

## **Pinchas ben Elazar, ben Aharon HaKohen, turned back My wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume Bnei Yisrael in My vengeance. (25:11)**

All of *Klal Yisrael* stood by staring in shock and revulsion, as Zimri blatantly debased himself with a Midyanite woman. They were revolted by this public defamation of our moral code; nonetheless, they did nothing. They stood there almost in passive acquiescence. This, explains *Sforno*, was the reason they required atonement. To witness such a despicable act and not protest taints the onlooker to the point that he, on some level, is considered an accomplice in the sin. While this is true, one wonders how they could have taken it upon themselves to protest when the *gadol hador*, the preeminent Torah leader of the generation, the quintessential *Rebbe*, *Moshe Rabbeinu*, was standing there – and not protesting. Would it not have been *chutzpah*, audacity, on their part to act when Moshe did not act?

Perhaps this is why Pinchas inquired of Moshe concerning the *halachah* of *bo'el aramis*, one who cohabits with a non-Jew. Moshe instructed him to act, since he remembered the *halachah*. Also, the obstacle that prevented Moshe from taking immediate action did not apply to Pinchas. Once the people saw Pinchas take the matter into his own, they woke up from their reverie and realized that they, too, should have turned to Moshe; they, too, should have been repulsed by Zimri's act. All too often we ignore our responsibilities and sit back with folded hands, waiting for someone else to take the initiative before we are inclined to make our move. It is not in our comfort zone to be the first one to protest. Meanwhile, we might have prevented a fellow Jew from committing a mutinous act against Hashem. When one is indifferent to his brother's sinful behavior, he becomes complicit in his sin. One who does not protest a spiritual aberrance on the part of a fellow Jew is, on some level, supporting his act of ignorance, rebellion, or apathy as a result of his indifference. It does not mean that one must go out and scream at anyone who is not observant – but it should at least bother us that a brother or sister is missing out on their purpose in life. When asked if another Jew's lack of observance is troubling to him, the invariable response will be: "It is none of my business", "I do not want to get involved", "I do not hate him"; "I could care less about what he does and how he acts." The opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. *Moshe Rabbeinu's* first public act of leadership was to go out to share in the burdens of his fellow Jews. He could have remained indifferent, but then he would not have become our leader. Responsibility goes hand-in-hand with leadership.