

# Miketz

## The Light of Darkness

*And he [Pharaoh] gave him Osnas, the daughter of Poti Phera the priest of On, as a wife, and thus Yosef went on to control the land of Egypt.* Bereishis 41:45

Yosef was accused by his master's wife of indiscretions that ought to have carried with them the death penalty,<sup>1</sup> explains the Midrash. So why was Yosef spared death, and simply imprisoned? The Midrash Abkir<sup>2</sup> tells us that, in fact, Osnas, the daughter of Potiphar, was aware of what really transpired between Yosef and her mother. She knew that Yosef was being railroaded by her mother's spite, and she told this to her father. It was as a result of this information that her father, Potiphar, did not give Yosef the death penalty, but rather imprisoned him. Osnas went on to marry Yosef.

Who was this Osnas? The Midrash<sup>3</sup> tells us that Osnas was, in fact, not the biological child of Mr. and Mrs. Potiphar, but was actually adopted. When Dinah was raped by Shechem, she conceived a child. That child was born, and her name was Osnas. But the brothers of Dinah did not like that child, and they plotted to kill her. Yaakov, however, wanted to spare his granddaughter, and so he took her and hid her in a bush,<sup>4</sup> where she was later found. Eventually, she made her way to the home of Potiphar, whose wife was barren, and she was raised by them. Yaakov gave her a necklace, which protected her, and reminded her where she came from. This Osnas was ultimately to marry Yosef. What is the significance of this? Why on earth would the brothers of Dinah want to kill her child, a child who went on to such great things?

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1 Bereishis 39:20

2 Quoted in Yalkut Shimoni 146

3 *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer* ch. 38

4 This is according to Rabbenu Bechaya to Bereishis 41:45. He explains that the name Osnas is related to “*sneh*” – bush (which Targum to Shemos 3:2 translated as “*asneh*”) – thus, she was named Osnas. See also R Moshe Wolfson in *Emunas Itecha* (Vayeshev, p. 129), where he explains that that in Moshe's blessing to Yosef (Dvarim 33:16), he spoke of Hashem as the One Who dwelled in the *sneh*. He explains that this means that Hashem, Himself, came down to Egypt, which was perilous as a thornbush – for, as the Arizal taught, Egypt was so dangerous that even a holy angel would have been ruined by just entering Egypt, and thus, Hashem came by Himself, as we are taught in the Hagaddah. Thus, Yosef, who “made it” in the place where even an angel would have been corrupted, and taught all the Jews to do the same, saw Hashem as the One present in even a *sneh*. And thus, the perfect wife for him was Osnas, whose name was from the word *sneh*. We will soon understand how this awareness of Hashem's presence, even in such places, was the very essence of Osnas, just as it was for Yosef. See *Chizkuni*, *Daas Zekenim* and *Sifsei Kohan* for similar accounts to that of Rabbenu Bechaya. *Sifsei Kohan* speaks of how Osnas was staggeringly beautiful, but was divinely protected and thus not noticed by any men until Yosef noticed her.

Before Yaakov died, he blessed his children.<sup>5</sup> When he came to Shimon and Levi, however, he gave them words of rebuke. Words of rebuke, when appropriate, are just as valuable as any blessing.<sup>6</sup> He spoke to Shimon and Levi, the ringleaders, about how they “uprooted the bull [*ikru shor*] at their will.”<sup>7</sup> Rashi explains<sup>8</sup> that they wanted to uproot Yosef, who is referred to as a bull,<sup>9</sup> and Yaakov was rebuking them for this. This is generally understood as relating to the sale of Yosef, where Shimon and Levi were the main plotters.<sup>10</sup>

However, R. David Luria<sup>11</sup> explains that, in fact, it is referring to the plot to kill Osnas, wherein the brothers wanted to render Yosef childless, in Hebrew, the term for this is *akkar*. This was the very word for uprooting, “*ikru shor*” – in other words, they sought to make Yosef impotent by getting rid of Osnas. In Osnas, the brothers saw a girl who would be the perfect wife for Yosef, and the very same way that they did not like Yosef and sought to get rid of him, they tried to get rid of her. So she, like her future husband, Yosef, found herself in exile long before the rest of the Jewish people, in the same country, and even in the same house! What was it about Osnas that made her so perfect for Yosef?<sup>12</sup> How was it so clear to Shimon and Levi even as an infant that she was for Yosef, and she had to be gotten rid of?

Yosef was the first of our nation to go into exile. It was in his merit that the Red Sea ultimately split,<sup>13</sup> for the Jewish nation merited leaving Egypt for three reasons: They did not change

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5 Bereishis 49

6 It is clear that Yaakov blessed all of his sons from 49:28: “Each man according to his blessings did he bless them,” as pointed out by *Pirush Maharzu* to Bereishis Rabbah 98:4. See also the important comments of R. Moshe Feinstein in *Kol Ram* vol. 3 to Bereishis 49:4, about how every bit of rebuke must be accompanied with blessing, in order that the rebuked not feel demolished by the rebuke, but rather empowered.

7 Bereishis 49:6

8 Ad loc. See also Targum

9 Dvarim 33:17

10 See Targum Yonason 37:19. According to Bereishis Rabbah 84:16, it was Shimon himself who threw Yosef into the pit. See also Rashi to Bereishis 42:24, where Shimon is also singled out as ringleader.

11 *Buir Radal* to *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer* 38

12 As the daughter of Dinah, Osnas already began with a special connection to Yosef; for Dinah started out as a boy in Rachel’s womb, while Yosef was in Leah’s womb, and then they were changed. (According to some, they actually switched places, as in *Maharsha* to Niddah 31a, and Targum Yonason. However, the simple reading of Brachos 60a, and Rashi to Bereishis 30:21, seem to imply that Dinah was switched from being a male fetus to a female. (See also Midrash Sechel Tov 30:21.) In fact, Radal to *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer*, and R. Yaakov Kaminetzky in his *Emes L’yaakov al Hatorah*, explain that this is why we see Yosef acting like a woman and playing with his hair, and Dinah acting like a man and being a “*yatzanis*” [one who goes out], leaving the home when she ought to have stayed in. In fact, Sheloh (*Derech Chaim Tochachas Mussar* to Vayishlach) already writes that the reason Dinah went out is because her nature was more male, and the same is found in *Sifsei Kohen al Hatorah* to Bereishis 34:1. See also Arizal in *Shaar Hapsukim*, Vayishlach 17a, where he explains that this is why it always spells the female *naarah* as *naar* when referring to Dinah, because she began as a male. This connection between Yosef and Dinah makes them special partners. In fact, Maharal in *Be’er Hagolah* (*be’er 2, os 11*, in Machon Yerushalyim ed.) explains that the reason that our Sages encouraged men to marry their sisters’ daughters is because ideally, one would marry his own sister, since she is most similar to him. However, explains Maharal, this is forbidden, and therefore, the closest person to oneself is one’s sister’s daughter. However, we have yet to explain what the connection is.

13 Chullin 92a

their names or their language, and they did not have any illicit sexual unions whatsoever.<sup>14</sup> Not one! Yosef was the progenitor of this.<sup>15</sup> He was the one who went into exile, and did not change his identity one bit. He was still busy thinking, when they were reunited, of what he had been studying with his father all those years ago. He didn't lose his train of thought for one second. And he did not succumb to the temptation to consort with the attractive Gentile woman, with whom any children would have had Gentile identities and names. Yosef assured that the Jewish people would retain their identity, and not get lost in Egypt.<sup>16</sup> He instilled that power within the Jewish people. Thus, the Red Sea split for the Jews, for it "saw" that they were coming with the great accomplishments that they had learned from their grandfather, Yosef. The Sea was split for the Jews because they properly implemented the ideals that Yosef taught them.

Yosef was not only the fellow to prove that exile can be beaten. He embodied the power that we have to conquer the exile. Yosef is compared to a spark of fire, that can burn up all the straw that is the power of Esav. Rashi<sup>17</sup> tells of a flax merchant who was once traveling with his camels laden with flax. He came to a narrow alley, and a blacksmith on the side of the road wondered aloud, "How on earth can all this flax fit through this alley?" But the wise man nearby smiled and said, "One spark that comes off of your blacksmith's hammer can completely consume all of the flax in but a moment." So, too, was Yaakov concerned when he saw the great power and numbers that Esav would enjoy in this world. But Hashem told him not to worry. "The house of Yaakov will be fire, and the house of Yosef will be a flame, and the house of Esav will be straw."<sup>18</sup> Falsehood is large, and imposing, but it is full of air. The truth, while small, and seemingly insignificant, is, in fact, fire. Yosef contains that power to burn through the falsehood exile, and demonstrate that while things may look bleak, and the Jewish people may seem small, they are armed with the fire that Yosef shows us how to foster, and that fire can burn through all the falsehood that exists. The fact that we have made it as a people this far through history is precisely the reason that Yosef made it as far as he did. We

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14 Bamidbar Rabbah 13:19 tells of these three merits. See the essay on Parshas *Shemos*, "Tongue Untied" (above), and our notes there, for further discussion of the other midrashim that list other merits, and the elusive, oft-quoted midrash that they did not change their clothing.

15 If fact, Bereishis Rabbah 84:8 tells us that the "coat of many colors" that Yaakov gave Yosef, the *Kesones Pasim*, was called the "*Pasim* cloak" because *Pasim* is a contraction of the words *pas* and *yam*, meaning the splitting of the Sea. For, if it was not for the fact that Yosef was given that cloak, which fueled his brothers' jealousy and got him sent to Egypt, the Jewish people would never have made it out.

16 Vaykira Rabbah 32:5 states explicitly that it was because Yosef managed to control himself that the Jewish people themselves managed to do so over the course of the exile.

17 Bereishis 36:1, s.v. *vayeshven*. With slight changes, the same story appears in Tanchuma there, Bereishis Rabbah 84:5, Aggadas Bereishis 59. See also Bava Basra 123b, where the same idea is expressed with no parable at all. The Midrash sees the Torah's juxtaposition of the list of Esav's great leaders, and the "chronicles of Yaakov are Yosef," as an indication that Yosef is the response to all of the power of those leaders. The verses thus go directly from the powerful leaders of Esav into "And Yaakov settled in the land where his fathers lived in the land of Canaan. These are the chronicles of Yaakov, Yosef," for Yosef is the spark that can consume all those mighty leaders who are no more than flax. Interestingly, notes Simcha Hochman (Sefer Hachamisha to Vayeshev) the last letters of the words "in the land where his fathers lived in the land of Canaan," spell "*nitzotz*," which means "spark."

18 Ovadiah 1:18

know that we are armed with the truth, and that it is more powerful than anything that we are up against.

It is from these very depths that Yosef shone, and it was from these very depths that Osnas emerged. She was the product of something terrible, and it would seem that nothing holy could come from such a devastating event as the rape of Yaakov's beloved daughter. But in fact, the entire future of Yosef came from there. Osnas not only bore his children, but saved his life. She was a great woman, conceived out of exile, and raised in exile. The power to see the good in such a tragedy is the power of Yosef, who grew stronger in exile. It is the power of the spark, who knows that no matter how much flax seems to be around it, there is no match for the flame.<sup>19</sup>

But that is not all. It is a basic tenet taught by our Sages that anything of significance that occurs to the Jewish people over the course of history occurred on a smaller scale in the lives of our Patriarchs. R. Gedalya Schorr<sup>20</sup> deduced, from the Midrash, that the precursor to the Chanukah story was the rape of Dinah. For, Chanukah was about the Jewish ability to weather an attack mounted on its very values. But even from the darkest of times, the Jewish people have learned, good can come out. The Osnas who seemed to be no more than something to get rid of, turned out to be one of the key players in Jewish history. The power of Yosef was compared to the spark igniting the flax. So was the Chanukah candle. The Mishnah tells us<sup>21</sup> that a person who leaves a candle out in the street is responsible if a flax-laden camel walks by, and his fire causes the flax to go up in flames. But then, the Mishnah tells us that if that candle was the Chanukah candle, the fellow is not responsible. If you want to successfully burn up all the flax, and get away with it, you will discover how to do it through the little oil jug of Chanukah.

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19 See also the comments of Ohr Hachaim to Bereishis 49:9, where he discusses the idea that R. Chanina ben Tradyon was trapped in Shechem and could only come into the Jewish people through his relationship with Dinah. He says that the Torah hints to this in the words "*rachavas yadayim*," since "*rachavas*" is spelled with the first letters of "Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon." We see that there was good to be taken from the Shechem incident. Chida (in *Chomas Anach* to Vayishlach, p. 55. See also his *Midbar Kedemos*, *maareches tav*, 27; his *Devash Lefi*, *maareches alef*, 22, with the gloss of R. Z. E. of Dinov, 'Dvarim Nechmadim' and R. Yitzchak Buchavza's *Lechem Lefi Hataf*, *maareches tav*, 4) has a similar method in which he quotes the Arizal, saying that Dinah was a reincarnation of Amaslai Bas Carnevo, the mother of Avraham. Amaslai was taken by force while she was a niddah, by her husband, Terach, and thus, Avraham was born. (The conception of Avraham by force is a detail that Chida only mentions in *Midbar Kedemos*, *ibid.*) As Dinah, she had that filth removed from her, and it transferred to Shechem. He explains that this is why Yaakov was not upset by the incident of Dinah the way that the brothers were, because he knew the secret that it was needed for her perfection. Dinah is all about knowing that there is good in the darkness. In fact, not appreciating the fact that Dinah was capable of changing the wicked Esav into a righteous man is what brought upon her the incident of Shechem, as Rashi to Bereishis 32:23 writes. The fact that Dinah could change the good into bad was not used for Esav, but it was used in the Shechem situation, and that is what Yaakov needed to learn. Chida says something similar in *Chomas Anach*, *ibid.*, namely, that since Yaakov knew that Dinah's cleansing would come (paradoxically) from a relationship with a wicked man, he was thus punished for not giving her to Esav.

20 *Ohr Gedalyahu*. Moadim, to Chanukah, p. 61

21 Bava Kamma ch. 6

In the darkness of exile, we remain strong, as Yosef taught us to. We look to his wife, Osnas, to learn that not only are we not to despair when we are challenged, but we can rather know that good can come from the darkness,<sup>22</sup> for, a little bit of quality oil can last a long time. A little spark of truth is far more valuable than any amount of falsehood. Our adversary Antiochus had a name with the numerical value of 156. And so did Yosef.<sup>23</sup> Yosef was the person who could teach us that we have what it takes to combat evil and falsehood, no matter what comes our way, for we are armed with the truth, and to change the entire world, we begin with a little bit of oil – and one little spark.

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22 In fact, Chida writes (in his *Chomas Anach* to Miketz 41:45, *os* 7, *ofen* 9, that the letters of Osnas in Hebrew are an acronym for “*Ado-nay somech noflim tamid*,” which means God constantly supports the falling. He goes on to say that whenever Yosef would mention her name, he would recall all of the kindness that Hashem had done for him in his troubled times!

23 *Megaleh Amukos*, *ofen* 252, quoted also in *Regel Yesbara* of R. Zvi Elimelech of Dinov, *alef* 200. He explains there that this is why the Greeks decreed that the Jews were to “write on the horn of an ox, ‘We have no portion with the God of Israel’” (see Yerushalmi, Chagiga 2; Bereishis Rabbah 2:4 and 16:4; Vayikra Rabbah 13:5 and Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria 11) – because Yosef was compared to an ox (see above), and this war was a war between Yosef and Antiochus. See also R. Dovid Cohen’s comments on this Midrash in his *Obel David* vol. 3 to Ovadiah 1:18, relating to Yosef and the Greeks. In his *Birkas Yaavetz* vol 2, p. 186, he further explains that the reason the Greeks decreed that the Jews must write down their denial of Hashem, rather than say it aloud, was because they decreed that the Jews were not to mention the name of Hashem with their mouths (see Rosh Hashanah 18b, and Megillas Taanis) and therefore they could not allow the Jew to say the name of Hashem, even in the context of denying a connection with Him! (Others interpret this to be the Greeks’ attempt to reference the golden calf, see *Eitz Yosef* and Maharzu to Bereishis Rabbah 2:4, and Maharal in his *Ner Mitzvah* pt. 1 (pp. 34–40 in Machon Yerushalayim, ed.). See also *Avraham Es Yado* of R. Avraham Palagi in *drush* 8, p. 57b. A third view quotes Rashi (to Shabbos 35b s.v. *vibatanya*), saying that animal horns were used as baby bottles in those times, and therefore, they were figuratively decreeing that “you are to feed the anti-God ideal to your children even as infants” (*Tal Liyisrael* of R. Yisrael Ganz, “Siyach Yisrael” to Chanukah, *sicha* 11. He then tells of a conversation wherein R. Leib Gurweicz of Gateshead told him of how he saw such a horn in an English museum that was dated, “one thousand years old.” In the *Kol Torah* Journal, vol. 53, R. Yitzchak Zilberstein also quotes this interpretation from R. Leib Gurweicz.) See also Shnayer Leiman’s article, “Kisvu Al Keren Hashor,” in Y. Pollak, ed., *Alei Be’er*, New York, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 109–113, where he discusses many other approaches to the subject.