

B'reishit 41:44-5

Par'oh said to Yoseif: "I am Par'oh; *ubil'adekha* no man shall raise his hand or leg throughout the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh declare Yoseif's name "Tzofnat Paneiach". He gave him Osnat, daughter of Poti Fera, Priest of On, as a wife. So Yoseif emerged over the land of Egypt.

Questions:

- 1) Why does Par'oh need to emphasize his title before describing Yoseif's authority?
- 2) What is the contextually correct translation of *ubil'adekha*?
- 3) Is Poti Fera the same man as Potifar, Yoseif's initial Egyptian master?

Commentaries

Onkelos – without your leave, no man in Egypt shall bear arms or ride horses in Egypt

Sa'adia, Rashbam - without your leave, no man in Egypt shall exercise authority in Egypt

Ibn Ezra – aside from you, no man shall be autonomous in Egypt

Bekhor Shor – Yoseif married Potiphar's daughter to blunt the latter's likely desire to claim status by recalling that he had been the viceroy's master

Meshekh Chokhmah – Par'oh made Yoseif marry Potiphar's daughter so that the Egyptian nobles would not object to the appointment of an ex-slave as viceroy.

My Comments

In Ibn Ezra's reading, Pharaoh is emphasizing that he still has direct control over the populace – Yoseif's power is an extension of his. This should be read as complementary to Rashbam's reading, whose language emphasizes the extent to which Yoseif's appointment potentially threatens Par'oh – can Par'oh himself still exercise authority without Yoseif's permission?

Yoseif's marriage similarly reveals his simultaneously powerful and precarious position. No man of low caste could marry the daughter of a noble, but this marriage is necessitated by politics (Note that the marriage takes place before the appointment is announced), and Yoseif is not given a choice about it.

One question I have is whether Yoseif – whose economic judgement so impresses Par'oh – understands that his position is precarious, that what Par'oh gave Par'oh can instantly remove. He should have learned this from his prisonmates, but he may think that his dreams grant him immunity.

A second question is how the word *bil'adekha*, used here by Par'oh to emphasize Yoseif's uniqueness, relates to the word *bil'adai* in 41:17, where Yoseif uses it to deny his uniqueness. There, Par'oh says that he has heard that Yoseif interprets any dream, and Yoseif responds "*Bil'adai* – God will respond for Pharaoh's tranquility." Perhaps this is just measure-for-measure reward, distinction for humility, but my suspicion is that there are levels of irony here. For example, it may be precisely Yoseif's sense of himself as a Divine agent that makes him susceptible to Pharaoh's superficial bestowal of unique status, a facade he does not see past until Yaakov's death.

Shabbat Shalom!

RK