

## "Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon the Kohen, turned away My wrath from the Bnei Yisroel." (25:11)

*Rashi*, at the end of the previous parsha, cites the *Talmud* in *Sanhedrin 82b* which states the following: *He saw the deed and remembered the law.* Pinchas asked Moshe, "I have received the law from you that one who commits harlotry with a gentile woman, zealous people have the right to strike him down." Moshe's response was "He who reads the letter He should be the carrier, i.e. let him who gives the advice be its executor." Upon perceiving the tragic erosion of morality exhibited which the prince of the tribe of Shimon exhibited, Pinchas zealously responded to this travesty.

As *Horav A. H. Lebowitz Shlita* notes, however, this was not an impulsive act of passion aimed at killing the perpetrators. Originally Pinchas went to inquire of Moshe regarding the *halachic* response to this terrible misdeed. We often mistakenly think of a zealot as one whose overwhelming devotion to Hashem compels him to react solely based upon an emotional response. According to the *Torah*, one must respond through the intellectual framework of *halacha*. All too often we hear of "zealots" taking the *halacha* into their own hands and creating nothing more than a flagrant *chilul hashem* (desecration of Hashem's Name). Although he was driven by extreme emotion, Pinchas clearly contemplated the consequences of his actions. Jewish action is not regulated by raw emotion. Rather, it is governed by Hashem's directive to us, reflected in *halacha*, and expounded by our *Torah* leadership. Pinchas should serve for us as a paradigm of zealotry appropriately harnessed by *halacha*.

*Horav Chiam Mordechai Katz Z"l* questions Moshe's abdication of the execution of this *halacha* to Pinchas. Indeed, after Moshe was reminded of the *halacha* of "zealots should strike him," he should have personally taken action, rather than delegating his authority to Pinchas. He explains that this law doesn't apply to everyone or every situation. The word "zealots" applies only to a select group of highly motivated individuals, who desire to avenge a sacrilege. These individuals possess a unique passion burning within them, as well as a sense of outrage at the desecration of Hashem's Name. Consequently, this *halacha* applies only to that moment at which one is driven to action. Moshe, did not share Pinchas's initial response to this violation. As he was aware of this *halacha*, he delegated the role of executor of the punishment to Pinchas. This unique *halacha* can only be executed by one who demonstrates a specific reaction to the moral degeneracy which originally formed the basis for its mandate.

*Horav Nissan Alpert Z"l* offers yet another insightful explanation for Moshe's relinquishing

the enforcement of this *halacha* to Pinchas. He states that two distinct infractions resulted from Zimri's immoral act. First, he openly defied Hashem and His *Torah*. This blatant chilul Hashem constituted an obvious rebellion against the Divine leadership. Moshe and the leadership of *Klal Yisrael* could have quelled this glaring insurrection. There was, however, a second breach that demanded punitive action. Zimri's act was a malicious affront to the dignity of *Klal Yisrael*, which necessitated an immediate response from within the ranks of the people. Pinchas, who was not yet ordained as a *Kohen*, was a member of the rank and file of the Jewish people. To him, this act constituted an outrage that required an immediate, critical response. His actions stimulated an atonement for the dual effect of Zimri's transgression.