

(כ) וַיִּזְדַּר יַעֲקֹב נֹדֵד לֵאמֹר אִם־יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמַרְנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ
הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנִתְּנָלִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבְגָד לְלַבֵּשׁ.
(כא) וְשָׁבְתִי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה ה' לִי לְאֱלֹהִים.

The Torah's use of the word וַיִּפְגַּע also helps us understand the various details given in the rest of the verse (see Question 5). It was because Yaakov *chanced upon* “the place” without realizing that it was the sacred ground of *Har HaMoriah* that he dared to spend the night there. And if you wonder why Yaakov *spent the night there* instead of continuing on to Yerushalayim (considering that he did not realize that Yerushalayim had come to him), the answer is that it was because the *sun had set*. And because he was still unaware that he was on sacred ground, *he took from the stones of the place* and made personal use of them, placing them *around his head ... and lay down [to sleep]*.¹³ [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to
Question 5

In sum, it was through Yaakov's dream and all that accompanied it that Hashem showed Yaakov that the entire world was subservient to him, and that he therefore had no reason to fear leaving Eretz Yisrael and going to Lavan's house.

YAAKOV MAKES A VOW TO GOD

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does verse 20 state that Yaakov made a vow, **saying** (“לאמר”)? This word always connotes “to say to

13. As the Alshich notes, when Yaakov woke up from his sleep he proclaimed (verse 16), אָכֹן יֵשׁ ה' בְּמִקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, *Surely, Hashem is in this place, and I did not know!* Upon which Rashi comments: Yaakov was saying, “Had I known, I would not have slept here.”

14. Translation of this *pasuk* and the next follows the simple meaning of the text. We shall see that the Alshich explains these *pesukim* differently.

someone else” — but to whom will Yaakov’s vow be reported?

2. God had already told Yaakov (28:15), *“I am with you and I will protect you wherever you go.”* So how could Yaakov say here, *“If God will be with me and protect me...”* — as if this was in doubt?
3. How are we to understand Yaakov’s request that God give him food and clothes? Is it possible that God could be with him and protect him while leaving him hungry and naked?
4. Yaakov asks for protection בַּדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ, *on this journey “that I am making.”* Aren’t the words אֲשֶׁר הוֹלֵךְ redundant?
5. How could Yaakov possibly say that only if God does all the things he requested, *“Hashem will be my God”*?!

When God appeared to Yaakov in his dream about the ladder, the *pasuk* says: נִצָּב עָלָיו (י-ה-ו-ה) וְהָיָה ה' וְהָיָה ה', *and Hashem was positioned above him* (verse 28:13). It was thus with the Divine Name י-ה-ו-ה, which represents the *Middas HaRachamim* (the Attribute of Mercy) that God promised Yaakov two *pesukim* later, *“I am with you and I will protect you wherever you go.”* But Yaakov was afraid of the *Middas HaDin* (Attribute of Strict Justice), which would hold him accountable for any sin he might commit — especially as he was about to embark on a dangerous journey. Therefore, Yaakov said, *“If Elohim will be with me and protect me on this journey,”* using the Divine Name which represents the *Middas HaDin*. Yaakov was requesting that even this aspect of God should be with him and protect him. [This answers Question 2.]

Furthermore, God had expressed His promise to Yaakov with the words: וְהָיָה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ, lit., *Here I am with you and I will protect you wherever you go* (28:15). Yaakov

Answer to
Question 2

was concerned that perhaps Hashem was saying that He would “personally” be with him only while he was “*here*,” i.e., in Eretz Yisrael. However, when he would leave Eretz Yisrael to go to Lavan’s house, Hashem would protect him but would not actually be with him.¹⁵ Yaakov therefore says: אִם יְהִי אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי — *If God*, i.e., God Himself, and not an angel, **will be with me**, i.e., actually be present with me Himself. [This is another answer to Question 2.] (This is also the meaning behind Yaakov’s request, “*If He gives me food to eat and clothes to wear*” — he is requesting that God Himself provide him with these things. [This answers Question 3.]) He then continues, “[*If God will be with me and protect me*] on this journey that I am making.” The words “*on this journey*” are referring to Yaakov’s going to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever,¹⁶ while the words “*that I am making*” refer to a second trip, namely his leaving Eretz Yisrael to go to Lavan’s house. [This answers Question 4.]

Another
Answer to
Question 2

Answer to
Question 3

Answer to
Question 4

We asked above (Question 5) how Yaakov could suggest that *Hashem will be my God* only if He would fulfill all his requests. The answer is that this is not at all what Yaakov was saying. Rather, these words are the next part of the whole series of requests that Yaakov is making of God: *If Hashem will be with me and protect me... if He gives me food to eat and clothes to wear; if I return intact to my father’s house; and if Hashem will be my God... (verses 20–21) — then whatever You give me I will surely tithe for You* (verse 22). But what did Yaakov mean by requesting that Hashem should be his God?

Let us preface our explanation with a short introduction. God generally does not allow Himself to be called the God of

15. Indeed, as the Alshich writes in other places (e.g., *Parashas Lech Lecha* 12:2–4, in answer to Question 2b), there is a general rule that God personally oversees matters only in Eretz Yisrael, while using His emissaries, the angels, to oversee matters in other countries.

16. See *Megillah* 17a.

a specific person while that person is still alive. Even regarding Avraham, Hashem is called אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, *the God of Avraham*, only after Avraham died.¹⁷ Yitzchak was on a somewhat higher level, for he was called אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, *the God of Yitzchak*, even during his lifetime.¹⁸ However, Yitzchak was a special case, because he was blind, and as our Sages¹⁹ have said, “A blind person is considered like dead.”

What Yaakov was doing here was making the following request: “On my return to Eretz Yisrael, please allow Yourself to be called ‘the God of Yaakov’ while I am still alive. You gave this honor to Avraham after his death, and to my father Yitzchak after he became blind. But Avraham had only his own merit, while Yitzchak had his own merit plus that of his father. However, I have the merit of all three of us! Therefore, give me this honor while I am still fully healthy (*intact*) and have no blemish that would cause me to be considered as if I was dead.” [This answers Question 5.]

We see later that this request of Yaakov’s was indeed fulfilled.²⁰ When he returned to Eretz Yisrael, the Torah states that *Yaakov came intact (שְׁלֵם — lit., complete) to the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan on his return from Padan Aram (Bereishis 33:18)*. Our Sages²¹ commented that Yaakov was שְׁלֵם physically and שְׁלֵם financially. In other words, he had no physical blemish (like blindness) that would cause him to be “considered as dead”; nor was he destitute, which would also cause this.²²

17. *Bereishis* 26:24 and 28:13.

18. *Bereishis* 28:13.

19. See *Nedarim* 64b, where it mentions that four kinds of people are considered as if dead: the blind, the leprous, the poor and the childless.

20. As we know, all of Yaakov’s other requests were fulfilled as well, for he returned safely to Eretz Yisrael with more than enough food and clothes (for he was a wealthy man); and neither did Esav harm him upon his return.

21. *Shabbos* 33b.

22. See footnote 19 above.

Answer to
Question 5

The Torah then continues, וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (33:20), which our Sages²³ interpreted as: *The God of Israel* (אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) *called him* (Yaakov), *El.*²⁴ The fact that the Torah refers to Hashem as “the God of Israel” (i.e., of Yaakov)²⁵ shows that God indeed allowed Himself to be called “the God of Yaakov” while Yaakov was still alive and in full health.

But what does it mean that God called Yaakov, “El” (which is one of the Names of God)? The word “El” literally means “strong,” and the *pasuk* is to be understood as follows: The reason God does not normally allow Himself to be called the God of a specific person in that person’s lifetime, is that there is always concern that a human being may sin.²⁶ Therefore, only after a *tzaddik* dies, having remained fully righteous until the end, would God attach His Name to him. This *pasuk*, which tells us that Hashem allowed Himself to be called “the God of Yaakov” while Yaakov was still alive, therefore tells us first why God was willing to do so: וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *The God of Israel called [Yaakov], “El.”* God testifies that Yaakov was an exception to the rule; he could be trusted to remain strong in his righteousness.

Finally, we asked (Question 1) to whom this whole vow of Yaakov’s was supposed to be reported, which is the purpose of the word לְאָמֹר. The answer is that the Midrash²⁷ says that the vow is to be reported to future generations. People should know that it is proper to make vows in times of trouble, as Yaakov does here. [\[This answers Question 1.\]](#)

Answer to
Question 1

23. *Megillah* 18a.

24. The *pasuk* in its entirety reads: וַיִּצַב שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, the simple translation of which is: *He (Yaakov) set up an altar there and called it, “God is the God of Israel”* (see Rashi there). The Alshich will now explain the Sages’ interpretation.

25. See *Bereishis* 32:29.

26. Until a person’s dying day he still has free choice, and thus the ability to sin. See *Midrash Tehillim* 16:2 where this principle is learned from the *pasuk*: וְהוּ בְקִדְשׁוֹ לֹא יִאֱמִין יָאֱמִין, *Behold, [God] does not have faith [even] in His holy ones (Iyov 15:15).*

27. *Bereishis Rabbah* 70:1.