

Parasha Miketz: Contextualizing Our Gifts

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Mishlei 25:6

אַל-תִּתְהַדָּר לִפְנֵי-מֶלֶךְ וּבִמְקוֹם גְּדֹלִים אַל-תַּעֲמֹד:

Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence;
Do not stand in the place of nobles.

1. Who Interprets Joseph's Dreams?

Bereishit 37:5-11

וַיְהִלֵּם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגֵּד לְאָחָיו וַיֹּסְפוּ עוֹד שָׁנָא אֹתוֹ:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמַעוּ-נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתִּי:
וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי וְנָחְנוּ מֵאֲלָמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה
קָמָה אֲלֵמִתִּי וְגַם-נִצָּבָה וְהִנֵּה תִסְבֵּינָה אֲלֵמִתִּיכֶם
וְתִשְׁתַּחֲוִין לְאֵלֵמִתִּי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ
עָלֵינוּ אִם-מְשׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ וַיֹּסְפוּ עוֹד שָׁנָא אֹתוֹ
עַל-חֲלֻמְתּוֹ וְעַל-דְּבָרָיו: וַיְהִלֵּם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר
וַיִּסְפֹּר אֹתוֹ לְאָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלֻמְתִּי חֲלוֹם עוֹד
וְהִנֵּה הַשֶּׁשֶׁשׁ וְהָיִלִם וְאֶחָד עֶשֶׂר כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים
לִי: וַיִּסְפֹּר אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אָחָיו וַיַּגְעֵר-בּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר
לּוֹ מָה הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתָּ הֲבֹא נְבוֹא אֲנִי
וְאֶמֶךְ וְאֶחָיִךְ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אֶרְצָה:
וַיִּקְנְאוּ-בּוֹ אָחָיו וַשְׁמַר אֶת-הַדְּבָר:

Once Joseph had a dream that he told to his brothers;
and they hated him even more. He said to them, "Hear
this dream that I have dreamed: There we were binding
sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up
and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered
around and bowed low to my sheaf." His brothers
answered, "Do you mean to reign over us? Do you
mean to rule over us?" And they hated him even more
for his talk about his dreams. He dreamed another
dream and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have
had another dream: And this time, the sun, the moon,
and eleven stars were bowing down to me." And when
he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated
him. "What," he said to him, "is this dream you have
dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your
brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?" So his
brothers were wrought up at him, and his father kept the
matter in mind.

Bereishit 40:8

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְנוּ וּפְתָר אֵין אֵתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא לֵאלֹהִים פְּתָרָנִים סִפְרוּ-נָא לִי:

And they [Pharaoh's courtiers] said to him [Joseph],
"We had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them."
So Joseph said to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell
me [your dreams]."

Bereishit 41:15-16

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְתִּי וּפְתָר אֵין אֵתוֹ
וְאֲנִי שֹׁמֵר עָלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר תִּשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לְפָתֵר אֹתוֹ:
וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף אֶת-פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר בְּלִעְדֵּי אֱלֹהִים יַעֲבֹה
אֶת-שְׁלוֹם פַּרְעֹה:

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but
no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you
that for you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning."
Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "Not !! God will see
to Pharaoh's welfare."

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

2. Bil'adai (Not By Me)

Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 89:9	
<p>(בראשית מא, טז): וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף אֶת פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר בְּלֹעֲדֵי אֱלֹהִים, תִּלְהָה הַגְּדֹלָה בְּבַעֲלֶיהָ.</p>	<p>“Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying: Not by me. God will respond for Pharaoh’s peace” (Genesis 41:16). “Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying: Not by me. God [will respond]” – He attributed the greatness to its initiator.</p>
Rashi on Bereishit 41:16	
<p>בלעדי. אין החכמה משלי, אלא אלהים יענה – יתן ענינה בפי – לשלום פרעה:</p>	<p>Not I— The wisdom to interpret dreams is not my own, but God will answer — He will put in my mouth an answer that will be for Pharaoh’s welfare.</p>
Rashbam on Bereishit 41:16	
<p>בלעדי - אינו תלוי בי, אלא הקב"ה יודיעני לפתור חלומך.</p>	<p>Not I— This matter depends not on me but on G'd; He may let me know how to put your mind at ease.</p>
Seforno on Bereishit 41:16	
<p>בלעדי. אע"פ שאמרת ופותר אין אותו כאלו אני יחיד בזאת החכמה אני חושב שיש בלי ספק פותר בלעדי:</p>	<p>Not I— Even though you have said ופותר אין אותו, that there is no one who knows how to interpret it, as if I were the only exception who possesses the necessary wisdom, I am convinced that there is certainly someone beside me who knows the answer.</p>

3. Contextualizing Our Gifts

Zohar, Parashat Miketz 4:57	
<p>וְתָא חֲזִי, לְעוֹלָם אֵל יִפְתָּח בֶּר נֶשׁ פּוּמִיָּה לְבִישׁ, דְּאִיהוּ לֹא יָדַע מֵאֵן נָטִיל הָהִיא מְלָה. וְכֵן לֹא יָדַע בֶּר נֶשׁ אֲתִקְשָׁל בָּהּ. וְצִדִּיקָא כֵּד פְּתַחֵי פּוּמִיָּהוּ כְּלָהוּ שָׁלֵם. תָּא חֲזִי, יוֹסֵף כֵּד שָׂרָא לְמַלְלָא לְפַרְעֹה. מֵה כְּתִיב, אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה אֶת שְׁלוֹם פַּרְעֹה. אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה, הָא אֲתַמָּר. דְּקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא חָס עַל שְׁלָמָא דְּמַלְכוּתָא, כְּמָה דְּאֵת אָמַר, (שְׁמוֹת ו'י"ג) וַיִּצְוֶם אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶתְּמַר.</p>	<p>Come and see, that a person should never open their mouth to evil, for one does not know who will take that word. And without knowing, a person will be tripped up by it. When the righteous open their mouths, they are all peace. Come and see of Joseph, when he began speaking to Pharaoh, what is written - <i>God will respond regarding Pharaoh's peace</i> (Genesis 41:16). Rabbi Yehuda said: “But was it not said, that the Holy Blessed One cares about the peace of royalty, as you say, and <i>commanded them to the Children of Israel and to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt</i> (Exodus 6:13)? And thus, it is explained.”</p>
Rabbi Shai Held, “Election and Service: What Joseph Learned,” Parashat Vayeshev	
<p>Joseph grows to the point of understanding that divine election is not an invitation to egotism and self-adoration... To know our own gifts and abilities is not arrogance; it is self-awareness. Arrogance is the illusion that we are the sole authors of our talents and that they are therefore our exclusive possession. Spiritual maturity, in contrast, is the understanding that we do not own our gifts. When we acknowledge how much has been done for us rather than achieved by us, we, like Joseph, grow ready to serve.</p>	