

## Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

### There Is No Such Thing as an “Unforgivable Sin”



One winter day, I received a call from Robert, a Jewish man who had accepted Christianity. He asked if we could meet for lunch and discuss the Jewish perspective of numerous bible passages, which he believed proved that Jesus was the messiah and his “personal savior.”

For several hours we carefully examined these passages. I pointed out that they were either mistranslated or read out of context. At the same

time, we also explored the Jewish understanding of these passages. Robert was shocked that in several instances they had nothing to do with the Jewish messiah.

During subsequent conversations, Robert and I spoke about the spiritual beauty of Judaism and how it is a path to a meaningful life and a personal relationship with God. He agreed that Jewish survival, despite thousands of years of persecution, was miraculous and demonstrates that God did not reject the Jewish people.

Robert expressed his desire to return to his Jewish heritage. However, he told me he was terrified because he had been warned that if he ever rejected Jesus, he would be committing an “*unforgivable sin*” (Mark 3:28) and never get a second chance at salvation.

Hearing the fear in his voice, I patiently explained that the idea of an “unforgivable sin” is not a Jewish belief and is not found anywhere in the Jewish Bible. I also pointed out that some Christian theologians reject the idea of an unforgivable sin and consider it a dogmatic misinterpretation of the New Testament.

**The idea of an “unforgivable sin” is not a Jewish belief.**

Judaism’s perspective on this crucial issue is validated in this week’s Torah portion, *Behaloscha* (Numbers 8:1-12:16), which describes individuals who receive a second chance to connect to God. If, for example, they cannot present a Passover offering due to defilement by ritual impurity, God decreed (Numbers 9:6-11) that they could give their offering one month later, on a holiday known as Pesach Sheni—the second Passover.

Although God desires that we pursue a life of goodness and holiness, we are not expected to be perfect. If perfection were the only option for humanity, God would not have provided the means to repent and rectify our mistakes. This idea is beautifully stated by the prophet Joel, who stated, “*Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate*” (Joel 2:13).

Giving us a second chance is a beautiful demonstration of God's compassion and mercy. We see this in the words of King David when he says, "*God is full of mercy and forgives sin*" (Psalms 78:38). The book of Daniel says God hears our prayers and forgives transgression "*Not because of our righteousness, but because of [His] great compassion*" (Daniel 9:18).

God loves us no matter how severe the transgression, saying, "*Return to Me and I will return to you*" (Zechariah 1:3).

Why would some Christians take such a radical and literal position and promote the idea of an unforgivable sin?

**It appears that the "unforgivable sin" argument may be used as a form of brainwashing.**

Based on Dr. William Sargant's groundbreaking work, *Battle for the Mind*, it appears that the "unforgivable sin" argument may be used as a form of brainwashing to frighten and coerce individuals. The intention is that they will not question or deny fundamentalist Christian beliefs.

The opposite is true of Judaism, which encourages questioning. This is highlighted on Passover when children are encouraged to ask the Four Questions. Moreover, critical thinking is promoted by King Solomon when he says, "*The first to state his case seems right until someone examines him*" (Proverbs 18:17).

Moreover, those Christians who reject the unforgivable sin point out that the New Testament says, "*Examine everything carefully*" (I Thessalonians 5:21) and "*Test the spirits to see whether they are from God*" (I John 4:1).

God gives us many gifts, including a mind with which to make thoughtful and meaningful decisions. Although faith plays an essential role in Judaism, it does not exempt us from thinking, as it says, "*A wise man will hear and increase in learning*" (Proverbs 1:5).

Robert's fears and questions were satisfactorily addressed and he enthusiastically returned to Judaism and the heritage of his ancestors.

This Shabbat is a special opportunity for each of us to contemplate God's compassion and explore and rededicate ourselves to Judaism's moral and spiritual teachings.

Shabbat Shalom,

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