

## **When he zealously avenged Me among them. (25:11)**

*Kanaus*, zealousness, is not a trait that one should exhibit indiscriminately. As the paradigm of the *kanai*, zealot, Pinchas exemplifies the true zealot. He acts definitively for the sake of the community, placing the needs of the *klal*, congregation, above his own safety and reputation. The *kanai* is not lauded; dinners are not rendered in his honor, nor does he have a large collection of friends. People are actually afraid of him, never knowing where and when he will strike; what will anger him; what he will see that is wrong. The *kanai* lives in a select circle, revered by those who understand his value to the community, spurned by those who become the subjects of his mission. What makes a person a *kanai*? Why do some express their revulsion to sin in one way, while others never even flinch, never bristle when they see another Jew committing a sin? Is *kanaus* a Jewish trait or is it “cultural”?

**Horav Menachem Mendel zl, m’Kotzk** suggests that *b’socham*, “[When he zealously avenged Me] among them,” is the origin of Jewish zealotry. “Among them,” Pinchas inculcated the trait of *kanaus* within the Jewish psyche. How? What did he do? The *Kotzker* explains that Pinchas infused us with intolerance for sin. We cannot withstand spiritually offensive behavior. We do not despise the sinner; we hate the sin!

The **Chasam Sofer** applies the word, *b’socham*, differently. What motivated Pinchas to act zealously? What prompted him to risk his life and reputation by taking the lives of Zimri and his supporters? It was the *b’socham*, “among them.” Pinchas contemplated the passion and fervor which the sinner exuded in executing his sin. Why should he not at least expend the same effort in preventing sin as the sinner had done in executing a sin? This motivated his response to Zimri’s spiritual mutiny.

The basic issue is tolerance of sin. We have become so complacent, so accepting of the sinner, and – by extension – his sin, that we have no room left in our hearts for zealotry. A person must be repulsed by the sin; he must feel revulsion; he must feel personally and collectively threatened by the effects of sin. While *kanaus* should not be personal (he must act out of love for Hashem), unless one takes it personally, he will not react zealously.

Veritably, everyone felt the way that Pinchas did. The others just did not have the courage and resolution to act as he did. Pinchas acted out what every Jew felt in his heart. He revealed the *kinaah* that was actually *b’socham*, “within them.”

Throughout the generations, self-styled zealots have always attempted to grab the mantle of *kanaus* from Pinchas and claim it for themselves. Regrettably, they have missed the primary ingredient in *kanaus*: sincerity born from *ahavas Yisrael* and *ahavas Hashem*. Only one who loves Jews and Judaism may take umbrage when he observes his fellow Jew desecrating these principles. One must take into account the mindset of the sinner before he criticizes him.

Today, especially in *Eretz Yisrael*, we have developed a newly-minted mutant *kanai*, who reacts to – and even looks for – every opportunity to squelch any anti-Torah activity – regardless of the means. Sadly, secular Jews provide much opportunity for these misguided zealots to do their thing, which is nothing more than a glorified *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name. These hooligans are neither zealots, nor do they represent the true Torah world which adheres to *ahavas Yisrael* and *ahavas Hashem*. On the other hand, this does not mean that the actions of the secular Jews do not hurt. They look for every opportunity to undermine Judaism, Hashem and the Torah world in order to promote their own destructive agenda. When we strike at them in a manner that gives credit to the extremist groups of the 60's, we provide them with fodder for their continued denigration of Hashem.

Pinchas acted violently; therefore those Jews acting against secularism feel that they have a right to be violent in their protests. They fail to realize – nor do they want to accept – that Pinchas was carrying out the *halachah of boel aramis – kanaim pogin bo*, “One who is cohabiting with a gentile – zealots may strike him.” Throwing light bulbs at baby carriages; hot coffee at women, stones at cars: these acts do not belong under the purview of *kanaus*. In a meaningful article on the topic of *kanaus*, Rabbi Moshe Grylak relates that he approached **Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl**, concerning the demonstrations that took place each *Shabbos* on Bar Ilan Street and on the Ramot road. Typically, ruffians in full *Shabbos* regalia hurled stones at cars. The venerable *Rosh Yeshivah* said, “It is quite possible that the real *mechallelei Shabbos* here are the stone throwers. Throwing stones is absolutely prohibited in and of itself, since one incurs the risk of killing someone. Aside from this, the *Shabbos* demonstrators themselves are creating *Shabbos* desecration; rather, they should vote in the municipal elections and create a shift in the balance of power within the government. With a religious majority, much *chillul Shabbos* can be circumvented.”

The attitude one takes toward the *chiloni*, secular Jew, often determines if the outcome will be positive or hateful. Rabbi Grylak relates the story of a *Yerushalmi* Jew who lives in the Ezras Torah section of *Yerushalayim*, bordering on the Ramot road, the scene of weekly *Shabbos* demonstrations. One *Shabbos*, during a particularly heavy and violent demonstration, this Jew noticed a car being pummeled by large stones. He quickly took note of the license number of the car, and he made a point the next day to call the license bureau to locate the owner of the vehicle. He immediately went to visit the owner of the car. When he knocked on the door, a child greeted him. When he asked for the child's father, the boy screamed out, “*Abba*, there is a religious man at the door.”

The father resisted in the usual manner, “Tell him I already gave money at the office.” In other words, all *frum*, observant, Jews are stereotyped as beggars asking for alms, either for themselves or for others. After all, why else would a *chareidi* Jew come to “his” neighborhood.

The *Yerushalmi* was not deterred by the man's jab: “I really must speak with your father, and please tell him I am not here concerning money.”

The father appeared a few moments later, apparently hostile and in a not very welcoming mood. "What do you want?" he asked.

The *Yerushalmi* was nervous, but he was going through with it: "On *Shabbat*, I noticed you driving in my neighborhood. I saw your car being pummeled with stones. I am here to apologize for the loathsome behavior. I speak on behalf of my neighbors. We want you to know that the rock throwers do not live in our neighborhood. They are rabble rousers who come from elsewhere. We wish you no harm. Apparently, you are new here. Welcome!" With these words, the two parted on good terms, even exchanging phone numbers.

The following *Erev Shabbos*, the Jew from Ramot phoned the *Yerushalmi* and said that, from now on, he would take an alternate route to go about his business on *Shabbos*. The *Yerushalmi* thanked him and wished him well.

A week later, the man from Ramot called again. "*Kavod haRav*, the truth is that, while we are not *Shabbos* observant, we do maintain a kosher home. Can you tell me where we can purchase kosher meat?" he asked.

A few months later, the man from Ramot called again. "*Kavod haRav*, I am sorry to bother you, but my son will become *bar mitzvah* in six months. I would very much like to get a pair of *Tefillin* for him and, since we are going this far, I really need someone to 'acquaint' him with Judaism."

Obviously, the *Yerushalmi* was only too happy to acquiesce. The end of the story: The boy became *bar mitzvah*; the *Yerushalmi* attended; the boy is now a student in good standing in a *yeshiva*! Rabbi Grylak writes that when he related the story to *Rav Shach*, the *Rosh Yeshiva* was moved to tears.

We see around us good people and people that require a serious education concerning: the characteristics of a Torah Jew; how a Torah Jew acts; and the definition of *middos tovos*, positive character traits. The insignificant riffraff pursue opportunities to gain prominence by following the true *kanai* and transforming his zealotry into hooliganism and utter violence. This is a reality that the most astute and sincere *kanai* must fear.

Pinchas was a genuine *kanai*. He saw the beginnings of a horrific tragedy that would devastate the nation. He acted out of love for the people. **Horav Aharon Kotler, zl**, was the individual who established America as a Torah stronghold following the decimation of European Jewry during the Holocaust. His efforts on behalf of European Jewry – both in relief and rescue – are legendary. His tolerance level for the foot dragging of the American Jewish establishment when precious lives were at stake was at "zero." He became frustrated when those who could help took their sweet little time and were more concerned with bureaucracy than with Jewish blood.

*Rav* Kotler did what was necessary, when it was necessary – regardless of the ramifications, both

personal and collective. As a true leader, many sought to attach themselves to him and his efforts on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. Unfortunately, not all of his followers possessed motives as pure as his. They just wanted to “get the other guy.” They were little people seeking significance in their lives.

Once, when one of the primary Jewish organizations in America was becoming bogged down in tedious, protracted bureaucracy, presenting excuse after excuse to justify its non-involvement in the war effort, *Rav Aharon* asked a student to prepare a car for a ride into Manhattan: “You will take me to the Fifth Avenue headquarters of their organization. I will take a stone and hurl it through their large picture window. A melee will ensue, in which police and reporters will arrive *en masse*, and they will be forced to wonder why an elderly, white-bearded rabbi was smashing windows on Fifth Avenue. I will tell them, and then the entire world will know that the heads of this organization are accessories to the murder of European Jewry.”

Hearing this, a group of younger students crowded around *Rav Aharon* and each one declared, “I also want to go in.” The *Rosh Yeshivah* told them no, explaining, “For my purposes, one stone is enough.”

One stone makes a statement; more than one stone creates a counterproductive tumult.