

Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen, turned back My wrath from Bnei Yisrael... Therefore, say: Behold! I give him my covenant of peace. (25:11,12)

Hashem granted Pinchas and his descendants the covenant of peace as a result of Pinchas' zealous intervention. Why was Pinchas granted this reward more than Moshe *Rabbeinu*? When *Klal Yisrael* sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe intervened on their behalf. He petitioned Hashem to forgive them to the point that he was prepared to see his name erased from the Torah. He succeeded in quelling Hashem's displeasure with the Jewish nation – not once – but many times. Yet, it was Pinchas who intervened one time during an act of moral profligacy, and, consequently, was credited with turning back Hashem's anger. How was his intervention different from that of Moshe?

[The *Maggid*, *zl*, of *Dubno*, explains that, indeed, Moshe prayed for the Jewish people. His intercession on their behalf achieved a delay in their punishment. *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 102a) teach that every punishment that is meted out to *Klal Yisrael* contains within it some form of retribution for the sin of the Golden Calf. In contrast, Pinchas did not merely delay the punishment – he eradicated it. Pinchas turned back the wrath, thus meriting the covenant of peace.

Sforno explains the achievement of Pinchas' zealousness in that he avenged Hashem's honor in sight of all. *Klal Yisrael* was privy to Zimri's despicable act. Indeed, he wanted it to be noticed publicly. Sadly, the members of the nation just stood there. No one protested. This means that the masses of Jews were not guilty of harlotry or idolatry. They were guilty of apathy (a sin which continues to plague us to this very day), having witnessed the licentiousness, the grave sins that were committed by those whose morals and faith were questionable, and failed to intervene or object. Their atonement was attained when they observed Pinchas intervene and slay Zimri – and they did nothing to prevent him from carrying out his self-proclaimed mission of zealous mercy. Veritably, they personally did not intervene, but the fact that they did not stand in the way of Pinchas earned them atonement.

Horav Eliyahu Svei, *zl*, compares this to the earlier incident of the Golden Calf, when *Bnei Levi* killed three thousand sinners. They went from tent to tent seeking out those who had flagrantly sinned – regardless of their relationship with the sinner. This act of dedication catapulted *Bnei Levi* to achieve spiritual superiority. One wonders how committing an act that involves blood-spilling of another Jew warrants one's ascension to spiritual aristocracy.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes from the *Meshech Chochmah* that *Bnei Levi* were a scant minority of 8,000 men standing up against 600,000. The nation could have easily banded together and vanquished them like swatting a fly. They did not, because they knew, once Moshe *Rabbeinu* descended the mountain that they had erred egregiously and deserved whatever punishment Hashem would mete out to them. No one fought *Shevet Levi*. They were wrong, and they would pay for it. That was their atonement. Thus, by answering Moshe's clarion call of *Mi l'Hashem eilai*,

“Who is for Hashem (come) to me!” *Shevet Levi* became the catalyst to buttress *Klal Yisrael’s emunah*, faith, in Hashem.

The Golden Calf incident rocked the nation's faith. The *Leviim* brought it back. Likewise, the nation acquiesced/or at least were not repulsed by Zimri's act. Pinchas entered the scene and put a stop to Zimri. When he publicly killed Zimri, the nation could have balked and prevented him from executing his mission. They did not, because they were acutely aware that they had been wrong and Pinchas was acting correctly. This was their atonement – sponsored by Pinchas. In this manner, he earned the covenant of peace.