

Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen has turned my anger away from Bnei Yisrael by his zealously avenging Me through them. (25:11)

Pinchas saw an outrageous act of moral turpitude, and he immediately acted with extreme courage to eradicate the sinners. Was it his actions in killing Zimri and Cozbi that earned him the accolades, or was it his clarity of vision to discern right from wrong, evil from good? Veritably, every *kannai*, zealot, who sincerely acts for Heaven's sake requires both qualities: unabashed clarity of vision; and extreme courage. The reason is that, unlike the zealot who sees clearly, those around him who stand observing with folded hands do not. Furthermore, some are so myopic that they brand the zealot as a wild man, one who has an evil streak. Instead of assisting him – or at least moving aside and allowing him to put an end to the travesty – they threaten him with bodily harm. Why? Because, by acting when they do not, he is triggering their fear of undermining the status quo. They would just as well turn their collective heads away or bury their heads in the sand for fear of getting involved and tainting their reputations.

Chazal (*Sotah* 22b) refer to the hypocrites who publicly act righteously, but privately, behind closed doors, maintain a totally different persona: *Oseh maaseh Zimri, umevakesh s'char k'Pinchas*; performs the reprehensible deeds of Zimri, yet expects a reward like Pinchas. The *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, explains that the hypocrites believe that they are indeed saving the world with their deeds; thus, they deserve reward. This disconnect is a hallmark of hypocrisy, in which individuals outwardly espouse virtuous ideals, while behaving in a manner that directly contradicts those purported beliefs. Despite their confidence in their actions and (in some cases, due to their misguided beliefs) even genuine intentions, hypocrites fail to recognize the harm they cause through their duplicity, ultimately undermining the very causes they “pretend” to support.

To see clearly, one must have *daas*, discerning knowledge. The *Yerushalmi* (*Berachos* 5:2) teaches that the reason *Chazal* placed the *Havdalah tefillah* of *Atah Chonantanu* in the *b'rachah* of *Atah Chonein l'adam daas*, “You graciously endow man with knowledge,” is that, without *daas*, knowledge, there can be no *havdalah*, separation.

Horav Avraham Grodzensky, zl (quoted by *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*), asks, “Fine, for distinguishing between *kodesh l'chol*, holy and the profane, a person requires *daas*. With regard to discerning between *Yisrael l'amim*, Jew and gentile, one needs *daas*. To distinguish between *ohr*, light, and *choshech*, darkness, however, does one need knowledge? Any creature is able to discern light from darkness!”

He replies that, indeed, one does not need *daas* to discern between the light of midday and the darkness of midnight, or even between the holy and the profane, or between Jew and non-Jew. A person, however, needs special knowledge to distinguish between the very last moment of the day and the earliest moment of the night. To draw the line and make a clear, unbiased distinction

between the holy and the profane and to set up and maintain boundaries between Jew and gentile, one needs insight to: know that he should not listen to those who seek to merge everything together; and maintain these distinctions in order to keep them in place. *Horav Chaim Brisker, zl*, would refer to one who manifests “blurred lines of distinction” as the person who owns one knife for which he has designated one side for meat and the other side for dairy. He does not realize that a knife that is half meat and half dairy is completely *treif*!

Likewise, there are those who see nothing questionable about mixing holy with profane, light with darkness, and Jew with non-Jew. Some even (sadly) feel that exposure to both sides of the coin is healthy. They err, as does the man who had the single knife that was meat and dairy. It is *treif*, as are their actions of comingling that which was meant to be separated.

The *halachah* of *kannaim pogin bo*, zealots may kill him [if one sees a Jew committing a sinful act with a gentile, he has license to intervene and execute vengeance for the sake of Hashem], lies outside the realm of the normative framework of *halachah*. The *kannai* is very definitely a murderer, and, if the sinner were to cause him harm, he would not be held guilty. Why then is there such a law? The *kannai*'s love for *Yiddishkeit* and Hashem arouses within him such a sense of horror, an emotional sense of loathing, that he cannot control himself. *Horav Gershon Liebman, zl*, was interned in the concentration camp. His devotion to Torah and *mitzvos* – despite the horrendous, life-threatening conditions – was legend. The Nazi commandant knew that he must break this rabbi if he were to control the prisoners. He summoned Rav Gershon to his office where, on the top of his desk he had placed an open *Sefer Torah*. On top of the parchment, the fiend had placed a large roasted pig which he was going to carve up for dinner. He figured the sight of such an outrage would cause Rav Gershon to have a complete meltdown. It did – but not in the manner the Nazi had expected. When the *Rosh Yeshivah* (Novoradok, France) saw the abomination before him, he broke loose of his captors, threw the pig off the table (landing in front of the commandant), grabbed the scroll, and, with bitter tears, cuddled it in his embrace. The guards began to rain blows on him with their truncheons. He ignored them as he “apologized” to the *Sefer Torah* for the insult to its honor. They beat him to within an inch of his life and left him there. Why did he do it? His love for the Torah was so overwhelming that it did not permit him to see it humiliated in such a disparaging manner. He did not care about himself – he cared only for the honor of Torah.

Horav Shmuel Aharon Yudelevitz, zl, was a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, without peer (*Meil Shmuel*) whose dedication and personal sacrifice to Hashem, His Torah and *mitzvos*, were remarkable. His devotion to *kedushas*, sanctity, of *Shabbos* was fabled. Every Friday afternoon, he would trudge along Yaffa Road, warning and encouraging the storekeepers to close in time for *Shabbos*. While many listened to him, one storekeeper intimated that, while he would like to comply and close his store in time for *Shabbos*, he feared losing his regular customers to his competition, who had no qualms about remaining open on *Shabbos*. He said that, if Rav Shmuel Aharon would stand in front of the door and block the customers from entering, they would blame the fanatical rabbi and not him. They would feel bad for him and continue using his store. Rav Shmuel Aharon considered it a privilege and an honor to give up his busy Friday afternoons, so

that *kavod Shabbos* could be upheld.

The storekeepers did not always treat him in such an honorable manner. Other grocers pelted him with rotten tomatoes. He kept on returning. He was a man on a mission – for Hashem. He said that, if he would back down, the forces of evil would prevail and *Shabbos* desecration would increase. “I am willing to give up my life for the honor of *Shabbos kodesh*,” he said. While he never had to make such a decision, once, during a *hafganah*, demonstration, against the public desecration of *Shabbos*, the police brutally beat him. His response was classic, “I am grateful to have had the privilege of being beaten for the honor of *Shabbos*.”