

(3) Yaakov said to Yosef, “E-I Shadd-ai appeared to me in Luz (i.e., Beis-El) in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me.”<sup>9</sup>

(4) “Then He said to me, ‘I will make you fruitful, and I will cause you to multiply, and I will establish you as a company of nations, and I will give this land to your offspring after you — an eternal possession.’

(5) “And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt prior to my coming to you in Egypt, they are mine; Efrayim and Menasheh, like Reuven and Shimon, will be mine.

(6) “As for your progeny that you will beget after them, they shall be yours; but they will be subsumed under the name of their brothers with regard to their heritage.”

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### YAAKOV CONSIDERS YOSEF’S CHILDREN AS HIS OWN SONS

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#### Let us consider the following questions:

1. Why does Yaakov introduce his blessing for Yosef’s sons by revealing that God had promised him, “*I will make you fruitful, and I will cause you to multiply, and I will establish you as a company of nations*” (verse 4)?
2. Yaakov then adds that Hashem had also promised, “*I will give this land to your offspring after you.*” Why does Yaakov consider that assurance relevant to the rest of his message to Yosef?

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9. The Name that Yaakov used here, *El-Shaddai*, is the Name by which Hashem identified Himself to Yaakov when Hashem blessed him with the *berachah* quoted in verse 4 here (see *Bereishis* 35:11, cited below).

The place where Yaakov dreamt of angels ascending and descending a ladder as he was on his way to Lavan’s house was originally called Luz. When Yaakov awoke and realized that he had been sleeping on sacred soil, he changed the name of the place to Beis-El, lit., “House of God” (see *Bereishis* 28:19).

(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֵל שְׁדֵי נְרָאָה־אֵלֵי בְלוּז בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתִי.

(ד) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵי הַנְּגִי מִפְּרֹךְ וְהִרְבִּיתֶךָ וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְקַהֵל עַמִּים וְנַתַּתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְזִרְעֶךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ אַחֲזֵת עוֹלָם.

(ה) וְעַתָּה שְׁנִי־בְנֵיךָ הַנּוֹלָדִים לְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד־בָּאִי אֵלַיךְ מִצְרַיִמָּה לִי־הֵם אֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה כְּרֵאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן יִהְיוּ־לִי.

(ו) וּמוֹלַדְתְּךָ אֲשֶׁר־הוֹלַדְתָּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם לְךָ יִהְיוּ עַל שֵׁם אַחֵיהֶם יִקְרָאוּ בְּנַחֲלָתָם.

3. Why does Yaakov use the expression, וְעַתָּה (*And now*), as a preface to his remarks about Efrayim and Menasheh?

4. The first half of verse 5, “*Your two sons ... they are mine,*” implies that Yaakov already considered Efrayim and Menasheh like his own sons. Why then does he state at the end of the verse, “*Efrayim and Menasheh ... will be mine*” (future tense), implying that he did not yet consider them so?

5. The Torah never actually indicates that Yosef had other children. To whom, then, was Yaakov referring when he said (verse 6), “*Your progeny born to you after them*”?

Hashem had earlier blessed Yaakov:<sup>10</sup> “*I am El-Shaddai: Be fruitful and multiply, a nation and a company of nations shall*

10. Bereishis 35:11.

be of you.”<sup>11</sup> Yaakov did not think it feasible that Hashem was blessing him to father another *nation* (i.e., tribe) as well as an additional *company of nations* (i.e., even more tribes).<sup>12</sup> Nor did he think that *nation* was a reference to Binyamin while a *company of nations* was a reference to the other, older tribes (with God blessing all twelve of them that each would multiply to become as large as a nation.)<sup>13</sup> Rather, Yaakov understood the two phrases to be referring to the same tribe: There is a *nation*, i.e., one tribe (Yosef), but it will be divided at some future date into a *company of nations*, i.e., two tribes. He is telling Yosef about God’s original blessing now, as he is about to bless Menasheh and Efrayim and *establish [them] as a company of nations*, i.e., as if they were Yaakov’s own children and thus as tribes in their own right. It is that Divine blessing which authorized him, as it were, to do such a thing. [This answers Question 1.]

Answer to  
Question 1

Now, in being divided into two tribes, Yosef would be treated as Yaakov’s *bechor* in place of Reuven, in that he would receive the firstborn’s double share in the inheritance, i.e., in Eretz Yisrael.<sup>14</sup> That is why Yaakov reassures him now of Hashem’s earlier promise to give Yaakov the Land of Israel. [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to  
Question 2

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11. In our passage (verse 4), Yaakov uses slightly different wording when recounting this blessing. The Alshich focuses on the words actually used by God.

12. While it is true that an additional tribe (Binyamin) was yet to be born at the time of this blessing (Binyamin’s birth is described in *Bereishis* 35:16–18), it was clear to Yaakov that Hashem was not blessing him to have other children in addition to Binyamin.

13. This is because God would not mention Binyamin separately, while referring to the other tribes collectively as a “company.”

14. However, the Alshich adds, as *Horayos* 6b states, that it was only with respect to that inheritance that Yosef would function as the *bechor*; the title of *bechor* would be retained by Reuven. The Alshich alludes also to *Divrei HaYamim I* 5:1, which states: *Now the sons of Reuven the firstborn of Yisrael, for he was the firstborn; but since he defiled his father’s bed [i.e., sinned by moving Yaakov’s bed from Bilhah’s tent to Leah’s tent], his birthright was given to the sons of Yosef the son of Yisrael; but not so as to have the birthright attributed to him (Yosef) by genealogy.*

After explaining to Yosef his understanding of the *berachah* Hashem had given him, Yaakov wishes to eliminate any lingering doubts regarding the validity of his interpretation. “You might think that *a nation* refers to Binyamin, who was indeed born after Hashem had blessed me, and *a company of nations* speaks of children that I would have later. But now that I am on the brink of death and have not had any other children after Binyamin, it is clear that *a company of nations* cannot refer to children yet unborn.” This is what Yaakov meant by saying, “*And now* — i.e., when it is clear that I will not have any more children.” [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to  
Question 3

Yaakov then continues, “*Your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt ... they are mine*, i.e., Efrayim and Menasheh are now considered as if they were born to **me**.” (Hashem’s *berachah* to Yaakov in Luz/Beis-El, “*I will make you fruitful, and I will cause you to multiply*” — verse 4 here — is accordingly to be understood as referring to the then-imminent birth of Binyamin,<sup>15</sup> and the later births of Menasheh and Efrayim.) However, Yaakov fears that Yosef might claim that even though his two sons would each become a tribe unto itself, **another** tribe, called Yosef, would be reestablished by the birth of Yosef’s future children. There would thus be three tribes descended from him. To preclude such a claim, Yaakov adds, “*Efrayim and Menasheh, like Reuven and Shimon, will be mine*. That is, only these two sons will be mine [i.e., founders of tribes] like Reuven and Shimon are — but you, Yosef, will not be.” As to Yosef’s future children, Yaakov says (verse 6), “*As for your progeny that you will beget after them, they shall be yours; but they will be subsumed under the name of their brothers with regard to their tribal heritage* (i.e., they will be included in the tribes of Efrayim and Menasheh).” [This answers Question 4.]

Answer to  
Question 4

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15. See footnote 12.