And Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was a child of his old age. He made him a cloak of stripes. (Bereishit 37:3)

Mesor Eynayim

[Tr. adapted from Green’s The Light of the Eyes.] The Torah is everlasting in every person and every time.

It preceded the world but took on the garb of stories about events in accord with the time.

That is, in the time of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Torah was garbed in the stories of their lives.

But in any case, it must be so in every time.

It is called “Torah” because it teaches or points the way (moreb derekh).

If so, we must understand in this verse what way it is indicating. . .

Our Rabbis have taught on (Bereishit 1:1), In the beginning God created: “For the sake of Torah and for the sake of Israel.” The ultimate purpose of all creation was for God to do good for His creatures. Surely, God had no need to create the world for Godself, in the sense that we humans might need something we lack. Rather, God is whole (shalem) in every way, so much so that the term lack is completely in applicable; surely, we cannot say that God needed to create the world. Rather it is in the nature of the good to bestow goodness, and יִקְּבֵּךְ is good to all (Ps. 145:9). That was why God created the world: so that God’s creatures might enjoy God’s goodness.

Now the truest part of that good is the pleasure that Israel has in the world in fulfilling God’s commandments; in this they are taking pleasure in the Eternal, and the Eternal too takes pleasure, as we have been taught: “Israel sustains their Father in heaven,” just as a father takes pleasure in his delightful child. With this we can clarify a statement in the Mishnah:

Be not like servants who serve the master in order to receive a reward; rather, be like servants who serve the master not in order to receive a reward. (Avot 1:3)

On its face, the statement is repetitious. Once we have been told not to serve for a reward, why must we again be told to serve not for a reward? But the point is that our joy in fulfilling a commandment is a true spiritual joy, a taste of the World to Come. Our service should not be in order to receive a reward afterward, something we anticipate for the future. Rather in that very moment, in the doing of the commandment, this spiritual joy from above should be aroused in us. This is “not in order to receive a
reward.” Our service should not be in order for anything, for that implies the future; our pleasure is in the act itself, and in that way, we immediately take pleasure in the Eternal.

“In the beginning [God created]—for the sake of Torah and for the sake of Israel”—but God is infinite; how then could He create a finite world? He did so through the Torah: You have clothed Yourself in glory and beauty (Ps.104:1). God concentrated God’s presence in the Torah to create a finite world: “For the sake of Israel,” so we might walk in God’s Torah and hence receive complete goodness, as it is said.

But why not begin Torah with the commandments? Why garb Torah in stories? The point is that we are commanded to tell of the Exodus from Egypt. In the words of the Haggadah: “It is a commandment for us to tell of the Exodus from Egypt, and the more one tells of this Exodus, the more praiseworthy.” Why “the more one tells?”

Our sages said (Sukkah 21b), “The ordinary conversations of the sages require study.” You cannot always be studying Torah; there are times when you need to speak of worldly things. But, the righteous walk in them (Hoseah. 14:10)—even when the righteous are speaking of worldly things they are attached to the Eternal and, mamash, their words are Torah, because and they uplift souls with these words, just like Torah study. Indeed, there are some souls who are better uplifted by this talk than they are by Torah study. They do not have the power to join themselves to Torah and lift themselves up with it. Only worldly speech can reach them. This is the point of “Exodus from Egypt [MiTZRaYiM]”—going out of the narrows of the sea (MeTZaR YaM), coming close to the shore of that true Sea of Wisdom. That is why “It is a commandment for us to tell of the Exodus from Egypt.” At every moment, whatever we say, we should be speaking of “Exodus from Egypt.” And that is why “the more one tells” not only applies to our discussion of the Exodus on Passover, but constantly.

This is the meaning of And Israel loved Joseph.

The Zohar refers to the Eternal as “the elder Israel,” and Joseph is the tzaddik.

Because the tzaddik is always adding something (moseph, like “Joseph”) by his fear of heaven, always raising up yet another rung from below to God.

For he was a child of his old age—Onkelos translates this as “a wise child for him.”

Meaning that he raises up all the souls by his speech, and all of them are purified in wisdom.

He made him a cloak of stripes—the tzaddik fashions garments for God, the garments in which God is clothed.
