

(ח) וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אַלֶּה.
 (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֲבִיו בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתְּ לִי אֱלֹהִים בְּזֶה וַיֹּאמֶר
 קָחֶם־נָא אֵלַי וְאֲבָרְכֶם.

(טו) וַיְבָרֵךְ אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְכֻוּ אִבְתֵּי לְפָנָיו
 אֲבָרְהֶם וַיִּצְחַק הָאֱלֹהִים הִרְעָה אֹתִי מֵעוֹדֵי עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.
 (טז) הַמְּלֶאךָ הַגָּאֵל אֹתִי מִכְּלַרְע יְבָרֵךְ אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים וַיִּקְרָא בָהֶם
 שְׁמֵי וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתֵי אֲבָרְהֶם וַיִּצְחַק וַיִּדְגּוּ לְרֹב בְּקִרְבַּ הָאָרֶץ.

YAAKOV BLESSES YOSEF'S SONS

Let us consider the following questions:

1. Why did Yaakov ask, “*Who are these?*” when Yosef brought Efrayim and Menasheh before him? After all, Yaakov had just used their names when speaking to Yosef in verse 5. In addition, the Midrash¹⁸ states that Efrayim was the head of Yaakov’s yeshiva, and similarly the Sages¹⁹ said that Yaakov raised Efrayim in his home, treating him as his son and student. Of course Yaakov knew who Efrayim and his brother were!
2. How does Yosef’s response (“*They are my sons*”) tell Yaakov something that he did not already know?
3. Yosef ends his response with, “...*whom God has given to me in this* [בְּזֶה].” Why is this word used here?²⁰

17. This insertion follows Onkelos, cited by the Alshich in his answer to Question 9.

18. *Vayikra Rabbah* 2:3.

19. See *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Vayechi* 6.

20. The Alshich notes that the Sages take בְּזֶה to mean *with this* and explain that Yosef showed Yaakov his *kesubah* (see Rashi; compare Rashi, *Shemos* 12:2, *Bamidbar*

4. Verses 15 and 16 record the blessing that Yaakov bestowed on his grandsons. So why does verse 15 begin, *“Then he blessed Yosef”* instead of *“Then he blessed the youths”* (as *he shall bless the youths* in verse 16)? And if you answer that a father (Yosef) is blessed when his children (Menasheh and Efrayim) receive a blessing, the Torah should say that Yaakov blessed the youths, and we will understand on our own that Yosef was being automatically blessed as well.
5. Why does Yaakov invoke God twice in verse 15 but not state either time what it is he wants God to do (which is, presumably, to bless Menasheh and Efrayim)? And why does he then invoke an angel (and not God) to actually *bless the youths* in verse 16?
6. In describing Avraham’s and Yitzchak’s relationship with Hashem, Yaakov says, *“The God before Whom my fathers have walked.”* When speaking of his personal relationship with Hashem, he says, *“The God Who tends to me.”* Why this difference? And why does he then say nothing about Menasheh and Efrayim’s relationship with Hashem, mentioning only the angel who continually rescues him from all evil?
7. Yaakov said (verse 16), *“My name shall be called upon [Menasheh and Efrayim], and the name of my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak.”* What did Yaakov mean by this? Are not *all* of Yaakov’s descendants (the Children of Israel) called by the name of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov? And why did Yaakov mention himself (*“my name”*) before mentioning Avraham and Yitzchak?
8. In both verses 15 and 16, Yaakov says, *“my fathers,”* and then states the names Avraham and Yitzchak. Why

8:4). But the Alshich seeks an explanation more in keeping with the simple meaning of the text.

is this necessary? Doesn't everyone know who Yaakov's fathers are?

9. What is the purpose of the seemingly unnecessary words (in verse 16), that Menasheh and Efrayim should multiply like fish “*in the midst of [the people of] the land*”?

When Yosef brought his two sons before his father for a blessing, Yaakov had a prophetic vision in which he saw that two wicked kings, Yeravam and Achav,²¹ who were certainly not deserving of his blessing, were destined to come from Efrayim.²² He wondered who was responsible for this decline in the spiritual values of his descendants. *Yisrael saw the sons of Yosef* and thought, “Yosef is a *tzaddik*. Certainly, future generations would not turn away from Hashem as a result of anything that **he** has done. Perhaps Efrayim and Menasheh are not truly righteous, and they are to blame. If that is so, how can I bless them?” So he asked Yosef, “*Who are these?*” meaning, “Are they righteous or evil?” [This answers Question 1.]

Yosef replied, “*They are my sons,*” i.e., they are as righteous as I am. [This answers Question 2.] If you want to know why their progeny will go astray, it is because *God has given them to me in*

Answer to
Question 1

Answer to
Question 2

21. *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi* 6. Yeravam ben Nevat rebelled against the Davidic king Rechavam and established the Kingdom of Israel. His wicked 22-year reign is described in *Melachim I* 12:20–14:20. Achav was an extremely wicked, idol-worshipping king of the Ten Tribes who lived about 50 years after Yeravam. His story appears in *Melachim I* 16:29–22:40.

22. Rashi to verse 8 adds that among the descendants of Menasheh, Yaakov saw King Yehu ben Yehoshaphat and his wicked successors. Yehu was king of the Ten Tribes — not evil, though not fully righteous either. See *Melachim II* 9:1–10:36. About each of the four generations of Yehu's dynasty after him, Scripture states, “*He did what was evil in the eyes of Hashem.*” Their kingdoms are described in *Melachim II* 13:1–19; 13:10–14:6; 14:23–29 and 15:8–12. *Midrash Tanchuma* (ibid.) tells us that at this point the Divine Presence left Yaakov, and he was unable to proceed with his blessing.

this (הַזֶּה), i.e., in the unholy, impure land of Egypt.²³ And for that they cannot be blamed. [This answers Question 3.]

Yaakov understood that his grandsons were not on the spiritual level that he was, whether because they were born in Egypt, as Yosef said, or for some other reason. He therefore realized that his blessings were on too high a level to be received in full measure directly by the intended recipients. Therefore, to facilitate its transmission, Yaakov needed to filter his *berachah* to Efrayim and Menasheh in stages: first, by transferring it to Yosef's level, and then from Yosef to his sons. This gradual filtering of the *berachah* would work because Yosef was not quite on his father's spiritual level either, although he was higher than his sons. This is why the Torah introduces the text of Yaakov's *berachah* with the words, *Then he blessed Yosef and said...*²⁴ [This answers Question 4.]

In addition, Yaakov did not deem it proper to invoke Hashem directly in the less-than-full blessing he planned to give his grandsons. However, he was sensitive to the possibility that his grandsons might feel slighted if they received his blessing through the medium of an angel, rather than directly from Hashem. After all, they were certainly aware that when Yitzchak had blessed Yaakov he had invoked Hashem Himself, without resorting to an intermediary.²⁵

Because of this apprehension, Yaakov introduced his *berachah*

23. The Alshich quotes *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Miketz* 148) that every part of the world represents a "limb" of the earth's "body," and Egypt represents the body's nakedness; *Bereishis* 42:12 quotes Yosef accusing his brothers, "No, for you have come to see the nakedness of the land."

24. The Alshich writes that the word אַתְּ in the phrase יְבָרַךְ אֶת הַנְּעָרִים, [the angel] shall bless the youths, comes to include Yosef. [The word אַתְּ can mean with and is often expounded by the Sages as coming to include something or someone not mentioned explicitly in the text.]

25. As the Alshich writes, when Yitzchak blessed Yaakov he began his blessing with the phrase, וַיִּתֵּן לָּךְ הָאֱלֹהִים, *May God give you...* (*Bereishis* 27:28); and similarly, we find that God Himself blessed Yaakov, as it says, וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵל יַעֲקֹב עוֹד ... וַיְבָרַךְ אֹתוֹ, *God appeared again to Yaakov ... and He blessed him* (*Bereishis* 35:9).

to Menasheh and Efrayim by differentiating between the blessings received by Avraham and Yitzchak and the blessings that he had received — in effect telling them that he was on a lower level than **his** forebears, so they should not feel bad if they are not on the level of **their** forebears (i.e., himself).

To understand how Yaakov accomplished this, let us first explain the different ways that two *tzaddikim*, Noach and Avraham, served God.

The Torah tells us that Noach was a *tzaddik* who *walked with God* (*Bereishis* 6:9). However, the Torah says that Hashem told Avraham, “*Walk before Me and you shall be perfect*” (*Bereishis* 17:1). The Midrash²⁶ explains the difference between these two verses: God’s statement to Avraham, “*Walk before Me,*” implies that Avraham was able to worship Hashem on his own, without any support. However, *Noach walked with God* implies that Noach required Hashem’s assistance in order to serve God properly. In his modesty, Yaakov did not compare his own service to that of Avraham [and Yitzchak, whom he equated to Avraham]. Rather, he compared himself to Noach.

Yaakov first invoked God as He was served by his father and grandfather: “*God [is the one] before Whom my fathers have walked,*²⁷ *Avraham and Yitzchak.* They walked before Him; they did not need His support.” Then he invoked God a second time as he himself served Him: “*As for myself, however, God [is the one] Who tends to me, from my earliest youth until today.* I do need His guidance and support (as Noach did) to worship Him properly.” Yaakov thus conveyed to his grandchildren: Even though I was blessed directly from Hashem Himself, just as Avraham and Yitzchak were, I recognize that I am a step below their level. You, Menasheh and Efrayim, should therefore not be offended if you

26. *Midrash Tanchuma, Noach* 5; *Bereishis Rabbah* 30:10.

27. This is the same language as used in *Bereishis* 17:1, quoted just above.

are treated in a manner that is one level below myself, and are blessed not from God Himself but from *the angel who rescues me from everything evil*. [This answers Questions 5 and 6.]

We asked (Questions 7 and 8) why Yaakov mentioned himself (“*my name*”) before Avraham and Yitzchak (in verse 16), and why he bothered to state the names of Avraham and Yitzchak when referring to “*my fathers*” (in verses 15 and 16). To understand this, let us look at a Midrash.

In *Vayikra* 26:42, God says: וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲבְרָהָם אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֶת יִצְחָק וְהָאָרֶץ אֶזְכָּר [וְאֶת] אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲבְרָהָם. *I shall remember My covenant with Yaakov, and even [וְאֶת] My covenant with Yitzchak, and even [וְאֶת] My covenant with Avraham*. The Midrash²⁸ states:

Why does the verse use the word אָרָא [which can also mean *anger*] in connection with Avraham and Yitzchak, but not in connection with Yaakov? It is because Yaakov’s bed was complete [i.e., his children were without blemish]. But this was not true of Avraham, for Yishmael and the children of Keturah were among his offspring; nor was it true of Yitzchak, for Esav and the princes of Edom were among his offspring. But Yaakov’s children were all righteous, as they were able to say, “*All of us are the sons of one man.*”²⁹

The Midrash’s question seems difficult. There is no reason for the *pasuk* to use the word אָרָא, *also*, in connection with Yaakov, since he is mentioned first! It seems clear that the Midrash is really asking why the *pasuk* reversed the order of the Patriarchs in such a way that the word אָרָא does not need to be written in connection with Yaakov. The Midrash answers that there is no אָרָא (i.e., anger) associated with Yaakov because all his progeny were *tzaddikim*.

28. *Vayikra Rabbah* 36:5. The Alshich expounds on this Midrash in greater detail in his comments to *Vayikra* 26:42.

29. *Bereishis* 42:11. That is, we are all equally righteous, for all of us try to emulate our father.

Hashem was saying, in effect, to the Jewish people: “If in remembering the merit of your forefathers I had mentioned Avraham or Yitzchak first, it would somewhat diminish the outpouring of Divine mercy that could be generated on your behalf. For there would be room for a prosecuting angel³⁰ to object that the merits of Avraham and Yitzchak are tarnished by their wicked offspring who refused to follow in their ways. I therefore mentioned Yaakov first, whose children were all righteous and whose merits are therefore untarnished. Having aroused that level of love and mercy, I was also able to mention Avraham and Yitzchak’s merits, thereby adding to the mercy you shall receive, without an angel’s prosecutorial comments having an impact.”

Let us now return to the blessings that Yaakov was bestowing upon Menasheh and Efrayim. Yaakov talked about himself first (“*My name shall be called upon...*”) just as Hashem mentioned Yaakov first in the *Vayikra* verse quoted above, in order to forestall an objection from the prosecuting angel. But when it came to mentioning his father and grandfather, he [did not just refer to them as “*my fathers.*” Rather, he] emphasized that unlike the verse in *Vayikra*, he was mentioning Avraham before Yitzchak. And why? Because he wanted to increase the merit being brought to bear on behalf of Menasheh and Efrayim in comparison to the amount of merit being brought to bear on behalf of the Jewish people in *Vayikra*. Avraham possessed greater merit than Yitzchak because **his** evil son, Yishmael, had repented to some degree,³¹ and had thus tarnished Avraham’s merits to a much lesser degree than Esav had tarnished Yitzchak’s. [This answers Questions 7 and 8.]³²

Answer to
Questions
7 and 8

30. The Alshich writes that there would be room for “הַאֲלֹהִים” to prosecute. הַאֲלֹהִים is the name of a destructive angel — see *Shabbos* 55a and *Nedarim* 32a. It is also possible that the Alshich is simply using הַאֲלֹהִים as a way of referring to *Satan*.

31. *Bereishis Rabbah* 38:12; *Bava Basra* 16b (see Rashi, *Bereishis* 25:9).

32. Thus the reference in Question 7 to the fact that all of Yaakov’s descendants