

## Verbs for Applying Liquids

*PS, 2019.*

The main point here is to help distinguish the meanings “sprinkling” and “throwing” and “pouring out”, especially in regard to blood. The *Handbook* gives good advice on Lev 1 and Lev 4 and is quoted below, but I wanted to provide a fuller picture of the terminology.

### 1. Some Data

The table below gives an overview over the various Hebrew verbs and how they are used.

<b>Table: Verbs for handling liquids, with examples</b>					
<i>Listed in Hebrew alphabetical order</i>					
<b>Hebrew</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Liquid</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Sample Reference</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
זרק <i>zrq</i>	throw / toss / dash / splash	blood	against the altar all around	Lev 1:5	with a מזרק <i>mizrāq</i> ‘tossing bowl/basin’
יצק <i>ysq</i>	pour (out) / [also: cast metal]	oil	pillar	Gen 28:18	
		holy oil	head	Ex 29:7	
		(olive) oil	flour (grain offering)	Lev 2:1	
		blood	base of altar	Lev 8:15	See footnote # 1.
משח <i>mšh</i>	smear / anoint	oil	pillar	Gen 31:13	
		oil	Tabernacle & equipment	Ex 40:9	
		(olive) oil	bread (grain offering)	Lev 2:4	
		holy oil	head	Lev 8:12	
נזה <i>nzh</i>	spatter / sprinkle	blood & oil	priests & their vestments	Ex 29:21	See footnote # 2.
		blood	curtain	Lev 4:6	with finger; in 5:9 not stated, but

					probably to be assumed
		blood & water	person healed from skin disease	Lev 14:7	See footnote # 3.
		water	Levites	Num 8:7	
		water with ashes	tent where someone died	Num 19:18	using hyssop
נתן <i>ntn</i>	put / smear	blood	horns of altar	Lev 4:7	Ex 29:12 specifies: “with your finger”
		blood	priests’ ear / thumb / toe	Lev 8:23-24	
	(“add”)	(olive) oil	grain	Lev 2:15	
	(“fill with”)	water	into basin	Ex 30:18	
שפך <i>špk</i>	pour (out) / spill / [dispose] / [also: shed blood; dump plaster]	blood	base of altar	Ex 29:12 Lev 4:7	Milgrom (on Lev 4:7, p. 238) speaks of “disposing remaining blood”
<i>Additional note: a different verb is used for libations:</i>					
נסך <i>nsk</i>	pour (out)	drink offering (wine)	sides of the altar	Num 28:7	See separate paper.
<i>Additional action regarding the offering of doves (in Lev only twice):</i>					
מצה <i>mšh</i>	drain out / squeeze out	blood	side of altar / base of altar	Lev 1:15; 5:9	

**Footnotes:**

1. Only in Lev 8:15 and 9:9, the verb *yšq* is used for this action. The usual one is *špk*. Milgrom sees no semantic difference in this choice of vocabulary, only a stylistic variation.

2. Stuart explains:

Moses retrieved some of the blood that was already applied “against the altar” (v. 20), meaning on its sides (vv. 16,20) and/or its horns (v. 12), mixed it into the anointing oil ..., and sprinkled that on the priests, ... The text does not state explicitly that the blood taken from the altar was mixed with the special anointing oil, but such a conclusion follows from the facts of the situation. The amount of blood available from the altar would be very small since the smooth bronze metallic surface on the sides and horns ... would contain just token amounts of blood – so little that it would be a matter mainly of dabbing at the bits of blood residue after virtually all of it had simply run down the sides onto the ground. ...

Houtman is a bit more reserved:

It is usually held that for the sprinkling a mixture of blood and anointing oil ... was to be prepared. As such this is not necessary ... In any case, it is true that the combination of two cleansing substances enhances the purifying effect. ...

The verse occasions the question, what blood is being used? The ending of 29:20 suggests that all the blood was used up. Nothing is said about blood that is caught in a basin and set aside ... In the current context, it must be the blood that was sprinkled against the altar or was designated for that purpose. ...

3. Leviticus 14:5-7 say (NASB):

<sup>5</sup> The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. <sup>6</sup> As for the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. <sup>7</sup> He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy ...”

The question in v. 7 is: sprinkle the person with what? Some English versions say “sprinkle it on him ...”, others “sprinkle the blood on the person ...”. But vv. 5-6 had just talked about blood and water, so HFA has it right saying “blutvermishtes Wasser” (= water mixed with blood).

Keil speaks explicitly of a “mixture of blood and water”. Wenham apparently has the same understanding. Milgrom explicates only “[the blood]” in his translation, but in his comment on v. 5 he adds: “Water ... was obviously needed because the blood of the bird would have been insufficient for dipping the required materials plus the live bird into it (Ḥazzequni).”

**From the data follows that these actions need to be distinguished:**

1. rub / smear (sometimes with finger)
2. sprinkle / spatter (with finger / with hyssop; a shaking/waving motion)
3. pour (e.g. oil onto head)
4. throw / toss (with a bowl)
5. pour (out) / spill (to dispose of)

## 2. Some explanations from the literature

On Lev 1:5, where *zrq* is used, the *Handbook* helpfully explains:

**Throw the blood ...:** this is different from placing the blood on the corners of the altar (4.25). In this case the priest caught the blood in a container as it flowed from the arteries of the animal. According to later Jewish tradition it was then tossed against the northeast corner in order to cover the north and east sides. Next he threw the remainder against the opposite corner to cover the other two sides so that all four sides were covered. The use of the verb “sprinkle” (as in the KJV, NASB, and NIV) is probably somewhat off the mark. But if **throw** implies indiscriminate or accidental scattering of the blood in the receptor language, it will be necessary to find a verb meaning “deliberately pour out.”

On the same verse, Wenham says:

Then the priest would *splash*<sup>4</sup> the blood against the sides of the altar, not on top of it.

<sup>4</sup> *Splash* (*zāraq*) is used of pouring liquids or powders from a container (Exod. 24:6, 8), sometimes with a view to dispersing them (e.g., Ezek. 10:2).

On Lev 4:6, where *nzh* is used, the *Handbook* comments:

**His finger:** if the receptor language has no general word for finger, it may be necessary to indicate which finger was used. In such a case it is probably better to specify the index finger of the right hand.

**Sprinkle:** this is not the same verb as in 1.5,11; 3.2,8,13, which has also sometimes been mistakenly translated “sprinkle.” In this verse the idea is indeed sprinkling and may be translated “cause to spatter.”

On the same verse, Wenham says:

Translation:

6 The priest must dip his finger in the blood, and then sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord on the curtain of the holy place.

Comment:

If the anointed priest was offering the purification offering, the blood was sprinkled seven times on the veil<sup>52</sup> of the sanctuary, that is, the curtain acting as the door into the holy of holies, the innermost part of the tabernacle.

<sup>52</sup> Understanding *'et p̄ānē p̄ārōkē* (*on the curtain*, vv. 6, 17) as the direct object of *sprinkle*. Lit. “sprinkle ... the face (surface) of the curtain.” Otherwise *'et-p̄ānē* may be taken as an alternative to *līp̄nē*, “before,” as in 1 Sam. 2:11.

On Lev 4:7, where *špk* is used, the *Handbook* states:

**Pour out:** this is the ordinary word for pouring; it is not the same as “tossing” (in 1.5,11; 3.2 and elsewhere) or “sprinkling” (in 4.6 above).

Wenham says:

The rest of the blood was poured out at the foot of the altar of burnt offering (as in the burnt and peace offerings).

### 3. Translation

Probably at least three different terms are needed, namely for: (1) smearing small amounts on specific places, (2) sprinkling medium amounts onto people and objects, and (3) throwing larger amounts against the altar – possibly distinguished from (4) pouring out, with less of a directional sense and with the primary meaning of disposing / throwing away.

**New Testament:** The verb *ἀντίζω*, which occurs in Hebr 9:13/19/21; 10:22, corresponds to *נזח* *nzh* and means “to sprinkle”, and this is the translation that almost all versions use.