

ZEALOTS!

Source 1: At the end of Sefer Bereshit

א וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב, אֶל-בָּנָיו; וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲאִסְפוּ וְאִגִּידָה לָכֶם, אֵת אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם, בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים. ב הַקְּבֹצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ, בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב; וְשִׁמְעוּ, אֶל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם. ג רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אַתָּה, כַּחַי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי--יִתֵּר שְׂאֵת, וְיִתֵּר עָז. ד פָּחוּ כַּמִּים אֶל-תּוֹתֵר, כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ; אִז חִלַּלְתָּ, יְצוּעֵי עֲלֵה.

ה שִׁמְעוּן וְלוֹי, אַחִים--כְּלֵי חַמָּס, מְכַרְתֵּיהֶם. ו בְּסוֹדִם אֶל-תִּבְא נַפְשִׁי, בְּקִהְלָם אֶל-תַּחַד כְּבֹדִי: כִּי בְּאַפִּים הִרְגוּ אִישׁ, וּבְרָצֹנִם עָקְרוּ-שׁוֹר. ז אָרוּר אַפִּים כִּי עָז, וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קִשְׁתָּה; אַחֲלִקֶם בְּיַעֲקֹב, וְאַפְיָצֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.

1 And Jacob called unto his sons, and said: 'Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days. 2 Assemble yourselves, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father. 3 Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the first-fruits of my strength; the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power. 4 Unstable as water, have not thou the excellency; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it--he went up to my couch. {P}

5 Simeon and Levi are brethren; weapons of violence their kinship. 6 Let my soul not come into their council; unto their assembly let my glory not be united; for in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they houghed oxen. 7 Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

Source 2: Following the original attack on Shechem

ל. וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל שִׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל לוֹי עֲכַרְתֶּם אֵתִי לְהַבְאִישְׁנִי בְיֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ בְּכַנְעֵנִי וּבְפְרָזִי וְאַנִּי מֵתִי מִסֶּפֶר וְנֶאֱסַפּוּ עָלַי וְהַכּוּנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי:

30. Thereupon, Jacob said to Simeon and to Levi, "You have troubled me, to discredit me among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and among the Perizzites, and I am few in number, and they will gather against me, and I and my household will be destroyed."

31. And they said, "Shall he make our sister like a harlot?"

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכְּזוֹנָה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת אַחֹתֵנוּ:

**Source 3: Ramban, citing Rambam, evaluates Yaakov's
anger and the justice of Shimon and Levi's actions:**

ד"ה ויענו בני יעקב... במרמה: הנה חמור ושכם אל אביה ואל אחיה דיברו, אבל הזקן לא ענה אותם דבר, כי בניו ידברו במקומו בעניין הזה לכבודו, כי בעבור היות הדבר להם לקלון, לא ירצו שיפתח פיו לדבר בו כלל. ויש כאן שאלה, שהדבר נראה, כי ברצון אביהם ובעצתו ענו, כי לפניו היו (=בנוכחותו ענו), והוא היודע תשובתם כי במרמה ידברו, ואם כן למה כעס?? ועוד: שלא ייתכן שהיה רצונו להשיא בתו לכנעני אשר טימא אותה; והנה כל האחים ענו המענה הזה במרמה, ושמעון ולוי לבדם עשו המעשה והאב אירר אפס להם לבדם. והתשובה, כי המרמה היתה באמרם להמול כל זכר, כי חשבו שלא יעשו כן בני העיר, ואם אולי ישמעו לנשיאם ויהיו כולם נמולים, יבואו ביום השלישי בהיותם כואבים ויקחו את בתם מבית שכם, וזאת עצת כל האחים וברשות אביהם. ושמעון ולוי ראו להינקם מהם והרגו כל אנשי העיר.

And the sons of Yaakov answered Shekhem and his father Chamor with guile: Behold, Chamor and Shekhem spoke to her father and her brothers, but her father did not answer them anything, as his sons spoke in his place about this matter out of respect for him. Since the thing was a disgrace for them, they didn't want that he should open his mouth to speak about it at all. And there is a question here, as [it] appears that they answered with the agreement of their father and with his counsel, as they were in front of him and he knew that their answer was spoken with guile. And if so, why did he get angry [with Shimon and Levi]? And also, it is not plausible that his will would be to marry his daughter to the Canaanite that defiled her. And behold, all of the brothers answered with guile, [even if] Shimon and Levi did the deed and [yet] the father only cursed their anger. And the answer is that the guile was in telling them to circumcise all their males, since they thought that the people of the city would not do this. And if maybe they would listen to their prince and they would all be circumcised, they would come on the third day when they were hurting and they would take their daughter from the house of Shekhem. And this was the counsel of all of the brothers and it was with the permission of their father. And Shimon and Levi wanted to take revenge upon them and killed all of the men of the city .

וייתכן שהיה הכעס ליעקב, שאירר אפס (פרק מ"ט, ה'ז') על שהרגו אנשי העיר אשר לא חטאו לו, והראוי להם שיהרגו שכם לבדו, וזהו מה שאמר הכתוב: "ויענו בני יעקב את שכם ואת חמור אביו במרמה וידברו..." , כי כולם הסכימו לדבר לו במרמה בעבור הנבלה שעשה.

ורבים ישאלו: איך עשו בני יעקב הצדיקים המעשה הזה לשפוך דם נקי. והרב (=הרמב"ם) השיב בספר שופטים (הלכות מלכים ט') ואמר, שבני נח מצווים על הדינים,

והוא להושיב דיינים בכל פלך ופלך לדון בשש מצות שלהן, ובן נח שעבר על אחת מהן נהרג בסייף. ראה אחד שעבר על אחת מהן ולא דנהו להרגו, הרי זה הרואה ייהרג בסייף, ומפני זה נתחייבו כל בעלי שכם הריגה, שהרי שכם גזל, והם ראו ידעו – ולא דנהו...

And it is plausible that Yaakov's anger that cursed them was because they killed the men of the city that had not sinned against him. And what was appropriate for them was that they would kill Shekhem only. And this is what the verse states, "And the sons of Yaakov answered Shekhem and his father Chamor with guile, and they spoke since he defiled Dinah, their sister" - since they all agreed to speak with guile because of the villainy that he did to them. And many will ask, "And how is it that the righteous sons of Yaakov did this act to spill innocent blood?" And the teacher (Ramabam) answered in the Book of Judges (Mishneh Torah, Kings and Wars 14:9) and said that the Children of Noach (gentiles) are commanded about laws (dinim), and that is that they set up judges in each and every town to judge about their six commandments. And a gentile who transgresses one of them is killed by the sword. [Likewise] if one sees someone who transgresses one of them and [that a court] did not judge him to kill him, behold, this observer should kill him with the sword. And because of this, all the men of Shekhem were liable for [the] death [penalty]. As behold, Shekhem had [kidnapped] and they all saw and knew [it] and did not judge him (and since they did not enforce civil law, their punishment was death) .

ואין דברים אלה נכונים בעיני, שאם כן, היה יעקב אבינו חייב להיות קודם וזוכה במיתתו, ואם פחד מבני שכם, למה כעס על בניו ואירר אפס אחר כמה זמנים וענש אותם והלקם והפיצם? והלא הם זכו ועשו מצוה ובטחו בה' והצילם? ועל דעתך, הדינין שמנו לבני נח בשבע מצוות שלהם אינם להושיב דיינים בכל פלך ופלך בלבד, אבל ציוה אותם בדיני גניבה ואונאה ועושק ושכר שכיר ואונס ומפתה ואבות נזיקין וחובל בחברו ודיני מלווה ולווה וכיוצא בהם כענין הדינין שנצטוו ישראל, ונהרג עליהם, אם גנב ועשק או אנס ופיתה בתו של חברו או הדליק גדישו; ומכלל המצוה הזאת שיושיבו דיינין בכל עיר ועיר בישראל – ואם לא עשו כן אינם נהרגים, שזו מצות עשה בהם, ולא אמרו אלא "אזהרה שלהן זו מיתתם" ולא תקרא "אזהרה" אלא המניעה בלאו...

And these words are not correct in my eyes. As, if so, Yaakov, our father, was obligated to be prior and merit [to be the instrument] in their deaths. And if he was afraid from them, why did he get angry with his sons and curse their anger several times and punish them and divide and scatter them? Did they not merit and do a commandment and trust in God, and He rescued them? But according to my opinion, the laws that were counted [as one] of the seven commandments that the Children of Noach were commanded is not only to set up judges in each and every town, but [rather] He commanded them in the laws of theft and fraud, abuse, fair wages, laws of guardianship, rape and seduction, the main categories of damages, injury to ones's fellow, laws of the borrower and lender, laws of purchase and sale and similar to them - like the

matter of the laws that Israel was commanded. And he is killed for them if he steals or abuses or rapes or seduces the daughter of his fellow, or if he burnt his hedge and caused injury with it, and similar to this. And in the category of this commandment is also that they set up judges in each and every city - like Israel. And if they do not do so, they are not killed; as this is a positive commandment. And they only said (Sanhedrin 57a), "Their warning is their death penalty" - and only the prevention of a negative commandment is called a "warning".

ומה יבקש בהם הרב חיוב? וכי אנשי שכס וכל ז' עממין לא עובדי עבודה זרה היו ומגלי עריות ועושי כל תועבות השם היו? והכתוב ציווה עליהם בכמה מקומות (ויקרא י"ח כ"ז) "כי את כל התועבות האלו עשו אנשי הארץ אשר לפניכם ותטמא הארץ". אלא שאין הדבר מסור ליעקב ולבניו לעשות בהם הדין. אבל עניין שכס, כי בני יעקב בעבור שהיו אנשי שכס רשעים, ודמם חשוב להם כמים רצו להינקם מהם בחרב נוקמת והרגו המלך וכל אנשי העיר, כי עבדיו הם וסורים אל משמעתם, ואין הברית אשר נמולו נחשב בעיניהם למאומה, כי היה להחניף לאדוניהם. ויעקב אירר אפם, כי עשו חמס לאנשי העיר, שאמרו להם במעמדו "והיינו לעם אחד" והם (בני שכס) היו בוחרים בהם ובטחו בדיבורם ואולי ישובו אל ה' – והרגו אותם חינם, כי לא הרעו להם כלל.

And [for] what is the teacher seeking their liability [for the death penalty]? Were the men of Shekhem and all of the seven nations not idolaters, sexually immoral and doing all of the abominations to God? And Scripture yells out about them in several places: "whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree" (Deuteronomy 12:2); "you shall not learn to do, etc." (Deuteronomy 18:9); and concerning sexual immorality, "For all those abhorrent things were done, etc." (Leviticus 18:27). But rather [the reason that Yaakov did not want to kill them is that] the matter is not given over to Yaakov and his sons to enforce the law upon them. But the [actual understanding of the] matter of Shekhem is that since they were evildoers and their blood was considered like water about them, the sons of Yaakov (Shimon and Levi) wanted to take vengeance upon them with the vengeful sword, and they killed the king and all of the people of his city, since they were his servants and submitted to his directive. And the covenant that they should be circumcised was not considered anything in their eyes, as it was to flatter their master. But Yaakov said to them about this that they brought him into danger: "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious," and then he cursed their anger, as they did violence to the men of the city. Since [the brothers] said to them in his presence, "and we will dwell among you and become as one nation," and [the men of Shekhem] chose them, and [yet Shimon and Levi] upended their words - and perhaps they would have repented to God. And [if so] they killed them for nothing, as they did not do any evil to them at all. And this is what [Yaakov meant] when he said (Genesis 49:5), "their weapons are tools of violence"

וכן דברי הרמב"ן, פרק י"ט ה':

...יעקב קצף על שמעון ולוי בהרגם אנשי העיר בעבור שעשו חמס, כי הם לא חטאו להם כלל ובאו בברית ונמולו ואולי ישובו אל ה', ויהיו כולם בכלל אנשי בית אברהם ומן הנפש אשר עשו. ועוד חרה לו, שלא יאמרו, כי בעצתו נעשה הדבר ויהיה חילול השם שיעשה הנביא חמס ושוד.

Source 4: R. Yosef Ibn Caspi

אמנם בזה המעשה הנעשה – רצוני הריגת אנשי שכם, שמע דעתי בני, וחי ה' לא אכזב בדברי לשום בה חילוף ממה שהוא בלבי, ואומר, כי אילו היה לשון הסיפור מוכיח, שהיה זה המעשה מעשה מכוער – כענין מכירת האחים ליוסף וכענין שכיבת ראובן עם בלהה, הייתי גוזר שזה נעשה שלא כדין, אך היה רעה גדולה, וכבר ניסו אבותינו לעשות רע בזה ויותר מזה, וגם אלה בעצמם טעו אז באלוהי הנכר שהחזיקו בידם עד שטמנם יעקב אביהם.

אבל לשון הסיפור יביאני לומר, שמה שעשו היה כדין וכראוי להם, וזה, כי כתוב תחילה (ז') "וכן לא ייעשה"; וזה שאנו בו (כלומר: המעשה שאנו עוסקים בו) היה בלי ספק פריעת מוסר ופריעת נימוס אף לבני נח... והעד על זה כי חמור ובנו עם היותם נשיאי הארץ דיברו דבריהם ליעקב ובניו הגרים בתחנונים ובפדיון מוהר ומתן רב מאוד, וגם הבנים אומרים (י"ז) "ולקחנו את בתנו והלכנו".

וכל זה מופת הכרחי מן המוחש שאין ספק בו, כי המעשה הוא (שכיבתו עם דינה) היה חמס מפורסם מצד מנהג ונימוס בני כנען כולם, עד שזו היתה סיבה אחת מן הסיבות אשר הסביבות לא נאספו עליהם...

10. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

י וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה
לֵאמֹר:

11. Pinchas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the kohen 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.

יא. פִּינַחֵס בֶּן אֱלֶעָזָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן
הִכְהֵן הַשִּׁיב אֶת חַמְתִּי מֵעַל
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאוֹ אֶת קִנְאַתִּי
בְּתוֹכֵם וְלֹא כִלִּיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְאַתִּי:

Source 5: Commentary of אור החיים

בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם. דקדק לומר קנאתי, גם אמר בתוכם, בא לתת כח המשיג בו השבת חמה, ואמר שהיתה באמצעות ג' דברים. הא' שקינא בכבודו ובעצמו וסכן בעצמו כאמור בדבריהם, והוא אומרו בקנאו בכינוי. ב' שהיתה הקנאה בשביל כבודי לבד לא לאמצעות שום דבר זולתו, וזו היא מצוה שלימה אשר יתרצה ה' בה יותר מכל אשר יעשה האדם, והוא אומרו את קנאתי בכינוי להמדבר ברוך הוא. ג' שלא היתה הפעולה שעשה נעלמת מעיני אדם אלא קדש ה' בתוך קהל ועדה, כאומרם ז"ל (סנהדרין פב.) שהיו כל שבט שמעון סביב לאהל אשר שם דקר שניהם והרג נשיאיהם בפניהם, והוא אומרו בתוכם:

The three elements of Pinchas' /"jealousy"

1. סיכן בעצמו
2. הקנאה לכבודי בלבד.
3. קידש את ה' בתוך קהל ועדה.

Source 6: Commentary of Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzhal

ב) יעקב לא ראה צורך להוכיח אותם במפורש, משום שפיהם אמר כבר הכל. היינו: לעתים מתנהל ויכוח, בו כל צד מדבר גבוהה על ה"עיקרון הרעיוני העמוק" שבטענתו. לפתע, פולט אחד הצדדים מלה, המסגירה את האמת שמאחרי דבריו ה"נשגבים"... כולם מבינים, שעמדתו אינה אלא שיקול אנוכי צר. וכך אירע גם כאן: ברגע שהאחים אמרו, "הכזונה יעשה את אחותנו" - לא ראה יעקב עוד צורך להגיב... כי אם המניע היה קנאה טהורה להי הפורצת למראה תועבה, מדוע הדגשתם שמדובר ב"אחותנו"? ואם היתה זו סתם נערה?... וכיוון שהודו שהיתה בהם גם נגיעה-אישית שלאחותם נעשה המעשה, לכן קילל יעקב את "אֶפְסִי" שנתנו לו דרור.

Rav Ari Kahn

RUINOUS RAGE

Jacob wants that these two sons, and their descendants, be divided, for when they are united, their rage becomes obsessive and debilitating. (The conspiracy against Joseph was instigated by Shimon and Levi, Rashi Berieshit 49:6). Jacob therefore prays for their division.

Over the years, the descendants of Shimon and Levi take different directions. On a personal level, when Moses sees an Egyptian beating a Jewish slave, he rises up to defend the Jew, killing the Egyptian in the process, acting akin to his ancestor Levi. When the people worship the Golden Calf, Moses calls out:

'Whoever sides with God join me!' And the entire tribe of Levi gathered about. (Exodus 32:25)

Here we see a fanaticism on the part of Levi, but directed toward God, against those who had rebelled. In this instance, Shimon is silent.

Later on in history, other descendants of Levi, the Maccabbes, lead a rebellion against the Greek Empire. We can trace the strain of fanaticism in the tribe of Levi, but we must notice how differently this fanaticism manifests itself in the tribe of Shimon.

Most or all of the 24,000 killed by the plague were from the tribe of Shimon.

We see clearly that the rebellion led by Zimri was not the act of one man. Parshat Balak concludes with the plague that took 24,000 lives. In this week's Torah portion, the results of the census numbers the tribe of Shimon at 22,200 (Numbers 26:14). At the previous census, they numbered 59,300 (Numbers 1:23). We see that the largest negative differential was in the tribe of Shimon; apparently, most or all of the dead were from that tribe. Likewise, Rashi concludes:

From the number of people missing from the tribe compared to the previous counting in the Sinai Desert, it seems that all 24,000 died from the tribe of Shimon. (Rashi 26:13)

We may thus conclude that the act of Zimri was one which had support among the rank and file of his tribe. In other words, this was a rebellion against Moses and God, spearheaded by Zimri but followed by great numbers of the tribe of Shimon.

SHIMON VS. LEVI

A stark and powerful contrast may be drawn. The entire tribe of Levi stands by Moses's side in the aftermath of the Golden Calf, ready to do all for God, while the entire tribe of Shimon stands at the side of Zimri.

When Pinchas took action against the fanaticism of Zimri, there were those who attacked him, calling his behavior unacceptable, "un-Jewish." They claimed that Pinchas must have inherited some foreign traits from his maternal grandfather Jethro.

The Midrash explains that our Torah portion introduces Pinchas as a descendant of Aaron, as if to attribute Pinchas' response to Aaron's behavior, and not to an alien, pagan source. Aaron, too, was from the tribe of Levi.

Perhaps the masses saw Aaron only as a lover of peace, and not as a passionate defender of truth. Aaron was a very sympathetic figure, and the people must have seen Pinchas's behavior as a radical departure from Aaron's. Moreover, the people must have reasoned that if Moses did not respond as Pinchas did, surely Pinchas' behavior must have been off the mark. After all, how could someone be more "religious" than Moses?

On his deathbed, Jacob attacked Shimon and Levi's anger; arguably, there is place for the behavior, but not when it is motivated by anger. So, too, is there an appropriate time and place for action of the sort that Pinchas took.

Jacob warned specifically against the merger of the two problematic tribes. While there may be a place for an individual's extra-legal response, when such action becomes the fusing point of two tribes, the danger of anger for its own sake, and the resultant fanaticism, is too great.

Once divided, the descendants of Levi become the prototypical servants of God, the Kohanim and Leviim, who would between them perform the Temple service.

Shimon, on the other hand, never succeeds in using anger in a positive manner.

Anger is a particularly dangerous trait. The sages compare it to idolatry, for when a person feels anger they lose control and are no longer serving God. Levi was able to control the anger, retaining a single-minded, extreme relationship with God. This complete dedication to the Divine is what allowed them to be Kohanim. At times this intensity of purpose manifested itself in the Temple, and at times it manifested itself on the battlefield, as with the Maccabees. The crucial point is the single-minded dedication to God. This trait, while being the domain of Levi, can be adopted by any Jew.

Maimonides in a celebrated passage, comments:

Not only the tribe of Levi, rather any man of the entire world whose spirit moves him, and causes him to separate and stand in front of God to serve Him and worship Him, in order to know God, and walks along a straight path as God has made him, and he rejects the numerous calculations which occupy most men, this person becomes sanctified -- [he becomes] a Holy of Holies, and God will be his lot, his portion forever and ever ... (Rambam Mishna Torah Laws of Shmita and Yovel 13:12)

Any Jew can become the "Holy of Holies." What is needed is single-minded dedication to God, as was manifested by Pinchas. His love of God required his extreme response. The fanatical behavior of Zimri, which was followed by his tribe of Shimon, had to be stopped.

TO BE HOLY

To be holy one cannot have personal agendas, as Zimri did. Perhaps Zimri deluded himself into believing that he was following the example of his great-grandfather Shimon. Pinchas, on the other hand, stood to gain nothing personally, quite the contrary. His action was ridiculed by the other leaders (Rashi 25:11).

Pinchas was motivated by a profound love of God, which would not give in to public opinion or political expediency. For this reason he was rewarded with the Covenant of Peace. The mandate of the kohanim is to bring peace to the world; sometimes this is accomplished by speaking words of peace, but at other times it is accomplished by force. The reward which Pinchas receives gives us insight into his motivation -- he desperately wanted peace, but the obscenity unfolding before his eyes left him no choice.

We are reminded of Hillel's teaching:

You shall be like the students of Aharon: love peace and pursue peace. (Avot I:12)

Occasionally the pursuit of peace requires an unconventional display of love. The kohanim were imbued with love -- love for God and their fellow man. The anger which Jacob cursed had been replaced by love. Therefore the tribe of Levi excelled.

On the other hand, the tribe of Shimon represented the greatest failure during the years spent in the desert. Witness to this is borne by Moses' final blessings to the tribes at the conclusion of Deuteronomy.

The conceptual and linguistic similarities to Jacob's blessings are numerous, but the most striking difference between the blessings lies in Moses' final words to Shimon and Levi.

To Levi, Moses gave a beautiful blessing:

Let thy Urim and Tumim be with thy pious ones ... (Deut. 33:8)

Levi is now called the "pious ones." Shimon, on the other hand, stands out as the only tribe to receive no blessing, no comment, from Moses -- only silence. And it is a silence which speaks volumes.

This tribe's potential for greatness was not realized. Jacob's clairvoyance called for the separation of the tribes, and, indeed, they were separated, following two different paths to two different destinies.

The conflict of Zimri and Pinchas serves as a microcosm of this larger issue, of two tribes traveling in two different directions, one toward greatness, the other toward infamy.

Long ago, Ya'akov prayed for these two to be separated, in order for each to find their unique path to God. Levi found theirs; Shimon did not. We see in this week's Torah portion that two people, and indeed two tribes, can have the same make-up, the same characteristics, but achieving greatness is less a function of inborn traits than the use we make of those traits.