

Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon Ha'Kohen." (25:11)

Chazal question the *Torah's* tracing of Pinchas' ancestry by placing emphasis upon the fact that he was a grandson of Aharon *Ha'Kohen*. They explain that after Zimri's death, members of Shimon's *Shevet*, who were cousins of Zimri, chided the members of *Shevet* Levi. They felt that they could not believe Pinchas was a true zealot. After all, on his mother's side he was a grandson of Yisro, who used to fatten calves for idols. Could it be that such a person really had sincere motivation, or did he assassinate the *Nasi* of *Shevet* Shimon out of hatred or feelings of inferiority ?

In response to Pinchas' critics, Hashem publicized the fact that Pinchas was a *tzaddik ben tzaddik*. His deed was inspired by the same noble motives which catalyzed the actions of his father, Elazar, and his grandfather, Aharon. *Chazal's* statement is enigmatic. Obviously, the people were aware of Pinchas's paternal pedigree. They chose to ignore it! What was to be gained by emphasizing that he descended from Aharon?

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, explains that ostensibly they were aware of Pinchas' two contrasting pedigrees. They felt, however, that his deeds reflected a murderous rage which could be expected only of a grandson of Yisro. Aharon's grandson could never be privy to an act of wanton murder! Hashem clarified the issue. Pinchas was Aharon's grandson, and it was the "Aharon" part of him that catalyzed his deed.

Aharon was characterized as a "*rodef shalom*," one who pursues peace. Sometimes, as the *Chasam Sofer* states, you must pursue peace by chasing away those who would undermine the foundations of everlasting peace. Peace can only exist when the underlying value system is moral and just. If corruption and prurience reign, peace can not be nurtured. Indeed, Pinchas' act of murder was an act which expunged the evil from *Klal Yisrael*, enabling the process of *shalom* to begin.

According to *Horav Bergman*, this is the reason that before his death, when Yaakov *Avinu* blessed his sons Shimon and Levi, he demanded that his name not be mentioned in regard to the conflict of Korach and the immoral act of Zimri. The deeds of these descendants of Shimon and Levi reflected an orientation which was not transmitted. Their actions were totally alien to his character and personality. They acted on their own, representing a complete break with their past.

One additional question must be addressed. When delineating Zimri's ancestry, why does the *Torah* mention the name of his grandfather, Shimon ? Did anyone fight against immorality more than Shimon ? Together with his brother, Levi, these two young men risked their lives and wiped out an entire city as a result of the licentious contamination of their sister, Dinah. If we trace Pinchas' pedigree to Aharon in order to demonstrate the sublimity of his actions, then conversely we should not trace Zimri's ancestry to Shimon, since he did not reflect Shimon's ideals. Why

should Shimon be "punished" by connecting his name to Zimri?

Horav Bergman offers a profound thought which characterizes the awesome responsibility that comes with being a spiritual giant. Shimon's intentions, albeit noble and sublime, were counter to the wishes of his father, Yaakov. Yaakov felt besmirched by his son's aggressive punishment of the people of *Shechem*. This purging of evil, this righteous outrage directed towards a people suffused in debauchery, was carried out without deference to the opinion of the Patriarch. No longer was this noble act as pure as it had seemed. Because of this, Shimon was held accountable and his name was associated with the act of Zimri. On the other hand, before Pinchas carried out his act of zealotry, he asked Moshe to render his decision. Moshe told him to take the initiative and do what must be done. Shimon and Levi's rejection of Yaakov's opinion indicates a tinge of disrespect which taints their actions.

It is frightening how a small deviation can later manifest itself in a great sin. How careful we should be in our every undertaking in scrutinizing our motives and intentions. Even the most sublime endeavor, if motivated by the slightest indiscretion, can be totally transformed -- and its legitimacy compromised.