

Truth, Reconciliation and Repair in Engaging Racism

“Al Chet” By Yavilah McCoy

As we prepare for Yom Kippur 2017-18 – 5779, I resubmit the following list of Al Chet to point my own and my other Jewish siblings’ attention to what our **ongoing** commitment to the eradication of racism must look like in Jewish spaces as our community engages this transformative time and avoids “*Tovel V’sheretz BiYado*,” an immersion in the *mikvah* of the month of Elul while still holding an unclean object in our hands...

We stand today in times that would try any caring human’s heart and soul. Attacks made daily on rights, freedoms and legislative policies set up to protect the most vulnerable among us. The looming threat of neo-fascism overreaching democracy in the US and Europe, the rise of hatred and global terror, perils to our natural resources and environment- some say that the world has not faced this level of crisis borne of destabilization and change since 1945 and WWII.

What will it take for us to turn these dark times from tomb to womb? What leadership, humility, discernment, and reflection will we need to engage this Yom Kippur in order to center our attention on the most targeted and most vulnerable among us as we speak truth and seek forgiveness? What role will our privilege play in our reflection as we consider the many among us who arrive at this day needy and displaced? How will this Yom Kippur 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 and filled with the audacity of hope?

The “*Al Chet*” confession of sins is 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 *Musaf* 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.

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, I stand as one with my people, and my people, and my people- all of us commonly indicted and commonly responsible for doing what we must to repair the brokenness of our world.

In 2017-18 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 the denial of the *tzelem elokim* (the divine spark) within Black bodies

For the sins we have committed through segregating Jewish souls in 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 and value of Black people in Jewish space.

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

For the sins we have committed in exploiting 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 effort to welcome Black people in Jewish space.

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 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 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.

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...