

WHAT ONE PERSON CAN DO!

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying: Pinchus son of Elazar, son of Aaron the Kohen turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged Me among them, so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance. (Bamidbar 25:10)

turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel: Why was HASHEM's anger aimed at all of Israel? This is to teach us that if even one person violates in this area he brings wrath upon the entire community! (Yalkut Pisron Torah)

so I did not consume the Children of Israel in My vengeance: Were all the Children of Israel to be destroyed? Rather, had it not been for the Tefilla (prayer) of Pinchus, all of Israel would have been eliminated in the plague, because of the principle that all Jews are guarantors one for another! (Midrash HaGadol)

We have to stand back and marvel at the magnitude of the accomplishment of Pinchus! All of Israel was at risk! We were hemorrhaging badly. Someone needed to stop the bleeding. The Midrash relates the gravity of the situation and the value of the deed done by Pinchus. However there's a louder point here. The whole plague was started like a wild fire by one person, and it was extinguished by the heroism of one man. Look at the power invested in the individual!

It may be hard for us to believe in the abstract but we live it concretely every day! Traffic is backed up for miles. Ambulances and stretchers are rushed to the scene. Lives are ruined and hundreds of thousands are inconvenienced by loss of valuable work time, missing appointments, and airplane flights. Why? One foolish person was engaging in distracted driving, multitasking, absorbed in texting during the morning commute. Look at the power any individual to be destructive. About this King Solomon had written in Koheles, "One sinner destroys a lot of good!" It's easy to be destructive. It's harder to be constructive. It takes months and years to build a house and with one match all is lost. It takes years to develop a trusting relationship and with one word or a single betrayal all can be undone! It's harder for us to imagine the power of the average individual to effect good like Pinchus did! Rebbe Nachman from Breslov said, "If you believe you have the ability to destroy something then you must also believe that you have the capacity to correct it." How can we understand this?

Years ago I bought one of my boys a bike. Unfortunately he left it in front of the house and when the public schools kids came home from school they could not resist and the bike disappeared. He was upset and feeling victimized so I bought him another bike and cautioned him to take better care of it.

This time he left it in the garage but he left the garage door open and when the public school kids were passing by they came into our garage and took his new bike. I wasn't about to buy a new one so fast but it was Pesach night and he was bargaining hard for the return of the Afikomen, I insisted he have "some skin in the game" and so we became 50/50 partners in another new bike. Chol HaMoed we were almost at the hotel upstate where my mother in-law was staying for Yom Tov when I decided to tease my son. I pressed the garage door opener which only works when you are 10 feet away. We were more than 50 miles away. Gazing into rear view mirror I told him that now the garage door was open and the public school kids are passing by our house. He glared back at me and advised, "Then push the button and close it again!"

That's what one person can do! DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).