

He was zealous for My sake in their midst...Because he was zealous for his G-d and made atonement for the Bnei Yisrael. (25:11,13)

What is the significance of the fact that Pinchas performed his act of zealousness "in their midst"? **Sforno** comments that Pinchas avenged Hashem's honor in the sight of all. Although they had originally seen Zimri's despicable act, and they did not protest, they could find atonement for not protesting against Pinchas. What *Sforno* is saying is that the masses were guilty of apathy. They witnessed blatant acts of harlotry and idolatry, yet they failed to object or to intervene. Their atonement would now be attained by permitting Pinchas to publicly carry out his act of zealousness. *Sforno* teaches us that apathy is almost as bad as the actual sin. When we permit others to flagrantly desecrate our heritage, to publicly debase the *Torah* and its *mitzvos* and to ridicule its disseminators, we are lending our support to their transgression. While it was not the masses who were guilty of the actual sin, they were, nonetheless, held in contempt for their indifference to the perpetrators. They received atonement by demonstrating that same "indifference" to Pinchas when he slew Zimri. One inaction atoned for another inaction.

We infer from here how far apathy can progress. It is one thing to look away from a sinner, but it is an entirely different matter to suppress he who is zealous enough to challenge those who desecrate the *Torah*. We offer various excuses. We are concerned about public opinion. It might be viewed as a *chillul Hashem*. We must make attempts at conciliation...The list goes on. Acts of zealousness are not appropriate for everyone to undertake. We must respect and applaud the work of those who are truly sincere and virtuous in protecting the *Torah*.

Once **Horav Amram Blau, zl**, who was the head of the *Neturei Karta* in *Eretz Yisrael*, went out on *Shabbos* to protest a soccer game that was being played in defiance of the holy day. People were desecrating sanctity of *Shabbos*; someone was obligated to take action to stop this public profanation of Hashem's Name. Alas, all *Rav Amram* received for his troubles were the bruises he suffered at the hands of the people he attempted to stop. Afterwards, he complained to the **Satmar Rebbe, zl**, regarding the small group of people that showed up for the protest, "Surely, had a larger group of Jews turned up to protest, we might have achieved greater success." The *Satmar Rebbe* responded jokingly, "You are lucky that your own compatriots did not come out against you." He cited the *Sforno* that demonstrates *Klal Yisrael's* apathy during the sin of *Pe'or*. A *kanai* must do what is right, but he should be aware that support for *kanaus* is very difficult to bolster. People tend to follow what is in vogue--even if it is wrong.