



VAYESHEV

JEWISH SUCCESS STORY

It's Not You, It's Him

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Vayeshev

Jacob settles in Hebron with his twelve sons. His favorite is seventeen-year-old Joseph, whose brothers are jealous of the preferential treatment he receives from his father, such as a precious many-colored coat that Jacob makes for Joseph. Joseph relates to his brothers two of his dreams, which foretell that he is destined to rule over them, increasing their envy and hatred toward him.

Simeon and Levi plot to kill him, but Reuben suggests that they throw him into a pit instead, intending to come back later and save him. While Joseph is in the pit, Judah has him sold to a band of passing Ishmaelites. The brothers dip Joseph's special coat in the blood of a goat and show it to their father, leading

him to believe that his most beloved son has been devoured by a wild beast.

Judah marries and has three children. The eldest, Er, dies young and childless, and his wife, Tamar, is given in levirate marriage to the second son, Onan. Onan sins by spilling his seed, and he too meets an early death. Judah is reluctant to have his third son marry her. Determined to have a child from Judah's family, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and seduces Judah himself. Judah hears that his daughter-in-law has become pregnant and orders her executed for harlotry, but when Tamar produces some personal effects he left with her as a pledge for payment, he publicly admits that he is the

father. Tamar gives birth to twin sons, Perez (an ancestor of King David) and Zerah.

Joseph is taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, the minister in charge of Pharaoh's slaughterhouses. G-d blesses everything he does, and soon he is made overseer of all his master's property. Potiphar's wife desires the handsome and charismatic lad; when Joseph rejects her advances, she tells her husband that the Hebrew slave tried to force himself on her and has him thrown into prison. Joseph gains the trust and admiration of his jailers, who appoint him to a position of authority in the prison administration.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Have you ever put in just as much effort—maybe even more—and still seen worse results than at other times?

What did that do to your sense of confidence or clarity about what leads to success?





Joseph was sold into slavery but rose through the ranks in Egypt, finding success at every turn.

TEXT 1

Genesis 39:1-6

א. וַיֹּסֵף הוּרַד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקְנֶהוּ פוֹטִיפָר סָרִיס
פְּרֹעֶה שֶׁר הַטְּבָחִים אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מִיַּד
הַיִּשְׁמְעֵאלִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרְדָהוּ שָׁמָּה.

ב. וַיְהִי ה' אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מַצְלִיחַ וַיְהִי
בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרַיִי.

ג. וַיֵּרָא אֲדֹנָיו כִּי ה' אִתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר הוּא עוֹשֶׂה
ה' מַצְלִיחַ בְּיָדוֹ.

ד. וַיִּמָּצֵא יוֹסֵף חָן בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּשְׁרֹת אֹתוֹ
וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ עַל בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל יֵשׁ לֹו נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ.

ה. וַיְהִי מֵאִזְ הַפְּקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ וְעַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר
יֵשׁ לֹו וַיְבָרֶךְ ה' אֶת בֵּית הַמִּצְרַיִם בְּגַלְל יוֹסֵף
וַיְהִי בְרַכְתָּ ה' בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לֹו בַּבַּיִת וּבַשָּׂדֶה.

ו. וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל אֲשֶׁר לֹו בְּיַד יוֹסֵף וְלֹא יָדַע אֹתוֹ
מֵאוּמָה כִּי אִם הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר הוּא אוֹכֵל וַיְהִי
יוֹסֵף יָפֶה תֹאֵר וַיְפֶה מְרָאֶה.

1. Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, Pharaoh's chamberlain, chief of the slaughterers, an Egyptian man, purchased him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

2. G-d was with Joseph, and he was a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

3. And his master saw that G-d was with him, and whatever Joseph did, G-d made prosper in his hand.

4. And Joseph found favor in his eyes, and Joseph served him, and Potiphar appointed him over his house, and all he had he gave into his hand.

5. Now it came to pass that since he had appointed him over his house and over all that he had, G-d blessed the house of the Egyptian for Joseph's sake, and the blessing of G-d was in all that he had, in the house and in the field.

6. So he left all that he had in Joseph's hands, and he knew nothing about what was with him except the bread that he ate; and Joseph had handsome features and a beautiful complexion.

TEXT 2

*Rabbi Don Yitzchak
Abarbanel, Genesis,
ad loc.*

שעזב כל אשר לו ביד יוסף, רוצה לומר מבלי כתיבה ומבלי שום חשבון. וזהו "ולא ידע אתו מאומה", כי הנה למעלה אמר "ויפקדהו על ביתו וכל יש לו נתן בידו" בדרך האוצרות, אמנם היה יודע אדוניו מה בבית והיה נותן לו חשבון מימים ימימה.

אבל אחרי שראה הצלחתו וישרו, לא ידע אתו מאומה, שלא היה שואל ממנו חשבון כמנהג המפקידים. וזה טעם "ויעזוב".

This is what it means when it says that Potiphar “left all that he had in Joseph’s hands”: Potiphar stopped keeping track entirely. That’s the meaning of “he knew nothing about what was with him.” Earlier, it says Potiphar “appointed him over his house, and all he had he gave into his hand”—meaning he entrusted him with managing the storage and resources but still kept tabs and expected regular reports.

But once Potiphar saw Joseph’s success and integrity, he gave up all oversight. Potiphar no longer required any accounting from Joseph at all.

Joseph was successful working for Potiphar and quickly rose to a position of full trust and authority.

"G-d was with Joseph, and he was a successful man."



TEXT 3

Genesis 39:21-23

כא. וַיְהִי ה' אִתּוֹ יוֹסֵף וַיִּט אֵלָיו חֶסֶד וַיִּתֵּן חָנוּן בְּעֵינָיו שֶׁר בֵּית הַסֵּהר.

כב. וַיִּתֵּן שֶׁר בֵּית הַסֵּהר בְּיַד יוֹסֵף אֵת כָּל הַאֲסִירִים אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית הַסֵּהר וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עוֹשִׂים שָׁם הוּא הָיָה עוֹשֶׂה.

כג. אֵין שֶׁר בֵּית הַסֵּהר רָאָה אֵת כָּל מְאוּמָה בְּיָדוֹ בְּאֲשֶׁר ה' אִתּוֹ וְאֲשֶׁר הוּא עוֹשֶׂה ה' מְצַלִּיחַ.

21. G-d was with Joseph, and He extended charisma to him, and He gave him favor in the eyes of the warden of the prison.

22. So the prison warden delivered all the prisoners who were in the prison into Joseph's hand, and whatever they did there, Joseph [was the one who] did it.

23. The prison warden did not inspect anything [that was] in Joseph's hand, for G-d was with him, and whatever he did, G-d was successful.



When Joseph was falsely accused and sent to prison, he once again rose to a position of influence.

“Whatever he did, G-d was successful.”

POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

"G-d was with **Joseph**, and he **was a successful man.**" → *Joseph gets (some) credit*

INCARCERATED

"Whatever he did, **G-d was successful.**" → *G-d gets all the credit*

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the Torah describe Joseph's success as his own in one place, but attribute it to G-d in another?
2. Whose success was it really—Joseph's or G-d's?

All blessings come from
G-d and are a manifestation
of His "success."



TEXT 4A

Proverbs 10:22

בְּרִכַּת ה' הִיא תַעֲשִׂיר וְלֹא יוֹסֵף
עֵצָב עֲמָהּ.

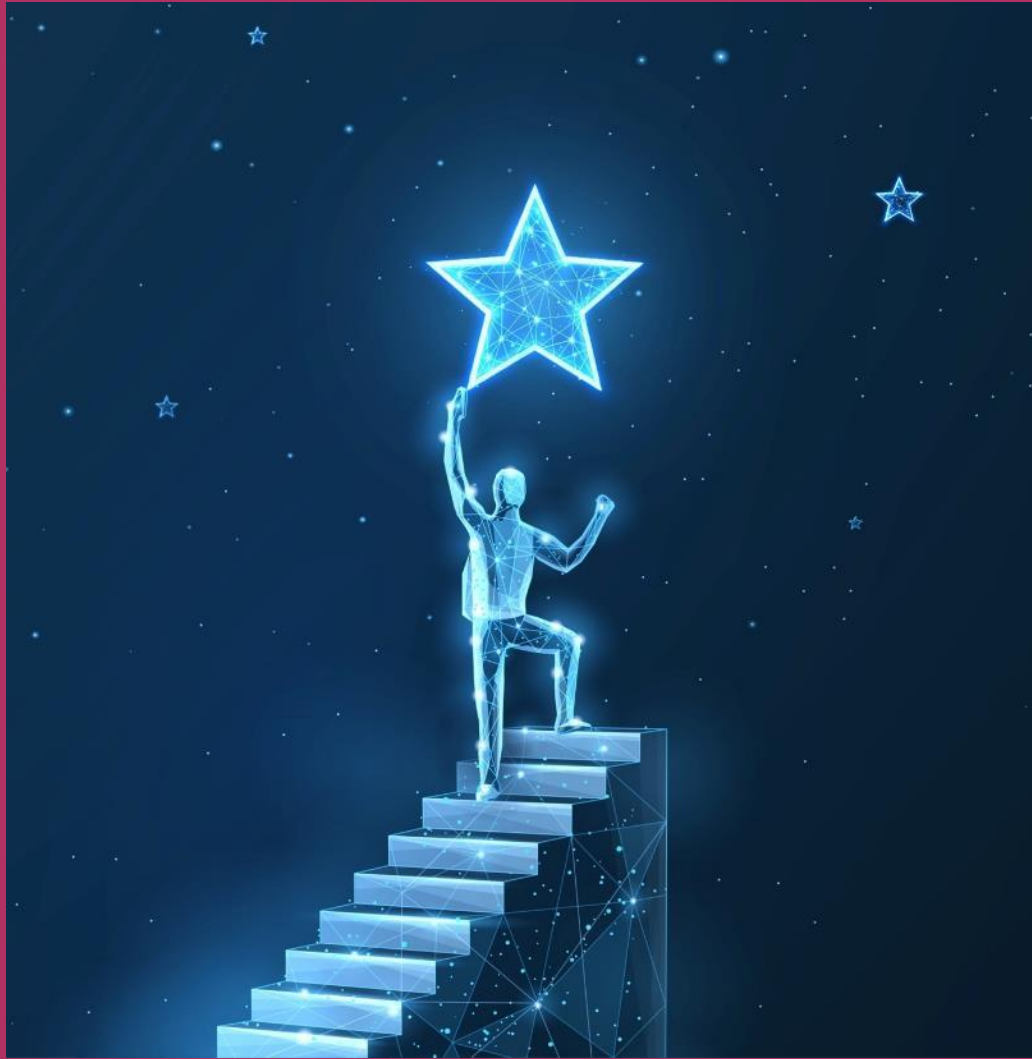
G-d's blessing will bring riches, and toil will add nothing to it.

TEXT 4B

*Rabbi David
Altschuler, Metzudat
David, ad loc.*

"ברכת ה'". הברכה שנותן ה' היא מעשרת את האדם, ועם הברכה ההוא לא יצטרך להוסיף עוד עזבון ויגיעה להרבות הון, כי יהיה די לו בהברכה הבאה.

"G-d's blessing." Success comes directly from G-d. When G-d gives His blessing, it brings true wealth to a person. And with that blessing, there's no need for added toil or stress to chase after more. The blessing itself is enough.



We must put in effort
to draw down the
blessings from G-d.

TEXT 5A

Deuteronomy 15:18

לֹא יִקְוֶה בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּשִׁלְחֶךָ אֹתוֹ חֹפְזֵי מַעֲמֶךָ
כִּי מִשְׁנֵה שְׂכָר שְׂכִיר עֲבָדְךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים
וּבִרְכָּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה.

You shall not be troubled when you send him free from you, for twice as much as a hired servant, he has served you six years, and G-d will bless you in all that you do.

TEXT 5B

*Midrash, Sifrei, ad
loc.*

יכול יהא יושב ובטל?

תלמור לומר "בכל אשר תעשה".

Perhaps we can sit around all day and do nothing?

The verse adds, "In all that you do."

We serve as agents who
create space for G-d's
blessings to flow into
the world through us.



TEXT 6

*Rabbi Shalom
Dovber Schneersohn,
Kuntres Umaayan
25:2-4*

כְּמוֹ שֶׁגִידוּל הַתְּבוּאוֹת נִמְשָׁךְ עַל יְדֵי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ. . . וְעַם זֶה אֵינָן אֱלֹא שְׁלוּחֵי
הַהַשְׁפָּעָה וְאֵין בְּיָדָם לְהַרְעֵ וּלְהַטִּיב כִּי אִם אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא. . . כִּי
הָעֵסֶק וְהַלְבוּשׁ הוּא רַק כְּשָׁלִיחַ לְבָד וְהַהַשְׁפָּעָה הִיא בְּיַד הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא. . .
הָעֵיִקָר הוּא בְּרִכַּת ה' וְכֹל מִי שֶׁהוּא יְהוּדִי אֵינּוּ חוֹשֵׁב בְּשׁוּם אוֹפֵן שֶׁהָעֵסֶק הוּא מְקוֹר
פְּרֻנְסָתוֹ חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם וְיוֹדֵעַ הֵיטֵב שֶׁהַהַשְׁפָּעָה מֵאֵת ה' הִיא וְהוּא הַנּוֹתֵן לוֹ אֶת פְּרֻנְסָתוֹ
עַל יְדֵי הָעֵסֶק.

Crops grow through the sun and the moon. . . . But these are only messengers of Divine influence; they have no power to help or harm on their own. They function only by G-d's will. . . . The same is true of work and livelihood. The job is only a garment, a vehicle. The actual sustenance comes from G-d.

A Jew never sees the business itself as the source of income. He or she knows with certainty that it's G-d who provides, and the business is just the channel through which the blessing comes.

ANSWER 2

It was both Joseph's and G-d's success. It was Joseph's efforts, but the result was G-d's blessings in motion.



True success, *hatzlachah*,
is achieving results
beyond expectations.

TEXT 7

Rabbi David Kimchi,
Sefer Shorashim,
Entry for “tzalach”

ענין ההצלחה ידוע, והוא הזמנת הטוב ובואו אל האדם
בדרך ישרה בלא עכוב. וענין קרוב לזה "וְצָלְחוּ הַיַּרְדֵּן
לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ" (שמואל ב' יט, יח), כלומר הדריכוהו
ועברו בו כאילו בקעו אותו.

The idea of *hatzlachah*—success—is well known: It means that good things are set in motion and reach a person smoothly, without delay or obstruction. A similar usage appears in the verse “and they crossed (*vetzalchu*) the Jordan before the king” (II Samuel 19:18), meaning they cleared the way and passed through it as if they had split it open.

OPTIONAL

Hatzlachah comes from *mazal*, a Divine, supernatural force beyond logic and nature.

Joseph's success came from G-d, making his achievements clearly Divine and evident to all.



OPTIONAL

TEXT 8

Rabbi Menachem
Mendel of Lubavitch,
Or HaTorah, Genesis,
vol. 2, p. 278; vol. 7,
p. 2478

אפשר לומר כי הצלחה הוא ענין מזל, כמו שקורין איש
מוצלח "בר מזל"—"גליק" בלע"ז. . . . וזהו בחינת יוסף. . . .
בחינה שלמעלה מהדעת, משם שורש יוסף. וזהו ענין
ההצלחה.

One could say that *hatzlachah* is related to *mazal*. That's why a successful person is called a "*bar mazal*," or in Yiddish, *glick*. . . . This reflects the quality of Joseph. . . .

Joseph represents a level that transcends logic and calculation. His root is from a place beyond the grasp of reason—and that's the essence of true success.



Hatzlachah reveals that something deeper is at play.

TEXT 9

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneersohn, Igrot
Kodesh 14, p. 130

והנה ההצלחה שזהו מה שתלוי במזל,
פירוש בלמעלה מן השכל, הוא גם
במסחר, בכל הענינים בבית ובשדה.
דאמרו רז"ל "שאין אדם יודע במה
משתכר כו".

וכמו שראינו במוחש בכמה בעלי הצלחה:
דכאשר הם עושים איזה דבר, אף
שבשכל אנושי אין לו מקום כלל, מכל
מקום לפי גודל הצלחתן נעשה הדבר
ההוא מעולה ביותר. ומי שמתחכם
בהתחכמות יתירה ועושה הכל בסדר
מסודר ובדעת יתירה ואין מועיל . . .
רק הכל תלוי במזל והצלחה שלמעלה מן
השכל.

Hatzlachah is a kind of success that comes from *mazal*—something higher than logic. It shows up not only in spiritual matters but in business, home life, and work in the field. As the sages say, “A person never really knows which effort will bring profit” (Talmud, Pesachim 54b).

We see this all the time. Some people make choices that seem completely unreasonable, yet everything turns out better than expected. Others follow every rule, plan with care, think through each step—and still come up short. . . .

Real success flows from a place beyond reason.

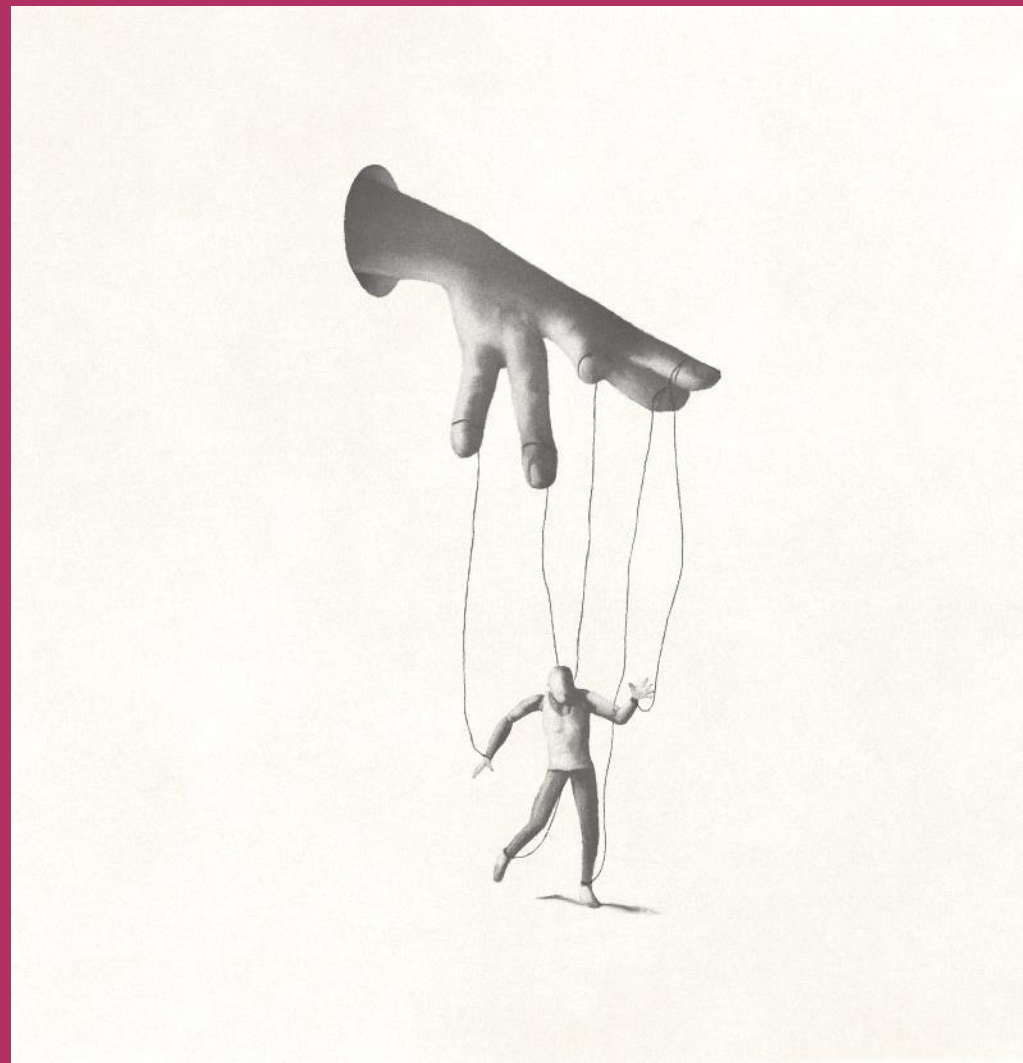
QUESTION

What was the secret behind Joseph's success?

ANSWER

Joseph recognized that all blessings come from G-d; by internalizing this truth, he opened himself to Divine favor, enabling his extraordinary success.

Halachah holds that coerced actions aren't attributed to the person.



TEXT 10A

*Talmud, Avodah
Zarah 54a*

אונס רחמנא פטריה.

G-d exempts one who is coerced.

TEXT 10B

Rabbi Yosef Engel,
Beit Ha'otzar,
Maarechet Alef, Kelal
24

דע דהא דאונס רחמנא פטריה נראה לעניות דעתי
דיש לומר ענינו דמעשה אשר אדם עושה מפאת אונס
אין המעשה מתייחס לו כלל, וחשיב כאילו נעשה
מאליו, ואיננו הוא העושה את המעשה.

There's a Halachic principle that "G-d exempts one who is coerced." This can be understood as follows: An action one does under coercion is not considered their action at all. It's as if the act happened on its own, and the person isn't regarded as the one who did it.



As time passed, Joseph's awareness that all blessing comes from G-d grew.

TEXT 11A

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 25, p. 216*

היות אז אין דעם אופן איז אויך לאחרי הביטול נאך אלץ דא
די מציאות פון "יד" העבד—דערפאר איז אויך די הצלחה
אלקית (נאר) אין אן אופן פון "ה' מצליח בידו" (כנ"ל), די
הצלחה אלקית איז אנגעטאן אין (ובמילא אפגעמאסטן לויט)
זיין "יד" ועשיה.

Even after a person reaches a place where they're totally given over to G-d, there's still the reality of their own "hand"—their personal effort. That's why the success G-d gives flows through the person's hand. It's Divine success, but it shows up in a way that matches the person's own action and effort.

TEXT 11B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Ibid.*

בשעת אָבער מ'האָט יוסף'ן איינגעזעצט בבית
האסורים, וואָס דאָס האָט ביי אים מגלה געווען א
ביטול מוחלט צום אויבערשטן, ער איז ביי זיך
געוואָרן כאין ואפס ממש. דעריבער איז אויך די
הצלחה אלקית געקומען אין אן אופן פון "ואשר
הוא עושה ה' מצליח" -- א הצלחה וואָס איז ניט
בגדר "איש", נאָר מען זעט מעיקרא אַז עס איז
דורכאויס יד ה'.

און אף על פי אַז אויך די הצלחה איז פארבונדן מיט
"ידו" (ועשייתו) של יוסף--ווי דער פסוק איז
מדגיש "ואשר הוא עושה ה' מצליח", . . . וויבאלד
אָבער אַז יוסף איז געשטאנען אין אַ פולשטענדיקן
ביטול צום אויבערשטן, וואָס לאַזט ניט איבער קיין
ארט כלל צו מרגיש זיין די אייגענע מציאות
(בדוגמא ווי אן אסיר בבית האסורים)--האט אויך
זיין "יד" (ועשיה) אינגאנצן ניט תופס מקום געווען.

When Joseph was put into prison, it brought out in him a complete loss of self to G-d—he became like nothing. That's why the success he experienced came in the form of "whatever he did, G-d was successful"—a kind of success where you can see right away that it's not human effort; it's clearly G-d's hand.

Yes, the verse still connects that success to Joseph's own "hand" and actions—"whatever he did, G-d was successful." . . . But because Joseph was in a state of such deep loss of self, like a prisoner with no personal identity, his "hand" didn't take up any space at all.



TEXT 11B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Ibid.*

און דעריבער איז די הצלחה אלקית אין זיין
עשיה ניט געווען מצומצם און מוגבל לויט די
גדרים פון "יד" הנברא, נאר--אן ענין אלקי
שלמעלה מהטבע לגמרי, ביז אז עס הערט זיך
אינגאנצן ניט דער "יד" ועשיה של יוסף, נאר
בלויז דער--ה' מצליח.

So, the success that came through him
wasn't limited by the usual bounds of
human effort. It was something
entirely G-dly, beyond nature
altogether, to the point that you didn't
even sense Joseph's hand anymore—
only G-d was making it succeed.

JOSEPH'S EVOLUTION:

A. POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

Joseph saw himself as an active partner in his success, believing in G-d's help while still viewing his own efforts as part of the process.

→ **Limited**

B. INCARCERATED

Joseph no longer saw himself as a channel or even a messenger; he fully surrendered, recognizing that all his success was entirely G-d's doing.

→ **Unlimited**

ANSWER 1

The changing language reflects Joseph's evolving perspective. The more deeply he internalized G-d as the sole source, the more his success appeared purely Divine.

TEXT 12

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 25, pp. 214-
215*

די "כלי" אויף הצלחה אלקית (שלמעלה מהטבע) איז כמפורש בקרא
"ואל זה אביט אל עני ונכה רוח"—ביטול.

וואז וויניקער דער מענטש פילט זיין ישות און מציאות, אלץ מער איז
"ה' איתו" (בגילוי)—אין זיינע מעשים זעט זיך אן אלץ מער כחו של
הקדוש ברוך הוא.

The "container" for such Divine success that's beyond nature is, as the verse says, "To this I look: to the one who is humble and broken in spirit" (Isaiah 66:2). In other words: a loss of self.

The less a person feels their own ego and sense of self, the more G-d is with them openly. In their actions, you see more and more of G-d's strength shining through.

Recognizing G-d as
the source of
blessing opens us to
greater success.



KEY POINTS

1. Joseph is described as someone remarkably “successful” in whatever he did.
2. All “success”—anything positive—is really just a manifestation of G-d’s blessings. True success is when the result exceeds expectation.
3. G-d tasks us with making an effort: the steps we take to realize that success is merely a function of making space for G-d’s blessing to flow. If we truly appreciate this, we completely “dissolve” into G-d’s efforts and results.
4. The more we appreciate and internalize this message, the more space we make for that blessing to flow and be realized in our lives.

