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:

\[ \text{If dy ʾlhym yʾnh ʾt šwm prʾh.} \]

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 prefaxes 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:

\[ \text{ḥlw ʾlhym ptrnym} \]
\[ \text{sprw nʾly} \]

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 ʾiptm 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.
pitrônîm, "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 hâlôm, "dream," likewise twice-repeated by Pharaoh, is included in Joseph’s reply, its place taken by the assonant term sâlôm, "well-being." Thus, by pointedly avoiding the language of Pharaoh’s query, Joseph succeeds in evading it altogether. 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 bîl’âdy. The Massoretes vocalized the word as bîl’âdîy, that is the conjunction bîl’âdé, “except for, apart from,” with the first person suffix. The form is pausal, and the word itself is punctuated with an ’etnaḥtâ. 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! (hâlîlā) 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 bîl’âday (MT) has been construed as the interjection “Nothing for me!”7 But, unlike the case of Genesis 41:16, the word bîl’âdy (bîl’âday) in 14:24 is not vocalized as a pausal form (bîl’âday), nor is it punctuated with an ’etnaḥtâ. Further, LXX (plên), and the literal rendering of Targum Onkelos (l̂hw m̂) construed the word bîl’âdy as the construct bîl’âdé, “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 (bîl’âdé) 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 hîwm, 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 . . .”).
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 (str mn).
9 The particle rq interposed between bîl’âdy and ’fr ’khw 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 (zulātī) 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 zwlyt, “except for,” is synonymous with, and functions exactly the same as, bl’dy in Genesis 14:24. 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’ādāy, “it is not in me!” in Genesis 41:16. Moreover, as with Genesis 14:24, even the reading bil’āday (non-pausal first person suffix) is to be rejected in favor of the construct bil’ādē “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

Proceding 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’ādē (not bil’ādāy, or even bil’āday). The same conclusion may be drawn from the obvious difficulty MT bil’ādāy 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’ādē

10 Note the parallelism of mbl’dy and zwlyt in Psalms 18:32, as well as the substitution of mbl’dy for zwlyt 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 (mbl’dy ‘yn ḥlhm) alongside 45:6 (zwlyt ‘yn ḥlhm), and 43:11 (w‘yn mbl’dy mwš’y) alongside 45:21 (‘ydyq mwš’y ‘yn zwlyt).

11 Contrast N. H. Tur-Sinai, P’sētō šel miqārē (Jerusalem, 1967), 1:37, who construes bl’dy 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’dy has been most plausibly emended to ‘dy, the consonants bl constituting a dittograph of the last two consonants of ḣbl 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 ḫkmty. Cf. Rashi’s paraphrase ‘yn ḫḥknh mšl’y, “the expertise is not mine.”

14 Aramaic: br mn ‘ l’ ‘yi gbr dpšr ḥlmyn.
pitrōnī, “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 bilʿādē ʿēlōhīm, “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: bilʿdy ʿlhym lʿ yʾnh (= lōʾ vēʾānē) ʿt ʾšlw ʾprʾh

LXX: aneu tou theou ouk apokritēsetai to sotērion pharao.

The syntactic construction attested here may be represented as bilʿādē X lōʾ + niphal verb Y, “without X, action Y is not accomplished.” While this rhetorical formulation with bilʿdy, 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 paens, where (a) the conjunction balu, (b) the negative particle, and (c) a verb in the N conjugation are likewise employed:

ihu ʿa ina balašu purussē šamē
(3) erṣetī la ipparrastā

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

balukka ul innandā ʿubštī
ul ibbaššimū kisuršu

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

While the reading of the phrase bilʿādē ʿēlōhīm, “except for God . . .,” for the awkward MT bilʿādāy, “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 yʾnh ʿt ʾšlw ʾprʾh. The specific idiom ʿānā ʿet sʾlōm 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 1QS (= Manual of Discipline), 11:11; 1QH (= Thanksgiving Scroll), 1:20; 10:9 wmbfʿdykh l(w)ʾ yʾšh (= vēʾāsē) (kwf), “and without You nothing is wrought.” 1QS, 11:17 ky mbfʿdykh hwʾ tim (= tittam) drk, “For without You no way is brought to completion.”

17 AKΛ 255, 1:3.

18 VAB 4, 238, 2:36.
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:

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wyṛ śr hʾpym
ky twb ptr
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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 yʾnh t prʾḥ šlw̱m. 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 šlw̱m prʾḥ. 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 ʾnh, “to answer,” and, presumably, bases its rendering on the highly specialized usage of ʾnh observed only in Ecclesiastes.

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 šālōm, “to speak, ordain (someone’s) well-being,” as in Psalms 85:9:

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šmʾḥ nh ydbṛ hʾl yhwḥ
ky ydbṛ šlw ᵇ lʾmr
wʾl ḫṣydʾyw
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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 ʾnh is employed not only in the sense of “to answer,” but, like Ugaritic ʾny, also as a more general verb of speaking. The suggested semantic association of the idioms ʾnh šlw̱m and dibbēr šlw̱m is particularly commended by the attestation of dibbēr and ʾānā as poetic synonyms in parallelism, in a context dealing specifically with the expression of the Divine will:

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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. ʾtywbh in 2 Chr. 18:7.
25 Note the idiosyncratic verb ʾnh, “to be concerned with” (cognate: ʾinyān, “a matter”) in Qoh. 1:13; 3:10; cf. 5:19 (hīpīl) “to cause (one) to be concerned with.” Indeed, on the basis of the equally strange usage of ʾnh 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 tbʾ nh špty thīlḥ . . . / ʾnh lswny ʾmrṭk, “May my lips utter (Your) praise . . . / May my tongue declare Your words . . .”
What has the Lord pronounced (in an oracle)?
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. Moreover, the associated biblical idioms dibber / 'ânâ šâlôm may in turn be viewed alongside Akkadian šulma qabû, “to pronounce (someone’s) well-being,” as attested, for example, in the following passages:

šalami balâṣi ina pi bêlîya qabi

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

qibissa šulmu

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

The particular nuance which would seem to be evident in our idiom ʿnh šîwm 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 ʿnh in Hosea 2:23–24. In the latter passage the verb ʿnh 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. The process, once all of its successive stages have been completed, will ultimately result in Jezreel’s bountiful harvest. The specific usage of ʿnh 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 qô in the contextually related words of the prophet Ezekiel:

wqr'ty 'î ḫdgн
ipples ʿwn
wel 'in ʿlykm r'b

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 ʿnh to assert that it is God who pronounces, and so ordains, Pharaoh’s well-being becomes somewhat more

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28 The oracular setting is clear from the earlier use of šâlôm in Jer. 23:33, and, more especially, the interchange of the noun massa', "oracular message" (in vv. 33–34, 36, 38) with the phrases mh ʿnh 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 ʿny 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 ʿnh, “to answer, respond,” here have little to recommend them. The assertion that the use of the verb ʿnh 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. 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 bi'lādē 'ēlōhīm over MT bi'lādāy, and to clarify the meaning of the expression ānā 'ēt š'lōm 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 bi'lādē 'ēlōhīm, the negative particle lō, and the niphal verb. That is not to say, however, that the reading of the Samaritan and LXX, bi'lādē 'ēlōhīm lō yē'ānē 'ēt š'lōm 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 'ēt in its construction with the niphal. While such usage is not without biblical parallels, the presence of 'ēt 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 'lāhym 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 Widdel 'ihym (my) y'nh 'ī slwm pr'h
bi'lādē 'ēlōhīm (mi) ya'ānē 'ēt š'lōm 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:

ky my 'l mbf'dy YWHH
wny swr mbf'dy 'lhnw

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 w'y'n ywsp, "Joseph spoke up in response," and concludes with Joseph's assertion that the Deity y'nh 'ī slwm 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 mbf'dy is paralleled by zwity 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.:

\[ mbl'dy \text{ YHW} \text{H my 'l} \]
\[ mbl'dy \text{ 'hynw my swr} \]

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 \textit{Ludlul bēl nēmeqi}, where, just as in Joseph's response to Pharaoh, a unique divine attribute is singled out for pious praise:

\[ ša lā Marduk mannu mūtušu uballit \]
\[ ela Šarpanitušu šītušu qīša nāpšasu \]

Except for Marduk, who reverses (lit., "quickens") his deathly state?
Apart from Šarpanitušu, 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:

\[ mannu annitam ša lā Enki ṭippuš \]

Who, except for Enki, could do this?\footnote{37}

\[ mannumma ša lā Ea amâtu ibannu \text{ (var. ibamî)} \]

Who, except for Ea, can devise a plan?\footnote{39}

Similarly, in the incantation literature Ea receives the following accolade:\footnote{40}

\[ ša lā Ea mannu unâḥkunuši \]
\[ ša lā Asarlûbi (sic!) mannu usâpšâhkuši \]

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

\footnote{37} Lambert, \textit{BWL}, 58:33-34. Note that the \textit{ša lā} (lit., "who is not") as employed in the above passage is the functional equivalent of the Akkadian conjunction \textit{balu}. See the equation of the two in an ancient commentary to the "Babylonian Theodicy" (Lambert, \textit{BWL}, 70, commentary to I. 11), cited and amplified by D. Marcus in "A Famous Analogy of Rib-Haddî," \textit{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):

\[ (a) \text{ balukka ul innandî šubî . . . "Without you, no dwelling is established here";} \]
\[ (b) \text{ ša lā kâšu mannu minâ ṭippuš "Without you, who can do anything?" (}\textit{VABB} 4, 238:36, 38).} 

\footnote{38} Atraḥasîs III, 6:13.
\footnote{39} Gilgameš XI:175.
\footnote{40} Maqlû V:141-42.
Indeed, other deities are likewise singled out for exclusive praise:

\[
\text{ela Šamaš ibbir mannu}
\]

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

\[
\text{Ištar mannu balukki bēleti}
\]

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

The divergence between the Samaritan-LXX reading \( \text{lo } yērānē \) (i.e., the passive voice in a negative construction) and the restoration proposed here \( \text{mi } yārānē \) (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:

\[
\text{Bēl ašared ilāni rubūm Marduk}
\]

\[
\text{balukka ul } \text{imanda šubī}
\]

\[
\text{ul ibbašimu kisuršu}
\]

\[
\text{ša } \text{lā kāšu manni minā ippūš}
\]

\[
\text{bēlu } \text{ina qibšika širtu}
\]

\[
\text{ša } \text{elika } \text{iābi lušēpiš}
\]

O Bel, foremost among the gods, Princely Marduk,

\( \text{Without you, no dwelling is established here,} \)

\( \text{Not even its outline is fashioned.} \)

\( \text{Without you, who can do anything?} \)

\( \text{O Lord, in accordance with your august command,} \)

\( \text{I would cause to be done whatever is pleasing to you.} \)

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) \( \text{ḥym } \text{yən } \text{ḥ } \text{šīwm } \text{pr } \text{ḥ} \)

God pronounces the well-being of Pharaoh;

(b) \( \text{ḥyd } \text{ḥym } \text{yən } \text{ḥ } \text{šīwm } \text{pr } \text{ḥ} \)

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

(c) \( \text{ḥyd } \text{ḥym } \text{yən } \text{ḥ } \text{šīwm } \text{pr } \text{ḥ} \)

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. Judging from the speeches attributed to

41 Gilgamesh X, 2:23. Note the preferred reading \( \text{ela} \) (for akla), for which see CAD, A, 277.
42 KAR 158 rev., 3:23.
43 VAV 4, 238: 35–40.
44 Note the midrashic comment: \( \text{thō } \text{ḥgdwh } \text{bb } \text{iyy } \)

"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:

\[ hP \text{ Phym } purnym \]
\[ htht \text{ ?hym } ?ny \]

Isn't it God who has solutions?\textsuperscript{45}

Am I in place of God?\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} Gen. 40:8.

\textsuperscript{46} Gen. 50:19; cf. 30:2.