

## A Communal “Al Chet” For the Sins of Racism

By Yavilah McCoy, 2016

It’s been a rough year for hearts and souls that dared to choose to love human dignity, justice and morality over greed, aggressive self-preservation, and avoidance of contact, mentally, emotionally, or physically, with the pain, suffering and death that have proliferated among the human family surrounding us.

I am awake this year to the particulars of what it has meant for me to travel as a Jewish soul in a black body and traverse the people, practices and culture that constitute Orthodoxy and the particular commitments that I was raised with around observance of the Torah and its *mitzvot*.... I wrote the following list of Al Chet to point my own and others’ attention to what the eradication of racism needs to look like in both Orthodox and broader liberal Jewish spaces, for our community to truly engage this transformative time and avoid “*Tovel v’sheretz biyado*,” an immersion in the *mikvah* of the month of Elul while still holding an unclean object in our hands...

In my observance of this ritual prayer, saying Al Chet in plural form welcomes my attention to the fact that in seeking truth and reconciliation for what has happened between us and our neighbors, we stand as one people commonly indicted and commonly responsible for doing what we must to repair ourselves and the brokenness that occurs in our world when any of our sins against humanity have not been rectified and eradicated.

So this year 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 elohim* (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.

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

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 and determine our practice of Judaism.

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***