

Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen, turned back my wrath... therefore say: Behold! I give him My Covenant of peace. (25:11,12)

When an opportunity for greatness appears, most people remain spectators, afraid to make that critical move due to fear of failure, indifference, or just plain laziness. One person, however, will emerge from within the crowd and seize the moment to grab the opportunity. As a result, he will save the day and change the course of his own life. Zimri, Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, blatantly carried out an act of moral turpitude, and, had Pinchas not immediately and decisively intervened, *Klal Yisrael* would have suffered even greater losses than it did. It took extraordinary courage for Pinchas to act as he did. It is not as if there were no other leaders present. Pinchas took the initiative: he asked Moshe *Rabbeinu* and was directed to take action. Why Pinchas? Where were the others?

Perhaps the others did not feel that they were worthy of being *kannaim*, zealots. Perhaps they did not feel they had a strong enough sense of *l'shem Shomayim*, for Heaven's sake. Perhaps they were nervous about the outcome. Perhaps they felt that, if Moshe did not deem it appropriate to take action, who were they to make demands? Perhaps... We all have excuses for backing down. *Baruch Hashem*, there was a Pinchas who had the clarity of mind, the resolute courage and decisiveness, to act. What was there about Pinchas that made him stand out above and beyond the rest?

Pinchas was a descendant of Levi, who, together with his brother, Shimon, destroyed the city of Shechem in moral outrage over the violation of their sister, Dinah. Why? It was a *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name, to treat a Jewish girl in such a base, repulsive manner. To violate a Jewish girl is not only a personal tragedy – it is a natural calamity. It is an affront to the girl – her family – the Jewish People – Hashem. Levi and Shimon did not allow this to go unrequited.

When the people sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe sought out those who were prepared to stand by him and slay the perpetrators. The tribe of Levi came forward. While there are always those who would exact vengeance, how many would do so repeatedly for the sake of Heaven? Only *Shevet Levi*. It was in their blood.

Pinchas was also a descendant of Yisro, who some might feel presented a somewhat negative influence on his pedigree. Perhaps not. Veritably, Yisro did, at one time, worship every idol, but this was all a part of his search for the true G-d. He was a truth seeker who did not tolerate anything but the pristine truth. This attribute best describes the zealot: he seeks the truth (regardless of how one cloaks this misrepresentation of “authentic”). Truth is an absolute. Deviation is false. Pinchas saw Zimri committing a deviant act of flagrant immorality. Zimri embellished his turpitude “outreach” as a new way to save the people. “Bend a little,” he declared. Pinchas countered, “No!” His heritage could not tolerate adjustment to the law. Zimri was undermining the Torah and Moshe. To stand

there and do nothing was to acquiesce. Pinchas took his spear and expressed the *halachic* response to this flagrant desecration of Hashem's Name.

Seizing the moment is not necessarily about zealotry. Moral leadership requires quick decisions, immediate responses, often under the most precarious circumstances. The zealot, as we see with Pinchas, maintained moral clarity, acting immediately and decisively. Obviously, to succeed in such an environment one must know what is proper and correct, and be prepared to run full force to overcome whatever obstacles lie in the way, so that he can realize success. Some people, sadly, are prepared to act, but ill-prepared to know what is right. *Zerizus*, alacrity – without knowledge of the *halachah* or the common sense to discern what is right – is as great an impediment as indecisiveness.

Many of us have potential locked into ourselves, resting peacefully on the back burner until that moment surfaces when we either continue sleeping – or we act. We are presented with a window of opportunity to transform potential into destiny. We were unaware of Pinchas until Zimri came along, and Pinchas acted. It was all potential until that moment. If we are up to it – we should seize the moment. It is transformative.

I recently read an incredible story about someone who took advantage of this transformative moment – literally saving the lives of a group of Israeli soldiers, who succeeded through the Divine guidance and miraculous assistance of Hashem to hold off the might of the Syrian Army, thus turning the tide of the *Yom Kippur War*. Emek HaBachah, the Valley of Tears, a valley deep in the Golan Heights in northern *Eretz Yisrael*, was the scene of an incredible battle which clearly bespeaks *neis*, miracle, at every juncture. A small group of soldiers, *meatim*, a few, against the *rabim*, many, battled for their lives and our Land – and survived. While the soldiers in their tanks risked everything that day, there was one hero, who, albeit not a soldier, was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice and saved the moment. His *z'chus*, merit, is outstanding, but his ability to seize the moment represents the “fuel” which fired up the miracle.

The battle of Emek HaBachah raged. The Israeli Army had 35 tanks – one battalion – surrounded by 650 Syrian tanks armed to the teeth. In addition to their being severely outnumbered, their fuel supply was extremely low and their ammunition was even lower. In the middle of the battle, a few tanks began pulling back to reload and gas-up. They had been struggling against a greater number, far more superior forces, with what seemed like an endless supply of ammunition and fuel.

When the battalion commander saw the couple of tanks pulling back, he immediately issued orders that they should hold their ground – even at the risk of running out of fuel. The young lieutenant countered that he was almost out of fuel and shells. The commander ordered him to stay put, and, if they had no ammo left, to move around, raise dust, and accompany it with machine gunfire. If they ran out of fuel then they should rotate their turrets. Under no circumstances were they to pull back. The moment the Syrians would see tanks leaving the battlefield, they would assume the Israelis were retreating. This would embolden them to come in with everything and rout the Jewish

soldiers. The tanks stayed in their places.

A truck driver who was back at the fuel depot heard the interchange between the commander and the lieutenant. He quickly jumped into his fuel truck and drove into the heart of the battle, under a constant barrage of shells, with no armor for protection – just to fill up the tanks! If he would have been hit, he would have been vaporized. Yet, the moment was there, and he seized it. This hero was the medium through which the outcome of that battle was altered. Hashem makes the miracle. He was waiting for that person, that “Pinchas,” who was willing to risk everything – his life – in order to save his People.