

Religion News Service

{ Martini Judaism }

For those who want to be **shaken & stirred**

Don't blame 'pious' Jews for Israel, West Bank killings

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Traditional Jews, praying at the Western Wall. Credit: Yuri Yavnik, via Shutterstock ([Image source](#))

Upset about what “pious” Jews did recently in Israel and on the West Bank — the wounding of marchers (and, now, murder, as sixteen year old Shira Banki succumbed to her wounds) at the gay pride parade in Jerusalem, and the burning to death of 18-month-old Ali Saad Dawabsheh in the West Bank village of Duma?

Pious Jews didn't do this.

(And, let the record note: when Christians and Muslims do horrendous things, their co-religionists are allowed to wonder: are these people truly “pious”? Or are they simply acting out their own aggressive tendencies, and putting a sacred sticker on them?)

Pious, learned Jews would have known that the Torah absolutely forbids wanton bloodshed. If they had gone to synagogue just days after the horrific events in Duma and Jerusalem, they would have heard the reading of the Ten

Commandments from the Torah. “Do not murder.” That means: in the streets of Jerusalem, even when marchers at a parade are celebrating a sexuality that you find abhorrent; and in Duma, in the West Bank as well.

Moreover, pious Jews would have known that Jews actually believe in a “Holy Trinity” — that we are commanded to take care of the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. Why? “Because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Pious Jews would have been paying attention during the annual Passover Seder. That whole “because you were strangers in the land of Egypt” thing — they would, surely, know that by heart by now. Right?

Apparently not. To paraphrase the late Biblical scholar Nechama Leibowitz: Just because you were oppressed is no guarantee that you won’t oppress others in your own land.

(And, if we are talking about strangers here, then that could mean that we are talking about anyone on the fringes of society. Like GLBT people, for example. A stretch, you say? Jewish law has stretched far more than this.)

Pious Jews would have known something else.

It’s about the burning of a baby in Duma.

Pious Jews would have heard stories from older pious Jews — survivors. They would have heard about how Nazis burned Jewish villages, locking entire Jewish communities into the synagogue, and torch the synagogue. They would have told the younger pious Jews about how one million Jewish children were burned in the ovens, and what it smelled like.

Pious Jews would have known something else. They would have known the concept of *hillul ha-shem* — that Jews actually have the power to wound God’s reputation in the world.

Pious Jews would have known the verse from Genesis 34, where Jacob castigates his sons for their rampage against the helpless people of Shechem (modern day Nablus): “You have made my name odious.”

There is a piece of graffiti in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv, which marks the place where the late Prime Minister was shot. The graffiti says this: “Shot by a man who was wearing a kippah (a traditional Jewish head covering).”

Was it scrawled in sarcasm — as if to say, “Ha, look at what ‘pious’ Jews are capable of doing!”

Or, was it written as a moan, as if to say: “My God, oy — look at what ‘pious’ Jews are capable of doing!”

(And, please — don't tell us: "Well, at least we don't go around naming town squares after our murderers!" That's a pretty low bar you've set there, friend. No, we don't do that — but we have our own ways of lionizing our fanatics. There is a memorial book about Baruch Goldstein, who murdered worshipers at the Cave of Machpelah. There was a fan club for Yigal Amir, Rabin's assassin. So, please — don't, for one minute, think that the horror in Duma came out of nowhere. It came out of us. It's our golem.)

How does societal change happen? Dylan Roof fired into a church in Charleston — and that was enough for good people in that state to say: "It's way past time for us to take down the old Confederate flag."

We Jews know about inward turning and self-assessment. (We might even have invented it). If it can happen in the streets of Charleston, it can happen in Jerusalem.

Jews should be saying to themselves: "Houston, we have a problem." We have become prey to our own dark side of the force, and every Jewish leader in Israel knows it, and is speaking out against it (read here, and here, and here, and here, for starters). If Israel's authorities cannot automatically change the hearts and minds of its virulent haters, then at the very least, sweep them from Israeli society. The Shin Bet (Israel's security apparatus) knows how to find and deal with terrorists. They should use that skill here.

I cannot get the image of sixteen year old Shira Bank, murdered at the gay pride parade, out of my mind — that beautiful daughter of Israel, our daughter.

I cannot stop thinking of the bereaved family in Duma, and I overflow with pride at the Jews who went to that village and sat with the grieving parents.

There is one last thing that I cannot get out of my mind.

It's the name of that Palestinian village.

Duma.

In Hebrew, *duma* means "silence."

This is no time for silence. And the entire Jewish people knows it.

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