

Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon Ha'kohen turned back My wrath from upon the Bnei Yisrael. (25:11)

Upon consideration, did Pinchas really have to act in such a drastic manner? He is lauded for avenging the honor of Hashem. Was there no other way to prevent Zimri from performing his reprehensible act of rebellion against Hashem? Could Pinchas not have chosen a less "final" -- and perhaps more conciliatory -- solution for the "Zimri" problem? This is the type of question that plagues those who do not quite understand the meaning of the term "*kanai*," zealot. Pinchas was not a reactionary who unleashed his uncontrollable anger, killing innocent people. He was not a religious maniac whose lack of discipline provoked him to resort to murder. No, *Chazal* teach us that "he saw the action (Zimri's act of harlotry) and (immediately) remembered the *halachah* that one who cohabits with a gentile, a zealous one may slay him." Pinchas viewed every question in life, every incident he confronted, through the eyes of *halachah*. He was a rational, peace-loving, man who responded to an incursion into the fiber of Judaism.

Conciliation and compromise do not comprise the *halachic* response for a *bo'el Aramis*, one who is intimate with a gentile. Had there been another approach, a less extreme punishment, something which would have satisfied all involved, Pinchas would clearly have taken such a route. *Halachah*, however, dictates death at the hands of a true zealot--and only at the hands of a true zealot.

Pinchas was an upholder of peace. We attribute this trait to him despite the fact that his action caused bloodshed. Peace with Hashem cannot be established upon the foundation of compromise or retreat. A responsible leader must confront, and subsequently, overcome all obstacles to peace. If this confrontation entails intervention on his part which might be characterized by some as intolerant or troublesome, then so be it. If people would only have greater insight into and respect for *halachah*, they might appreciate the actions of those who defend the purity of the *Torah*.