

SELICHOT PRAYERS FOR YOM KIPPUR

Everett Fox

SESSION SUMMARY

In this workshop, participants examined the traditions of asking for forgiveness on *Yom Kippur*. They looked at the prayer texts that deal with acknowledging our shortcomings and talked about how to approach this subject with children and teens.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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These prayers, which are said five times on Yom Kippur, teach us how to think about and ask for forgiveness for what we've done wrong.

We start out with the idea that God is patient, and ask for help, since we're like "a small driven leaf."

I *Darkekha Eloheinu* (written in the 6th century C. E. by Yose ben Yose)

Your path, O God, is patience with the wicked

As well as with the good;

And that is Your praise.

For Your sake, not ours, help us.

We stand before You wretched and worthless.

Leave room for the small driven leaf,

Have compassion on ashes and earth.

Cast away our sins, show us favor.

You see that we have no earthly advocate,

So act toward us with mercy.

When we approach God on Yom Kippur, we use an important moment from the Bible. In the story of the Golden Calf, the people have worshipped other gods and forgotten who they really are. Moses asks God to reassure them that he is still with them, and in the first three lines, he tells them about who he is.

II God is compassionate, acting with lovingkindness, forgiving the transgression of mortals. You taught us that Your attributes are many. You revealed to us on Sinai that You have multiple dimensions--layers upon layers, and that understanding this brings us closer to understanding our place in the universe.

♪ *Adonai, Adonai, El rahum ve-hannun*

erekh appayim, ve-rav hesed ve-emet,

notzer hesed la-alafim, nosei avon va-fesha ve-hatta'a ve-nakei.

Selah lanu, avinu, ki hatanu,

mehal lanu, malkeinu, ki fasha'nu,

ki atta Adonai tov ve-sallah

ve-rav hesed le-khol kor'ekha.

III God, God, who is gracious and compassionate:

he takes a long time to get angry, and has a lot of kindness and loyalty;

he is loyal for a thousand generations, and bears with us when we do wrong.

Forgive us, our Parent, for we have sinned;

pardon us, our Ruler, for we have transgressed.

For You, O Lord, are generous and forgiving;

great is Your love for all who call to You.

This next prayer is about being heard and asking for help. We ask God not to turn away from us when we are in need.

IV SHEMA KOLEINU

Shema Koleinu, Adonai Eloheinu

hus ve-rahem aleinu

ve-kabbel be-rahamim, u-ve-ratzon et t'fillateinu.

**Hashiveinu Adonai eilekha ve-nashuva, be-nashuva
hadesh yameinu ke-kedem.**

**(8) Hear our voice, O God, pity us, save us,
Accept our prayer with compassion and kindness.**

Help us return to You, and we shall return;

Renew our lives as when we were young.

Cast us not away from Your presence,

Take not Your holy spirit from us.

Cast us not away when we are old,

When our strength is gone, do not abandon us.

Do not abandon us, O God, do not be far from us.

Show us a sign of favor, in spite of our foes,

For You are our help and our comfort.

Hear our words, O God, and consider our inmost thoughts.

May the words of our mouth and the musings of our heart

Be acceptable to You, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer.

For You we wait; You, O God, will answer. [trans. Jules Harlow]

This prayer is sung with a lively melody, expressing that we're happy that God is not just a judge or a king but somebody with whom we have a loving relationship.

**V Our God and God of our fathers and mothers, forgive us, pardon us, and grant us
atonement.**

♪ *Ki anu amekha, ve-atta Eloheinu / Anu vanekha, ve-atta avinu*

Anu nahalatekha, ve-atta Goraleinu / Anu Tzonekha, ve-atta ro'einu,

Anu kharmekha, ve-atta not'reinu / Anu fe'ulatekha, ve-atta yotz'reinu,

Anu ra'yatekha, ve-atta dodeinu / Anu segulotekha, ve-atta k'roveinu,

We are your people, and you our God / We are your children, and you our Loving One.

We are your possession and you our Destiny / We are your flock, and you our Shepherd.

We are your vineyard, and you our Guardian / We are your creation and you our Creator.

We are your loved ones, and you our Beloved / We are your treasure and you our Protector.

VI You know the mysteries of the universe, the secrets of everyone alive. You probe our innermost depths. You examine our thoughts and desires. Nothing escapes You, nothing is hidden from You.

*May it therefore be Your will, Lord our God and God of our fathers
and mothers, to forgive us all our sins, to pardon us all our iniquities, to grant
us atonement for all our transgressions.*

*Blessed are You, Ruler over all the earth, who makes holy Israel and the Day of
Atonement.*

This prayer is a confession—a list of things we've done wrong that goes according to the alphabet (acrostic). On this page there's an alphabetical translation, and on the next page, it's literal. Why do you think that it goes alphabetically?

**VII *Ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu, dibarnu dofi,
he'evenu, ve'heershanu, zadnu, hamasnu, tafalnu shaker.
Ya'atznu ra, kizavnu, latznu, maradnu, ni'atznu, sararnu, aveenu, pashanu,
keesheenu oref.
Rashanu, sheehatnu, tee'avnu, ta'eenu, teetanu.***

**Together: Who are we? we're light and truth
infinite wisdom, eternal goodness.
Yet we've Abused, we've Betrayed,
we've been Cruel, we've Destroyed.
We've Embittered, we have Falsified,
we have Gossiped, yes, we have Hated.**

**Our real being is light and truth,
infinite wisdom, eternal goodness.
Yet we've Insulted, we have Jeered,
we have Killed, yes, we have Lied.
we have Mocked, we've Neglected,
we've Oppressed, we have Perverted.**

**At our core we're light and truth
and infinite wisdom, eternal goodness.
yet we have Quarreled, we've Rebelled,
we have Stolen, yes, we've Transgressed.
We've been Unkind, we've been Violent,
we've been Wicked, we've been Xenophobic.** [Rabbi Burt Jacobson]

Here is a literal, non-alphabetical translation:

**We're guilty, we've betrayed, we've committed robbery, we've spoken falsehoods;
We've done perversely, we've done wickedly, we've done intentional wrong, we've
been violent, we've slandered with lies.
We've lied, we've scorned, we've rebelled, we've mocked, we've turned our backs,
we've committed iniquity, we've transgressed, we've oppressed, we've been
stubborn.
We've destroyed, we've acted abominably, we've strayed, we've led others astray.**

**VIII Leader: May I use God's gifts only for the glory of God's name and creation. May
this day lead me to reconciliation with myself, with those whom I have hurt
and offended, and with the God of mercy.**

Now comes the "big" confession, which is also alphabetical in the Hebrew. There are many different translations which add things we think about today, but the original one is like what we have here: it deals with all different parts of the body and how we often go in the wrong direction with them.

The word "sin" is not the best translation here; the Hebrew word (*chet*) really means "to miss the target." When we do the wrong thing, we've gone off the path, gone astray, and we hope to get back on the right road.

**For the sin we have sinned against You by the hardening of the *heart*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by the utterance of the *lips*;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by the uncovering of *nakedness*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by the speaking of the *mouth*;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by the reflection of the *mind*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by the over-strengthening of the *arm*;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by the defilement of the *mouth*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by the condescension of the *eyes*;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by the *inner impulse* to do evil,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by the confession of the *mouth*.**

Ve-al kullam, Eloha selihot, selah lanu, mehal lanu, kapper lanu. [2x]

And for all these things, O God who forgives, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!

**For the sin we have sinned against You by an evil *tongue*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by stretching out the *neck* [in pride];**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by the conversation of the *lips*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by a wandering *eye*;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by the foolishness of the *mouth*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by *legs* running to do evil;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by being *brainless*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by being *stiff-necked*;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by the confusion of the *mind*,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by narrowing the *eye* [in envy].**

Ve-al kullam, Eloha selihot, selah lanu, mehal lanu, kapper lanu. [2x]

And for all these things, O God who forgives, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!

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**For the sin we have sinned against You by not taking care of our world,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by not spending time with parents
and children;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by not doing more to protect children from
abuse,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by accepting that war is part of
human nature;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by not pursuing learning in our adult lives,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by not adequately taking care of our
bodies;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by not nurturing our souls,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by not changing society through the
political process;**

**For the sin we have sinned against You by not fighting hard to eradicate poverty,
and for the sin we have sinned against You by not taking time to do kind deeds.**

[source unknown]

Ve-al kullam, Eloha selihot, selah lanu, mehal lanu, kapper lanu. [2x]

And for all these things, O God who forgives, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!

Some people add paragraphs like these, to focus more on the good things we've done:

IX For the good that we have done by softening our hearts,

And for the good that we have done with kind and comforting words.

For the good that we have done by bringing pleasure to our life partner,

And for the good that we have done by offering sincere advice.

For the good that we have done by dreaming of a better world,

And for the good that we have done by not using our power or position to harm anyone.

For the good that we have done by speaking the truth,

And for the good that we have done by giving someone a kind look.

For the good that we have done by acting on the impulse to do what is right,

And for the good that we have done by protecting our environment. [source unknown]

Ve-al kullam, Eloha selihot, selah lanu, mehal lanu, kapper lanu. [2x]

And for all these things, O God who forgives, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!