

Pinchas... and rose up from the midst of the people, and took a spear. (25:7)...Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen turned back my wrath. (25:11)

It appears that Pinchas' rising up from among the people contributed to his ultimate success. Indeed, we recite in the *Selichos*, *Mi she'anah l'Pinchas b'kumo mitoch ha'eidah*; "May He – Who answered Pinchas when he rose up from the midst of the people." Why should his rising up from the midst of the people carry such weight? *Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, explains that "rising up from the midst of the people" is reference to Pinchas' acting independently, with no support or assistance. No one rallied him on. He had only detractors. Indeed, if Zimri and Kosbi would have stopped their immoral behavior before Pinchas came – and he would have killed them – he would have to stand trial for murder. His act of vengeance/zealotry was permissible only at the time of the original act. As a result of his acting solo in taking down the *Nasi* of the Tribe of Shimon, Pinchas merited awesome *siyata d'Shmaya* in the guise of twelve Heavenly miracles that protected him.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* suggests an added dimension to Pinchas' single-handed act of zealotry. Some act alone because it is their nature. They are iconoclasts who refuse to adapt to the ways of the society around them. Thus, the Torah underscores the fact that Pinchas was a part of the community. He was no different than any of the thousands of spectators who had witnessed Zimri's flagrant act of profligacy. They swallowed the iniquity which they beheld; Pinchas, however, did not. He rose above them to act on his own, because he cared; he was troubled; he could not tolerate Zimri's humiliation of Hashem. This is the mark of a leader – to be from the people, but to be able to rise above them.

The Torah underscores Pinchas' lineage as a descendant of Aharon *HaKohen*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* feels that the Torah does so to emphasize that Pinchas hailed from a family which was very much a part of the community – and proud of it. They were individuals who were dedicated to the nation with every fibre of their beings. Their devotion to *Klal Yisrael* was inculcated in Pinchas from day one. Life was not personal; it was communal. Thus, when Pinchas saw an incursion – that, if left unimpeded, would mushroom into a full-blown rebellion – he took prompt action and saved the day. It was a dangerous undertaking which could have brought his life to an untimely end, but, with the people on his mind, he acted and was justly rewarded by Hashem.

Perhaps we might suggest another reason why the Torah details Pinchas' *yichus*, lineage, as descending from Aharon *HaKohen*. The simple explanation is that Aharon is the symbol of *shalom*, peace, and its greatest and most successful advocate. The Torah seeks to convey a critical message: Pinchas' act was motivated by his following in the footsteps of his paternal grandfather; thus, his act of zealousness was an act of peace. This runs counter to the ludicrous claims of Zimri's supporters who maintained that Pinchas' act was one of wanton murder, inspired by his maternal grandfather, Yisro, who had offered sacrifices to idols. [As an aside, this indicates how far and how low these people would go to demean Pinchas. Furthermore, Yisro's idol worship

concluded when he embraced Judaism and was *megayeir*, converted. He saw that a life without commitment to Hashem and His Torah was vacuous and had no value.]

I think the Torah accentuates the connection to Aharon *HaKohen* due to Aharon's unparalleled response to his personal tragedy, *Va'yidom Aharon*, "And Aharon was silent" (*Vayikra* 10:3). In the face of the untimely tragic demise of his two elder sons on what was supposed to be the happiest, most auspicious day of his life – Aharon was silent, mute, showing no emotion, not emitting a signal sound, a single tear. He demonstrated superhuman self-control. Aharon's extraordinary restraint was bequeathed to his grandson, Pinchas. Thus, when Pinchas rose up and acted, it was not a spur of the moment, knee-jerk reaction to an outrage, but a controlled, tempered response to a *chillul Hashem*. The Torah is teaching us that Pinchas knew when to be silent and when to raise his voice. It was part of his family DNA.