

פינחס

ZEALOTRY

פינחס בן אלעזר בן אהרן הכהן השיב את חמתי מעל בני ישראל בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם
“Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon the *Kohein*, has turned My anger
away from *B’nei Yisrael* by his vengeance for Me among them . . .” (*Bamidbar*
25:11).

Rashi (ibid.) explains the term “*bekano es kinasi*” — “by avenging My vengeance — via his rage, when I should have been enraged.” In other words “*kinah*” — “zeal” or “jealousy” — implies a rage which propels vengeance. It was appropriate for Hashem to display his anger with Zimri son of Salu and the other transgressors of *Sheivet Shimon* (ibid. 14) by punishing them. In fact, Hashem did punish them with a plague (ibid. 26:1). The affront to Hashem galvanized a rage within Pinchas which prompted him to wreak vengeance on the leader of the transgressors. This act, committed purely for the love of Hashem, was accepted by Him as a substitute for His own form of punishment — and the plague ceased.

This rage was a characteristic he inherited from his great-grandfather, Levi, who, when confronted with the news of the abduction and humiliation of his sister, Dinah, joined with his brother, Shimon, in annihilating the entire city of Shechem, the city which tacitly approved of this abomination committed by the son of its leader (*Bereishis* 34:25). When Shimon and Levi discerned that Yosef, their brother, was not behaving according to standards of holiness they expected from their family, they plotted his death (ibid. 37:19,20). It was this rage which Yaakov sought to temper in declaring:

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“Cursed be their anger because it is fierce” (ibid. 49:7).

Yaakov sought not to eliminate it, but to redirect it to holiness. *Sheivet Shimon* demonstrated that they had learned nothing from Yaakov’s admonition, as was evident from their involvement in the scandal involving the Midianite women (*Bamidbar* 25:14). Levi, on the other hand, assimilated Yaakov’s teaching. This was the only *Sheivet* to respond to Moshe’s call “Whoever is for Hashem, join me” (*Shemos* 32:26), and they proceeded to punish the transgressors in the sin of the *eigel*. Levi was the only *Sheivet* to remain pure of sin in the above-mentioned incident; Levi was the only *Sheivet* that was not involved in idol worship in Egypt (*Yoma* 66:), and the only *Sheivet* that did not abandon the practice of *bris milah* in the desert. They understood Yaakov’s message and forcefully molded their heart and their intellect to conform to the standards set by their great father. The Rambam (*Hilchos Shemitah Veyoveil* 13:12) declares that Levi is “separated to serve Hashem.”

It is this holy rage, but a rage nonetheless, that *Anshei Keneses Hagedolah* sought to temper by inserting the “*Sim Shalom*” prayer into the *Shemoneh Esrai*. They specifically placed it after

Birkas Kohanim. This holy rage was passed down to the physical and spiritual descendants of Levi throughout the generations. This is the single major characteristic which illuminated the glorious career of Eliyahu *Hanavi*. Holy rage is what prompted him to slaughter the prophets of Ba'al at the Kishon River (*Melachim I* 18:40), and it resulted in his ultimate reward in avoiding death and in gaining immortality when he “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (*Melachim II* 2:11).

The indignation expressed by Mattisyahu ben Yochanan toward the Jewish traitor of Modi'in, who followed the Syrian-Greek officer's instruction to ritually slaughter a pig, was the rage he inherited from his great-grandfather, Levi. Mattisyahu bristled at the religious restrictions imposed by the Syrian-Greeks for some time. His quietly seething anger burst forth in an abundant rush of deafening rage, and Mattisyahu killed the offending sinner, much to the chagrin of many of his co-religionists. They preferred passive resistance and hoped that the stormwinds of religious persecution would disappear with time. He and his small band of followers hid in the forests, hunted by their enemies like animals. They elected to mount an offensive against the Syrian-Greeks which culminated in the holiday of *Chanukah* (*Sefer Chashmonaim I*).

A great number of our *Nevi'im* were descended from *Sheivet Levi*. The job of a *Navi* was to severely castigate his brethren in order to improve their spirituality (see page 348). The job description required an internal rage to uphold the honor of Hashem.

Rav Papa once inquired of Abbaya (*Berachos* 20•), why were miracles performed for the earlier generations and not for our current generation? Rav Papa pointed out that it could not be due to any inferiority in Torah learning, for their generation was certainly superior to earlier generations in this venue. Abbaya responded that earlier generations had demonstrated greater self-sacrifice for the sake of Hashem. He presented as a case in point the incident of Rav Adda bar Ahava, who saw what he thought to be a Jewish woman, dressed in a red outer garment in public. Incensed that a Jewish maiden would violate accepted standards of dress, he rushed over and tore the garment off her back. As it turned out, the woman was a Gentile, and he incurred an exorbitant fine for damaging her property. It nevertheless demonstrated the fire and rage which burned within Rav Adda's chest for the glory of Hashem.

The parameters for *kana'us* are outlined in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Sanhedrin* 9:7). The act must be performed totally for the sake of Heaven, without even a hint of any ulterior motive. The act of *kana'us* must be executed at the time of commission of the sin, and it must be discharged in the presence of ten Jews (*P'nei Moshe*). It must be spontaneous and not premeditated. It is improper to clear the act with a *Bais Din* or Torah authority. For once the question is posed to them, they are mandated to inform the potential *kano'i* that murder, even for the sake of Heaven, is wrong. The reason for this is that a *Bais Din* is incapable of discerning the inquirer's true purpose and they are therefore required to suspect an ulterior motive. Shimon and Levi, Eliyahu and Mattisyahu acted without consulting any Halachic authority. Pinchas, however, reminded Moshe of the *halachah*, and Moshe responded, “He who reads the letter should be the messenger” (*Sanhedrin* 82•). It was, therefore, incumbent upon the *beis din* —the court— to ostracize Pinchas, because he sought advice before he acted; this is an adulterated form of *kana'us*. Ultimately, the *Ruach Hakodesh* revealed to one and all that Pinchas' motives were pure, and that he deserved praise and not condemnation.

Up until this point, Moshe had considered Pinchas to be his heir apparent. However, when he observed that Pinchas was capable of an act of *kana'us*, Moshe felt that although Pinchas was truly holier than all others, he was nevertheless incapable of becoming a leader of *Klal Yisrael*. It is essential that a *manhig* — leader — exhibit traits of moderation and flexibility. Moshe appreciated that Pinchas' rage for the sake of Hashem was commendable and worthy of praise, but it invalidated him as a leader (Kotzker Rebbe). This sentiment is echoed by the *Kuzari* (*Sha'ar* 8): "Man's emotional fervor must be held in check so that it does not lead to fanaticism . . . unbridled zeal easily leads one to wrath and hatred, and disturbs the purity of his soul." Hence, it is understandable that Moshe now had a diminished opinion of Pinchas' leadership qualities.

Similarly, Eliyahu was rebuked by Hashem after the slaughter of the *Nevi'ei Haba'al* (*Melachim* I 19:11-13). Hashem appreciates demonstrations of jealousy on His behalf by His zealots, but leaders of *Klal Yisrael* must demonstrate restraint, equilibrium and responsible calm. Hashem (metaphorically) visited Eliyahu with a strong wind, an earthquake, a fire, and a still, small sound, all in quick succession. Regarding these four conditions it was revealed to Eliyahu that Hashem associated Himself only with the small, delicate sound. The symbolic message to Eliyahu was that Hashem's way is the way of deliberate calmness, not overbearing rage. The Rambam explains, "Eliyahu was prone to anger. Although he vented his anger only against nonbelievers, our Sages say that Hashem removed him from the world, saying that he was unfit to lead men and serve as their priest" (*Shemoneh Perakim* 7).

Kana'us in the right place and at the proper time is a virtue. It is indicative of holy intent and a holy spirit. The *kana'i* must be prepared to bear the consequences of his action. Throughout Jewish history, there are many instances of groups and individuals who presented themselves as zealots for the Jewish cause. Prominent among these groups are the zealots who sought refuge from the onslaught of the Roman armies at the time of the destruction of the Second *Beis Hamikdash* (Josephus, *Wars*, 2:408, 433). Throughout all serious Halachic literature there is scant mention of this group or other similar groups. Very little attention is paid to them, and they are memorialized as a unique symbol of courage primarily in secularist literature. The fact is that archeological studies indicate that they very scrupulously observed the ritual laws. They maintained and made extensive use of *mikva'os*, synagogues, *Batei Midrashim*, observed tithes to *Kohanim* and *Levi'im*, and there are many indications that they were involved in Torah study. Their *raison d'etre* was avoidance of the *chilul Hashem* of being captured by the Romans for possible servitude, murder, or worse — curtailment of religious life. Their mass suicide to avert capture by Rome is reminiscent of the mass suicides committed by many European communities to avoid forced baptism by the Crusaders (*Kinos* of *Tisha Be'av* 22, 33). This is also similar to the celebrated suicide committed by the four hundred Jewish youth who were being transported by the Romans by boat for immoral purposes (*Gitten* 57:; *Midrash Eicha Rabbah* 1:45). Nevertheless, this type of zealotry was not broadly or prominently recognized by our Sages. [This is marked by a dispute between *Tosafos* (*Avodah Zarah* 27:) and the Rambam (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 5:4).]

The tone for accepted standards of zealotry was established by *Chazal* at the time of the Destruction of the Second *Beis Hamikdash* (*Gitin* 56•). *Chazal* were confronted by a similar group of zealots who desired to confront the Romans in battle. They were labeled "*Baryoni*" — empty individuals — who sought war (Rashi, *ibid.*). Their motives may very well have been pure;

but they were not guided by the Torah authorities. Zealotry by an individual not totally immersed in Torah, or at least guided by *da'as Torah*, is confused zealotry at best. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, that generation's Torah giant, in consultation with the other leaders of that time, decided that *hishtadlut* — cunning negotiations with the enemy — was the way to salvation. A doomed military effort would only result in total annihilation.

Similarly, during the Adrianic Era, the revolt against Rome was led by an individual named Bar Kochba. Although condemned by most Torah authorities, Rabbi Akiva did initially lend him support (*Sanhedrin* 97:; *Yerushalmi Ta'anis* 24•). The ultimate result of this effort was untold Jewish destruction (*Gittin* 57:; *Eicha Ravti* 2). Group zealotry, which does not conform to the formula established by *Chazal*, cannot achieve success. This is not to say that the individuals involved in this effort were not *kedoshim* — holy ones. On the contrary, Hashem may have rewarded them in the next world for their zealous demonstration of rage on His behalf. However, the direction authorized by the Sages must be adhered to. *Kana'us* on an individual level, nevertheless, like that of Pinchas, is still attainable by the select individual.

The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:45) points out that this keen sense of absolute justice is the essential first step in the attainment of prophecy. “Prophecy begins when a man is Divinely guided in the performance of a major good deed . . . an individual is inspired in this way . . . he could not bear the sight of injustice, neither could he desist from removing it.” Not everyone who demonstrates this capacity is a prophet, but clearly this was Pinchas' key first step in achieving the level of *Navi* (as Eliyahu *Hanavi*).

As a reward for Pinchas' zealous display leading to *kidush Hashem*, he was promised the “covenant of peace” and the “covenant of everlasting priesthood.” *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* (47) explains this to mean that Pinchas' life spanned several hundred years, and that in the later part of his life, he was known as the illustrious Eliyahu *Hanavi*. Hence, it is clear that Pinchas successfully climbed the Rambam's “eleven step” ladder from *kana'us* to *Nevuah*. Just as Moshe *Rabbeinu* determined early on in Pinchas' career that, as holy as he was, he was yet unfit for leadership; so too Hashem, in His infinite patience, determined that Eliyahu had to be replaced as the leader of *Klal Yisrael*.

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