



Selichot Sources

for considering the liturgy's "we"
and reflecting on the role of
repentance, prayer, and deeds
in transforming systemic racism.

"But teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah
-- repentance or return, prayer,
and deeds of justice --
transform the harshness of the decree."



Contents:

Introduction

Shema Koleinu -- "Hear Our Voice"

Ki Anu Amekha -- "Because We Are Your People"

Vidui -- "Confessions"

More Resources

Three prayers -- *Shema Koleinu*, *Ki Anu Amekha*, and *Vidui* -- appear together at several points in the *Machzor*. Together these sections reflect on human-divine relationships: what God expects of us; what we expect of God. These sections also present important prompts to consider the size and composition of "**we**" in asking God to "hear **our** voice," in chanting "**We** are Your people, and You are **our** God," and begging for God to "forgive **us**, pardon **us**, and grant **us** atonement."

The following intentions, prayers, and confessionals are offered as aid in our personal and communal high holiday reflections, particularly around racism and social justice. Some pieces here were created by us, a pair of white Jewish members of Hill Havurah; some are borrowed from other Jews doing this work. We, speaking as the authors/collectors of this supplement, know that our perspectives are limited and that these materials are flawed. On behalf of Hill Havurah, we ask your patience and your feedback so that future efforts might be nearer the mark.

SHARE FEEDBACK – additions, corrections, suggestions? antiracismselichotHH@gmail.com

Some of these materials will appear in portions of our public prayers; all can be used at many points in our own reflections. As with any public or private prayer text, you are encouraged to "create your own adventure," following the words on the page or the text of your heart.

-- Rachel Conway and Virginia Spatz, Hill Havurah

These materials prepared with advising from Rachel Faulkner,
National Jews of Color Organizer, Dimensions Educational Consulting

thanks also to Racial Justice group at Temple Sinai and the Jewish Emergent Network

Hill Havurah is located on land that was once home to the Nacotchtank, Anacostan people.

See back cover for more information.



Unless otherwise noted, this publication is presented with Creative Commons License: CC-BY-NC-SA (By attribution; not for commercial re-use; share-alike.) *Selichot Sources: Toward Anti-Racism* by Virginia Avniel Spatz for Hill Havurah, Washington DC, 2020

5780 has been hard. 5781 will bring its own demands.

We've heard "unprecedented" a lot in recent months.

But struggling through one difficult year with more difficulties ahead
is not unusual on this planet.

And it's certainly nothing new for Jews.

Centuries of struggle and grief and anxiety might have led to new year's traditions centering around celebration of survival and sharing fortifying breaths for whatever is to come. And while we have a bit of that, it's telling that Jewish tradition focuses instead on looking inward, to ourselves and our communities, for areas of improvement needed for the new year. Regardless of how dreadful the past year and how dire the circumstances ahead the Jewish new year is less "We made it! Onward!" and more "Where did we fail? How can we do better?"

Meanwhile, the world around us is already asking for a lot of self-examination these days:

We are being asked to re-examine our relationship to space, time, and other people;

We are being asked to re-examine our relationship to basic services, education, & governance;

Some of us are re-examining our relationships to resources, including housing;

Some of us are re-examining our relationships to race, gender, and other identities; and

All are being asked to consider how our various identities give us power and how we use it.

We might be tempted to decide it's all too much or that we cannot spare bandwidth for one more effort.

We might believe that, somehow (to paraphrase words shared below), all of this just "isn't about us."

Besides, if the prayers already cover every sin in the book, so to speak, what more is there to consider?

The *Machzor* includes a gamut of errors: willful sins, unwilling ones, known sins and unrealized ones; our own and those of others in the community. But listing sins is not enough. We are often reminded that atonement for wrongs between humans requires appeasing those wronged (Mishnah Yoma 8:9). So, calls for re-examining so many aspects of our lives can be viewed as an opportunity to identify, and seek to make amends for, some previously unrecognized errors of thought, word, and deed.

Some of us have been spurred to consider issues of race and privilege by the recent national focus on Black Lives Matter, by the disparate effects of Covid-19, and/or by the 1619 Project reframing U.S. history around our legacy of human trafficking. For Black, Indigenous, and People of Color among us, racism and its effects have been part of reality all along. Some of us are just learning to share our pronouns, while some are still waiting for our gender identity to be recognized by those around us.

If our awareness of various kinds of brokenness has recently increased, we can use that new awareness in our individual and communal selichot. The high holiday liturgy reminds us each year that, wherever we are in these self-examination journeys, there is more work to be done, individually and communally. And that a great deal depends on that work....Even in years that have already asked a lot of everyone.

2020 has been hard.

So, undoubtedly, was the year *Untaneh Tokef* (Who By Fire) first appeared (11th Century CE?)

For at least a millennium, the *Machzor* has alternated between reflection and plea:

We let God know of our fears and disappointments.

We beg God's help, calling on the long communal relationship, with our ancestors and with us.

We demand that God hold up Their part of the covenant

-- acknowledging all that is not in human control.

We reflect on our own behavior, and that of the *Machzor's* collective "we," over the past year.

We consider where we went wrong, failing to uphold our part in the covenantal relationship with God.

We commit to change course and undertake repairs as necessary -- to take up responsibility for what is in our control.

Side note

“Unetaneh tokef kedushat hayom

– Let us declare the holiness of day,” is a prayer of uncertain date, sung on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It intones an ominous list of possible deaths and inspired Leonard Cohen (z”l, 1934-2016), to write the song, “Who by Fire,” released in 1974....

“...and who shall I say is calling?”

As a multicultural congregation, Hill Havurah knows that "we" has many meanings, even as we recite or pray in unison. These Selichot Sources ask us to consider carefully, and from various angles, who is meant by "we" at various points in the proceedings and prayers. These selichot pages explore sins related to systems of oppression, with a special focus on anti-black racism:

- We reflect on ways in which many in Hill Havurah and the wider Jewish community participate in, and uphold systems of oppression and racism;
- We acknowledge ways in which some in Hill Havurah and the wider Jewish community are actively harmed by systems of oppression and racism; and
- We stand together -- in the season's alternating reflection and plea -- seeking new awareness and a renewed sense of commitment to change as the new year unfolds.

And we stand together, too, as a community aware that we all come into the new year with personal relationships in need of repair, with injuries to heal, and with many layers to our efforts at return. So many of us are overwhelmed as 5781 begins. However, as Rabbi Tarfon used to say: "It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it" (Avot 2:16).

Beginning with Rosh Hashanah, we meditate on fate and the year ahead:

"who by fire and who by water...who will be strangled and who will be stoned..."

This litany of vulnerability is immediately linked back to the power of our own actions.

With every fate-focused "who by fire," we repeat that three things are in our control:

"But *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, and *tzedakah*

-- repentance or return, prayer, and deeds of justice --

transform the harshness of the decree."

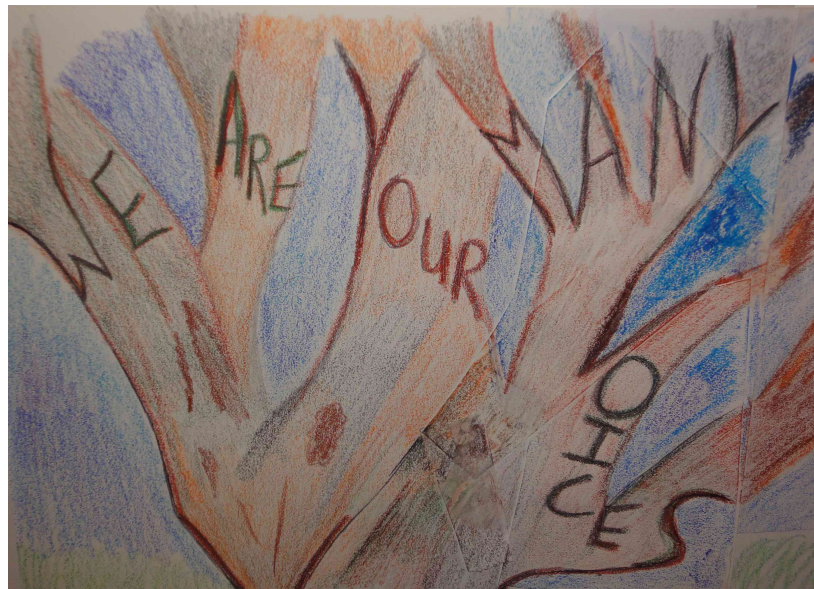
How much more can we transform by heeding the call for re-examination, as individuals and in community, in the work of *teshuvah* (repentance or turning)?

Teshuvah is not easy or quick. Nor is it a once-and-done kind of thing. The on-going nature of the work is evidenced in the commandment to participate annually in a group wake-up call and in the repetition of certain prayers throughout the season. This repetition is a great gift, allowing us to focus on many areas of repentance and repair.

This year, Hill Havurah offers some readings and prayers to help guide us through reflection around racial justice: what more can we help transform through identifying, and seeking to make amends, alone and together, for, previously unrecognized errors of thought, word, and deed?

These materials focus on three prayers which appear together at several points in the *Machzor*. Use them to prepare for the holidays, during Yom Kippur especially, and beyond the holidays, knowing that the work is hard and not quick and that there is always time for turning, time for repair.

"Who by fire and who by water?" We have work to do.



**We are
Your partners
in the world...**

כִּי אֲנִי שְׂתָּפִים בְּעוֹלָם

**...You are
the Source
of all Repair**

וְאַתָּה מְקוֹר הַתְּקוּן

Shema Koleinu -- Hear Our Voice

new verses & some questions

יְהוָה חִקְרָתַנִּי וַתֵּדַע:

O, YHVH, You have examined me and know me (Ps. 139:1)

הַעֲבֵר עֵינַי מִרְאֹת שׁוֹא בְּדַרְכְּךָ חַיִּי:

Avert my eyes from seeing falsehood, by Your way preserve me (Ps. 119:37)

תְּדַעֵנִי אֶרֶח חַיִּים....:

You will teach me the path of life... (Ps. 16:11)

What falsehoods may be contributing to our own errors of thought and action?

What falsehoods prop up racist power structures and internalized oppression?



נְדִי סִפְרָתָהּ אֶתָּה שִׁמָּה דְמָעָתִי בְּנֹאדְךָ הֲלֹא בְּסִפְרָתְךָ

You keep count of my wanderings; put my tears into Your flask, into Your record. (Ps. 56:9)

אֵיךְ נִשְׁיֵר אֶת־שִׁיר־יְהוָה עַל־אֲדָמַת נֹכַר

How can we sing a song of the LORD on alien soil? (Ps. 137:4)

נֵר־לְרוֹגְלִי דְבָרְךָ וְאוֹר לְנִתִּיבֹתַי

Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path. (Ps. 119:105)

What has brought me, or my community, to tears;
what has made me, or us, feel alienated?

שִׁמָּה
דְמָעָתִי
בְּנֹאדְךָ

Images via Pixabay.com -- arrow map: Gordon Johnson; flask: Open Clipart Vectors

***Ki Anu Amekha* – Because We Are Your People**

"*Ki anu amekha*" is a Yom Kippur liturgical poem, elaborating on Song of Songs 2:16:

"My beloved is mine, and I am my beloved's."

The prayer interweaves three themes at the heart of the high holidays:

-- **Celebrating**, even triumphant, in our relationship with God

-- "Because we are ***Your...***" and "You are ***our...***" --

--- **pleading** for help, and

--- and acknowledging our failure and **obligation**.

On its own, asking for pardon **because** of our relationship with God might seem to be celebrating some kind of "in" as God's people, flock, vineyard, beloved...

But reciting *Ki Anu Amekha* between "*Shema Koleinu!*" and the Confessional, emphasizes that tripartite theme of plea-celebration-obligation. In this spot, *Ki Anu Amekha* is aspirational, a meditation on the "we and You" we hope -- or need! -- to become through God's assistance and our own renewed commitment to a better world.

One popular, rousing tune for *Ki Anu Amekha* was originally composed for the joyous festival of Simchat Torah, although it uses these words from the Yom Kippur liturgy, capturing in music that pleading-celebration-obligation theme. The boisterous tune, and its contrast with so much of the other music on Yom Kippur, emphasizes that triumphant, particularistic aspect of the tripartite theme. At the same time, though, the song and its words remind us of our obligation, a communal commitment to ethical conduct. "We are your people," is also a universalist, aspirational vision, reminding us of the bond we have with one another, as fellows in relationship to God -- people for whom God is our joint Sovereign, as sheep for whom God is our shepherd...

Belting out a range of images for God helps us stretch beyond the words and images to the presence of God in our lives, more fully realized the more fully we recognize one another.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-94), "the Lubavitcher Rabbi" or as just "the Rebbe" to followers, was the leader of Chabad-Lubavitch movement for decades.

Schneerson taught one very popular melody for "Ki Anu Amekha," including sections of wordless tune, at Simchat Torah 1956. A similar version sans "ya-da-da" is also common on Yom Kippur.

**A larger, more varied, stronger -- and louder -- "we"
is part of the prayer.**

But how universalist, really, is our vision as we approach God declaring "We are Your people"? This year, let's see how we might expand our thinking and our prayer...

Questions to Ponder:

Ki Anu Amekha

**When we speak of God's people,
whom do we include?**

כי אנו עמך
ואתה אלהינו

Because we are Your people
& You are our God

אנו בנים
ואתה אבינו

We are Your children
& You are our parent

**Do God's children include all
marginalized communities?**

**Do God's servants encompass
a range of physical
and cognitive abilities?**

אנו עבדים
ואתה אדוננו

We are Your servants
& You are our master

אנו קהל
ואתה חלקנו

We are Your congregation
& You are our portion

**Is that congregation
a safe space for Black,
Indigenous, and
People of Color?**

**Does God's heritage include
variety of histories? or just one?**

אנו נחלתך
ואתה גורלנו

We are Your heritage
& You are our destiny

אנו צאנך
ואתה רוענו

We are Your flock
& You are our shepherd

**Does that flock
include all hues?**

**Is the vineyard vast and varied
enough for all to grow
and thrive?**

אנו כרמך
ואתה נוטרנו

We are Your vineyard
& You are our protector

אנו פעלתך
ואתה יוצרנו

We are Your creatures
and You are our Creator

**Do we imagine God's
companions coming from
all walks of life?**

אנו רעיתך
ואתה דתנו

We are Your companions
& You are our beloved.

**When we say that we're God's
treasure, how homogenous
is that delight?**

אנו סגלתך
ואתה אלהינו

We are Your treasure
& You delight in us

אנו עמך
ואתה מלכנו

We are Your nation
& You are our sovereign

**When we speak of
God's people,
whom do we include?**

אנו מאמריך
ואתה מאמירנו

We the Your promised ones
& You are our promised

Expansions to Explore:

"*Ki Anu Amekha*" gives us many images for the human-divine relationship. What other images come to mind?

Because we are Your _____ and You are our _____

Here are some ideas to get you started:

We are Your many voices,
and You are what we sing
We are Your many hues,
and You, sublimity
We are more diverse than we know
and You are the Source of our life
We are Your partners in the world,
and You are the Source of repair

*Ki anu kolotekhe
v'ateh shir shelanu
Ki anu tzivaimkhe
v'ateh nisgavotnu
Ki anu magven yoter;
v'ateh m'kor ha-chayyim*

כִּי אָנוּ שְׂתַפִּיםְךָ בְּעוֹלָם וְאַתָּה מְקוֹר הַחַיִּימוֹן

NOTE: Apologies if images involving sight and sound are less accessible for some of us.

Here are a few amateur drawings intended to spark exploration at any level of artistic expertise...
If you haven't used crayons or colored pencils in a while, consider giving them a try...



Expansive Language:

To further open up our thinking, these few images incorporate non-binary Hebrew in an effort to be more inclusive gender-wise -- and maybe expand our ideas of the divine. See nonbinaryhebrew.com/

For those interested in experimenting with non-binary:

כִּי אֲנִי _____ וְאַתָּה _____

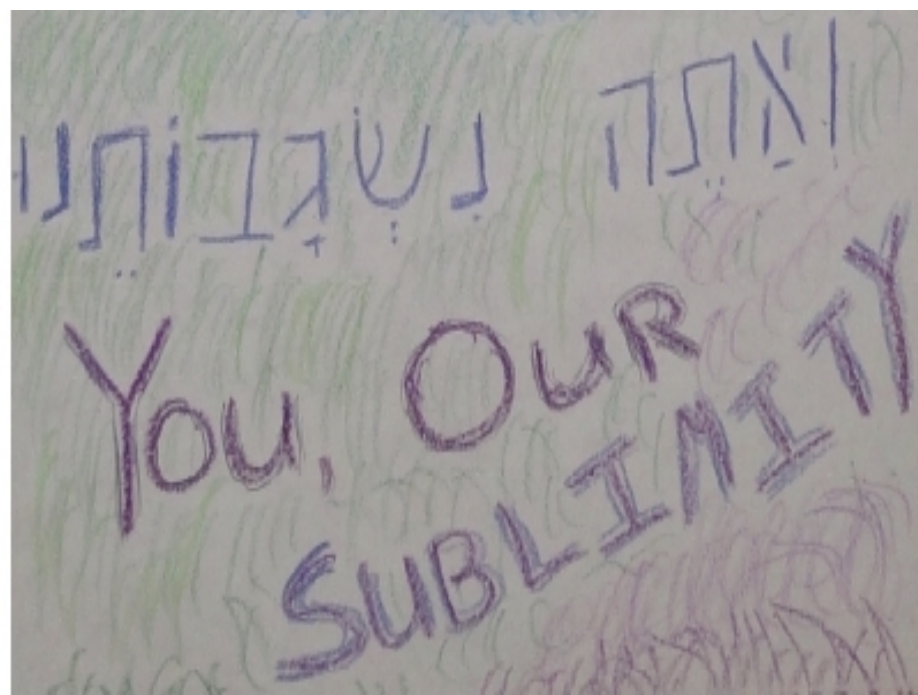
Ki anu ____khe -- using וְ-

"We are Your"

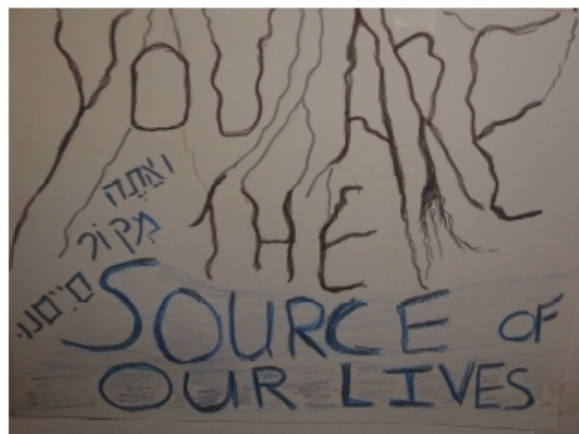
(addressing God
as **non-binary, singular, They**)

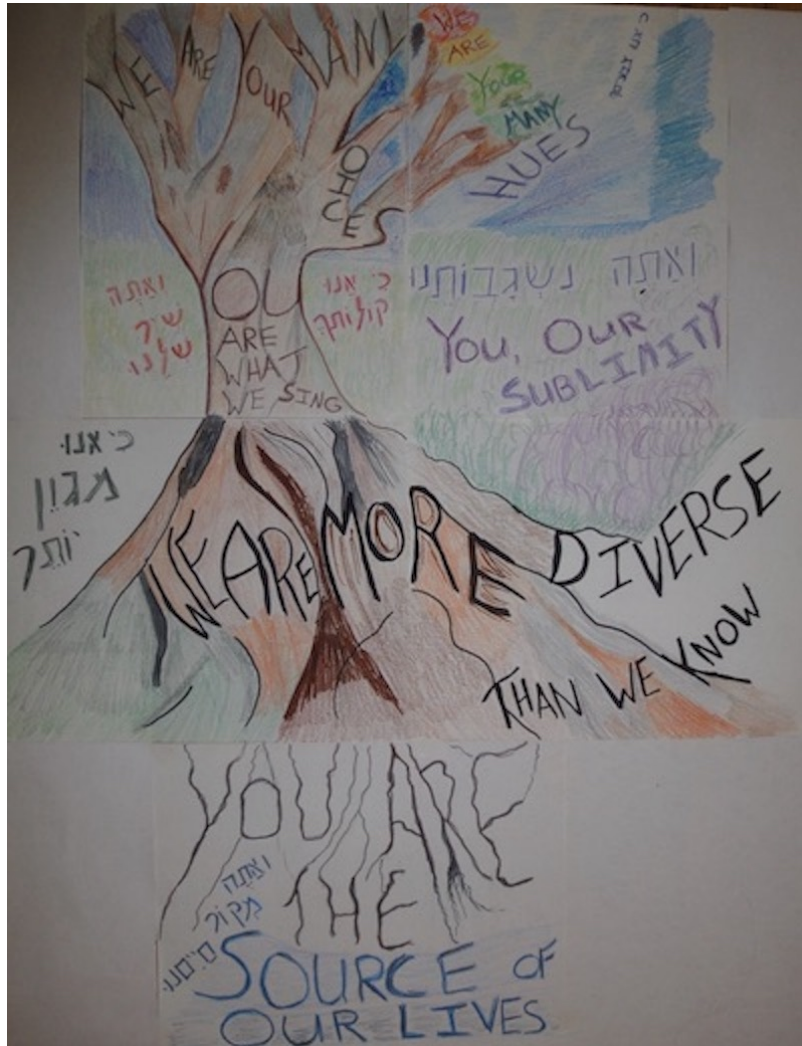
v'ateh -- using אַתָּה-

"You (**non-binary, singular**) are"



Visit the Non-Binary Hebrew Project -- <http://nonbinaryhebrew.com> -- for background, grammar.





How would you fill in the blanks?

Because we are Your _____
and You are our _____.

Vidui – Confessions

The long Confessional presents a list of sins or ways of "missing the mark." The list is repeated ten times in the Yom Kippur liturgy; some Jews also use the list to reflect in preparation for the holidays. As Hill Havurah turns communal energy to addressing racial injustice, all of us are encouraged to use some of our confessional time for reflecting on sins of racism, using the following passages to supplement, or replace, the traditional *Vidui* at some point(s).

The authors of this supplement note again that this material has its limitations. Much of this section in particular addresses white Jews -- as it should be, in many ways -- and we regret being unable to provide more resources from perspectives of Black, Indigenous and Jews of Color. We hope you will share feedback and perhaps add additional or different reflections for the future.

"We," Race, and Confession

The Ashkenazi *Machzor* has long included two lists of sins, both in plural formats:

- The "short confessional" or "*Ashamnu*," is an alphabet list "*Ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu...* [**We** have trespassed, **We** have betrayed, **We** have stolen...]."
- The "long confessional" or "*Al Chet*" is a double acrostic, listing 44 sins in the form "*Al chet shechatanu l'fanecha...* [For the sin **we** have committed before You...]"

That plural "we" is generally explained in several ways:

- reflecting an ancient understanding of Jews as one body, who "collectively own" any errors committed by community members;
- acknowledging that all Jews are responsible, one for the other, and reminding us of the commandment to give and receive *tochecha* [rebuke or admonition];
- emphasizing collective responsibility for societal conditions that result in sin;
- recognizing how our fates are all intertwined.

Daniel Zemel suggests taking a long view of "we":

We need the “we” because change occurs cumulatively over the entire chain of people who constitute the centuries; each Yom Kippur, each of us is part of this historical “we,” the Jewish People that we call our own, and the human family of which the Jewish People is a part.

...Overall growth and change may not happen in our own lifetime; meanwhile, we expose our failing publicly and offer support in our wrestling match with history.

-- "*Al Chet Shechatanu, Collectively We Own Them All*," Daniel G. Zemel, 2012

But what about the sins of racism,
in particular?

“Collectively We Own Them All,” IN *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism*. L. Hoffman, ed. Jewish Lights, 2012.

Zemel is senior rabbi of Temple Micah in DC (Reform). He is Ashkenazi, of European descent.

Any of us might trespass, betray, or steal, but we are not equally susceptible to sins of racism: Some of us are primary targets of systemic racism, still experiencing active harm, while others of us continue to benefit from, and participate in perpetuating, structures that favor us. So, do we "collectively own" sins of racism?

How do we understand responsibilities to give and receive rebuke in regard to sins of racism?

Knowing what a large role race has played in our fates and in our experiences of societal shortcomings, how can multicultural Jewish communities rise together to confess sins of racism?

In the long view, if we recognize that racism weighs disparately on different community members, can we stand together united in "our wrestling match with history"?

At the start of Elul 5780, Yavilah McCoy offered a new version of her 2016 "A Communal 'Al Chet' For the Sins of Racism." In the new introduction, she addresses some of these questions:

As we utilize this prayer, in this time, amidst a global pandemic and a national uprising for racial justice and equity, I am hoping that we can specifically use this prayer to deepen our own and others commitments to fully dismantling racism in every space we navigate.... In my personal observance of this ritual prayer, saying *Al Chet* in plural form welcomes my attention to the fact that in seeking truth, reconciliation and repair in eliminating the sins of racism in Jewish spaces, I stand as one with my people, and my people, and my people, and my people - all of us commonly indicted and commonly responsible for doing what we must, across diverse entry points, to deepen racial equity, grow racial justice and repair the brokenness of our world. --Y. McCoy 2020

“Truth, Reconciliation, and Repair,” by Yavilah McCoy, is adapted from her 2016 “Communal Al Chet for the Sins Racism.” It is part of “Confessions of the Heart-Antiracism in Action,” Jewish Emergent Network.

McCoy is CEO of Dimensions Educational Consulting in Boston. She is an African American Jew of Orthodox background.

Still, how does considering ourselves "commonly indicted and commonly responsible" work in practice? what does it imply about confessing sins that apply mostly, if not wholly, to white Jews? How can we best stand together, as a multiracial, multicultural Jewish community engaging in this "wrestling match with history"?

We – speaking here as Selichot Sources authors/collectors, along with our advisors in- and outside of Hill Havurah -- know that we don't have the answer to these questions, or even a good one. But we also know that we -- audaciously speaking for all who read/pray with these words -- cannot wait for the answer(s) before venturing into some effort to address the sins of racism....

The authors, on behalf of Hill Havurah, invite you to consider these questions as we continue through the season of repentance and beyond, to engage with the questions and with the text here, and to help create a better version of these prayers in the future.

Materials below include

McCoy's *Al Chet* (with full introduction);

two pieces focusing on sins of racism, likely more applicable to white Jews;

and verses from the Reform Machzor that seemed relevant.

Again, all are encouraged to pursue a "choose your own adventure" in confession....

For Failures of Truth/Integrity

-- Selected from *Gates of Repentance*. CCAR 1978, 2015. Chaim Stern, editor --

For failures of truth and integrity, YHVH, we ask forgiveness

For passing judgement without knowledge of facts
and for distorting facts to fit our purposes

For deceiving ourselves and others with half-truths
and for pretending to emotions we do not feel

For using others' bad behavior to excuse our own
and for blaming others for our mistakes and poor decisions

For condemning in younger generations faults we tolerate in ourselves
and for condemning in older generations faults we tolerate in ourselves

For Failures of Justice

-- Selected from *Gates of Repentance*. CCAR 1978, 2015. Chaim Stern, editor --

For failures of justice, YHVH, we ask forgiveness

For accepting poverty and despair and for ignoring the cry of the oppressed

For using violence to maintain our power and for using violence to bring about change

For waging aggressive war and for the sin of appeasing aggressors

-- Selected from *Gates of Repentance*. CCAR 1978, 2015. Chaim Stern, editor --

For the sin of silence,
For the sin of indifference,
For the secret complicity of the neutral,
For the closing of borders,
For the washing of hands

“Failures of Truth” and “Failures of Justice,” from *Mishkan HaNefesh: Machzor for the Days of Awe* © 2015;
under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis
reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

A Vidui For Black Lives Matter

-- adapted from "A Vidui Because Black Lives Matter" by Rabbi Ruth Adar, (Coffee Shop Rabbi)

*For all our sins, may the Holy One who makes forgiveness possible
forgive us, pardon us, and make atonement possible.*

For **Arrogance**, that makes it difficult to see our own failings

For **Brutality**, allowing us to stand by and think, "He must have done something to deserve it"

For **Credulity**, believing unreliable "news" sources

For **Disregarding** facts we find uncomfortable

For **Executing** those whose offenses did not merit their death

For allowing unreasoning **Fear** to dictate our behavior

For **Greed**, underpaying for work or over-charging for services

For baseless **Hatred**, demonizing entire groups of human beings.

May the Holy One forgive us, pardon us,
and make atonement possible.

From R. Adar cont.

For willful **Ignorance**, not wanting to know things that are embarrassing to us

For **Jailing** millions for nonviolent crimes, separating inmates from opportunities and families

For **Killing** the hope of young people who believe their only futures lie in prison or the grave

For **Laziness** in speaking up on racism

For **Minimizing** the pain of others

For **Non-Apologies** that fail to take responsibility for harm we have done

For **Omission**, when we failed to act

For **Presuming** on the basis of skin color

*May the Holy One forgive us, pardon us,
and make atonement possible.*

from R. Adar (cont.)

For **Quiescence** in the face of racist behavior

For **Racism**, in all its myriad forms

For **Self-congratulation** for acts of common decency

For **Taking Offense** when learning that our words or actions were racist in effect, if not in intent

For **Unconscious** acts which have injured others

For **Violence** against other human beings

For using **Words** in ways that perpetuate racism

For **Xenophobia**, fearing and hating those who seem foreign to us

May the Holy One forgive us, pardon us,
and make atonement possible.

For the sin of **Yakking** when we should have been listening
For the sin of **Zoning** out when we assumed this list wasn't about us

For all of the sins of commission and omission,
all the sins we committed consciously and unconsciously,
for those that were simply accidents and those for which we failed to make an apology:

May the Holy One forgive us, pardon us, and make atonement possible.

-- Rabbi Ruth Adar, adapted for Hill Havurah 5780/81

Al Chet for Racial Injustice

As we enter the new year, Hill Havurah is working to reorganize its Tzedek [Justice] and Tikkun Olam [Repair of the World] committees as well as a new Task Force on Racial Justice. As part of an effort to spur reflection on related issues, two of us were asked to create a new piece of liturgy focused on justice, particularly around race and the Black Lives Matter movement. Along with the previous notes this "*Al Chet*" is one of the results.

Note: of the 44 sins in the 1100-year-old acrostic, more than half focus on speech or thought, rather than action. So, in a similar spirit, do many of the statements below.

Al chet shechatanu l'fanecha -- for the sins we have committed,

by believing that what benefits us personally is a universal benefit, without harm to others.

and by believing that whatever doesn't benefit or interest us is unimportant.

by believing that whatever is not a problem for us personally is not in need of attention;

and by believing that what ails us is a universal problem in need of immediate attention.

by expecting Jewish perspectives to be understood in spaces we often avoid and rarely engage;

and by treating Black Lives Matter as optional concerns for Jews and Jewish institutions.

by prioritizing predominantly white Jewish communities' concerns;

and by believing that, even in Black liberation work, white people are entitled to direct.

by taking "good" and "bad" neighborhoods for granted and expecting to live in a "good" one;
and by accepting as givens disparities across Rock Creek Park and the Anacostia River.

by participating in, and benefiting from, the displacement of Black residents and culture;
and by enjoying Black culture without supporting Black individuals and communities.

by failing to notice and respond in the face of daily, mundane bigotry and bias;
and by responding in ways that make us feel good but don't make targeted people safer.

by failing to examine our own explicit and implicit biases;
and by failing to recognize the pain of constant exposure to bias.

V'al kulam Eloha selichot, s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, ka-per lanu:

For all these sins, forgiving God: forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.

Al chet shechatanu l'fanecha -- for the sins we have committed,

by allowing "antisemitic" to be deployed as a weapon in some cases and not in others;
and by allowing antisemitism to go unchecked in the name of coalition or solidarity.

by missing how "we were all immigrants!" erases indigenous and formerly enslaved people;

and by separating immigration, policing, and bigotry toward Black and brown people.

-

by refusing to acknowledge privilege in our health and health care, wealth, and education;
and by accepting narratives that attribute "success" to right choices and hard work.

by opting to protect our families and businesses without regard for those who lack those choices;
and by discounting the struggles of people who don't face the same options that we do.

by relying for safety on systems, including police, courts, and jails, that do not protect us all;
and by critiquing others' participation in systems they are not at liberty to ignore.

by failing to grapple with white supremacist policy in law, economy and other structures;
and by failing to learn and honor the history of resistance and anti-racism.

by equating hurt feelings in political discussion with death, injury, and harassment by the state;
by dismissing the impact of dehumanizing language and images.

V'al kulam Eloha selichot, s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, ka-per lanu:

For all these sins, forgiving God: forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.

Al chet shechatanu l'fanecha -- for the sins we have committed,

by citing involvement in the Civil Rights Movement as a universal commitment among Jews;
and by taking credit for actions of Jews in decades past without acting ourselves today.

by honoring Rabbi A.J. Heschel's image but not his battle with "the evil of indifference."
and by still "lacking a sense of the *monstrosity of inequality*," and the "blasphemy" of racism.

by claiming "my feet were praying," like Heschel did at Selma, without regard to the context;
and by failing to emulate Heschel's pre-Selma activism and relationship with Black leaders.

by limiting our social justice engagement to quoting Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.;
and by quoting King but not addressing the "triple evils of poverty, racism, and militarism."

by treating King's particular approach to public protest as the only acceptable method;
and by confusing permitted, police-protected marches with confronting police, then or now.

by equating white protesters' voluntary risk with systemic threats to Black and brown people;
and by dividing protesters into "good" and "bad" based on their treatment of property.

by thinking we're already "progressive" or "woke" enough to deserve a break;
and by thinking we have the answers and can somehow fix it all.

V'al kulam Eloha selichot, s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, ka-per lanu:

For all these sins, forgiving God: forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.

Forgive us, too, and pardon us and grant us atonement, *al chet shechatanu l'fanecha* -- **for the sins we have committed,**

by asking a Jew about conversion or expecting everyone to share in "Jewish geography";
and by indulging in the urge to categorize and in curiosity where it was not invited.

by using "Jew" to mean "white Ashkenazi Jew of European descent (resembling Mel Brooks)";
and by treating Sammy Davis Jr. as a punchline and Tiffany Haddish and Drake as "variety."

by centering, and re-centering, ourselves and what we find comfortable as "standard Judaism,"
and by failing to learn and celebrate and support the vastness of our true community.

V'al kulam Eloha selichot, s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, ka-per lanu:

For all these sins, forgiving God: forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.

Truth, Reconciliation and Repair: A Prayer for the Elimination of the Sins of Racism

-----Yavilah McCoy-----

The following adaptation of the *Al Chet* prayer was created to support us in rooting our ongoing and developing racial justice practice within the transformative High Holiday practices of seeking atonement, valuing human dignity, engaging in healing and deepening interconnected-ness. The confessional nature of the *Al Chet* prayer is utilized to point our attention to the spoken and unspoken truths that we live out together each day as the ongoing conditions of racism persist in our systems and in our lives. It was composed to cause us to ask:

--- What leadership, humility, discernment, and reflection will we need to engage this period of atonement by centering the most targeted and most vulnerable among us as we speak truth and seek forgiveness?

--- What role will our historical privilege and oppression play as we consider the many among us who will arrive at this day wounded, displaced and in need of healing?

--- How will our journey this selichot season strengthen us to give up playing small in our fear and enable us to reach boldly for a new year and a new future devoid of hate, unriddled by shame and filled with the audacity of our hope?

Truth, Reconciliation and Repair:
A Prayer for the Elimination of the Sins of Racism (Cont.)

As we utilize this prayer, in this time, amidst a global pandemic and a national uprising for racial justice and equity, I am hoping that we can specifically use this prayer to deepen our own and others commitments to fully dismantling racism in every space we navigate.

In my personal observance of this ritual prayer, saying *Al Chet* in plural form welcomes my attention to the fact that in seeking truth, reconciliation and repair in eliminating the sins of racism in Jewish spaces, I stand as one with my people, and my people, and my people, and my people - all of us commonly indicted and commonly responsible for doing what we must, across diverse entry points, to deepen racial equity, grow racial justice and repair the brokenness of our world. Won't you join me in saying it together?" -Yavilah McCoy

Y. McCoy (cont.)

In 2020, I'm saying *Al Chet*

For the sins of silence.

For the sins of using the “I” voice of individualism when a “We” born of collective accountability was called for.

For the sins of using “We” toward erasure of others and the elevation of a single narrative.

For the sins of failing to acknowledge our own and other's Power.

For the sins of acknowledging Power that is misused and misplaced.

For the sins of judging others favorably and unfavorably without gaining proximity to their lived experience.

Y. McCoy (cont.)

I am saying *Al Chet*

For the sins we have committed through conscious and unconscious racial bias.
For the sins we have committed through hardening our hearts to the need for change.

For the sins of colluding with racism both openly and secretly.

For the sins we have committed through uttering racist words.

For the sins we have committed through acts of racial micro-aggression.

For the sins we have committed through insisting on urgency and perfectionism as a measure of human value.

Y. McCoy (cont.)

I am saying *Al Chet*

For the sins we have committed through the denial of the *tzelem elokim* (the divine spark) within Black bodies.

For the sins we have committed through segregating Black bodies from participation and leadership within our institutions.

For the sins we have committed in deceiving others by not teaching our children the worth, value and contributions of Black people.

For the sins we have committed in not honoring and protecting the journeys of Black elders and Black children.

Y. McCoy (cont.)

For the sins we have committed in not caring for the ways that race and class intersect in our efforts to deepen community with Black people in Jewish spaces.

For the sins we have committed through turning Black bodies into objects of lust and sexual gratification.

For the sins we have committed through confessing our commitments to ending racism insincerely.

For the sins we have committed that desecrate the divine name by allowing White Supremacy habits to shape/determine our practice of Judaism.

For all these, we seek pardon, forgiveness and atonement

Y. McCoy (cont.)

For the sins of racism that we have committed knowingly and unknowingly that continue to do damage to our siblings, children, families and community.

For the sins of racism we have committed through creating hierarchies of value between our siblings from Europe and those from the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

For the sins of racism we have committed through engaging in foolish racial talk and gossip in our places of worship.

For the sins of racism we have committed through haughty demeanor and proud looks.

For the sins of racism we have committed through the glances of our eyes.

For the sins of racism we have committed through passing judgement.

For the sins of racism that we have committed through baseless hatred.

Y. McCoy (cont.)

For the sins of racism that we have committed through turning a blind-eye to pain and suffering around us.

For the sins of racism that we have committed by not seeing racism as an evil among us.

For the sins of racism that we have committed by not committing to end it.

For all these, we seek pardon, forgiveness, and atonement

**May all of us be written and inscribed in the Book of Life.
May joy and blessing follow our reflection, our atonement and our
commitments to living
truth, reconciliation and repair in our time.**

-- Yavilah McCoy, Jewish Emergent Network, 2020. Used with Permission.

We work and pray for an end to systemic racism, soon and in our day.
Meanwhile, Hill Havurah welcomes ideas for anti-racist learning and action,
within the congregation and beyond. Visit HillHavurah.org for some ways to connect.

Here are a few more organizations to follow for Jewish anti-racism work:

Organizations of Jews of Color – national or regional

Ammud: JOC Torah Academy -- <https://www.ammud.org/>

Bechol Lashon -- <https://globaljews.org/>

Edot HaMidwest: Midwest Regional Jewish Diversity Collaborative -- <https://edotmidwest.org/>

Jews in ALL Hues -- <https://upstartlab.org/innovator/jews-in-all-hues/>

Jews of Color Field Building Initiative -- <https://jewsofcolorinitiative.org/>

Jewish Multiracial Network -- <https://www.jewishmultiracialnetwork.org/>

A few more (of many) Jewish organizations working on anti-racism

Jewish Emergent Network -- <http://www.jewishemergentnetwork.org/>

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice -- <http://jfrej.org>

Jews United for Justice-Baltimore -- <https://jufj.org/where-we-work/baltimore-md/>

Multiracial Sinai Committee, Temple Sinai (DC) -- <https://templesinaidc.org/multiracial-sinai/>

Tikkun Olam/Social Action Team, Adas Israel (DC) -- <https://www.adasisrael.org/socialaction>

Uri L'Tzedek -- <http://utzedek.org/>

Hill Havurah recognizes Anacostan Land

The land on which Hill Havurah is situated was once home to the Nacotchtank, or Anacostan, people. Anacostans were an Algonquian-speaking people with several thriving villages here before Europeans arrived.

Beginning with the arrival of John Smith and first contact with the 17th Century English colonizers, indigenous tribes of the Chesapeake Bay area were carefully mapped. Within forty years, existing indigenous townships and cultures had been crippled by war and the introduction of new diseases. Remaining Anacostans were forcibly removed and lost their original identity. Some moved farther north; others were adopted by Piscataway people in what is now Maryland.

After a long struggle, Maryland recognized all three Piscataway tribes in the state. These tribes are still not recognized by the U.S. government.

SOURCES: native-land.ca, National Park Service, & Friends Committee on Nat'l Legislation (FCNL)

Closing words of FCNL's land acknowledgement:

*Let us be aware
that we occupy
Nacotchtank-Anacostan homeland,
that their presence
is imbued in this land,
these rivers,
islands,
and
coastal
plains."*

Map Source: anacostiaws.org



ANACOSTIA
WATERSHED
SOCIETY

To find other Native lands:

Text a zip code or location [City, ST – include comma]

to Canadian non-profit Native Land at (907) 312-5085;

their bot responds with names of the Native lands corresponding to that region.

Note to security conscious: this app does not store phone numbers/locations.

Hill Havurah, Washington DC

5780/81 – 2020

HillHavurah.org