

What Sins Will Really Get You in Trouble?

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BH

As we're rounding the bend toward the High Holidays, we should start thinking about what we've done in the last year that we should truly atone for and repent for if possible. Here's what the Babylonian Talmud says regarding various sins:

For the crime of robbery, locusts make invasion and famine is prevalent...

As a punishment for delay of judgment or perversion of judgment, spoiling of judgment and neglect of Torah, sword and spoil increase, pestilence and famine come; people eat and are not satisfied...

For the crime of vain oaths, false oaths, profanation of the Divine name and the desecration of the Sabbath, wild beasts multiply, domestic animals cease, the population decreases and the roads become desolate...

Through the crime of bloodshed the Temple was destroyed and the Shechinah departed from Israel. (B. Shabbat 33a-b)

This is just a small part of a passage that goes on and on about how various sins are punished.

Discussion Questions

1. Well, how much trouble are you in this year? How can you expiate the spiritual crimes you've committed?
2. What can we do about the crimes that have been perpetuated by our society? How can we do atonement for those sins?
3. Do you believe, as the sages do, that sin does cause misfortune? Is it true some of the time? None of the time? All of the time?
4. There are some sins that aren't on this list that we must atone for, as well, such as baseless hatred. Sins like this involve what I'd call "spiritual hygiene", i.e., the developing of habits of righteousness. Habits are powerful: once we establish a habit we tend to keep it up while not doing something is also a habit. Can you develop a habit of keeping your word, not hating others baselessly, working for justice? Would it be easier to develop these habits all at once or work on developing one at a time?

As always, looking forward to your insights!