

In last week's parasha, Pinchas, the son of Elazar and grandson of Aharon HaKohen, jeopardized his own life by performing a heroic act and thereby rescued the people of Israel from a ravaging plague. In a shocking exhibit of brazenness, Zimri ben Salu, a leader of the tribe of Shimon brought this Midianite woman (the daughter of a prince) directly to Moshe Rabbeinu at the entrance of the Ohel Mo'ed and performed a sinful act in public view. Everyone was in shock, unable to move, until Pinchas, without regard for his personal safety took the "law into his own hands" and inflicted capital punishment on both perpetrators, killing them instantly.

Let us put this scene in perspective. Pinchas was not an ordinary "zealot", not an activist nor a rabble rouser. He was by nature a quiet and unassuming man. The Torah testifies to that by listing his name as the son of Elazar, which is quite ordinary. But then the Torah does the extraordinary by listing him as the grandson of Aharon HaKohen, who was a man of "Ohev Shalom and Rodeph Shalom" a man of "peace" who loved peace and pursued peace all of his life. This act of Pinchas was totally out of character for him. Pinchas did this out of a pure love of HaShem and Torah. At the moment he was propelled by a burning indignation upon witnessing an act of immorality in progress.

Pinchas did not consider himself at that moment as a hero who will be rewarded, glorified and praised by all Bnei Yisrael. The Torah suggests that lack of consideration by separating the "act of killing" in one parasha (Balak) and recording the "eternal reward" in a second parasha (Pinchas). If not for the fact that G-d Himself bestows the eternal reward upon Pinchas, the story would have ended quite differently. The Rabbis in the Yerushalmi stated that Pinchas acted against the wishes of the Sages and they wanted to place him in "Cheirem" {excommunicate him}. His life was in great danger from the family of Salu, and the Talmud tells us that six miracles occurred at that moment to insure his safety from the mob.

The message we get from the Talmud is that what Pinchas did is not something that we should emulate, he is not a role model that we would copy by acting impulsively and taking the law into our own hands. What Pinchas did was an abhorration to what Judaism and Torah stands for. The Torah teaches us the value of each and every human being, to establish a society of Law and Order and to respect those who uphold the law. Only this one time to this one man did the All-Mighty signal an approval and even rewarded him with a Brit Kehunat Olam, a covenant of eternal priesthood for him and his offspring after him. If not for G-d's intervention Pinchas would have been condemned for what he did. And anyone in our day and age who acts impulsively by taking the law into his own hands is in violation of the Torah and causes a great Chillul HaShem to our land and our people.