

Spotlight on...Yosef's Tunic

Parashat Vayeishev begins the tumultuous story of Yosef and his brothers. The most well-known symbol of Yaakov's love of Yosef is the tunic, or the כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים, that he provides for Yosef. The tunic is introduced in Chapter 37:3-4

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-בָּנָיו כִּי-בֶן-זָקֵנִים הוּא לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים:

Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic.

וַיֵּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי-אֵלֵינוּ אָהַב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל-אָחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלָם:

And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.

Questions:

1. Based on the pshat (plain reading of the text), why did Yaakov make Yosef this tunic? What deeper message did this communicate to the rest of the brothers?
2. The Seforno explains that Yaakov made Yosef the tunic to demonstrate that Yosef was the *המנהיג בבית ובשדה*, or the leader at home and in the fields. According to his explanation, what deeper message did the tunic communicate to the rest of the brothers?
3. Like the Seforno, the Kli Yakar agrees that Yaakov made Yosef the head of the family. However, he explains that the tunic was designed to look like the garments of the kohanim, because the oldest son also filled the role of kohen for the family (this cannot mean kohen in the literal sense, but rather as the family member whose role it was to serve God on behalf of the rest of the family.) According to his explanation, what deeper message did the tunic communicate to the rest of the brothers?
4. In your opinion, do any of these 3 explanations help justify how the brothers reacted to Yosef? Why or why not?

BONUS QUESTION!!! While fans of Broadway know this tunic as the “technicolor dream coat,” its actual design is unclear and debated in the commentaries. Email MaharatRuth@ostns.org with one explanation of what the tunic looked like to win free ice cream!