

Idiom, Rhetoric and the Text of Genesis 41:16

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Having been summoned and brought before Pharaoh, Joseph is greeted with a somewhat oblique royal compliment:

I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream so as to interpret its meaning.¹

To these cautious words of praise Joseph promptly responds with an even more oblique remark of his own:

bl'dy ʔlhym y'nh ʔt šlwm pr'h.

Clearly, the very nature of the situation calls for a well-considered, tactful answer on the part of Joseph. He is bound to express humble deference to the Deity as the ultimate source of his interpretive gifts, while at the same time being careful not to deny outright that he himself does indeed possess the expertise with which he has been credited. In this respect, the situation is reminiscent of the earlier interchange which took place with his Egyptian cell-mates, likewise on the subject of dreams and their interpretation. Thus in Genesis 40:8 Joseph prefaces his solutions with a statement in two parts, the first directly addressing the divine role in the interpretation of dreams, and the second indirectly affirming his own:

*hlwʔ ʔlhym ptnym
sprw nʔ ly*

Isn't it *God* who has solutions?
Do tell *me* (the dream).

Now, standing before Pharaoh at this more critical and decisive interview, Joseph's response is understandably more subtle. No mention at all is made of

1 Genesis 41:15. Contrast the idiomatic renderings of, e.g. *NAB*, *NJV*, Anchor Bible *Genesis*, and E. Fox, *In the Beginning* (New York, 1983), 168, all of which would seem to stress the immediacy with which Joseph's interpretation follows his having *heard* its content: "you have only to hear a dream to interpret it." More to the point are the translations of *NEB* ("you can understand and interpret dreams") and *TEV* ("you can interpret dreams"), following *KJV* ("thou canst understand a dream to interpret it"). As already grasped by the medieval commentator Rashi, the particular nuance of the verb *šm'* in this verse actually involves the notion of understanding the difficult "language" of dreams, even as one comprehends other alien tongues. Cf., e.g., Gen. 11:7; 42:23; Deut. 28:49; 2 Kgs. 18:26; Isa. 33:19; Jer. 5:15; Ezek. 3:6. Also note this usage in the Akkadian verb *šemû*, for which see *AHW.*, 1212, meaning 6. The infinitive *lptr* immediately following the verb *šm'* in our verse expresses the extent or culmination of Joseph's comprehension, which, in his case, is said to advance from decoding the symbolism of the medium to the fuller apprehension of the message.

pitronim, “solutions,” although that is precisely what Pharaoh asked for, employing the root *ptr* twice in his brief statement to Joseph. Indeed, not even the key-word *ḥālôm*, “dream,” likewise twice-repeated by Pharaoh, is included in Joseph’s reply, its place taken by the assonant term *šālôm*, “well-being.” Thus, by pointedly avoiding the language of Pharaoh’s query, Joseph succeeds in evading it altogether.² Yet, above and beyond what seems to have been the author’s intentional depiction of Joseph as an appropriately inscrutable sage, our own penetration into the precise meaning of the actual reply is further complicated by specific questions of idiomatic usage, rhetoric and even the preservation of the biblical text itself.

The first problem confronting the reader of Genesis 41:16 involves the construction to be placed on its initial word *bl̄dy*. The Massoretes vocalized the word as *bil̄ādāy*, that is the conjunction *bil̄ādē*, “except for, apart from,” with the first person suffix. The form is pausal, and the word itself is punctuated with an ²*etnaḥtā*². This interpretation of the preserved consonants yields a kind of staccato interjection: “It is not in me,”³ “Not I!”⁴ and the like.⁵ One commentator attempted to convey the specifically emphatic force of the pausal form with the more dramatic paraphrase “Heaven forfend! (*ḥālilā*) I in no way!”⁶

It must be objected, however, that only one biblical parallel can be cited for this curiously abrupt construction, and that passage is itself more than suspect. Thus, in Genesis 14:22–24, Abraham forswears any personal interest in the spoils of his recent military victory, and the initial word of v. 24 *bil̄āday* (MT) has been construed as the interjection “Nothing for me!”⁷ But, unlike the case of Genesis 41:16, the word *bl̄dy* (*bil̄āday*) in 14:24 is not vocalized as a pausal form (*bil̄ādāy*), nor is it punctuated with an ²*etnaḥtā*². Further, LXX (*plēn*), and the literal rendering of Targum Onkelos (*lḥwd m-*) construed the word *bl̄dy* as the construct *bil̄ādē*, “except for,” directly connected to the following phrase, and making no reference whatsoever to Abraham in the first person.⁸ That is, v. 24 actually constitutes an exclusion clause to Abraham’s oath as related in the preceding two verses, and the complete passage should be rendered as follows:

I hereby solemnly swear . . . that I will not take anything belonging to you—neither thread nor thong—(that you may never say “It is I who made Abram wealthy) *excepting* (*bil̄ādē*) only⁹ that which the fighting men consumed, and the portion due the men who accompanied me; Aner, Eshkol and Mamre—they may take their portion.

2 The language of Gen. 41:15 clearly echoes that of 40:8, and further picks up on the repeated use of the *Leitwort ptr/ptr(w)n* in 40:5, 12, 16, 18, 22; 41:8, 11, 12 (twice), 13. Following such extensive repetition, Joseph’s avoidance of the term stands out all the more. An even more heightened effect obtains with respect to the key-word *ḥlwm*, employed some nine times in chapter 40 and, again, twelve times in chapter 41, before Joseph makes his carefully-worded reply. Thus, to Joseph, dreams and their interpretation clearly become secondary issues, means to a greater end, in this story of Divine Providence guiding human destiny.

3 E.g., *KJV*, *RSV*, *JPS* (1917).

4 E.g., Anchor Bible *Genesis*, *NEB*, *NAB*, *NJV*, E. Fox’s *In the Beginning*, 168.

5 New World Translation (“I need not be considered!”); *TEV* (“I cannot . . .”).

6 A. Kahana, *Miqraḥ Mēpōraš: Sefer Berēšit* (1904; reprint: Jerusalem, 1969), 117.

7 Anchor Bible *Genesis*; Fox, *In the Beginning*, 55. Cf. *NJV* (“for me, nothing . . .”); *NAB* (“nothing for me”). Less abrupt are the renderings of *RSV* (“I will take nothing . . .”) and *NEB* (“I will accept nothing . . .”).

8 Cf. also the renderings of the Vulgate (*exceptis*) and the Peshitta (*šr mn*).

9 The particle *rq* interposed between *bl̄dy* and ²*šr klw* seems more than a bit awkward, as if it were a gloss. The text, however, is attested to in the Samaritan version.

Indeed, the rather involved syntax of Genesis 14:22–24 as a whole is directly illuminated by the less ambiguous context of Deuteronomy 1:34–36, which likewise involves an oath followed by an exclusion clause:

(The Lord) . . . took an oath saying: "No one of these men, this wicked generation, shall ever see the good land which I swore to give to your ancestors, *excepting* (*zûlâtî*) Caleb the son of Jephunneh—he shall see it, and I shall give the land on which he treads to him and to his sons. . . ."

Here the Hebrew term *zwly*, "except for," is synonymous with, and functions exactly the same as, *bl^cdy* in Genesis 14:24.¹⁰ Further, in neither case does the final *yod* of these two conjunctions represent a first person suffix.

With the support of Genesis 14:24 removed, no actual biblical usage exists to support the MT construction of *bil^cādāy*, "it is not in me!" in Genesis 41:16.¹¹ Moreover, as with Genesis 14:24, even the reading *bil^cādāy* (non-pausal first person suffix) is to be rejected in favor of the construct *bil^cādê* "except for. . ." Indeed, the reading with the first person suffix in Genesis 41:16 necessarily imposes an incongruously ironic tone upon Joseph's otherwise humble acknowledgement of God's Power, viz., "without any help from me," or, worse, "without my permission." The latter idiomatic usage is attested in the selfsame chapter of the Joseph story, as Pharaoh promises Joseph:¹²

wbl^cdyk P yrym ʔys
ʔt ydw wʔt rglw
bkl ʔʔ mʔrym

Without you (i.e., without your permission)
no one may so much as lift hand or foot
in all the land of Egypt.

Proceeding from the evidence of internal biblical usage to the testimony of ancient versions and translations, it is, of course, well known that both Samaritan version and the LXX to Genesis 41:16 call for reading the construct *bil^cādê* (not *bil^cādāy*, or even *bil^cādāy*). The same conclusion may be drawn from the obvious difficulty MT *bil^cādāy* posed for the two Targumim. Thus Onkelos was constrained to supply a noun, and then paraphrase: "It is outside of my *expertise*."¹³ Pseudo-Jonathan is further pressed to expand as follows: "Beside myself, *there is no man who interprets dreams*."¹⁴ Among the medieval commentators, Ibn Ezra attempts to clarify the difficult construction along the lines of more conventional Hebrew usage, *bil^cādê*

10 Note the parallelism of *mb^cdy* and *zwly* in Psalms 18:32, as well as the substitution of *mb^cdy* for *zwly* in the duplicate text of 2 Sam. 22:32. So, too, observe the interchange of terms in otherwise identical phrases and contexts, e.g., Isa. 44:6 (*mb^cdy ʔyn ʔlhym*) alongside 45:6 (*zwly ʔyn ʔlhym*), and 43:11 (*wʔyn mb^cdy mwšy^c*) alongside 45:21 (*ʔl ʔdyq wmwšy^c ʔyn zwly*).

11 Contrast N. H. Tur-Sinai, *P^cšūṭô šel miqrā³* (Jerusalem, 1967), 1:37, who construes *bl^cdy* in Gen. 14:24, as well as in 41:16 and Job 34:32, as *bl* ("not") *dy* ("to me"). Cf. idem, *The Book of Job*, rev. ed. (Jerusalem, 1967), 486, where the same unproved assertion is made. It will be observed, however, that in Job 34:32 the initial word *bl^cdy* has been most plausibly emended to *dy*, the consonants *bl* constituting a dittograph of the last two consonants of *ʔhbl* in the preceding verse. See, E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (1926; reprint and trans.: Nashville, 1984), 526.

12 Gen. 41:44. Cf. the corresponding idiomatic usage of Akkadian *balu(m)* in, e.g., law 57 of the Code of Hammurabi: *balum bēl eqlim*, "without the permission of the owner of the field." For other examples, see *CAD*, B, 71.

13 Aramaic: *br mn ḥkmy*. Cf. Rashi's paraphrase *ʔyn ḥḥkmh mšly*, "the expertise is not mine."

14 Aramaic: *br mny P ʔyt gbr dpšr ḥlmyn*.

pitronî, “without *my solution*.” Clearly, all of these exegetical attempts (including the MT itself!) seek to make Joseph’s reaction more properly responsive to Pharaoh’s actual query, which calls for some reference by Joseph to himself, and specifically to his reputed abilities as dream-interpreter. As we shall see, however, Joseph has in fact chosen to be decidedly and deliberately less direct, avoiding any reference to himself in his response.¹⁵

Internal and external evidence alike thus yield an unexceptional construct phrase *bil^cādê ʔēlōhîm*, “except for God. . . .” While the improved reading is patently meaningless in terms of the MT of the rest of the verse (“Except for God he will ‘answer’ Pharaoh’s welfare”), the construct phrase fits neatly into the syntax of the verse as understood in both LXX and the Samaritan, i.e., as a negative passive construction:

Samaritan: *bl^cdy ʔlhym l^p y^cnh (= lō^p yē^ʔānê) ʔt šlwm pr^ch*

LXX: *aneu tou theou ouk apokrithēsetai to sotērion pharaō.*

The syntactic construction attested here may be represented as *bil^cādê X lō^p + niphal* verb *Y*, “without *X*, action *Y* is not accomplished.” While this rhetorical formulation with *bl^cdy*, as a heightened expression of divine praise, is elsewhere unattested in biblical literature, it was especially favored by the pietistic poets of the Dead Sea scrolls.¹⁶ Moreover, the construction witnessed to by the Samaritan and LXX to our verse finds close stylistic, syntactic and semantic parallels in Akkadian paeans, where (a) the conjunction *balu*, (b) the negative particle, and (c) a verb in the N conjugation are likewise employed:

*ilu ša ina balūšu purussē šamē
(u) eršeti lā ipparrasū*

The god without whom decisions (affecting)
heaven (and) earth are not made.¹⁷

*balukka ul innandā šubti
ul ibbaššimu kisuršu*

Without you, no dwelling is established here,
nor is its outline fashioned.¹⁸

While the reading of the phrase *bil^cādê ʔēlōhîm*, “except for God . . .,” for the awkward MT *bil^cādāy*, “it is not in me!” thus receives multiple confirmation, broader questions of idiomatic usage and textual criticism remain, and will be returned to presently. First, however, another problem must be confronted in the elusive phrase *y^cnh ʔt šlwm pr^ch*. The specific idiom *ānâ ʔet šēlôm PN* is attested only in Genesis 41:16, and modern translations betray understandable confusion as to the precise idiomatic usage represented in our verse:

15 Cf. Dan 2:26–28, where again, a royal question concerning the expertise of a reputed dream interpreter is responded to *without* any specific personal reference to himself or his own abilities.

16 IQS (= Manual of Discipline), 11:11; IQH (= Thanksgiving Scroll), 1:20; 10:9 *wmb^lc^{dy}kh l(w)^p y^cšh* (= *yē^cāšē*) *kwl*, “and without You nothing is wrought.” IQS, 11:17 *ky mbl^cdykh lw^p um* (= *tittam*) *drk*, “For without You no way is brought to completion.”

17 AKA 255, 1:3.

18 VAB 4, 238, 2:36.

- (a) to give Pharaoh a favorable answer;¹⁹
 (b) to give Pharaoh the right answer;²⁰
 (c) to answer for Pharaoh's welfare;²¹
 (d) to see to Pharaoh's welfare.²²

It will be observed, however, that none of the above renderings are without difficulty. Thus the notion of giving a correct or otherwise acceptable interpretation appears, for example, in Genesis 40:16, where it is expressed adverbially:

wyr³ šr h²pym
 ky t²wb ptr

The chief of the bakers perceived
 how well he (Joseph) interpreted (the dream). . . .

Elsewhere, biblical usage suggests that even using the actual wording of Genesis 41:16, the giving of a favorable response would have been expressed by means of different syntax, on the order of y^cnh ²t pr^ch šlwm.²³ Further, if it were a matter of "answering" either "for" or "to" the best interests of Pharaoh, one might also expect the use of the prepositional phrase lšlwm pr^ch.²⁴ Least objectionable from an idiomatic standpoint is the rendering *NJV* ("to see to Pharaoh's welfare"), which, however, avoids any direct association with the verb ^cnh, "to answer," and, presumably, bases its rendering on the highly specialized usage of ^cnh observed only in Ecclesiastes.²⁵

An approach more in line with idiomatic usage and the actual context of our passage is suggested by the possible analogy of the idiom *dibbēr šālôm*, "to speak, ordain (someone's) well-being," as in Psalms 85:9:

šm^ch mh ydbr h²l yhwh
 ky ydbr šlwm ²l ^cmw
 w²l hsydyw

I would hear what the Lord God ordains,
 that He ordains well-being for His people
 and those devoted to Him.

As is well known, the Hebrew verb ^cnh is employed not only in the sense of "to answer," but, like Ugaritic ^cny, also as a more general verb of speaking.²⁶ The suggested semantic association of the idioms ^cnh šlwm and dbr šlwm is particularly commended by the attestation of *dibbēr* and ^cānā as poetic synonyms in parallelism, in a context dealing specifically with the expression of the Divine will:²⁷

19 *RSV*. Cf. *TEV* "give a favorable interpretation."

20 Anchor Bible *Genesis*; *NAB*.

21 *NEB*; cf. Fox, *In the Beginning*, 168, "answer what is for Pharaoh's welfare," and *KJV* "give an answer of peace."

22 *NJV*.

23 See, e.g., Deut. 20:10–11.

24 See, e.g., Gen. 37:4; Jer. 28:9; cf. *l²wbh* in 2 Chr. 18:7.

25 Note the idiosyncratic verb ^cnh, "to be concerned with" (cognate: ^cinyān, "a matter") in Qoh. 1:13; 3:10; cf. 5:19 (*hiphil*) "to cause (one) to be concerned with." Indeed, on the basis of the equally strange usage of ^cnh in Qoh. 10:19, one might just as well render our idiom in Gen. 41:16 "to provide for Pharaoh's well-being."

26 E.g., Deut. 21:7; 26:5; Ps. 119:172.

27 Jer. 23:35, 37 (cf. 1 Kgs. 2:30). Also note the poetic parallelism in Psalms 119:171–72 between *tb^cnh špty thlh* . . . // *t^cn lšwny ²mrtk*, "May my lips utter (Your) praise . . . // May my tongue declare Your words. . . ."

mh ᵑnh yhwh
wmh dbr yhwh

What has the Lord pronounced (in an oracle)²⁸
 What has the Lord spoken.

Indeed, the oracular setting of the latter passage is especially congruent with the actual narrative context of Joseph's statement to Pharaoh.²⁹ Moreover, the associated biblical idioms *dibbēr* / *ᵑānā šālôm* may in turn be viewed alongside Akkadian *šulma qabû*, "to pronounce (someone's) well-being," as attested, for example, in the following passages:

šalamī balāqī ina pī bēltiya qabi

My well-being, my health, is ordained (lit., "is spoken") at the command (lit., "from the mouth of") my Mistress.³⁰

qibissa šulmu

Her pronouncement is (i.e., results in) well-being.³¹

The particular nuance which would seem to be evident in our idiom *ᵑnh šlwm* in Genesis 41:16, i.e., that of the Deity's ordaining the well-being of Pharaoh by verbal pronouncement, or fiat, is somewhat reminiscent of the usage of *ᵑnh* in Hosea 2:23-24. In the latter passage the verb *ᵑnh* appears five times as part of an elaborate chain-reaction, following a definite chain-of-command. Thus the Deity promises to *address* the heavens, which will then *address* the earth, which, in turn, is to *address* the grain, wine, and oil, which themselves are to *address* Jezreel.³² The process, once all of its successive stages have been completed, will ultimately result in Jezreel's bountiful harvest. The specific usage of *ᵑnh* in this prophetic oracle, as a divinely issued verbal command to one of the elements of nature, is itself clarified by the manifestly less exceptional use of *qr*² in the contextually related words of the prophet Ezekiel.³³

wqr²ty ᵑl hdgn
whrbyty ᵑtw
wl² ᵑin ᵑlykm r^cb

I will *summon* the grain,
 and cause it to multiply,
 and not impose famine upon you.

Viewed in this light, Joseph's idiomatic use of the verb *ᵑnh* to assert that it is God who pronounces, and so ordains, Pharaoh's well-being becomes somewhat more

28 The oracular setting is clear from the earlier use of *šᵑl* in Jer. 23:33, and, more especially, the interchange of the noun *maššāᵑ*, "oracular message" (in vv. 33-34, 36, 38) with the phrases *mh ᵑnh* and *mh dbr* (in vv. 35, 37).

29 In his kind comments on the oral presentation of an abbreviated form of this article at a meeting of the American Academy of Religion (Hudson-Delaware Region; April 13, 1986), Professor Morton Smith rightly stressed the importance of the oracular nuance in Joseph's response to Pharaoh. Cf. the specifically oracular usage of *ᵑny* in 1 Sam. 9:17; 28:15.

30 *PBS* 7, 128:8, cited *CAD*, B, 47.

31 Ebeling, *Handerhebung*, 30:4.

32 Recent arguments advanced in favor of the commonly attested sense of the verb *ᵑnh*, "to answer, respond," here have little to recommend them. The assertion that the use of the verb *ᵑnh* in the Hosea passage necessarily indicates a "response," which itself "presupposes an intercession," is not borne out by the actual context; J. L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, 1969), 52-53. So, too, the assumption of a specifically "liturgical response" in our passage is without adequate justification; so F. L. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea*, Anchor Bible 24 (Garden City, N.Y., 1980), 285, with the literature cited.

33 Ezek. 36:29.

comprehensible. Implicitly, Joseph is contrasting his own unmentioned prowess in the reading of another's destiny to the incomparably greater role of the Deity in determining and pronouncing that destiny.³⁴ Further, Joseph's pious acknowledgement in our verse serves, in effect, to redirect Pharaoh's short-sighted preoccupation with dream interpretation away from the mere means and toward the larger end.

Up to this point, we have attempted, on specifically idiomatic grounds, to argue for the adoption of the construction *bil'ādē 'ēlōhīm* over MT *bil'ādāy*, and to clarify the meaning of the expression *'ānā 'et š'elōm par'ōh* in the particular context of our verse. We have also provided specific parallels to the larger rhetorical formulation attested in the Samaritan and LXX, combining the construct *bil'ādē 'ēlōhīm*, the negative particle *lō'*, and the *niphal* verb. That is not to say, however, that the reading of the Samaritan and LXX, *bil'ādē 'ēlōhīm lō' yē'ānē 'et š'elōm par'ōh*, is itself free of all problems, and is, accordingly, to be adopted as the *only* idiomatically and rhetorically viable alternative to MT. For one thing, one would have preferred that the Samaritan text did not insist upon the inclusion of the *nota accusativi 'et* in its construction with the *niphal*. While such usage is not without biblical parallels,³⁵ the presence of *'et* in our verse is also a nagging reminder of the active construction with the *qal* in MT. Secondly, adoption, of the Samaritan-LXX reading does involve the assumption that the negative particle *lō'* has inadvertently dropped out of MT, for which assumption no orthographic explanation, such as haplography, is at hand.

However, there is a contextually appropriate alternative to both MT *and* the reading of the Samaritan-LXX, one which receives support not only from idiomatic and rhetorical usage, but from the particular orthography of our verse as well. On the assumption of haplography, whereby the final *mem* of *'lhyṃ* and the initial *yod* of the immediately following *y'nh* have been lost, we may restore the interrogative particle *my* "who?", and render the text of Genesis 41:16 as follows:

bl'dy 'lhyṃ (my) y'nh 't šlwm pr'h
bil'ādē 'ēlōhīm (mī) ya'ānē 'et š'elōm par'ōh

Except for God, *who* can pronounce Pharaoh's well-being?

The proposed restoration of our verse as a rhetorical question finds a close idiomatic and rhetorical parallel in the hymnic praise of 2 Samuel 22:32:³⁶

ky my 'l mbl'dy YHWH
wmy šwr mbl'dy 'lhyṃw

Who indeed is a god except for the Lord?
 Or who is a "rock" except for our God?

34 One cannot help being struck by the *double-entendre* suggested by the repeated use of the verb *'nh* in Gen. 41:16. The verse begins with the narrator's indication *wy'nh ywsp*, "Joseph spoke up in response," and concludes with Joseph's assertion that the Deity *y'nh 't šlwm pr'h*, "pronounces (i.e., ordains) Pharaoh's well-being," highlighting the quintessential difference between mortal and divine speech.

35 E.g., Gen. 17:5; Exod. 21:28; Numb. 26:55.

36 See the stylistically preferable variant in Ps. 18:32, where *mbldy* is paralleled by *zwly* in the "b-clause," as noted above, n. 10.

Here, the simple re-arrangement of clauses yields the identical formulation as proposed for Genesis 41:16, viz.:

mbl^cdy YHWH my ʔ
mbl^cdy ʔlhynw my ʃwr

Except for the Lord, who is a god?
 Except for our God, who is a "rock?"

A particularly close stylistic, syntactic, and semantic analogue to this rhetorical usage is afforded by a hymnic passage of the Babylonian *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, where, just as in Joseph's response to Pharaoh, a unique divine attribute is singled out for pious praise:³⁷

ša lā Marduk mannu mūtūtašu uballīṭ
ela ʃarpanitum ištartum ayītum iqīša napšassu

Except for Marduk, who reverses (lit., "quickens") his deathly state?
 Apart from ʃarpanitum, which goddess gives his life (back) to him?

Here the formulation as (a) a rhetorical question, (b) in an active construction, (c) without the negative particle directly corresponds to our proposed alternative to the reading of MT, Samaritan and LXX. One is further reminded of the special status accorded to the god Enki/Ea in the Mesopotamian flood stories:

mannu annūtam ša lā Enki ippuṣ

Who, except for Enki, could do this?³⁸

mannumma ša lā Ea amātu ibannu (var. *ibanni*)

Who, except for Ea, can devise a plan?³⁹

Similarly, in the incantation literature Ea receives the following accolade:⁴⁰

ša lā Ea mannu unāḥkunuṣi
ša lā Asarludi (sic!) mannu ušapšahkunuṣi

Who, except for Ea, can put you to rest?
 Who, except for Asarlūḫi, can calm you down?

37 Lambert, *BWL*, 58:33–34. Note that the *ša lā* (lit., "who is not") as employed in the above passage is the functional equivalent of the Akkadian conjunction *balu*. See the equation of the two in an ancient commentary to the "Babylonian Theodicy" (Lambert, *BWL*, 70, commentary to l. 11), cited and amplified by D. Marcus in "A Famous Analogy of Rib-Haddi," *JANES* 5 (1973), 283–84. Likewise illuminating is the sequence of the following two contextually related formulations in a passage partially quoted above (n. 18), and which is to be quoted again more fully below (n. 42):

(a) *balukka ul innandā šubti* . . . "Without you, no dwelling is established here";
 (b) *ša lā kāšu manni minā ippuṣ* "Without you, who can do anything?" (*VAB* 4, 238:36, 38).

38 Atraḫasīs III, 6:13.

39 Gilgameš XI:175.

40 Maqlū V:141–42.

Indeed, other deities are likewise singled out for exclusive praise:

ela Šamaš ibbir mannu

Who, except for Shamash, crosses (the sea)?⁴¹

Ištar mannu balukki bēleti

Who, except for you, Ishtar, is the Mistress?⁴²

The divergence between the Samaritan-LXX reading *lōʿ yēʿānē* (i.e., the passive voice in a negative construction) and the restoration proposed here *mī yaʿānē* (i.e., the active voice in a rhetorical question) actually involves two equally acceptable and mutually interchangeable stylistic options. The close relationship between the two constructions may be observed, quite strikingly, from their juxtaposition in the following hymnic passage from the royal inscriptions of Nabonidus, part of which was already quoted above:⁴³

Bēl ašared ilāni rubūm Marduk

balukka ul innanda šubti

ul ibbaššimu kisuršu

ša lā kâšu manni minâ ippuš

bēlu ina qibūtika širtu

ša elīka tābi lušēpiš

O Bel, foremost among the gods, Princely Marduk,

Without you, no dwelling is established here,

Not even its outline is fashioned.

Without you, who can do anything?

O Lord, in accordance with your august command,

I would cause to be done whatever is pleasing to you.

One may thus view the confused MT of Genesis 41:16 as a conflation at once embracing and deleting elements from all of the following three progressively rhetorical theological assertions:

(a) *ʔlhym yʿnh ʔi šlwm prʿh*

God pronounces the well-being of Pharaoh;

(b) *blʿdy ʔlhym (P) yʿnh (yēʿānē) ʔi šlwm prʿh*

Without God, Pharaoh's well-being is not pronounced.

(c) *blʿdy ʔlhym (my) yʿnh (yaʿānē) ʔi šlwm prʿh*

Except for God, who can pronounce Pharaoh's well-being?

It will be observed that any one of these stylistic options *alone* would have been an appropriately reverent response by Joseph.⁴⁴ Judging from the speeches attributed to

41 Gilgameš X, 2:23. Note the preferred reading *ela* (for *akla*), for which see *CAD*, A, 277.

42 *KAR* 158 rev., 3:23.

43 *VAB* 4, 238: 35–40.

44 Note the midrashic comment: *tlh hgdwlh bbʿlyh*, "He attributed the greatness to whom it rightly belonged"; *Genesis Rabba* 89:9 (with parallels elsewhere).

Joseph elsewhere in the Genesis narrative, the third option, as proposed in this study, would seem to comport best with his marked propensity for the oblique, employing rhetorical questions whenever humbly deferring to the Deity in the presence of others:

hP l'lhym ptrnym
htht 'lhym 'ny

Isn't it God who has solutions?⁴⁵
 Am I in place of God?⁴⁶

45 Gen. 40:8.

46 Gen. 50:19; cf. 30:2.