

BBH Workbook p. 97 #2

(Gen 41:15)

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יֹסֵף חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְתִּי וּפָתַר אֵין אֶתּוֹ
וְאֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי עֲלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר תִּשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לְפָתַר אֶתּוֹ

This verse contains some difficult syntax and cannot at times be translated in a literal fashion.

וַיֹּאמֶר

A footnote indicates that this verb form may be translated “and (he) said.”

MORPHOLOGY

Although we have not yet learned how to parse וַיֹּאמֶר, we may observe that its root is אָמַר.

פַּרְעֹה

The Egyptian royal title *pr.*^o came into Hebrew as פַּרְעֹה, into Greek as Faraw, and into English as “Pharaoh.”

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה is the subject of

אֶל-יֹסֵף

אֶל-יֹסֵף consists of

- the preposition אֶל-, "to"
- the proper noun יֹסֵף, "Joseph"

Summary: וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יֹסֵף

And Pharaoh said to Joseph

What follows is a quotation of Pharaoh's words.

חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְתִּי

The masculine noun חֲלוֹם means "dream."

חֲלַמְתִּי, "I dreamed," is the Qal Perfect 1cs of חָלַם.

TRANSLATION

When a verb takes a direct object which comes from the same root as the verb (here the common root is חָלַם), the object is called a *cognate accusative*. Because Hebrew uses cognate accusatives more than English does, it is often necessary to translate the verb in a Hebrew cognate accusative construction other than literally in English. For example,

חַטָּאוֹת יִרְבְּעוּ
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא

the **sins** of Jeroboam,
which he **committed** (lit., sinned)

(1 Kgs 14:16)

וַיִּבְרַח יִפְתָּח נֶדְוָר

Jephthah **made** (lit., vowed) a **vow**

(Judg 11:30)

לְשַׁלַּל שָׁלַל
וּלְבַז בָּז

to **seize** (lit., spoil) **spoil**
and to **capture** (lit., plunder) **plunder**

(Ezek 38:12)

חָלַמְתִּי חִלּוֹם may be translated "I dreamed a dream" or "I had a dream."

וּפְתָר

וּפְתָר, which we may provisionally translate "but one who can interpret," consists of

- the conjunction Waw
- the verbal noun פִּתְרִי, which (as indicated by a footnote) may be translated “an interpreter” or “one who can interpret”

MORPHOLOGY

When a Waw is prefixed to a word beginning with a bilabial consonant (בּ, מּ, or פּ), the Waw is often spelled Shureq. For example,

| | | |
|--------------|---|-----------|
| בַּיִת + ׀ | → | וּבַיִת |
| מֶלֶךְ + ׀ | → | וּמֶלֶךְ |
| פִּתְרִי + ׀ | → | וּפִתְרִי |

The Bet and Pe in the examples in the right-hand column lack a Daghesh Lene because they are preceded by a vowel (Shureq).

The only case in Hebrew in which a word (or syllable) may begin with a vowel is when word-initial Waw changes to Shureq, as under the aforementioned circumstances.

TRANSLATION

Although the conjunction Waw may often be translated “and,” in the present context it is best rendered “but.” This

translation is appropriate because the statement
חֵלֹם חֵלְמָתִי וּפְתֵר אֵין אֹתוֹ *contrasts* with the statement

I had a dream, but there is no one who can interpret it.

אֵין

The negative particle אֵין means “there is not.” אֵין negates the previous word, פְּתֵר, “one who can interpret.” Thus וּפְתֵר אֵין means “but there is no one who can interpret.”

אֹתוֹ

אֹתוֹ, “it,” consists of

- the definite direct object marker
- the 3ms pronominal suffix ׁוֹ

אֹתוֹ (which refers back to חֵלֹם) is the direct object of the verbal noun פְּתֵר. Thus

וּפְתֵר אֵין אֹתוֹ

means

but there is no one who can interpret it

וְאֲנִי

וְאֲנִי, "and I," consists of

- the conjunction Waw
- the 1cs independent personal pronoun אֲנִי, "I"

MORPHOLOGY

When the conjunction Waw is added to אֲנִי, the Waw takes Pathach, the short vowel which corresponds to the reduced vowel Hateph Pathach under the Alef: וְאֲנִי.

שָׁמַעְתִּי

שָׁמַעְתִּי, "I (have) heard," is the Qal Perfect 1cs of שָׁמַע.

וְאֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי means "and I have heard."

עָלֶיךָ

עָלֶיךָ, "about (or, concerning) you," consists of

- the preposition **עַל**, which may have many meanings, but here is best translated “about” or “concerning”
- the 2ms pronominal suffix **יָךְ**, “you”

לְאָמַר

We have not yet studied the verb form **לְאָמַר**. Its function in the present context is to introduce what Pharaoh has heard about Joseph. **לְאָמַר** might literally be translated “saying,” but we must read the remainder of the verse to know how best to translate it here.

תִּשְׁמַע

תִּשְׁמַע, which we may provisionally translate “you will hear,” is the Qal Imperfect 2ms of **שָׁמַע**.

TRANSLATION

The Hebrew Imperfect sometimes expresses what English does by means of modal verbs. For instance, the Imperfect **תִּשְׁמַע** could in certain situations mean any of the following:

you will hear

you **would** hear
you **could** hear
you **can** hear
you **may** hear
you **might** hear
you **should** hear

(The helping verbs highlighted in red are modal verbs.)

חֵלוֹם

The masculine noun חֵלוֹם means “dream.”

לְפַתֵּר אֹתוֹ

A footnote indicates that the verb form לְפַתֵּר means “to interpret.”

אֹתוֹ, “it,” consists of

- the definite direct object marker
- the 3ms pronominal suffix ׁוֹ

אָתוּ (which refers back to חֲלוֹם) is the direct object of the verb form לְפַתֵּר. Thus אָתוּ לְפַתֵּר means “to interpret it.”

Summary: וְאֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי עָלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר תִּשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לְפַתֵּר אֹתוֹ

A wooden translation of this text might read as follows:

*And I have heard about you, saying,
you hear a dream to interpret it.*

We might substitute “that” for “saying” in order to arrive at a slightly better sentence:

*And I have heard about you,
that you hear a dream to interpret it.*

Furthermore, if we translate תִּשְׁמַע with the modal “can” (see above), the sentence makes a bit more sense:

*And I have heard about you,
that you **can** hear a dream, to interpret it.*

The preceding translation is similar to that of the NKJV, which reads:

*But I have heard it said of you
that you can understand a dream, to interpret it.*

(The meaning “understand” for שָׁמַע is attested elsewhere; cf. 2 Kgs 18:26; Isa 36:11; Jer 5:15; Ezek 3:6.)

Other English Bibles have translated this portion of Gen 41:15 more idiomatically. For example, the NIV reads:

*But I have heard it said of you
that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.*

The readings of the NASB, NRSV, and ESV are almost identical.

Final Translation

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, but there is no one who can interpret it. And I have heard about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.”