph was presently (-ibid 42:7), "he made himself a stranger to them, and he spoke to them harshly," and being that Joseph was in the presence of his people, hence, before Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, Joseph would definitely not have displayed and public emotions. As was in fact the case, that when, "And he wanted to weep, so he went into the room and wept there. And he washed his face and came out, and he restrained himself."

Therefore, we must say that for the, "mercy was stirred," something *extraordinarily moving* must have taken place! And being that the verses doesn't tell us specifically what it was that caused Joseph's compassion to stir, therefore, Rashi understood that it is connected to the last thing in the verse that took place before Joseph's mercy was stirred: "And he said (Joseph to Benjamin), 'May G-d favor you, my son.'" Rashi understands from this that (i) the event must be connected to G-d's favoring Benjamin (10 sons -as we see that Rashi's interpretation (-ibid 33:5) to the words, "G-d has favoured your servant," is speaking of offspring), and that (ii) it is connected to, "for his mercy was stirred toward his brother (Benjamin's 10 sons are somehow connected with Joseph, *his brother*)." Therefore, Rashi begins with, "Have you a brother from your mother (Benjamin was Joseph's only brother from his mother)?" But then, Rashi needs to move the conversation to Benjamin's sons ("May G-d favor you"), and not as Benjamin's sons, but as Benjamin's sons are related to Benjamin's brotherhood with Joseph ("was stirred toward his brother"), and hence, Rashi feels that this must have been the *extraordinary event* that *immediately* caused Joseph --the courageous and strong viceroy of Egypt-- to "his mercy was stirred." With this we understand Rashi's elaboration of the story, in which (i) Joseph is learning that Benjamin never stopped thinking of him, and (ii) that each name is invoking Joseph's painful memories, meaning that each name of Benjamin's son would consistently be reminding Benjamin of his Joseph and his suffering, stirring great yearning by Benjamin for the return of Joseph! This is what brought a strong man like Joseph to an immediate state of, "his mercy was stirred."

With this we now have clarity as to why Rashi first explains the events that let up to the, "his mercy was stirred," before he explains the meaning of the word *nichmiru*, because the story is the source to Rashi's meaning, of an intense stirring, unlike Onkeles' (-[Link](#)) translation, which is *isgollelu* -a standard stirring.

And because Rashi is translating the word *nichmiru* to mean and intense and unusual stirring, hence, Rashi feels the need to bring as to the very meaning of the word *nichmiru* being of, "heating up":

- (i) This is why brings his Scriptural proof from the earlier (than the *Books of Scriptures: Lamentations*) *Books of Prophets* (we find the word *nichmiru* in the Books of Kings (Kings I 3:26) and Hosea (11:8)), because there the word *nichmiru* is also referring to emotions, and we have no proof that it means an intense stirring (*heating up*). Therefore, Rashi is turning to places where the word *nichmiru* is speaking concerning other (not human emotions) concepts, in which the word *nichmiru* means *heated up*.
- (ii) Rashi's first proof is from the *Mishna* (-[Link](#)), which is Hebrew (like the Scriptures; unlike the Talmud (-[Link](#)), which is Aramaic). *Komer* is a vessel in which the olives are *heated*. Hence, it is understood that the very meaning of the word *nichmiru* --which in Hebrew is spelled with the same root letters of *komer* (in Hebrew the letters **k** and **ch** are one-ant-the-same)-- means *heat up*.

Emotionally Stirred -continued

- (iii) However, a proof from the vessel *komer* isn't complete, because one can ask, *If we don't have an absolute example of 'komer' meaning 'heating', then what is our proof that the vessel is called 'komer' because it is used for heating the olives?!* Therefore, Rashi brings another proof, "and in Aramaic (the word is *komer*) because of the heating (*michmor*) of the meat." And just as the *Talmud* (using Aramaic) is an explaining to the *Mishna* (using Hebrew), so too, the meaning in Aramaic is explaining the meaning in Hebrew, hence, the word *komer* is from the same root of *heating* ("*michmor* (of the meat)").
- (iv) However, being that the word in our verse is *nichmiru* (not precisely *komer*), hence, Rashi wants to bring a proof from a verse with the word *nichmiru*. Therefore, Rashi brings the verse, "Our skin is *nichmiru* (as by a furnace) because of the heat of hunger, in which the, "heat and hunger," tells us that the *nichmiru* does not mean *blackened* (as other commentaries interpret), but *heated*. However, the prophet (Jeremiah) is telling us of the painful sufferings of the Jewish people, hence, what is the great suffering of being *heated*? Hence, Rashi adds on and explains, "So is the way of all skin; when it is heated, it shrivels and shrinks," which is obviously very painful. And being that Rashi has to add on to the meaning of *nichmiru* in the verse to also mean *shriveled up*, therefore, Rashi brings this (*Scriptural*) proof only at the end of his three proofs.