

Parashat Vayeshev: Divine Notice

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Bereishit 39:2	
וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מַצְלִיחַ וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרִי:	God was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master.

1. "God was with Joseph..."

Sforno on Bereishit 39:2	
וַיְהִי ה' אֶת יוֹסֵף. לְהַצִּילוֹ מִהִמָּתְקוֹמִים עָלָיו:	ויהי ה' את יוסף, to save him from anyone who would take advantage of him.
וַיְהִי אִישׁ מַצְלִיחַ. מַשִּׁיג כָּל תַּכְלִית מְכֻנָּן מִמֶּנּוּ.	ויהי איש מצליח, he achieved every venture that he set out to accomplish.
וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרִי. עוֹמֵד לְשֵׁרֶת בְּחֹדֶר אֲדֹנָיו, וְלִשְׁוֹן הָיָה כְּמוֹ עֹמֵד, כְּמוֹ "וְהָיָה שָׁם" (דְּבָרִים לֹא: כו), "וַיְהִי שָׁם כְּאִשֶּׁר צִוִּי ה'" (דְּבָרִים י: ה).	ויהי בבית אדוניו המצרי, he would perform tasks in his master's private room. The meaning of the word היה here is the same as the meaning of the word עמד elsewhere, i.e. stationed, remaining in a fixed position. Examples of the word היה occurring in this sense are found in שם, "והיה שם", "it would remain there." Compare also "ויהיו שם כאשר צווי", "they remained there as the Lord had commanded me."

Hizkuni on Bereishit 39:2	
וַיְהִי ה' אֶת יוֹסֵף הַצֶּרֶךְ סִינֵעַ וְסַעַד כָּדִי שְׁלָא יִטְמַע לְבֵין הַגּוֹיִם.	ויהי ה' את יוסף, "Hashem was with Joseph;" he required Divine assistance in order to insulate him against the temptation to adopt the corrupt ways of that country.

Or HaHayyim on Bereishit 39:2	
וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו וְגו'. הִנֵּה יוֹסֵף הַכְּתוּב הַדְּרָגוֹת הַמַּעֲלוֹת אֲשֶׁר הָעֵלָה ה' אוֹתוֹ, כִּי מִקְדָּם כְּשֶׁקָּנָא נִתְּנָה לְעִבּוֹד עֲבֹדֶת עֲבָדִים הָעוֹבְדִים עֲבֹדֶת חוּץ, כִּי הַגְדֻלִּים לֹא יַעֲמִידוּ לְשֵׁרֶת בְּבֵיתָהֶם אֲלָא אֲשֶׁר יְהִי אִישׁ רָאוי וּמַצְלִיחַ, וְלִזְזָה צִנָּה ה' אֶת הַהַצְלָחָה וּבָצָה הָיָה בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרִי מְשׁוֹמְרֵי הַבֵּית, וְהוּא אֶמְרוּ וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו וְלֹא בְּשָׂאָר	ויהי בבית אדוניו, He stayed in the house of his master, etc. The Torah described how G'd arranged for a variety of promotions Joseph experienced while in the service of Potiphar. At the beginning Joseph performed menial labour outside the home of Potiphar. When he did so successfully he was promoted to work inside the home. He then became a guard in the home. Eventually, he performed all his duties only indoors, i.e. בבית אדוניו. Still later he became Potiphar's personal valet, i.e. וישרת אותו. This made Joseph's life comfortable. Still later

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

<p>עבודות, ועוד לו מדרגה אחרת כשראה אדוניו וגו' וישרת אותו פרוש יחדו לשרת אותו ב'יחוד, שבה יהיה חשוב ולא יהיה ח' צער כח' העבדים השפלים. ועוד לו ויפקידהו על ביתו הרי זה קנה מעלה על כל קנין אדוני. ועוד לו ויעזב כל אשר לו וגו', ועוד לו שלא ידע אתו וגו' שלא היה יודע הנכנסים והיוצאים ונעשה הוא שליט, פרוש מירדומ' בלע"ז, בכל קנין המצרי:</p>	<p>Potiphar appointed Joseph as the general manager over his entire household, i.e. יוסף. Eventually, Potiphar left every initiative to Joseph, not even bothering to ask him to account for what he was doing.</p>
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Radak on Bereishit 39:2	
<p>איש מצליח, בכל ענינו היה מצליח, וכן מצליח בבית אדניו המצרי בכל מה שהיה שולח לו ידו בעסק אדניו היתה בו הצלחה:</p>	<p>ויהי ה' את יוסף ויהי איש מצליח, he was successful in all things he undertook on his own behalf and also was successful in the house of his Egyptian master. Every task that was assigned to him he managed to carry out successfully.</p>

2. God's Role in the Joseph Story

Maimonides, <i>Guide for the Perplexed</i> , Book 2, 45:4	
<p>וכתם שלא כל מי שרואה חלום אמת הוא נביא, כה לא נאמר על כל מי שגילה אליו סיוע לדבר מה – יהא הדבר אשר יהא, כמו רכישת נכסים או השגת מטרה אישית – שגילה אליו רוח ה', או ה' עמו, ושהוא עשה מה שעשה ברוח הקדש. אלא אנו אומרים זאת רק על מי שעשה מעשה טוב בעל משמעות רבה, או מה שמוביל לכה, כמו הצלחת יוסף בבית המצרי (בראשית לט, ב), שהיתה סבה ראשונה לדברים גדולים שארעו לאחר מכן, כידוע.</p>	<p>Just as not everyone who has a true dream are prophets, so it cannot be said of every one who is assisted in a certain undertaking, as in the acquisition of property, or of some other personal advantage, that the spirit of the Lord came upon him, or that the Lord was with him, or that he performed his actions by the holy spirit. We only apply such phrases to those who have accomplished something very good and grand, or something that leads to that end; e.g., the success of Joseph in the house of the Egyptian, which was the first cause leading evidently to great events that occurred subsequently.</p>

James L. Kugel: <i>The Great Shift: Encountering God in Biblical Times</i> , 33-34	
<p>It is important to consider what sort of contact [Joseph] he has with God in this story. The answer is surprising: none. He is kicked around a lot—by his brothers, by his master's wife, by his cellmates, by life itself—yet not once does he lift his voice in prayer to the Almighty. Nor, for that matter, does he offer thanks to God when he was saved (from his brothers, who first planned to kill him, Bereishit 37:18-20; from execution, which probably ought to have been his punishment for attempted rape; from prison after his reputation as a dream interpreter reached Pharaoh). He does say, when Pharaoh first tells him that he has heard of Joseph's abilities as a dream interpreter, "It is not I, but God who will give Pharaoh the proper answer." A nice sentiment, but actually, there is no indication in the text that God ever supplies Joseph with the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams; Joseph does it all on his own, without even praying for God's help (contrast Daniel 2:19)...</p>	
<p>Joseph is the only figure in the book of Genesis described as "wise"...Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—none of these distinguished ancestors is ever so described. Now, we have seen that "wise" is a kind of code word; <i>wisdom</i> is the great set of divine rules and plans, and someone who is wise necessarily understands this and acts accordingly. Joseph's wisdom is thus expressed not only in his ability to interpret dreams...but in his character: patient, optimistic, modest, and of good disposition (he never takes revenge on his brothers.)</p>	