

Pinchas ben Elazar, ben Aharon HaKohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael, when he zealously avenged Me among them. (25:11)

In a number of places in Rabbinic literature, *Chazal* teach that Pinchas and Eliyahu *HaNavi* were one and the same. This is quite possibly because both earned the title of *kanai*, zealot. Their courage and decisive action under extreme pressure turned the tide in the nation's spiritual leadership. Thus, they glorified Hashem's Name at a time when it was being dragged through the muck. *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, quotes the **Brisker Rav, zl**, who points out another area in which their commonality is apparent.

Shortly before his death, Yannai *Hamelech* told his wife, "Do not be afraid of the *Perushim* [The term was used to describe those who adhered to the words of the rabbis and were meticulous in their Torah observance. They were opponents of the *Tzedukim*, who opposed Rabbinical law. Yannai was a scion of the *Chashmonean* dynasty, but he reneged his faith and became a *Tzeduki*]. Rather, fear only those who appear to be *Perushim*, but in reality are not pious. For their actions are like those of the wicked Zimri; yet, they seek the reward reserved for the righteous Pinchas."

The *Brisker Rav* explained that Zimri did not openly come out with a plan to undermine Moshe *Rabbeinu's* leadership. He came forward with a suggestion to save the Jewish People who were falling prey to the pagan god, Peor. The men would meet the Moavite women and were immediately captivated by their spell. Promises of moral turpitude were craftily ensconced in pagan worship. Bow down to my god, and you can then feel free to indulge yourself to your heart's content. The debauchery was a cover-up, a wily tactic to ensnare the men and compel them to worship the idol.

Zimri presented a compromise, a solution for their predicament. Rather than sneaking off to meet the pagan girls in their camp, let us welcome the harlots into our camp and, this way, the "worst" the men will do is act inappropriately. They will not worship the idol. Zimri was suggesting a compromise, in order to limit desecration of the Torah.

Pinchas replied zealously, "Who made you (Zimri) a *baal*, proprietor, over the Torah? Who granted you control to decide what to compromise, what to cut and paste in Jewish law? No room for compromise exists when the Torah says something is prohibited. Likewise, when King Achav worshipped idols, Eliyahu told the people: 'Make up your minds; you are either idol worshippers or Jews. You cannot be both!'"

This idea goes back to our Matriarch Rivkah, who felt strange rumblings within her womb. One moment the fetus gravitated towards the *bais hamedrash*, while the next moment it attempted to connect to the house of idol worship. She knew something was amiss. Could she be carrying a child that would be *poseach al shtei ha'seifim*, stand on both doorsteps, maintain dual allegiances?

When she heard that she was actually carrying two children – one saintly and virtuous, the other evil and wicked – she was calmed. She could deal with someone who is an avowed apostate. She would always hope that he might realize the error of his ways and recant. One who is mixed up, however, who lives a life of compromise, a chameleon who is as comfortable in the church as he is in the *shul*, such a person has great difficulty seeing the truth. He sees nothing wrong with his lifestyle. Why would he want to change?

Our people have never feared the blatant apostate, the heretic who has disavowed the faith of his ancestors. People stay away from the dangerous wolf. It is when the wolf puts on sheep's clothing, when he presents Judaism as a religion which must compromise, break with some of the old traditions, dismantle a system that was established by the rabbis of old, *talmidei chachamim*, *yarei Shomayim*, G-d-fearing, uncompromising, Torah scholars, whose commitment to Hashem and His Torah was unequivocal – then we have a serious problem.

Yes, they act like Zimri, calling themselves Orthodox, expecting to be recognized as such, all the while impugning the very foundation of what Orthodoxy stands for. They embrace those whose moral fiber is in flagrant contempt of the Torah, whose activities comprise abomination at its nadir. These individuals have been shunned by the few people in our contemporary society who still adhere to faith-based morals and believe in an Almighty G-d who declared what is moral, what is proper, Who defined the composition of the family unit. They do this because they feel we must compromise. They act like Zimri and expect – no, demand – the reward reserved for Pinchas.

Horav Chaim Brisker, zl, offers a powerful analogy which goes to the crux of the spiritual aberration resulting from compromise. A Jew who was making every attempt to be observant in all areas of religious life was confronted with a problem. He possessed only one knife. This righteous, well-meaning, G-d-fearing Jew had an incomplete set of flatware, several spoons, and forks, but only one knife. What was he to do? A man must eat, and the food must be sliced. There are just so many varieties of food that one can eat whole; everything else must be sliced. He required a knife to smear the butter on his bread for breakfast and to slice his steak for dinner. He decided to use one side of the knife for meat and the other side of the knife for dairy. He was so proud of his incredibly innovative idea that he could not understand why more people were not doing the same. Why bother with two knives when one could do the trick? Obviously, he was unaware that a knife which was part dairy and part meat was completely *treif*, unkosher. Likewise, those who choose to make an admixture out of Orthodoxy, transforming it into an egalitarian, all embracing, do-what-suits-you-religion, have only distorted the Torah's concept of religious observance. It is certainly neither Orthodox nor is it any of the liberal venues which serve as a medium for self-defined religious Jewish expression.