



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 17 | Vayikra | Sichah 3

A Pressing Matter

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Vayikra 1:15: And the *kohen* shall bring it to the altar, and nip off its head, and burn it on the altar, and {beforehand} its blood shall be pressed out upon the wall of the altar.

וְהִקְרִיבוּ הַכֹּהֵן אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּמָלַק
אֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַה
וְנִמְצָה דָמוֹ עַל קִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:

Rashi: and its blood shall be pressed out: [The word וְנִמְצָה] a term {whose meaning here is} similar to {its meaning in the verses} “pressing out (מִיץ) anger” (*Mishlei* 30:33); and, “for the milking (הַמָּץ) has come to an end” (*Yeshaya* 16:4). He presses the slaughtered area {of the bird’s neck} against the wall of the altar, and thereby, the blood is pressed out and runs down {the wall}.

1.

QUESTIONS ON RASHI

In his commentary on the verse, “And the *kohen* shall bring it to the altar, and nip off its head, and burn it on the altar, and {beforehand} its blood shall be pressed out upon the wall of the altar,”¹ Rashi quotes the words “its blood shall be pressed out,” and explains: “{‘Pressed out’ — ‘וְנִמְצָה’ is} a term similar to ‘pressing out (מִיץ) anger’² and ‘for the milking (הַמָּץ) has come to an end.’³ He squeezes the slaughtered area {of the bird’s neck} against the wall of the altar, and thereby, the blood is pressed out and runs down {the wall}.”

Presumably, the intent of Rashi’s remarks is to explain the meaning of the word וְנִמְצָה — a word not previously found in Scripture, and one that is generally uncommon in the Torah. He, therefore, explains that it is “a term similar to ‘pressing out (מִיץ) anger’ and ‘for the milking (הַמָּץ) has come to an end.’”

¹ *Vayikra* 1:15.

² *Mishlei* 30:33 — there it says “**and** the pressing.”

³ *Yeshaya* 16:4.

However, we need to clarify:

- a) What is the connection between the definition of this word and the description that immediately follows — “He squeezes the slaughtered area {of the bird’s neck} against the wall of the altar, and thereby, the blood is pressed out and runs down {the wall}” — that led Rashi to include them together {in a single gloss}? Seemingly, if Rashi’s intent is to explain the process of pressing, he should have described this process in a separate gloss.
- b) Why must Rashi bring two prooftexts for the meaning of the term וְנִמְצָה; why is he not content with only one?
- c) Why did Rashi quote **these** specific verses? This expression {וְנִמְצָה} is found in multiple places in Scripture.
- d) Furthermore: In *Mishlei* — the source from which Rashi quotes “pressing out (נִמְ) anger” — Rashi explains that the term “נִמְ” is “similar to ‘he pressed dew {from the fleece}’”⁴ (which appears earlier, in the book of *Shoftim*). As such, Rashi should have quoted the verse from *Shoftim* here, since: (a) it **precedes** *Mishlei*, and (b) (according to Rashi,) we only know the meaning of the verse in *Mishlei* from the verse in *Shoftim*!
- e) Of the verses that are quoted, Rashi first presents the prooftext, “pressing out anger,” from *Mishlei*, and not the verse of “for the milking has come to an end,” which appears **earlier**, in *Yeshayahu*. Why?
- f) In the first verse — from *Mishlei* — the term נִמְ appears twice **before** “pressing out anger”: “For pressing {נִמְ} milk will produce butter, and pressing {נִמְ} the nose will produce blood.” Why does Rashi specifically quote the **third** instance of נִמְ?

⁴ *Shoftim* 6:38, and Rashi there.

2.

WHAT IS RASHI'S AIM?

The explanation of all this: Rashi's aim here is not merely to interpret the meaning of the word “הַנִּמְצָה,” but rather to resolve a dilemma raised by this verse:

“הַנִּמְצָה” is the passive verb form. This implies that the action happens by itself, as it were; the blood is drained out, as if by itself, along the wall of the altar — during the process of “burning it on the altar” (or by the nipping of its head). But this is problematic:

Regarding an (animal) *olah*⁵ sacrifice, we already know⁶ that it involves the **rites** of slaughtering, sprinkling of its blood on the altar, and burning {of its limbs}. The difficulty: We see the rites of slaughtering and burning represented in a bird *olah* (nipping the bird's head in place of slaughtering). However, we do not find a rite for a bird *olah* that corresponds with the **rite** of sprinkling the blood on the altar!

Therefore, once Rashi marshals the prooftexts for the semantic meaning of הַנִּמְצָה, he addresses and explains that (the effect of) הַנִּמְצָה happens through a **rite** and a specific human action — “he squeezes (the slaughtered area [of the bird's neck] against the wall of the altar, and thereby, the blood is pressed out and runs down [the wall]),” similar to the **rite** of sprinkling the blood on the altar.

⁵ {Commonly translated as “an elevation offering,” it was consumed completely on the altar.}

⁶ *Vayikra* 1:5 and on.

3.

PRESSING THE POINT

Now we can understand why Rashi chooses to quote these verses specifically as support, for they emphasize how the meaning of $\text{רָמַץ} - \text{וַיִּמְצָה}$ is tied to human action — squeezing:

The beginning of the verse in *Mishlei* — “For pressing milk will produce butter, and pressing the nose will produce blood” — does not offer proof that וַיִּמְצָה in our verse means “**squeezing** (the slaughtered area),” for squeezing will neither produce butter from milk nor cause a nose to bleed, whereas striking or beating will. [To strengthen this point: there are times that both phenomena happen as a result of no action at all: cream can float **to the top** of milk, and a nose can bleed spontaneously, as we see empirically.]

For this reason, Rashi specifically quotes the conclusion of the verse in *Mishlei*, “pressing out anger (produces strife),” for, in that case, the רָמַץ takes the same form as “**squeezing** the slaughtered area”: By squeezing and drawing out one’s anger, it “produces strife” — conflict develops.

This proof-text alone remains inadequate, for the רָמַץ of anger is not a tangible act (as opposed to squeezing the slaughtered area, which is a tangible action). Therefore, Rashi also quotes the verse, “the milking has come to an end,” which refers to “milk and butter {cream}” that is wrung from sheep and cattle (as Rashi mentions there) — an action, whereby milk is extracted by actual squeezing, not by striking (or the like).

However, the proof-text, “the milking has come to an end” alone would also be inadequate, for there, the word רָמַץ can be interpreted as {a gerund} only a **description** of the wealth and glory symbolized by sheep and cattle, which was a result of pressing milk and butter from them, but not as {a verb} emphasizing the act of pressing itself. As Rashi explains there: “{*the milking*: your pressing — your wealth, and your glory, which you obtained through your flocks and your cattle, from which you would press milk and cream.” Therefore, Rashi must also

quote — and lead with — the proof-text of “the pressing of anger,” in which מִיץ actually means the **act** of squeezing.

4.

RESOLVING RASHI

The reason why Rashi does not bring proof from the verse in *Shoftim*, “he **extracted**, וַיִּמָּץ, dew from the fleece” (which denotes an action):

In that same verse (in *Shoftim*), *before* Scripture says, “he extracted, וַיִּמָּץ, dew from the fleece,” it says “he **squeezed**, וַיִּזַר, the fleece,” meaning, he squeezed out the fleece (as Rashi interprets there — “{וַיִּזַר is} a term denoting, ‘squeezing out’”). Since it was already wrung out, it is obvious that the subsequent clause, “he extracted dew,” cannot refer to the wringing out {and pressing down on} the fleece itself, but rather to the dew **oozing out** from the fleece, as the conclusion of the verse intimates, “and out of the fleece was extracted, וַיִּמָּץ,⁷ — a **bowl**⁸ full of water.”

Therefore, this verse is not a fitting example for our case, where the clause, “its blood shall be pressed out,” is meant to emphasize the act of “**pressing** the slaughtered area.”⁹

In contrast, Rashi’s intention in *Mishlei* is to explain the common denominator between the three subjects in the verse — “For pressing milk... and pressing the nose... and pressing anger” — not in terms of the **way** the milk, nose, and anger are manipulated [on the contrary, each of them is manipulated differently way (as mentioned in Section 3)]. Rather, the common denominator among all three actions is the outcome — (the **issuing forth** of) the מִיץ, the liquid.

⁷ *Metzudas Dovid*, ad loc, suggests that וַיִּמָּץ is a passive construct.

⁸ {In other words, the verse emphasizes the collection of the {seeping} dew in the bowl, not any dynamic action to release it.}

⁹ {This resolves the question raised in Section 1, subsection “d.”}

For this purpose, the proof from *Shoftim* is appropriate, as the words “he extracted, וימץ” refer to the oozing out (and extraction) of dew.

Now we can also understand why Rashi includes the explanation of “squeezing the slaughtered area” in the same gloss, continuing his proofs {from the other verses} of the various usages {of pressing} — because this is related to the substance of his interpretation, i.e., to (also) explain that “its blood shall be pressed out” was done by squeezing.¹⁰

5.

PRESSING THE POINT II

A difficulty remains: Why is it pertinent to emphasize **here** that the pressing of the blood was done by **squeezing** the slaughtered area (which then required Rashi to quote these two specific verses, as discussed above), and not by another action?

In light of the above, we can explain: Since Rashi understands that the “pressing out” {the blood} was in place of and modeled on throwing (sprinkling) {blood} on the altar, it makes sense that these two actions shared a resemblance — therefore, it {the pressing of the bird’s blood} had to be done specifically through squeezing, “squeezing the slaughtered area”:

Blood that is released through striking (or some similar action) — “pressing the nose will produce blood” — does not continue to flow as a result of the continuous application of force of the action; the blow is what causes the initial hemorrhage, followed by the blood flowing for a while **by itself**.

In contrast, liquids that are {typically} discharged by pressing (e.g. milking an animal or the like) only flow continuously if there is **continuous** compression.

¹⁰ {This resolves the question raised in Section 1, subsection “a.”}

Since the rite that “its blood shall be pressed out” is in place of throwing (and sprinkling) that occurred exclusively through a *kohen’s* action, Rashi, therefore, interprets “its blood shall be pressed out” as referring to “**squeezing** the slaughtered area.”

6.

SQUEEZE YOURSELF!

From the “wine of Torah” in Rashi’s commentary: As known, *Ramban* states regarding all the rites performed in conjunction with a sacrifice (that secure atonement for people) that a person must reflect —

... he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that really, his blood should be spilled and his body burned were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator, Who accepted a substitute from him... (the sacrifice), so that its blood should be in place of his blood; its life in place of his life....¹¹

This is also the meaning behind offering the sacrificial fat and blood on the altar. In a person’s Divine service, this corresponds to the need to surrender his pleasure (fat) and enthusiasm (blood, dedicating them) to Hashem.¹²

Therefore, at the (conclusion of) {the passage discussing} the first type of sacrifice described in the Torah — the *olah* [which also atones (for violating a positive commandment, or a prohibition linked¹³ to a positive commandment¹⁴)] — Rashi highlights a nuance in the clause, “its blood shall be pressed out” [i.e., in relation to throwing the blood, which is the essence of atonement].¹⁵ He explains that the atonement conferred by a sacrifice is accomplished by “גַּזְזָה,” pressure — {corresponding to} *iskafya*¹⁶ and *bittul*¹⁷ of a person’s being. Consequently, “the blood is pressed out and runs down,” i.e., his zeal for worldly desires is squeezed out and purged.

¹¹ *Ramban* on *Vayikra* 1:9.

¹² See the *maamer Taama Ki Tov* 5709, sec. 2.

¹³ {I.e., a negative commandment whose violation can be remedied by a specific positive commandment.}

¹⁴ Rashi on *Vayikra* 1:4; *Toras Kohanim* on this verse.

¹⁵ *Toras Kohanim*, loc cit; *Zevachim* 6a.

¹⁶ {Lit., “bending”; the *avodah* of subduing and overcoming one’s negative impulses.}

¹⁷ {*Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

This is why Rashi writes “a term similar to ‘pressing out {קִיץ} anger,’” for the overall meaning of sin, and the manner of *teshuvah*¹⁸ and atonement, is conveyed (by means of allusion) in the words “pressing anger produces strife,” as will be explained below.¹⁹

7.

A TALE OF TWO STRIFES

Regarding anger, our Rabbis teach that “whoever gets angry is considered as if he has worshipped idols.”²⁰ [The Alter Rebbe explains:²¹ When a person is angry, “his faith left him,” for if he had believed that this {the cause of his anger} was orchestrated by Hashem, he would not have gotten the least bit angry.] That is, his anger demonstrates his estrangement from Hashem — it is “as if he had worshipped idols.” This is the essence of all sins — as the Alter Rebbe explains — since, with every sin by which a person violates Hashem’s will, a person is sundered from Divinity, akin to the {effect of the} sin of idol worship.

This, then, is the deeper meaning of the verse, “(pressing anger) produces strife”: Sin causes “strife” between the sinner and Hashem. However, since this strife is more blatant a case of anger as opposed to other sins (as we observe, only certain sins are said to be tantamount to idol worship), therefore, this is stated in conjunction with “pressing anger,” in which case, the “strife” is more obvious, as discussed.

And when a Jew brings a sacrifice and repents for his sin, this is also a case of “**pressing** anger produces strife,” except in the form of “**suppressing**²² his anger” as mentioned above, as well as “**inciting** the good inclination against the evil inclination.” (This is generally the case with respect to *teshuvah* for any sin:

¹⁸ {Repentance.}

¹⁹ {This resolves the question in section 1, subsection “f.”}

²⁰ *Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, ch. 7.

²¹ *Iggeres HaKodesh*, ch. 25.

²² {In the original, כּוֹבֵשׁ can mean both pressing and suppressing.}

a person suppresses and crushes his evil inclination, which brought him to violate Hashem's will and be severed from Divinity.) This also leads to "producing strife," battling the evil inclination.

This is why the verse {"מִיץ אַפִּים" lit., "pressing angerS"} uses the plural term, אַפִּים, {for it alludes to both} the anger that produces strife with Hashem, as well as the ("squeezing" {emoting} of) anger that segregates (a person) from what is prohibited²³ when he does *teshuvah* and offers a sacrifice, inducing strife with his evil inclination.

8.

TRANSFORMATION,

However, a difficulty can arise: Since a Jew is inherently insusceptible to sin — as the Alter Rebbe says,²⁴ "A Jew is unwilling and unable to tear himself away from G-dliness" — when a Jew sometimes falls into sin, it is attributable only to a Heavenly "ruse,"²⁵ as it were. Therefore, no one will ever be banished from His presence,²⁶ and eventually, every Jew will do *teshuvah*.²⁷ As such, why was the fall and concealment that resulted from sin even necessary?

To address this, Rashi continues: "For the milking has come to an end," which refers to the milk that is squeezed out from sheep and cattle. Meaning, when a person does *teshuvah*, what is extracted by this "squeezing" and "pressing," is similar to "milk":

According to the "Torah of Truth," there was a supposition that milk intrinsically ought to have been prohibited (either because "blood becomes turbid and turns into milk"²⁸ or due to the prohibition of eating "a limb of a

²³ Regarding this subject, see *Iggeres HaKodesh*, sec. 25 (140b); *Tanya*, ch. 29. {At times, it is advisable and helpful for a person to get himself angry about the impudence of his negative impulses.}

²⁴ See *Maamar Basi Legani 5710*, sec. 3.

²⁵ *Tanchuma*, "Vayeshev," sec. 4.

²⁶ {Per *Shmuel II* 14:14.}

²⁷ *Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Aruch*, "Hilchos Talmud Torah," ch. 4, par. 3; *Tanya*, "Likkutei Amarim," ch 39.

²⁸ {*Niddah* 9a.}

living animal”). The **Torah**, however, introduced a novelty that milk is permissible.²⁹ Not only that, but milk became something for which the land of Israel is praised³⁰ — “a land flowing with milk and honey.”³¹ This represents the concept of *ishapcha*³² — something that, according to the Torah’s principles, should have been forbidden, but the Torah permits and also acclaims.

This is true in spiritual terms as well: As discussed, “pressing of anger produces strife,” which begins when a person commits a sin, resulting in “strife” between him and Hashem. This is followed by “suppressing his anger,” and {by *teshuvah* and} “strife” with his evil inclination.

The intent of this aforementioned cycle is for the purpose of *iskafya* and *ishapcha* — transforming evil to good, as *Tanya* explains the verse,³³ “‘Hashem has made everything for His sake, even the wicked for the day of evil.’ This means that a person should repent from his wickedness, and transform his negativity into *day* and *light* Above.”³⁴

This produces “a pleasing aroma for Hashem”³⁵ — pleasure for Hashem, derived from “sharp or pungent foods {which are unpalatable in their raw state}, but have been well-seasoned and prepared so that they become delicacies that revive the soul.”³⁶ Through this {struggle}, “the glory of Hashem is uplifted On High.”

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Vayikra*, 5736 (1976)

²⁹ *Bechoros 6b*; *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, under the entry of “*chalav*.”

³⁰ *Ibid*.

³¹ *Shemos 3:8*, **et al.**

³² {Lit., “transformation,” the *avodah* of a person transforming his negative impulses and urges into good.}

³³ *Mishlei 16:4*.

³⁴ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 27.

³⁵ *Vayikra 1:9, 13, 17* — at the conclusion each of the passages describing the various *olah* sacrifices.

³⁶ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 27.