

## And Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen saw, and he stood up amid the assembly and took a spear in his hand. (25:7)

*Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 82a) teach that Pinchas saw the moral outrage which Zimri had committed. He immediately remembered the *halachah* (which applies to this act). He first asked his *Rebbe*, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, “Did you not teach that one who cohabits with an *aramis*/pagan, zealots may strike/kill him?” If someone comes to ask a *shailah* concerning how he should act, however, we do not rule as such (*Kanaim pogin bo*, zealots may strike him.) “This concept of *halachah*, “this is the law, *v’ein morin kein*, but we do not rule in this manner,” is novel. After all, if it is the *halachah*, why may we not express the ruling?

*Halachah* – Pinchas was justified in his actions, and, as a result, the Torah praises him. However, *v’ein morin kain* – despite it being correct in this instance, the *Sanhedrin* would neither issue this ruling proactively, nor encourage others to take similar action. This is because zealotry can easily be misapplied if not purely for the sake of Heaven.

*Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*, explains why a *bais din* may not rule regarding actions of *kanaus*. Actions like that committed by Pinchas require a rare level of *lishmah*, pure intent, and moral clarity. Since most people are incapable of acting with such complete selflessness, *Chazal* have ruled that, while the act was justified, it is neither to be taught nor promoted as normative behavior.

This, notes, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is the reason the Torah delineated Pinchas’ lineage back to Aharon *HaKohen* – the symbol of love for a fellow Jew. The Torah is underscoring that Pinchas’ act of *kanaus* emanated from pure love of his brethren and pure love of Hashem. Pinchas was not a blood thirsty zealot bent on destruction. He was a refined *ben Torah*, grandson of the man who loved peace and pursued peace, whose abiding love for the Jewish People spurred him to take action.

*Horav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Kaminetz*, exemplified the character of the true *kanai*. He was wont to say, “If one wants to test (himself), if he is among those who truly, sincerely love Hashem, he must ask himself (and introspect) whether he despises evil. If one genuinely loathes evil of any sort – then he has license to refer to himself as an *ohaiv*, loves, Hashem. David *Hamelech* famously said, *Ohavei Hashem sinu ra*, “You who love Hashem, hate evil” (*Tehillim* 97:10). Loving Hashem is not just about positive emotions or devotion, it requires an active rejection of evil and wrongdoing. One who genuinely loves Hashem cannot tolerate injustice, immorality, or actions that contradict/challenge His will.

In a deeper sense, this concept suggests that a person who loves Hashem should strive to cultivate moral clarity. Loving Hashem and tolerating evil do not mix. It is not enough to simply avoid wrongdoing personally – one should oppose evil in society, in the community which he calls

home, and work to uphold goodness and truth.

Rav Baruch Ber loved all Jews – regardless of their activities. A Jew was a Jew. He despised the sins committed by a sinner – but he loved the person. If someone spewed self-loathing anti-Torah opinions and philosophies, he would come at him with vehemence. It was the radical anti-Torah ideas that he could not tolerate. He viewed this person as a Jew was lost – but, he was still a Jew. He would quote *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, who said that we do not hate the heretics as much as they hate us, because we are not as righteous as they are evil. To despise an individual as a result of his deep love for Hashem is not something that just anyone can do. It demands tremendous love for the Almighty.

When *Yeshivas Kaminetz* celebrated its milestone *chanukas ha'bayis*, inauguration of their new building (*Chanukah* 1937), the Beitar secular Zionists of Kaminetz asked if they, too, could celebrate with song and musical accompaniment. He flatly refused, explaining that he did not want his students to even look at them. The singers made every attempt to convince the *Rosh Yeshivah* to change his mind. In order not to humiliate these people, he quickly had them escorted to the old *yeshivah* where they were invited to sing to their hearts' content. While guests may have been assembled there – no student of the *yeshivah* was in attendance. The *Rosh Yeshivah* later explained his actions, "The *Rebbe* (I assume this is in reference to *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, Brisker, zl*, the *Rebbe muvhak*, primary mentor, of Rav Baruch Ber) said, 'A Jew must live in such a manner that, after living a long, productive life, he will be able to explain and rationalize every action that he took during his lifetime.' I will be able to say that I did not permit these (misguided) Jews to step foot in the *yeshivah*."

His son-in-law, *Horav Moshe Bernstein, zl*, explained that, while his father-in-law was vehemently against their singing and the content of the songs – never for one moment did it enter his mind to humiliate them in any way. Indeed, he often excoriated the secular Zionists, the Bundists and the Communists (sadly all Jews whose personal insecurities spurred them to adopt these beliefs), but he never embarrassed any one person. Every reproof that he issued was couched in the profound fatherly love he felt for every Jew. Indeed, when he left the community, these same ill-advised activists were sad. Although Rav Baruch Ber fought valiantly against *chillul Shabbos*, he never publicly scorned, he never expressed dislike for them personally. After all, they were *Yehudim* – brothers – children of Hashem.