

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Pinchas

“PINCHAS ... BY HIS ZEALOUSLY AVENGING ME AMONG THEM ...”
(BAMIDBAR 25:11)

Pinchas took a leadership role once again

FOURTEEN YEARS after Pinchas heroically stood up for the honor of Hashem, Pinchas took a leadership role once again: After fighting valiantly alongside their brothers in conquering the Land of Israel on the west of the Jordan River, the tribes of Reuvain, Gad and half of Menashe were taking leave of their brethren and returning to their families in the trans-Jordan. Before crossing the river, they erected a monument in the form of an altar. The Mishkan of Shiloh was already in service and an altar in any alternate location was prohibited. The rest of *B'nei Yisrael* gathered to plan a response. They gathered together, prepared to do battle against the 2½ tribes. But first, they sent a delegation including Pinchas and ten tribal leaders to confront the tribes of Reuvain, Gad and Menashe to find out what truly transpired. They eventually learned that the monument was never meant as an altar for sacrifices. Rather, it was meant to show future generations that these 2½ tribes did indeed keep their pact to help *B'nei Yisrael* conquer Canaan. They were concerned that their future generations would feel disconnected from the other tribes of *B'nei Yisrael*. The monument was intended to keep the bond intact. This explanation was accepted by the delegation and bloodshed was avoided. (Yehoshua 22)

They should have used the fastest option

The Ralbag (end of Yehoshua, Toeles 22) asks why *B'nei Yisrael* did not take the easier route of simply asking Yehoshua – their leader and prophet – as to the true meaning of this monument. This is especially true, the Ralbag continues, since they were acting to zealously guard Hashem’s honor, so they should have used the fastest option of asking Yehoshua instead of sending a delegation to investigate. If the stakes are so high, why send delegations – why not just ask the prophet and act quickly? The Ralbag answers that, if they intended to go to war and execute justice, they needed to use the *halachic* procedures of investigation and see the situation firsthand. They could not, in this case, rely on the words of a prophet, even though the prophet’s information was absolute truth.

Zealousness does not mean acting rashly

B'nei Yisrael were acting from zealous conviction. They could not bear to see an apparent desecration of the laws of the Torah. They know that this situation calls for immediate action. Yehoshua’s prophecy was the quickest way to ascertain the truth. Under these circumstances, shouldn’t they forgo the technicalities and simply take the fastest path to discovering the truth? They needed to take action! If *B'nei Yisrael* had a viable, trustworthy and quicker alternative, how could they, in their state of high emotional pitch, bear to delay the process to fulfill a technical detail, a legality?

Zealousness does not mean acting rashly. Rather, it means that one loves Hashem and cares enough about His honor to ensure that it is defended correctly and in the best – not necessarily fastest – way possible. Unfortunately too many of us confuse a zealot with an angry individual seething with righteous, religious indignation. A true zealot is consumed by genuine love for Hashem, which translates into care and love for his fellow man, and concern that not one iota of Torah law be violated in his emotion-laden quest to carry out justice. May we emulate the example of true heroes – the real zealots who place Torah law foremost in their minds, as they express their burning love for Hashem’s honor with speed, emotion and above all, care for His Torah’s laws.