

(2) These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef was seventeen years old. He would shepherd with his brothers¹⁵ among the sheep. He was a youth together with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. Yosef brought a bad report about them to their father.

(3) Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his other sons because he was born to him in his old age, and he made him a tunic of fine wool.

(4) His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers and they hated him; they could not speak with him in a peaceful way.

about Yosef's sale into slavery by his brothers, causing Yaakov not to settle down peacefully. Verse 1, which states that *Yaakov settled in the land* is thus followed by: *These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef was seventeen years old*. Yosef was the main continuation of Yaakov.¹⁴ His being sold removed the state of tranquility from Yaakov's life. Furthermore, Yaakov's situation would be defined by that of his main offspring, Yosef — who was certainly not in a peaceful state himself and whose life was now pulling the descendants of Yaakov towards their eventual state of true slavery in Egypt. In this way, the 400-year count would not be interrupted. [This is another answer to Question 1.]

Another
Answer to
Question 1

WHY THE BROTHERS HATED YOSEF

Consider the following questions:

1. After saying, *These are the generations of Yaakov*, why does the Torah mention only Yosef and not any of his other sons?

14. See Rashi, citing the Midrash.

15. Translation of the phrase *הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת-אֶחָיו* follows Onkelos (who takes *אֶת* to mean *with*) and is how Alshich initially understands it as well.

(ב) אֵלֶּה תְּלֻדֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שִׁבְע־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־אָחָיו בְּצֹאן וְהוּא נָעַר אֶת־בְּנֵי בְלָהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־דַּבְּתָם רֹעֵה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם.

(ג) וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בְּנָיו כִּי־בָן־זִקְנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשֵׂה לוֹ כְּתוּבַת פְּסִים.

(ד) וַיִּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי־אֵתוֹ אֶהָב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אָחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֵם.

2. Why do we need to know that Yosef was seventeen, and that he was a shepherd with his brothers?
3. Why does it say (verse 2) בְּצֹאן, *among the sheep*? It should have said הַצֹּאן, *the sheep* — “Yosef would shepherd the sheep with his brothers.”
4. Why do we need to know that Yosef was a youth together with the sons of Bilhah? And why does it say, “with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah”? It should have said, “with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.”
5. Why does it say, “his father’s wives”? Don’t we already know that Bilhah and Zilpah were Yaakov’s wives?
6. How is Yosef’s bringing a *bad report* connected to the first part of the verse?
7. Why does the Torah use the name “Yisrael” here (verse 3) when it used the name “Yaakov” in the previous verses?
8. Why is the fact that the brothers saw that Yaakov loved Yosef the most (verse 4), the reason why *they hated him*? Was it Yosef’s fault that Yaakov loved him the most?

It is necessary to correct a mistaken impression that might be formed when considering the actions of the brothers and their holy father, Yaakov. Many of the things described here seem, God

forbid, to present them in a very bad light. How could Yosef Ha-Tzaddik tell his father *lashon hara* about his brothers? How could Yaakov, the holy servant of God, accept the *lashon hara* without protest? How could the righteous brothers hate Yosef and be jealous of him to the point that they wanted to kill him and throw him into a pit of snakes and scorpions? How could they sell him as a slave to Arab merchants? Are these the actions of *tzaddikim*? A person without proper understanding might wrongly suspect that the brothers were not true servants of God, and conclude that they had turned out like the wicked offspring of Esav.

To correct this false impression, the Torah states, *These* — Yosef and his brothers — *are the generations of Yaakov*, i.e., they are all righteous. The Torah was careful to write אֵלֶּה תְּלֻדֹת יַעֲקֹב (These are the generations of Yaakov), not וְאֵלֶּה (And these, etc.), in order to make clear that Yaakov’s offspring are not linked to Esav’s offspring enumerated in the immediately preceding passage at the end of the previous *parashah*.¹⁶

We asked above (Question 1) why after saying, *These are the generations of Yaakov*, does the Torah mention only Yosef and not any of his other sons. The answer is that the Torah begins its justification of the behavior of Yaakov’s “generations” with Yosef — but as we shall see, it will also deal with the rest of the family.¹⁷ The Torah was not just singling out Yosef as the “generations of Yaakov.” [This answers Question 1.]

Let us now look closely at our passage to see how the Torah

Answer to
Question 1

16. That is, the word אֵלֶּה without the *vav* serves to separate the righteous *generations of Yaakov* from the previously enumerated offspring of Esav. A *vav* would have linked these verses with the previous ones, which would have meant “these are wicked as well.”

17. The Alshich adds that, in discussing Yosef (verse 2), then Yaakov (verse 3), then the brothers (verse 4), the cantillation on each of these three words (Yosef, Yisrael, the brothers) is a long and emphatic note. It is as if the Torah is pausing by each one, saying, “This person whom you suspected of misdeeds, well, here is the explanation of his actions.”

is careful to limit the blame of each person involved. Regarding Yosef, the Torah tells us that when he was seventeen years old, *וְהָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת-אֶחָיו בְּצֹאן*, which may be translated: *he would shepherd his brothers*¹⁸ [when they were] among the sheep. When they were at home, their father Yaakov would guide his children; but when they were outside among the flock, Yosef's natural wisdom and ability would come to the fore, and he would counsel them; and this despite his great youth. The Torah is telling us that although Yosef was just seventeen, he was mature and wise and was able to “shepherd” his brothers. In light of this, how could one suspect him of being a sinner who would go around spreading false reports about his brothers? [This answers Questions 2 and 3.]

Someone might still claim that Yosef shepherded and guided his brothers because he was arrogant and haughty, and not because of his superior wisdom and ability. Therefore, the Torah tells us that *he was a youth together with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives*. Being a youth together with them means that he was happy to serve them and attend to their needs. He did not hold himself to be superior, even to them. He did not treat them as the offspring of simple maidservants but as full brothers — as “the sons of ... his father's wives.” [This answers Question 5.] He related this way not only to “the sons of Bilhah,” who was the maidservant of his mother Rachel, but also to “the sons of Zilpah.” And this was true not only when all four of Bilhah and Zilpah's children were together (when he might have honored Zilpah's two children out of respect for Bilhah's), but also when each pair of sons were by themselves. This is why the Torah repeats “**the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah**” rather than just saying “with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.” From all this we see that Yosef was certainly not arrogant and haughty. [This answers Question 4.]

18. Taking *אֶת* in its common sense of linking a verb to its direct object.

However, someone might still think that if Yosef was wise and not arrogant, then he is even more blameworthy for bringing a bad report about his brothers. To this the Torah answers, “This question should not trouble you too much. *Yosef brought a bad report to their father*” — i.e., only to “*their father*,” with the intention that Yaakov should examine their actions and guide them on the right path, as a father does for his sons. Yosef did not go about gossiping to strangers, in the manner of one who wishes to belittle a person and ruin his reputation. The Torah has thus provided some justification for Yosef’s actions. [This answers Question 6.]

Answer to
Question 6

The next verse turns its attention to Yaakov: *Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his other sons*. One might think that this was because he accepted Yosef’s bad report, and now thought that only Yosef was righteous. To refute this interpretation, the Torah refers to Yaakov by his name “Yisrael,” from the root ישר, meaning righteous and just; “*Yisrael*, i.e., Yaakov, with justice, *loved Yosef more than all his other sons*.” That is, his love was justified; it was not because he accepted any *lashon hara* but because בן זקנים הוא לו. The word זקנים comes from the root זקן, meaning old, and it is written in the plural to hint at a double meaning: (1) that Yosef was the son of Yaakov’s old age; (2) that Yosef was wise in Torah.¹⁹ [This answers Question 7.] And Yaakov’s favoring Yosef with the tunic of fine wool should not have aroused any great enmity on the part of the brothers, for the tunic is worn underneath all the outer garments and is almost entirely invisible to others.²⁰

Answer to
Question 7

19. The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 32b) says that the word זקן refers only to someone who has acquired wisdom (see also Rashi, *Vayikra* 19:32).

20. The Alshich states that this is derived by the Midrash (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 84:16) from verse 37:23, which states, וַיִּפְשִׁטוּ אֶת יוֹסֵף אֶת כְּתֹנֶתוֹ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת הַפְּסִים אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו, and [the brothers] stripped Yosef of his tunic, the fine woolen tunic “that was on him.” The last words, which are seemingly unnecessary, are to be understood: the fine woolen tunic upon which [the outer garments were worn].

But now that we have justified the actions of Yosef and Yaakov, the actions of the brothers seem even more blameworthy. If the brothers were so righteous, why did they become full of hatred when they saw their father's special love of Yosef? Why was their jealousy and enmity aroused by the gift of a simple tunic?²¹

However, if we look carefully we will see that the brothers' enmity did not stem from their father's preferential treatment of Yosef (i.e., from jealousy). For the Torah does not say here that the brothers envied Yosef. Rather, it states: *His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers and they hated him*. The brothers believed that Yosef had turned their father against them through his *lashon hara*, and had presented only himself in a good light. This must be the reason their father loved Yosef the most — and this was why the brothers hated him.²² [This answers Question 8.]

Answer to
Question 8

Perhaps you will say that the brothers should have judged their father more favorably. They should have assumed that he loved Yosef so much because he was *the child of his old age* (as stated in verse 3). The Torah responds to this argument by saying that their father loved him *more than all his brothers*. If the reason Yaakov loved Yosef was because of Yosef's youth, Yaakov should have given the special tunic to Binyamin, who was even more "the son of his old age" than Yosef was. But the brothers saw that Yaakov loved Yosef *more than all his brothers*, i.e., even

21. The Alshich cites *Bereishis Rabbah* 84:8, where our Sages say that the entire material of the tunic could be compressed into the palm of the hand. See also *Shabbos* 10b, which states that Yaakov gave each of the other brothers a tunic as well; Yosef's was simply a little fancier.

22. In other words, the brothers did not hate Yosef because they were jealous that Yaakov loved him the most. They hated him because they suspected him of ruining their reputation in the eyes of their father. Yaakov's expression of love served as the fuel for their suspicions; it was not the reason they hated him.

(5) Yosef dreamed a dream and he told his brothers and they hated him even more.

(6) He said to them, “Come and listen to this dream that I dreamed!

(7) “Now, we were gathering bundles of wheat in the field and then my bundle stood up and it also remained established. Then your bundles made a circle and they bowed down to my bundle.”

(8) His brothers said to him, “Will you come to be a king over us?! Will you rule over us?!” They hated him even more because of his dreams and because of his words.

(9) He dreamed another dream again, and he told it to his brothers, and he said, “Now I have dreamed a dream again. See! The sun and the moon and eleven stars are bowing down to me.”

(10) He told his father and his brothers, and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you dreamed? Will I and your mother and your brothers come to bow down to the ground before you?!”

(11) His brothers were jealous of him and his father kept the matter in his heart.

more than Binyamin.²³ If so, they concluded, there must be a different reason for Yaakov’s special love for Yosef: Yosef’s *lashon hara*, which had turned their father against them.

We have seen how the Torah actually went out of its way to show that the actions of Yosef, Yaakov and the brothers were not as bad as they appeared, and that in fact they were all righteous. If the Torah seems critical of their behavior, it is only because “God is exacting with the righteous, even to the extent of a hairsbreadth,”²⁴ i.e., He judges the righteous very strictly.

23. The Alshich adds that this is also why the Torah says here *מְאֵל אָהָיו*, *more than all his brothers*, rather than *מְאֵלָם* “more than all of them” — to specifically include Binyamin, who was Yosef’s only full brother.

24. *Yevamos* 121b; *Bava Kamma* 50a.

- (ה) וַיְחַלְמֵם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגִּד לְאָחָיו וַיּוֹסֶפוּ עוֹד שָׁנָא אֹתוֹ.
- (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמַעוּ-נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלַמְתִּי.
- (ז) וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי חֹנֵן מֵאֲלֹמִים אֲלֹמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֶלְמָתִי וְגַם-נִצְבָּה וְהִנֵּה תִסְבִּינָה אֶלְמֹתֵיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶי-וּ לְאֶלְמָתִי.
- (ח) וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם-מְשׁוֹל תִּמְשַׁל בְּנוֹ וַיּוֹסֶפוּ עוֹד שָׁנָא אֹתוֹ עַל-חֲלֹמְתוֹ וְעַל-דִּבְרָיו.
- (ט) וַיְחַלְמֵם עוֹד חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיְסַפֵּר אֹתוֹ לְאָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה חֲלֹמְתִי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד עֶשֶׂר כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי.
- (י) וַיְסַפֵּר אֶל-אָבִיו וְאֶל-אָחָיו וַיַּגִּיעַ-בּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלַמְתָּ הַבּוֹא נְבוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמִּי וְאָחִיךָ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אֶרְצָה.
- (יא) וַיִּקְנֹאוּ-בּוֹ אָחָיו וְאָבִיו שָׁמַר אֶת-הַדָּבָר.

THE MEANING OF YOSEF'S DREAMS

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does verse 5 say only, *they hated him even more*, and not add “because of his dreams,” as it does in verse 8?
2. Almost all of verse 6 seems redundant. The Torah should have simply stated: *He said, “Now we were gathering...”*
3. In verse 7 it states, *“My bundle stood up and it also remained established...”* What does the second half of this statement add to the first?
4. Why do the brothers mention two separate expressions of rulership (verse 8), *“Will you come to be a king over us?! Will you rule over us?!”* Also, are they genuine questions, or are they expressions of astonishment?