

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter IX: Vaveishev (Gen. 37:1–40:23)

Essay 12. The blessing that Joseph brought to Potiphar's house.

**פסוק** "וַיְהִי ה' אֶת-יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מְצַלִּים וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרָיִם. וַיֵּרָא אֲדֹנָיו וְכוּ', וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינָיו. וַיִּשְׁרֹת אֹתוֹ וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ עַל-בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל-יְשֻׁלוֹ וְכוּ'. וַיְהִי מֵאֲזוּ הַפְּקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ וְכוּ' וַיְבָרֶךְ ה' אֶת-בֵּית הַמִּצְרָיִם וְכוּ'."

There are verse[s]: “The L-rd was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. And when his master saw that the L-rd was with him and that the L-rd lent success to everything he undertook, **he took a liking to Joseph. He made him his personal attendant and put him in charge of his household, placing all that he owned** in his hands. **And from the time that he put him in charge of his household** and of all that he owned, **the L-rd blessed the Egyptian's house** for Joseph's sake, so that the blessing of the L-rd was upon everything that he owned, in the house and outside.” (Gen. 39:2–5).

יש לדקדק מהו שְׁלֵשָׁה פְּעָמִים "וַיְהִי" בַּפְּסוּק אַחַד, וְעוֹד קִשָּׁה שְׁהֵיָה לוֹ לומר וַיִּשְׁרֹת אֹתוֹ וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וְכוּ', שְׁתַּחֲלֶה עֲבַד אוֹתוֹ וְאַחַר כֵּן מְצָא חֵן בְּעֵינָיו. וּמַהוּ זֶה הַסֵּךְ? וּמַהוּ שְׁחֹזֵר הַכְּתוּב לומר "וַיְהִי מֵאֲזוּ הַפְּקִיד וְכוּ' " וְהֵלֵךְ כְּבָר אָמַר "וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ עַל-בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל-יְשֻׁלוֹ וְכוּ' וַיִּבְרַךְ ה' אֶת-בֵּית הַמִּצְרָיִם וְכוּ'.

We should investigate why the word *va'yehi* (וַיְהִי) (“and he was”) appears **three times in one verse, and another difficulty is that Scripture could have said, “He made [Joseph] his personal attendant, and he took a liking to Joseph,” that first he served him and afterward he took a liking to him**, literally, “he found grace in his eyes.” **Also, what is the reason for Potiphar's liking of Joseph? Also, why did Scripture return to say “from the time that he put him in charge of his household” in Gen. 39:5, for didn't it already say “he put him in charge of his household” in Gen. 39:4? It would have been sufficient for Scripture to say, “He made him his personal attendant and put him in charge of his household, placing all that he owned in his hands,” “and the L-rd blessed the Egyptian's house etc.,” i.e., omitting the beginning of Gen. 39:5, “And from the time that he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned.”**

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ואיתא במדרש רבה על פסוק "ויקנהו פוטיפר", "כל העבדים חשודים על הגזל אבל זה", "ויברך ה' את בית המצרי בגלל יוסף." "כל העבדים חשודים על הערונה אבל זה", "ולא שמע אליה" עכ"ל. ולכן אמר הכתוב "ויהי ה' את יוסף" שיהיה ה' אתו ואם כן, נדאי לא היה חשוד על הערונה. "ויהי איש מצליח" ואם כן נדאי לא היה חשוד על הגזל. "ויהי בבית אדוניו המצרי" שאף על פי שאותו הבית היה בית מצרי ולא היה ראוי לזה, עם כל זה היה גם שם ה' אתו והיה מצליח.

**It's brought in Midrash Gen. Rabbah 86:3, on the verse "Potiphar bought him" (Gen. 39:1), "All of the servants were suspected of theft except for this one." This is because, as Scripture has said, "the L-rd blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake." The midrash continues, "All of the servants were suspected of immorality except for this one," and therefore Scripture said, "As much as she coaxed Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her, to be with her" (Gen. 39:10). Therefore, Scripture says, "The L-rd was with Joseph," that the L-rd was with him, and if so, then certainly he was not suspected of immorality. Similarly, Scripture says, "and he was a successful man," and if so, then certainly he was not suspected of theft. Finally, Scripture uses *va'yehi* (וַיְהִי) ("and he was") a third time in the verse, saying, "and he was in the house of his Egyptian master," that even though this same house was an Egyptian house and wasn't suitable for [G-d's presence], nevertheless even there, G-d was with him and he was successful.**

וכשהרגיש אדוניו שה' היה אתו דוקא והיה מצליח בכל אשר היה עושה בין לעצמו בין לאחרים, אז הפיר שהיה כמו סגולה שיש לו ליוסף כמו מי שהוא מומחה לכתוב קמיעים. ולכן מצא יוסף חן בעיניו ורצה שהוא דוקא ישרת אותו כדי שתהיה ההצלחה במעשה ידיו. ולא די זה אלא אף, ונפקדהו על-ביתו, כדי שתשרה הברכה אף בביתו בזכותו של יוסף. וכן היה שמיד שהפקיד אותו בביתו הרגיש שנשתלחה הברכה בביתו, וזהו, ויהי מאז הפקיד אתו נכו'.

**When his master perceived that G-d was with [Joseph] specifically, and that he was successful in all that he did, whether for himself or for others, then he recognized that this was like a virtue that Joseph had, similar to someone who is an expert in writing amulets. Therefore, he took a liking to Joseph and wanted that he specifically would serve him in order that the success would be in his actions, i.e., on behalf of Potiphar. This wasn't enough, but he also put him in charge of his household, in order that the blessing would also rest on his household in the merit of Joseph. Thus, it was that immediately upon putting him in charge of his household, he perceived that the blessing was sent upon his household, and this is why Scripture appears to repeat itself in Gen. 39:5 by saying, "And from the time that he put him in charge etc."**

ובזה יובן מאי דאמרין בפרק ד' דסנהדרין אמר ר' יצחק הכי אמר לו אחאב לעובדיה, בנעקב כתיב "נחשתי ונברכני ה' בגלגל". וביוסף כתיב "נברך ה' את בית המצרי בגלגל יוסף". וביתיה דההוא גברא לא קא מבריה. שמה לא ירא אלהים הוא? יצתה בתקול ואמרה "ועבדיהו הנה ירא את ה' מאד" וביתו של אחאב אינו מזומן לברכה ע"כ. וקשה איך יתכן שבית המצרי ינה מזומן לברכה יותר מביתו של אחאב.

**In this way, it will be understood that which is said in the fourth chapter of Sanhedrin:**

**Rabbi Yitzchak says, "Thus said Ahab to Obadiah: It is written regarding Jacob: 'And Laban said to him: If now I have found favor in your eyes, I have learned by divination that the L-rd has blessed me on your account' (Gen. 30:27). It is written regarding Joseph: 'The L-rd blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.' The house of that man, i.e., my house, was not blessed. Perhaps you, i.e., Obadiah, do not fear G-d? Immediately, a Divine Voice emerged and said: 'Now Obadiah feared the L-rd greatly' (I Kings 8:13), but the house of Ahab is not fit for blessing."**

- Sanhedrin 39b

**It is difficult to understand how it is possible that the house of the Egyptian was more fit for blessing than the house of Ahab.**

ונש לומר דלעולם אף בבית המצרי לא היתה שורה הברכה, אי לאו שאדוניו מסר ליוסף כל מה שיש לו, כאילו הוא אדון ומושל בכל. אכל בעובדיה עם אחאב לא הנה אפשר זה, שהרי אחאב הנה מלך וביתו הנה נקרא בית המלך והמלכות שפיר לעצמו. ואינו דומה לפוטיפר ולכן שהסיוח דעתם מנכסיהם ומבתיהם לאחר שמסרו הכל ביד נעקב ויוסף. ובזה נמי נבא לתת טעם מה הנה לו ליוסף להשיב לאשת פוטיפר, "הו אדני לא ידע אתי מה וכו'", "אלא נדאי כדאמרין כלומר הנה אדוני מסר לי הכל כדי שתחול עליו הברכה, ולמה זה? מפני שה' אתי, "ואיך אעשה" אם כן "הרעה הגדלה הזאת וחסאתי לאלהים?"

**It can be said that even in the Egyptian house, there was no right of blessing, if not for the fact that his master gave to Joseph everything he had, as if [Joseph] were master and governor of all. But for the case of Obadiah with Ahab, this was not possible, for Ahab was king and his house was called a royal house, and the kingship remained for [Ahab] alone to control. This is not like Potiphar and Laban, who removed their thoughts from their possessions and houses after handing everything over to Jacob and Joseph. In this way we will also come to give a taste of what Joseph had to say to Potiphar's wife, "Look, my master, having me, doesn't know what is in the house, and he has put all that he has into my hand" (Gen. 39:8). Rather, it is certain that he meant, "Look, my master has given everything to me in order that the blessing should rest upon him, and why is this that he has done so? Because he recognizes that G-d is with me, "and how will I do" this thing, if so, "this great evil and sin before the L-rd? (Gen. 39:9)"**

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