



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

Pi-N'CHAS

## Zealots for a Lost Cause

Pinchas was a zealot who stood up and took drastic action for the sake of God (Bamidbar 25:10-12).

We praise him as an enthusiast and think he was worthy of his Divine reward (T'hilim 106:30-31). At the same time we recognise that zealotry in the wrong hands is a curse to the perpetrator as much as to their victims.

"Zeal" is from a root that means to seethe or boil. If boiling over means wreaking immense harm to anyone who gets in the way, how can it be a good thing?

There are at least four good reasons against this kind of zealotry:

1. It employs brawn, not brain: it doesn't say, "Let's talk together and work out a way in which we can live together."
2. Regardless of whether the cause is moral or not, it denies the rights and dignity of the other.
3. It knows that the cause is already

lost and says it no longer matters how much havoc is unleashed.

4. It has no idea of the blessings that can come from kindness, concern and charity.

The story of Pinchas teaches us not only how to help a cause, but how to destroy it.

## The Army Chaplain

What happened to Pinchas after the incident with Zimri and Kozbi?

We do not have long to wait for the Torah to tell us. In next week's sidra, Matot, we hear that there was a war with the Midianites, and Pinchas went with the Israelite forces as their army chaplain. The campaign was waged by "a thousand from every tribe, and Pinchas the son of Elazar HaKohein" (Bamidbar 31:6).

Pinchas, says Rashi, echoing the sages (Sotah 43a), was MASHU'ACH MILCHAMA - "the kohen anointed for battle" (see D'varim 20:2).

This phrase illustrates the paradox that has haunted military chaplaincy throughout history: for how can religion, which believes that swords should be beaten into ploughshares (Yishayahu 2:2-4, Micha 4:1-4), condone warfare to such an extent that it consciously anoints a kohen to go with the armies?

The answer is that war is sometimes a tragic necessity, defence preparedness is essential to a nation, and a defence force needs a religious advisory arm to watch over the morality of its policies and the morale of its troops.

In Biblical times, the kohen anointed for battle had the role of sustaining the spirits of the army, who, as the rabbis explained, fearing the cruelty of the enemy and the noise of the military machine, were in danger of losing their nerve and unable to concentrate out of worry about what was happening at home.

All this means that Pinchas not only has a place in the history of Israel but was the very first chaplain in military history. -OZ

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**