



## Parshas Pinchas 2023, defender of faith

*The Parsha Perspective is in honor of the Refuah Shlema of Ruchma Leah Bas Sarah. And loving memory of Leah Mintche Bas Ya'akov Yosef, Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia.*

*This week's Parsha Perspective is in the merit of the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh, Rav Chaim Ibn Attar, one of the commentaries I quote frequently. Earlier this week, on Tuesday, the 15th of Tammuz, we observed his Yahrzeit, the anniversary of his passing.*

Our Parsha begins with Pinchas, the grandchild of Aaron, receiving a reward for killing Zimri, the head of the tribe of Shimon. Zimri was publicly consorting with a Midianite princess, so Pinchas took a spear and ended both of their lives.

The reward bestowed upon Pinchas was the Kehunah, the priesthood. The Talmud in Zevachim (101b) explains that when G-d anointed Aaron and his four sons as priests, the appointment was intended for Aaron, his descendants, and future generations. As Pinchas was already alive at the time of their anointing, he did not receive the priesthood himself.

However, a question comes to mind: At the beginning of Parsha, the Torah mentions the names of the two people that Pinchas killed, Zimri and Cozbi, yet the Torah does not mention their names last Parsha when the story is told of their death.

Why does the Torah specifically withhold their names when describing the story of their public sin and subsequent demise? What purpose is served by revealing their names at the beginning of this Parsha?

Rashi, Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading Torah commentary gives a simple explanation. He cites the Midrash Tanchuma, which states that when the lineage of a righteous individual is mentioned, it is an expression of praise and commendation. Similarly, when the lineage of an evil person is mentioned, it serves to intensify the level of shame and disgrace associated with their name.

Rashi explains that at the conclusion of the previous Parsha, there was no need to further amplify the shame that Zimri had already brought upon himself. His public transgression with the Midianite princess had far-reaching consequences for his tribe and the entire nation. Therefore, the Torah merely alludes to his identity, allowing his actions to speak for themselves.

However, the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He answers that the Torah specifically mentions their names to underscore the courage and bravery exhibited by Pinchas in his decisive act. In full view of the public, Pinchas killed the leader of a powerful tribe and a princess of a mighty nation, regardless of the potential repercussions.

According to the Ohr Hachaim, by detailing the reward Pinchas received for his actions, the Torah conveys the courage it took to eliminate Zimri and Cozbi. While others stood by as mere spectators, Pinchas stepped forward to defend G-d's honor.

The Pasuk describes the reaction of the people upon witnessing Zimri bringing Kozbi into his tent (25:6), *"A Jewish man brought a Midianite woman in view of Moshe and the nation who were weeping at the entrance to the Mishkan."*

Those who witnessed this act were shocked by the audacity of a tribal leader committing such a grave sin without apparent shame. However, Pinchas

reacted differently. He saw a leader transgressing and understood that he had to stand up for G-d's honor.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the Torah mentions the names of Zimri and Cozbi solely to extol and honor Pinchas. In truth, their names are inconsequential to the narrative, except for the fact that both held positions of leadership—Zimri as a tribal leader and Cozbi as the daughter of Balak, the king of Midian.

Despite the potential consequences and political implications, Pinchas boldly took action to put an end to the serious desecration of G-d's name. Thus, the Torah includes their names to highlight his courage, bravery, and unwavering resolve, as he stood firm while others felt powerless.

This profound lesson is ever more relevant as we embark on the three-week mourning period for the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. The Beis Hamikdash housed the Shechinah—the Divine Presence manifest through the smoke on the altar. As we mourn their destruction, we must reaffirm our belief and steadfastly proclaim G-d's unity to the entire world.

In our daily life, it is imperative that we understand that it takes nothing to stand on the sidelines with the rest of the masses. But it takes real courage and determination to defend your beliefs and values to an ever-growing opposition. But it is in those moments that your true self comes out, and your soul shines.

**"As the tides of doubt rise, we have a responsibility to be steadfast ambassadors of G-d's light, reminding the world of the profound beauty and meaning that lie within a life of religious devotion."**

-Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,  
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*