

The Deeds That Are As Bad As Murder

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BH

The sages have a way of saying that something is really, really bad. They say that it is “k’ilu shofeich damim/as if you had shed blood.” Some of the things that make the list might surprise you.

1. Not engaging in procreation. (Remember that for the sages, your student counts as your child.) (B. Yebamot 63b)
2. Not visiting the sick. (B. Nedarim 40a)
3. Not accompanying someone on a journey, at least part of the way. (B. Sotah 46b)
4. Shaming someone in public. (B. Baba Metsia 58b)
5. Putting off distributing daily charity because it’s a fast day. (B. Sanhedrin 35a)
6. Onanism. (B. Niddah 13a)
7. Having sexual intercourse during the second trimester of pregnancy (B. Niddah 31a) (The sages didn’t really understand the whole biological process very well when we compare it with today’s medicine.)
8. And don’t forget that Y. Peah 1:1 said that gossip was worse than murder.

You might wonder what caused me to fetch this list out of my computer. I was going over the passage that deals with visiting the sick. This is not a Toraitic mitzvah so it doesn’t get its own tractate. In fact, it doesn’t get much airtime in the Talmud. However, we do have this notion that it’s very, very important.

Now, in the Bavli, oftentimes, the late editor would have assembled the list, above, and stuck it right into the text. This time, they failed to do it anywhere in the Bavli, so we have the “mystery of the missing list.”

Discussion Questions

1. So how did you do on this list? I have a feeling none of us would be able to get through that list without having done at least one of its items (sigh). If it’s not too embarrassing, can you say which ones you missed?
2. Do you agree with any of the items on the list? For example, not putting piety before the needs of actual people in need?
3. Did you ever receive a visit while you were sick that really did help you in your recovery? If you can tell us that story, please do so.

As always, looking forward to your answers and insights!