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With Yom Kippur approaching, what is the greatest sin for which the Jewish community should make atonement?

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

Sins and transgressions are commonly defined as violations of a moral code or set of rules that are established by a deity. These terms are not part of the vocabulary of most secular Jews. Our worldview is non-theistic or, if it includes a God-concept, does not posit a watchful and often punitive deity who is judging our every move. At the same time, it is no less incumbent on secular Jews to contemplate our wrongdoings whether committed personally or collectively as a community.

When we promote an anxiety-driven formula that worries relentlessly about our survival as a people and the ever-present threat of our dissolution, whether by assimilation, intermarriage, waning allegiance to Israel, or moving on past Holocaust-remembrance, we commit a wrong-doing.

When we erect barriers to inclusivity that alienate and shut the door on our own family, whether we push away the young or singles or gays and lesbians or intermarried or those who are at odds with Israel's policies, or those who subscribe to beliefs and practices that are different from our own, we commit a wrong-doing.

And finally, when we focus on sins and not strengths, when we tear down rather than build up, when we chastise and condemn rather than comfort and show compassion, then we commit a wrong-doing. And for all these things we could do much better.

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