

Pirkei Avot (ד:כא) teaches רבי אליעזר הקפר אומר הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאים את האדם מן העולם. Jealousy or zealotry, is an undesirable attribute that drives man from this world. Yet the Torah tells us that Pinchas was rewarded for acting on that very trait when he killed Zimri and Kazbi. If קנאה is to be avoided, why was Pinchas praised for exercising it? Also, the word בקנאו is an odd construction in that the Hebraic form that adds a letter Vav at the end usually means that there is a second individual associated with the verb. For example, בשלחו implies sending someone else. Who was the subject of Pinchas' קנאה? Was he jealous of Zimri? Was he zealous towards him? While he succeeded in staunching the plague caused by the people cohabiting with the daughters of Moab, was the קנאה he displayed by his actions appropriate?

Clearly Pinchas was acting to stem the terrible desecration of Gd's name initiated by the daughters of Moab. That desecration reached its apex with Zimri's act. Moses and the leadership of the generation seemed powerless to act and unable to respond appropriately. The קנאה he displayed was on behalf of Gd Himself, קל קנא, the vengeful Gd, as he acted instinctively in exacting retribution from those who desecrated His name.

However קנאו can also imply a different subject of Pinchas' zealotry. Often a person fails to take into account the possible ramifications of his actions towards someone else. The words בדברו and בשלחו involve two individuals, one who influences the actions of the other. The association between the initiator and agent is transient. It terminates with the completion of the assignment.

On the other hand, קנאה creates a destructive relation between the jealous individual and the subject of that jealousy, a corrosive that can cause irreparable damage to both. It is interesting to note that Rabbi Eliezer does not say that קנאה removes the jealous individual. As noted in Pirkei Avot, the result of קנאה can be so devastating that it leads to the demise of the jealous individual **and** the subject of that jealousy. Indeed, the formulation of the statement is interesting: הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאים את האדם מן העולם. It speaks about אדם, saying קנאה corrupts the very fabric of humanity and human relationships. There are no boundaries or limits to the depths jealousy and zealotry can cause an individual to sink to once it takes

root. An individual's singular, focused jealousy towards his fellow man will drive him to destroy everything; his relationships with others, even his own family and his very life itself. Once infected with קנאה, man is driven irrationally to pursue it. Our Rabbis warn us of the danger of such a mindset, as it sets off an insatiable desire that will consume the jealous individual and all those around him, including the subject of his rage.

The destructiveness of קנאה is especially acute and tragic when it results in internecine jealousy. Many families have been destroyed by internal strife that took on a life of its own and manifested in a גַּם לִי גַם לְךָ לֹא יִהְיֶה, let the whole thing burn down so long as my relative does not derive any benefit. Such a tragedy is devastating, wasteful and avoidable. Our Rabbis teach us that there are several words in the Hebrew language for man, but the word אָדָם, Adam, refers exclusively to the Jewish People. Our Rabbis are telling us with this statement in Pirkei Avot that קנאה directed at some other member of the Jewish family is especially tragic and will have unfortunate consequences. It must be avoided.

However, the Torah praises Pinchas for his קנאה because he directed it inward. He himself was the subject of his קנאה which he internalized and used to improve himself by acting upon it. He did not act out of his own personal zealotry or jealousy, but on behalf of Gd's honor. The Midrash tells us that Pinchas approached his teacher Moses and asked him, did you not teach us הַבּוֹעֵל אֶרְמִית? Do we not have an obligation to be jealous and zealous in order to nullify the desecration of Gd's name? Moses was reminded of the Halacha by his student and told him קְרִינָא דְאִגְרָתָא אִיהוּ לְהוּי פְּרוּנְקָא (סנהדרין פב), Pinchas, as the one who reminded us of the law, you should be the one to act on it. The קנאי who should act is the individual motivated to defend Gd's honor. קנאה can be positive when applied appropriately. When directed inward and not against a fellow Jew or human being, it can lead to great acts.

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