

# Truth, Reconciliation and Repair: A Prayer for the Elimination of the Sins of Racism “Al Chet” By 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 interconnectedness. 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 to Yom Kippur 2020 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?

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?

*The “Al Chet” confession of sins is traditionally said ten times in the course of the Yom Kippur services: following the Amidah of the afternoon prayers of the day before Yom Kippur; just before sunset on Yom Kippur Eve; and twice during each of the following services—the evening service of Yom Kippur eve, and the morning service, the Mussaf service and the afternoon service of Yom Kippur day—once at the end of the Silent Amidah, and once during the cantor’s repetition of the Amidah.*

LAB / SHUL



### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

For the sins we have committed in commoditizing Black people and Black bodies in our business dealings.

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**

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 judgment.

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

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...