

**The Sin for Which There is No Teshuvah:  
Thoughts on 911: 20 Year Later  
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Shabbat Shuvah is a day that we celebrate the power of Teshuvah. Next to monotheism, this notion that human beings can win forgiveness from God for their wrongdoings may be Judaism's greatest contribution to the world. It embraces the idea that we are created imperfectly, that we will make mistakes, and by facing ourselves and acknowledging our wrongdoing, and facing God in the process we can move forward in our relationships with one another and with the Kadosh Baruch Hu. There is always a path forward.

From the vantage point of the Rabbis the world itself could not have been created without the possibility of Teshuva and forgiveness. The Rabbis also offer God wide discretion over who is forgiven. In one Midrashic work notes that Cain, the first murderer in the human history according to the Torah was able to win forgiveness from God in an act of Teshuvah. But it does not end there. The Rabbis Claim that Ahab, one of the most despicable people in the Bible was able to win forgiveness of God through Teshuvah as were the people of Nineveh who were destined to the destroy Samaria: The Northern Kingdom of Israel.

While it is a remarkable statement, we did not really need the text of the Pesichta to know just how wide God's parameters for forgiveness are. Afterall, according to our tradition the day of Yom Kippur, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei was the very date that God forgave the Jewish people for the sin of building a Golden Calf, of practicing Idolatry at the foot of Mount Sinai. As a result, over and over again we repeat the attributes of God:

*Noseh Avon va-pesha ve-hatah ve-na-keh: forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and granting pardon.*

So far murder, religious mayhem, the Destruction of the 10 tribes of Israel and Idol worship can all be forgiven by God if true Teshuvah was made. **Is there any crime that God is unwilling to forgive?**

In actuality the answer is yes, and it appears in the 10 commandments.

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוּא: {פ} (7) You shall not swear falsely by<sup>b</sup> the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.

To swear falsely using God's name, is an unredeemable sin. I remember learning this text from the tractate of Yoma in Rabbinical School and wondering how that was possible. Of all of the sins, from murder to mayhem, how is the misuse of God's name the unforgivable sin?

And then came 911

I am sure that if you are old enough to remember that horrible day in 2001 that you can say exactly where you were when you heard the news that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. That those horrific images of the day are seared into all of our memories. The second plane hitting the building, people jumping from windows to escape the fire, the collapse of those structures.

All in the name of the God of Osama Ben Ladin and the followers of Al Queda. If there is a better example of taking God's name in vain than I am not aware of it.

In case this point was lost on anyone, Osama Ben Ladin the mastermind of 911 sent a letter explaining himself. Rereading his manifesto his manifesto of madness and evil years later it is stunning how much of Ben Ladin 's focus was on the destruction of the State of Israel and his hatred of Jews.

*The creation of Israel is a crime which must be erased. Each and every person whose hands have the power must act In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,*

He goes on to attempt to justify 911 by saying that America's support of Israel is one of the reasons to murder nearly 3000 innocent people.

It brings us both laughter and tears to see that you have not yet tired of repeating your fabricated lies that the Jews have a historical right to Palestine, as it was promised to them in the Torah.

In his missive Ben Ladin derides the morality of America while committing an act of pure evil.

"Permission to fight (against disbelievers) is given to those (believers) who are fought against, because they have been wronged and surely, Allah is Able to give them (believers) victory"  
[Quran 22:39]

The conclusion of the letter is call for America to convert to Islam and impose Shariah law and a reminder that quote:

Allah accepts the repentance of whom He wills. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise." [Quran9:13-1]

Perhaps, most remarkably Osama Ben Laden with blood literally dripping from his hands calls for America to make Teshuvah.

Let us state openly that from the Jewish point of view, from the Torah's perspective invoking God to justify violence against the innocent is not

an act of sanctity but of sacrilege. It is a kind of blasphemy. It is to take God's name in vain. Now I think that we understand why the one sin that is unforgivable is to use God's name in vain. It gives license to unimaginable acts of evil and justifies them in the name of God. Is there a greater desecration of the holy name of God?

Looking back over the past 20 years it is remarkable just how much Osama Ben Ladin got wrong. He believed that Muslims around the world would be filled with religious zeal after seeing the Big Satan attacked on its own shores never materialized.

Bin Ladin believed that his act of wanton terrorism would make Americans reconsider its commitment to Israel, but every poll shows overwhelming support for the America's support of Israel

Osama bin Ladin believed that his act of madness in the name of Allah would rally the Arab world to his cause and it never materialized. He was killed in a remote hideout living in fear. What would have shocked Bin Ladin beyond belief was the Abraham Accords. He did not live long enough to see the signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. Since then, Bahrain has joined and Morocco, Oman and the Sudan are entering. People believe it will only be a matter of time before Saudi Arabia will become part of that group. The most powerful statement against the madness of Osama Bin Laden. The Abraham Accords between the sons of Isaac and the sons of Ishmael. Abraham's children are coming together.

One thing that would surely bring joy to Osama Bin Ladin would be to see just how divided we are as Americans today. Americans are in disagreement about our nation's history, about what this nation stands for, what our domestic policy should be, and how we should conduct ourselves in this world. The fact that 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 911 falls on

Shabbat Shuvah for America is in need of the blessing of Teshuvah, and introspection, contrition and forgiveness of one another.

- May we use this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary to honor the memory of 2996 Americans who were murdered.
- May we use this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary to rediscover our points of agreements in this country as opposed to that with which we disagree.
- May we full appreciate the danger of using the name of God to justify evil.
- May we learn to follow the good example of God and try to be more forgiving of one another
- May we remind ourselves that if the sons of Abraham can find a path one another then so can we.