



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 17 | Metzora | Sichah 2

Touching the Outside

Translated by Rabbi Shmuel Kesselman

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Copy Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger
Content Editor: Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

© Copyright by Sichos In English 2022 ◦ 5782

A note on the translation: Rounded parentheses and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; squiggly parentheses are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in squiggly parentheses are those of the translators or editors and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists. **Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org**

1.

EARTHENWARE THAT THE ZAV WILL TOUCH

On the verse,¹ “An earthenware utensil that the *zav*² will touch it shall be broken; and any wooden utensil shall be rinsed in water,” Rashi quotes the phrase, “An earthenware utensil that the *zav* will touch it,” and comments:

“One might have thought that even if he touched it on its outside,”³ etc., as stated in *Toras Kohanim*,⁴ until the words, “What sort of ‘touching it’ is considered like touching all of it? Say that this refers to moving it.”

We need to clarify: What difficulty in *pshat*⁵ compelled Rashi to explain the words “will touch” according to the **exposition**⁶ of our Sages in *Toras Kohanim*? Why did Rashi not explain these words simply to mean **touching** — any manner of touching, even touching its outside?

The answer: We cannot explain the words “will touch” in our verse to mean actual touching because we have already learned (in *parshas Shemini*⁷ regarding the impurity of a *sheretz*)⁸ — as Rashi says there — that “earthenware only becomes impure from its inside.” Therefore, in our case, we cannot explain the phrase, “an earthenware utensil that the *zav* will touch” to mean that the earthenware can become impure by the *zav* touching its outside. Although we could suggest the following distinction: Specifically there, regarding the impurity of *sheretz* — a lesser degree of impurity — “earthenware only becomes impure from its inside.” But in our case, regarding a *zav* — a higher degree of impurity (since a *zav* can make articles impure by lying or sitting on them) — perhaps

¹ *Vayikra* 15:12.

² {A man who suffers an abnormal seminal discharge, and is rendered ritually impure as a result.}

³ {*Toras Kohanim* goes on to teach, based on Scriptural analysis, that earthenware does not contract impurity by a *zav* touching its outside; it only contracts ritual impurity from its inside, or by a *zav* moving it (“touching it, which is like touching all of it”).}

⁴ Commenting on this verse.

⁵ {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.}

⁶ {An exposition, *drush*, does not ordinarily provide a straightforward interpretation.}

⁷ *Vayikra* 11:33.

⁸ {Eight species of creeping creatures which transmit ritual impurity when dead. See *Vayikra* 11:29-32.}

earthenware **can** become impure by the *zav* touching its outside, and indeed, “will touch” here is to be understood literally?

As a result, in order to ensure that we do not make this distinction (especially, as this explanation fits better with the *pshat*), Rashi quotes [not only the words (that he explains), “will touch,” but also the words that would emphasize the distinction]: “An **earthenware** utensil that the **zav** will touch,” and says, “One might have thought that even if he touched it on its outside” (since here we are discussing the impurity of a **zav**) “etc., as stated in *Toras Kohanim*.” [The continuation in *Toras Kohanim* says as follows:

It can be derived from a *kal va'chomer*:⁹ If a corpse, whose impurity is more severe {than a *zav*} does not transmit impurity to earthenware by touching its outside, does it not stand to reason that a *zav*, who has a lesser impurity, should not transmit impurity to earthenware by touching its outside? — No! If you say {that a corpse does not transmit impurity to earthenware by touching its outside, it could be attributed to the fact} that if it rests on bedding or a seat it does not make them a primary source of impurity. {Could you say the same about a *zav*?}... Therefore, it says, “that the *zav* will touch it {*bo*},” and it says above,¹⁰ “in which {*bo*} it was cooked.” Just as *bo* of the above verse refers to the inside {of the vessel}, so, too, *bo* here refers to the inside.]

But this raises a question. If touching the outside of earthenware does not render it impure, what does the phrase, “will touch it” mean?¹¹ To address this question, Rashi cites *Toras Kohanim*'s conclusion: “What sort of ‘touching it’ is considered like touching all of it? Say that this refers to moving it.”

⁹ {*Kal Va'chomer* — Lit., “light and heavy,” *kal va'chomer* is a talmudic logical proof, whereby a strict ruling in a lenient case demands a similarly strict ruling in a more stringent case; alternatively, a lenient ruling in stringent case demands a similarly lenient ruling in a lenient case.}

¹⁰ *Vayikra* 6:21.

¹¹ We cannot answer that it refers to the insides of earthenware, for the impurity is already transmitted when it is inside an earthenware vessel, even without touching it. See *Gur Aryeh* on Rashi's commentary here.

2.

QUESTIONS FROM BOTH ANGLES

But this is puzzling because whichever way we look at it, we are left with a question: Either Rashi should have quoted the entire passage from *Toras Kohanim* (including the proof that the phrase “that {the zav} will touch,” cannot mean “on its outside”); or, if Rashi relies on his readers to look up and read the text of *Toras Kohanim*, he should not have cited the conclusion (“what is ‘touching it’...”). Rather, Rashi should have concluded his explanation with the phrase, “as stated in *Toras Kohanim*” [similar to his comments in *parshas Vayikra*,¹² “If you will say that it is an unnecessary verse, it has already been expounded in *Toras Kohanim*”].

We could answer simply: Rashi quotes the end — “What is ‘touching it’...” — because that **defines** the phrase, “will touch it” (moving), in contrast to the preceding discussion in *Toras Kohanim*, which offers only an exposition and proof that earthenware does not become impure by being touched on its outside. Therefore, Rashi does not quote the end of *Toras Kohanim*, and he relies on his readers to analyze this section in *Toras Kohanim*.

But this answer is difficult for the following reason: (We have discussed many times that) **everything** that is necessary for the simple understanding of Scripture, Rashi explicates clearly and explicitly for the novice student.¹³ Since the phrase “will touch it” could refer to touching its outside, Rashi should have **explicitly** quoted the proof {from *Toras Kohanim*} that this cannot be the case. Rashi should not have relied on his reference to *Toras Kohanim* [moreover, *Toras Kohanim* derives this from the verse using a *gezeirah shavah*,¹⁴ and not from the **simple** reading of the verses].¹⁵

¹² *Vayikra* 5:19.

¹³ {“*Ben chamesh (le'mikra)*,” 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 appropriate age for a child to begin learning *Chumash* is at the age of five. Rashi wrote his commentary on *Chumash* to solve problems that a five year-old student would encounter in understanding the simple meaning of a verse.}

¹⁴ {*Gezeira shava* — A type of analogy whereby details provided in one verse are applied to another verse on the basis of the two verses sharing a similar word.}

¹⁵ {And Rashi’s approach is to explain Scripture based on *pshat*.}

Therefore, we must conclude that according to *pshat*, the proof {that the phrase “that the *zav* will touch,” cannot mean “on its outside”} is based on the words that Rashi quotes **explicitly** from *Toras Kohanim* (and not from the *gezerah shavah* {based on the words} “*bo – bo*,” which Rashi does not mention in his commentary). [Rashi only says, “etc., as stated in *Toras Kohanim*,” as a **supplemental** proof and explanation (as will be explained below). Therefore, Rashi is content to allude to this by saying, “etc., as stated in *Toras Kohanim*.”]

3.

THE *KAL VA'CHOMER*

Perhaps we could say that we infer this law {that the phrase “that the *zav* will touch,” cannot mean “on its outside”} from corpse-impurity. Corpse-impurity is also severe; nonetheless, it cannot defile earthenware by contact with its outside, as the verse says later in *parshas Chukas*.¹⁶ Thus, a *zav* (whose impurity is not as severe as that of a corpse) will also not defile earthenware by touching its outside.

This is Rashi’s intention when he references *Toras Kohanim*: He is not alluding to the *gezerah shavah* {based on the words} “*bo – bo*,” but rather to the *kal va'chomer* mentioned there: “If a corpse, whose impurity is more severe {than a *zav*’s} does not transmit impurity to earthenware by contact with its outside, does it not stand to reason that a *zav*, who has a lesser impurity, does not transmit impurity to earthenware by touching its outside?” (A ***kal va'chomer*** involves **straightforward reasoning – *pshat***.) Although *Toras Kohanim* proceeds to disprove the *kal va'chomer* on the grounds that a *zav* possesses a stringency over the corpse (“that if a *zav* rests on bedding or a seat, he renders them a primary source of impurity”). The intention here is merely that they are equivalent (because each one has a stringency over the other). According to ***pshat***, this also serves as a reason for their equivalence with respect to the law that earthenware is not defiled by {impurity} touching its outside.

¹⁶ *Bamidbar* 19:15; and **Rashi**.

[The reason Rashi references *Toras Kohanim* — and not the verse in *parshas Chukas* (***pshat***) — is because the proof from the verse: (a) depends on a more complex line of reasoning; and, (b) we cannot be certain that the novice student of Torah will adequately appreciate the inference. But in *Toras Kohanim*, the inference is clear and precise.]

But this answer, too, does stand up to scrutiny because [aside from the fact that we still have not explained why Rashi does not write the proof **explicitly**, as discussed]:

A corpse cannot defile something by causing it to move.¹⁷ Accordingly, if it is possible to posit that the verse, “will touch it,” teaches us the ***chiddush***¹⁸ that a *zav* defiles through movement (which a corpse **cannot**), why would we not rather posit that the verse, “will touch it,” teaches us the *chiddush* that a *zav* can defile earthenware by touching its outside, even though a corpse **cannot**? (This interpretation would be preferable, seemingly, because on this basis, the phrase, “will touch it” fits with the ***pshat***.)

4.

THE WOODEN VESSEL ASPECT

Seemingly, we can posit that the end of the verse, “and any wooden utensil shall be rinsed in water,” serves as Rashi’s proof:

If “will touch it” means moving, then we understand that the *chiddush* of the phrase, “and any wooden utensil,” is that a *zav* can defile even a wooden utensil by moving it. However, if “will touch it” is understood literally, i.e., even touching the outside of a utensil {transmits ritual impurity}, and the verse serves

¹⁷ {“*Hesses*” in the Hebrew original. A *zav* can defile an object by moving it, even if he isn’t touching the object because something interposes between the *zav* and the object.} See *Shabbos* 83b: “for we have found no similar instance {to a *zav*’s ability to defile something by *hesses*} in the entire Torah.”

¹⁸ {A novel idea. Rashi does not state the obvious in his commentary; he offers novel solutions to difficulties in the plain understanding of the text.}

to **introduce the principle** that a *zav* can defile **earthenware** by touching its outside, a question arises: What is the *chiddush* of the phrase, “and any wooden utensil”? It is not a *chiddush* that a wooden utensil becomes impure by being touched on its outside.

However, this explanation, too, does not correspond well with Rashi’s wording. If this explanation were valid, Rashi should have also quoted the phrase, “and any wooden utensil” in his caption, or at least alluded to it by writing, “etc.” But Rashi does **not** do so. This proves that, in his view, this {line of reasoning} does not support the conclusion that “will touch it,” means moving, as will be explained. (Alternatively, Rashi could maintain that his proof is superior to this one.)

5.

THE CHIDDUSH

We will clarify all the above by prefacing with a question: What *chiddush* is learned from the previous verse:¹⁹ “Whomever the *zav* touches without having rinsed his hands in the water²⁰ shall immerse his garments and immerse himself in the water, and he remains impure until the evening.” It already said earlier,²¹ “One who touches the flesh of the *zav* shall immerse his garments and immerse himself in the water, and he remains impure until the evening.”

[The law (as Rashi explains)²² that as long as “he has not yet immersed {himself in a *mikveh* and purified himself thereby} from his impurity, even if he has ceased from his discharging, and has counted seven {consecutive days without a discharge}, he transmits impurity” (a) can be inferred using a *kal va’chomer* from the law of the requirement of a woman who has given birth to immerse herself.²³ (Even **after** immersion — “she may not touch anything

¹⁹ {*Vayikra* 15:11.}

²⁰ {Rashi, loc. cit., explains that “the water” refers to a *mikveh*, and *rinsing his hands* refers to immersion.}

²¹ *Vayikra* 15:7.

²² {Rashi on *Vayikra* 15:11.}

²³ *Vayikra* 12:4; Rashi, *ibid*; and Rashi, *ibid*, on verse 7.

sacred,” “but she does not become pure until the setting of the sun of the fortieth day, because on the following day she will bring the **atonement** {sacrifice} of her purification.” (b) **Most importantly:** The Torah would not need to repeat the entire verse just to teach this detail. The Torah could have just inserted the words, “without having rinsed his hands in the water” in the previous verse, “one who touches the flesh of the *zav*.”]

As a result of this perplexing point, the *Gemara*,²⁴ in fact, understands that the phrase, “whomever the *zav* touches” does not mean touching, but rather, movement. **Rashi**, on the other hand, like *Toras Kohanim*, understands that only the “touch” in **our** (later) verse refers to moving. Thus, the question stands according to Rashi: Why does the Torah say, “Whomever the *zav* touches...”? (And it is not apparent that Rashi anticipates this question).

The explanation: According to *pshat* (also), the Torah can record an entire verse just for a **single** detail that is introduced. This is certainly the case since, at times, Torah reiterates entire **sections** “for a *chiddush* introduced therein.”²⁵ [Already in *parshas Bereishis*,²⁶ we see that the Torah repeats the narrative of Adam and Chavah’s²⁷ creation because of the **details** that are added the second time. In other places, too {this stylistic device is used}.]²⁸

Therefore (according to *pshat*), this difficulty — why does the Torah say “Whomever the *zav* touches” — poses no difficulty. The Torah records this verse for the *chiddush* of in the additional phrase, “without having rinsed **his hands** in the water.” This phrase teaches us (as Rashi says at the conclusion of his remarks — after he explains the *pshat*) that “the inner parts of organs do not require immersion in water; only an exposed limb like the hands {requires immersion}.”

²⁴ *Niddah* 43a; Rashi, loc. cit., s.v. “*dichsiv*.”

²⁵ *Sotah* 3a; **Rashi**, *Bamidbar* 5:6; see *Vayikra* 14:21 ff.; *Menachos* 10a.

²⁶ *Bereishis* 2:7, 2, ff {the second narrative}.

²⁷ {*Bereishis* 1:26-29 — the first narrative.}

²⁸ See **Rashi** on *Bereishis* 2:19.

6.

THE END OF THE *MIDRASH*

When Rashi reaches our verse, however, the question comes up again: What is the *chiddush* of our verse? We would know the law that a vessel becomes impure by a *zav* touching it by means of a *kal va'chomer* from the previous laws (that a person becomes impure from a *zav* touching him, and that a *zav* defiles objects even by sitting or lying on them, etc.).

Therefore, in his remarks on our verse, Rashi needs to preempt {the following mistaken line of reasoning}: “One might have thought that even if he touched it on its outside,” since the simple meaning of the words “will touch it” implies even touching it on its outside. Meaning, we would assume that the *chiddush* of this verse is that a *zav* defiles “**earthenware**” by touching even its “outside” (as discussed above at length).

— And no difficulty is posed by the question: If this is the case, what then is the *chiddush* made by the end of the verse: “and any wooden utensil...”? Because, as discussed, it suffices for a verse to teach only a single *chiddush*, i.e., that a *zav* can defile (even) **earthenware** by touching its outside. —

To provide further support for this {mistaken} suggestion — “One might have thought...,” Rashi adds, “etc., as stated in *Toras Kohanim*.” In *Toras Kohanim*, we do, in fact, find that the stringency associated with *zav*-impurity could leave room for one to think that a *zav* should be able to defile earthenware by touching its outside (although a corpse **cannot**). Meaning, Rashi (does **not** reference the **beginning** of the discussion there, in *Toras Kohanim*, regarding the law that a *zav* **cannot** defile earthenware by touching its outside, but on the contrary: he) references the (second rationale in) *Toras Kohanim*. (I.e., Rashi writes: “until [close to the words] ‘What sort of ‘touching it.’”) The conclusion of *Toras Kohanim* indicates that **there is** an argument to be made (“one might have thought”) that a *zav* can defile earthenware by touching its outside. (For this reason, Rashi alludes to this {mistaken suggestion raised in *Toras Kohanim*} with “etc.,” and does not write it explicitly.)

The proof that the verse cannot be understood in this way is from *Toras Kohanim's* {final} **conclusion**: “What sort of ‘touching it’ is considered like touching all of it? Say that this refers to moving it,” as will be explained below.

7.

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF TOUCHING

The explanation:

In addition to the entire verse seeming to be superfluous, the initial words of the verse, “(an earthenware utensil) that the *zav* will touch” are completely unnecessary. This verse is a thematic continuation of the previous verse which says, “Whomever the *zav* touches.” The Torah could have just written, “an earthenware utensil shall be broken.” [Doing so would be similar to the end of the verse, “and any wooden utensil shall be rinsed in water.” And there, the verse does not (repeat), “and any wooden utensil **that the *zav* touches** shall be rinsed in water”].

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the *chiddush* of this verse is found in **these** words, in the phrase, “will touch it”: “Will touch it,” here, refers to a new type of touching (unlike the touching mentioned previously). **This** “{will} touch” is of “**it**.” Meaning, touching the **entire** vessel (as a whole), dissimilar to regular touching, in which there is contact only with a specific part of the surface. In Rashi’s words, “What sort of ‘touching it’ is considered like touching all of it? Say that this refers to moving it.” Doing so repositions the entire vessel.

[In contrast: If we were to learn that the *chiddush* of this verse is that earthenware can become impure by {some impurity} touching its outside, then in this verse, only the word “**earthenware**” constitutes the *chiddush*, or also the word, “it.” But the {combination of the} words, “will touch it,” **together**, would not constitute the *chiddush*.]

8.

A LESSON

A lesson in *avodas Hashem*:

Earthenware, made from clay, represents a person — “a man’s origin is from dust.”²⁹ [As Scripture says, “Hashem formed man out of dust of the ground”;³⁰ “For you are dust.”]³¹ In this regard, the ruling is that earthenware cannot become impure by {impurity} touching its outside. Meaning, materialistic matters that attach to a person’s body (the body is called man’s “outside”) cannot defile a Jew’s **essence**.

Since Hashem created a person such that his body needs to eat, drink, and be involved in other worldly matters, which **naturally**, a person enjoys, his *avodah* is not to **break** his body. Rather (as the Baal Shem Tov teaches),³² “you must aid it”³³ — a person must transform his body and his environment³⁴ into a dwelling place for Hashem (**in the lower realms**). He is not at fault if mundane matters cling to him, but at the end of the day, he must rid himself of them.

[When does this apply? When a person views himself as Hashem created him — as an **earthenware** vessel (which alludes to *bitul*).³⁵ However, if a person views himself as a “wooden vessel” — a fully developed entity (like a grown tree), or he views himself as a “metal vessel” — whose ego is strong as metal, then he is no longer in the image in which Hashem created him; he then can also be defiled from the “outside.”]

Regarding this scenario, Rashi says: “One might have thought that even if he touched it on its outside.” Meaning, one might have thought that a severe

²⁹ High Holiday prayer liturgy, “*Unesaneh Tokef*.”

³⁰ *Bereishis* 2:7.

³¹ *Bereishis* 3:19.

³² *Hayom Yom*, “28 Shevat”; *Kesser Shem Tov, Addendum*, ch. 16.

³³ *Shemos* 23:5.

³⁴ {In the Hebrew original, “*chelko ba’olam*”; lit., “his (Divinely designated) portion in the world.”}

³⁵ {*Bittul* — *Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

impurity such as the impurity of a **zav** can defile a Jewish person, even “from the outside.” *Ziva*³⁶ is not a natural occurrence like {the impurity} of menstruation; rather, it is a **sickness**, an unnatural flow of blood. In *avodah*, this represents the following: The blood of menstruation represents negativity that naturally exists within a Jewish person — “the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth.”³⁷ The blood of *ziva* represents the evil inclinations that a person brings upon himself, more so than his natural evil inclination. As *Sefer HaChinuch* says:³⁸ “*Ziva* occurs to a person who **constantly leaves** the straight path with respect to the food he eats....”

Therefore, one might think that in **this** scenario, the person (“earthenware”) becomes impure even “from the outside,” for he has fallen into such negativity that is not the necessary consequence of a person’s nature.

(*Toras Kohanim* and) Rashi address this: Only if a *zav* touches something in a manner “which is **like** touching **all of it**.” Meaning, if the negativity affects the entire person, the earthenware becomes impure (even by {impurity} touching its outside). But a regular touch, even from a **zav**, cannot affect the essence of a Jew. As Rambam rules,³⁹ even in the case of someone who must be compelled to do a *mitzvah* (this compulsion) is only necessary to influence his “externality” — “his evil inclination compelled him.” But even then, in his core, “he wants to be part of the Jewish people, and he wants to perform all the *mitzvos*.”

Coercion removes the **dust** that may cover and conceal the true desire of a Jew. This reveals “Hashem’s truth” (also, “**forever**”)⁴⁰ in that a Jew declares, “**I want**”⁴¹ — “to be a member of the Jewish people” and to “observe all of the *mitzvos*.”

— Based on a talk delivered on *Shabbos parshas Metzora*, 5736 (1976)

³⁶ {I.e., being a *zav*.}

³⁷ *Bereishis* 8:21.

³⁸ *Mitzvah* 178.

³⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Geirushin*,” ch. 2, par. 20.

⁴⁰ *Tehillim* 117:2. {The verse reads, “For His lovingness toward us has intensified, and Hashem’s truth is eternal, *Halleluluka*.”}

⁴¹ {See *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid*. *Rambam* writes there that the defiant husband is coerced until he agrees to give a *get*, a bill of divorce, to his wife, telling the Jewish court that now “*I want to comply*.”}