



## Parshat Vayeshev

# Why Did Ya'acov Give Yosef a Special Coat and What Kind of Coat was It?

**Dear Rebbetzin,**

It bothers me that Ya'acov didn't treat his sons equally but gave Yosef a coat of many colors. Wasn't Ya'acov aware that favoring Yosef in this way would cause his other children to become jealous as we see is what happened? Ya'acov – the father of the Jewish people – is supposed to be a role model for life. How can he be such a negative example of child rearing?

**Ruchama Stein** (name changed)

**Dear Ruchama,**

I totally understand your question, which is in sync with the Talmud that states, “A man should never single out or distinguish one son among his other sons. For on account of the two sela's weight of silk, which Ya'acov gave Yosef in excess of his other sons, his brothers became jealous of him and the matter resulted in our forefathers' descent into Egypt” (*Shabbat* 10b). So why did Ya'acov, our father, give Yosef such extra special garment and what kind of garment was it?

פֶּרַח בְּרֵאשִׁית פָּרַח לְזֶפְתוֹק גַּ' וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיו כִּי בֶן זָקֵנִים הוּא לוֹ וְעָשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים:  
 “Israel loved Yosef more than all his sons, for he was a child of his old age, and he made him an embroidered or striped tunic” (*Bereshit* 37:3).

## Like the Garments of the Kohanim

In the Torah, various garments play important roles. Garments reflect the occupation and status of those who wear them, just as today a fireman, pilot and soldier wear a special uniform. Yosef's cloak represented being appointed for an important mission. The commentaries give various views of the meaning of *כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים/ketonet passim* that Yisrael bequeathed to Yosef. *Passim* can mean respectively, decorated, embroidered, multicolored or striped. *Ketonet* can mean a shirt, cloak or a tunic, like that which the Kohanim wore. The word even sounds similar to the word cotton or *kutna* in Hebrew. Surely, Ya'acov gave Yosef a most remarkable garment symbolizing Yosef's leadership both in the home and in the field (*Sforno*). Kli Yakar explains that Ya'acov made Yosef a tunic for honor and glory similarly to the garments of the Kohanim who were dressed in *כְּתֹנֶת תִּשְׁבֵּץ/ketonet tashbetz* – a checkered tunic and whose garments were also called “for honor and glory” (*Shemot* 28:2-4). With this special garment, Ya'acov bequeathed Yosef with the firstborn rights, which he had removed from Reuven. (Reuven became disqualified when he mingled into his father's private affairs, moving Ya'acov's bed from Bilha's to Leah's tent). Before the sin of the Golden Calf, the firstborn's responsibility was to serve as the Kohen to Hashem. Therefore, Receiving the *ketonet passim* symbolized Yosef's new role to minister as a Kohen connecting heaven and earth.

## Shortening Exile and Heralding Redemption

The word *פָּסִים/passim* shares the same numerical value as the word *קֵץ/ketz* – end (190). In the merit of Yosef, the Egyptian exile ended 190 years earlier than what Avraham was told, “...your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs. They will be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years” (*Bereishit* 15:13). Due to Yosef, the Egyptian exile was shortened to 210 years (See Rashi,

*Bereishit* 42:2). Ba'al HaTurim notes that the word פּוֹטִיפָרִים/*passim* is the acronym for פּוֹטִיפָרֶע/Potifar, סוֹחָרִים/*sochachim* – merchants, יִשְׁמַעֲלִים/Yishmaelites and מִדְיָנִים/Midianites. Yosef suffered greatly under the hand of each of these on his way to Egypt and within Egypt. Suffering cleanses all the sins of a person (*Berachot* 5a). At times, a *tzaddik* takes on the suffering of the people and brings atonement for the entire generation. Through the slavery of Yosef, the slavery of the Israelites was greatly reduced. The fact that the word *passim* shares the *gematria* with the word *ketz* – end, also means that Ya'acov handed over to Yosef the secret of the end of days. In addition, Ya'acov hinted to Yosef that he would bring about the end of days since he is the predecessor of Mashiach ben Yosef (Siftei Kohen).

### Spiritual Garments of Rectification

The garment that Ya'acov made for Yosef was more than just a material apparel. Yosef's *Ketonet Passim* indeed was אֹרֶךְ/קֶתְנֵת אוֹר/*ketonet ohr* – a garment of light. Adam and Eve wore such spiritual garments in the Garden of Eden. However, their garments of אֹרֶךְ/*ohr* – light were turned into garments of עוֹר/*or* – skin when they eat from the Tree. The spiritual garments of the *ketonet passim* that Ya'acov created reflected his rectification of Adam by returning his lost garments of light. Eating from the Tree of Knowledge brought schisms into the world, and Ya'acov knew that Yosef – whose name means to gather – was his only son worthy to return the original unification (Shlah HaKodesh, *Mesechet Matza Ashirah*). It was the serpent that caused the original breach in world unity, by bringing about the removal of the א/alef (symbolizing oneness) from the name of Adam. Without the א/alef all that was left from אָדָם/Adam was דָּם/*dam* – blood, for blood was spilled, now that death was introduced to the world. Parallel to the alef dropping from the name of Adam, the alef also dropped from the garments of light – אֹרֶךְ/*ohr*, which then turned into skin, flesh and blood. When the tribes stripped Yosef of his special garment they separated him from his highest unification with Hashem and thus removed his א/alef. This brought about the דָּם/*dam* – blood, which remained of Adam after the sin. This is the secret of “they dipped the *ketonet passim* in blood (*Bereishit* 37:31); (Shelah HaKodesh, *Parashat Vayeshev*).

### Returning the Lost Light of the Garden through the *Ketonet Passim*

“The serpent was naked” (*Bereishit* 3:1), therefore, it tempted Adam and Eve and stole their spiritual garments. Without these garments of light, Adam and Eve became aware that they were naked and separate from the Oneness of G-d. With the removal of the garments of light and life, death and mortality entered the lower world, which no longer was united with the higher worlds. The unity of G-d that originally shone forth in the Garden became concealed within the split reality of our world. The evil Nimrod who like the primordial serpent rebelled against G-d's unity, got a hold of the spiritual garments, and subsequently the wicked Esau desired them too and eventually stole them from Nimrod (Rashi, *Bereishit* 15:26). Esau, who was an incarnation of the serpent, had given the spiritual garments to his mother to safeguard. However, “Rivkah, his mother, took Esau, her son's desirable garments and dressed Ya'acov, her son in them” (*Bereishit* 15:26), in order to enable him to receive his father's blessing and firstborn right. Yosef, who can overcome Esau, (*Ovadia* 1:18), had the ability to unify the world and bring back the lost light of the Garden. For this purpose, Ya'acov had to hand over to Yosef the *Ketonet Passim* – the original garments of light. They were the embodiment of the *Ohr HaGanuz* – the hidden light, which was hidden for the *tzaddikim* to reveal (Tiferet Shlomo, *Parashat Vayeshev*).