



## Apt Zealotry

### Parshas Pinchas

"This is voice of Israel from Jerusalem, it is three o'clock, and this is the news by..." The old lady was not able to hear the announcer from her old transistor, as her front door suddenly swung open. She stood there startled, worried about the intruder's intentions.

It's him again, she was certain. How could she be mistaken? He's short, has a reddish countenance, curly hair, and exerts zealotry. He comes every few days, yells insults at the radio, makes his threats and then leaves. What does he want now, the widow thought to herself, it's Friday afternoon.

For some reason he just stood at the door. The widow's soul almost left her body. Let him yell and leave, what is he waiting for? He then took hold of a bucket and spilled the dirty water on her just-cleaned floor. The widow began to shout, her voice mixed with the news coming from the radio. My uncle, Rabbi Shimon Grossman OB"M, who was her neighbor came running in. The tearful widow told him what had just transpired. My uncle began to re-clean the floor himself, and then walked to the zealot's house.

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In our weekly Parsha, Pinchas, we read: "Pinchas, the son of Eleazar the son of Aharon the Cohen, has turned My anger away from the children of Israel by his zealously, avenging Me among them; so that I did not destroy the children of Israel because of My zeal. Therefore, say, "I hereby give him My covenant of peace."<sup>1</sup>

Rashi comments: "Since the tribes were disparaging him, saying, Have you seen the son of Puti, whose grandfather, Yisro<sup>2</sup> fattened calves for idols, and who killed a chieftain of an Israelite tribe (for idolatry)? For this reason, in his defense, Scripture traces his pedigree to Aharon."

At first glance, the tribes' criticism and attack is not understandable. They saw the terrible plague brought upon the Jewish Nation as a result of their sins. They furthermore were witnesses to the fact that the only thing that stopped the plague was Pinchas's decisive action. Why did they attack him?

Another question: what is the meaning of: "Have you seen the son of Puti, whose grandfather, Yisro fattened calves for idols". If the desire is to mention Pinchas's idol worshipping grandfather,

why not just say that he was an idol worshipper, why focus on the fattening of the calves?

A further question: Scripture traces his lineage to Aharon. Does that annul his other side? If he is Aharon's grandson, does that cancel him being Yisro's grandson?

The answer is that zealotry can be positive if the motives are positive. Zealotry in itself is not desirable. Only if zealotry is motivated by Torah and the proper intentions is it considered worthy zealotry.



That's what the tribes were referring to – they claimed that when Pinchas took a lance he demonstrated that bad blood of cruelty was flowing through his veins, inherited from Yisro, who was acquainted with all forms of idolatry and who cruelly fattened calves for idol worshipping.

What did G-d do? He traced his ancestry to Aharon, to notify all that his true heritage came from Aharon, who is known as someone who "loved peace and sought peace" and whose entirety was compassion and the love of his fellow man. This was Pinchas's true essence. When Pinchas encountered a terrible act of desecration of G-d's name he acted zealously and overcame his mercy.

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My uncle, Rabbi Shimon ran through the streets of Jerusalem climbing and ascending stairs, searching for the zealous vandal. "What have you done?" Rabbi Shimon demanded. The zealot was adamant. "What is her wrong doing?" my uncle continued, "She is lonely and wished to fill the void. How did your hands not tremble when you executed such an improper act of zealotry?"

When my uncle saw that the zealot would not budge he asked him to accompany him to the religious court, to hear what Rabbi Dushinsky had to say about all this. My father, who was Rabbi Dushinsky's close student, followed them.

When they arrived the Shabbos has already entered. Rabbi Dushinsky was studying at his table. The three of them entered, they let the zealous young man speak first. He told of the widow who insolently listened to the radio. Such things should not be allowed to happen. Therefore, he explained, he poured the dirty water in her house. Was I not right in my actions? He concluded passionately.

Rabbi Dushinsky was visibly troubled. Rabbi Dushinsky, who was usually delicate and kind, stood up, his face burning, took hold of his cane, pointed it at the zealot and shouted: "Wicked one, get out of my house, immediately!" he calmed down only after the zealot was gone. Only then he calmed down and returned to his studies.

<sup>1</sup> Bamidbar 25, 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Yitro, Moshe's father in-law was an idol worshipping priest before he converted to Judaism. Pinchas was his grandson. In the previous Parasha he slaw a tribe chieftain for idol worshipping.