

Prayers: For Our Sins as Individuals and as a Society

A Contemporary Version of the Al Kheyit Prayers for Yom Kippur and Year Round! And Not Just for Jews!

By [Michael Lerner](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Religion](#)

Global Research, September 17, 2018

These Prayers by Rabbi Michael Lerner constitute a powerful and far-reaching humanitarian message, coupled with an accurate and incisive analysis of the unfolding global crisis.

What Rabbi Lerner puts forth is an understanding of the World we live in.

The prayers call upon people across the land nationally and internationally to act in solidarity with one another, to reverse the tide of war, human suffering and environmental collapse, to take a stance as individuals and communities against social inequality, racism and xenophobia:

“For the sin of believing “homeland security” can be achieved through military, political, diplomatic, cultural, or economic domination of the world rather than through a strategy of generosity and caring for the people of the world?”

And for the sin of seeing every use of violence as “terrorism” except American use of violence in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Korea, Vietnam, and the violence we used to achieve our ends around the world and in the US;

...by allowing a global capitalist system and its media to uproot traditional societies and impose the values of the capitalist market system, fostering materialism and selfishness around the world, supporting dictatorships that would give American corporations freedom to exploit the resources of other countries...

The prayers are in many regards a call to social struggle and political activism.

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, September 17, 2018

(Emphasis added)

We take collective responsibility for our own lives and for the activities of the community and society of which we are a part. We affirm our fundamental interdependence and interconnectedness. We have allowed others to be victims, subject to incredible suffering; we have turned our backs on others and their well-being—today we acknowledge that this world is co-created by all of us, and so we atone for all of its miseries and injustices. In our atonement process, we do not seek to blame others for what they have done wrong, though there are many who do wrong—our task is to focus on ourselves and our personal lives, and on our own religious, ethnic, and national communities in which we live and for which we have special responsibility.

While the struggle to change ourselves and our world may be long and painful, it is our own struggle; no one else can do it for us. To the extent that we have failed to do all that we could to make ourselves and our community all that we ought to be, we ask each other for forgiveness—and we now commit ourselves to transformation this coming year, as we seek to get back on the path to our highest possible selves.

For the Sins:

Sing together:

Ve'al kulam Elo-high seh'lee-chot, seh'lach lanu, meh'chal lanu, ka'peyr lanu

For all these ways we have missed the mark, we ask the spiritual reality of the universe to forgive, us pardon us, accept our atonement!

For the sins we have committed before you and in our communities by being so preoccupied with ourselves that we ignored the larger problems of the world;

And for the sins we have committed by being so directed toward outward realities that we have ignored our spiritual development;

For the sins of allowing our government to put terror into the lives of undocumented workers and refugees rather than to open our borders and our hearts to those fleeing oppression and extreme poverty elsewhere;

And for the sins of dismantling environmental regulations that sought to restrain corporations or individuals from doing more damage to an already endangered planetary life support system;

For the sins of allowing our government to weaken the capacity of working people to obtain reasonable pay and benefits at work;

And for the sins of not spending more time and energy in defeating elected officials who support racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, Islamophobic, xenophobic, age-ist, and/or anti-Semitic policies and who contribute to the emergence of violence and hatred in our society;

For the sins committed by allowing a global capitalist system and its media to uproot traditional societies and impose the values of the capitalist market system, fostering materialism and selfishness around the world, supporting dictatorships that would give American corporations freedom to exploit the resources of other countries, dump waste materials, in the process impoverishing or maintaining in poverty many societies, and then being outraged when people responded with violence or by embracing reactionary forms of religion or nationalism as a way of retaining a sense of community against the extreme individualism that the marketplace fostered and the Western media preached as the highest form of psychological and intellectual development;

And for the sin of seeing every use of violence as "terrorism" except American use of violence in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Korea, Vietnam, and the violence we used to achieve our ends around the world and in the US;

For failing to prosecute those in our government who enabled the torture of prisoners

around the world and in American detention centers in the Obama years, and who denied them habeas corpus and other fundamental human rights—and for then “being surprised” when torture and other forms of abuse threatened to again become officially allowable in the Trump years;

And for the sin of not demanding that our elected representatives provide affordable health care and prescription drug coverage for everyone in the Obama years, and then “being surprised” when people lost faith in Obamacare as insurance companies raised the prices of health insurance and pharmaceutical companies priced medications beyond what many could afford to pay;

Sing together:

Ve'al kulam Elo-high seh'lee-chot, seh'lach lanu, meh'chal lanu, ka'peyr lanu

For all these ways we have missed the mark, we ask the spiritual reality of the universe to forgive, us pardon us, accept our atonement!

For the sin of not demanding dramatic changes that are needed to save the planet and lessen the power of big money to shape our democratic process, so that it no longer primarily serves the interests of the corporations and the wealthy, and the sin of watching passively as the Trump Administration dismantles the most important environmental and social justice protections initiated in the past 80 years;

And for the sin of dismissing the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the US Constitution (ESRA) as “unrealistic” while embracing lesser struggles for constitutional amendments far less likely to make a dent in the power of the 1 percent or to significantly restrain the ethical and environmental arrogance of the large corporations;

For the sin of those of us in the West hoarding the world's wealth and not sharing with the 2.5 billion people who live on less than two dollars a day;

And for the sin of supporting, through consumption and complicity, forms of globalization that are destructive to nature and to the economic well-being of the powerless;

For the sins of all who became so concerned with “making it” and becoming rich that they pursued banking and investment policies that were destructive not only to their investors but to the entire society;

And for the sins of blaming all Muslims for the extremism of a few and ignoring the extremism and violence emanating from our own society, which continues to use drones to kill people suspected of being involved in supporting terrorism;

For the sin of being cynical about the possibility of building a world based on love;

And for the sin of dulling our outrage at the continuation of poverty, oppression, and violence in this world;

For the sin of believing “homeland security” can be achieved through military, political, diplomatic, cultural, or economic domination of the world rather than through a strategy of generosity and caring for the people of the world (e.g. in creating a Global Marshall Plan to

once and for all eliminate global and domestic poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate health care, and inadequate education);

And for the sin of believing that we can get money out of politics as long as corporations have the right to move their investments abroad to any place where they can find cheap labor or lax environmental laws, the threat of which is sufficient to have them get their way in American politics;

For the sin of not being vigilant stewards of the planet and instead allowing the water resources of the world to be bought up by private companies for private profit, energy companies to pollute the air, water, and ground, and allowing endless consumption to waste the earth's scarce resources and contribute to the rapidly increasing climate change;

And for the sin of allowing military spending and tax cuts for the rich to undermine our society's capacity to take care of the poor, the powerless, the young, and the aging, both in the US and around the world;

For the sin of not doing enough to challenge racist, sexist, and homophobic institutions and practices;

And for the sin of turning our backs on the world's refugees and on the homeless in our own society, allowing them to be demeaned, assaulted, and persecuted, and in 2018 the sin of our country separating children of refugees from their parents and putting them into horrific cages while treating their parent refugees in horrific ways;

For the sin of acting as though those who do not share our understanding of the need to fundamentally change our economic and political arrangements are either evil, dumb, deplorable, or without moral consciousness: thus shaming and blaming all of the tens of millions of people who did not support progressive policies and office seekers;

And for the sin of making people who have different cultural, religious or intellectual proclivities from our own feel that we are looking down on them;

For the sin of abandoning the Jewish prophetic tradition by refusing to address in our synagogues, churches, mosques or zendo or other spiritual gatherings the distortions of our economic system and the evil choices being made by our political leaders, or the leaders of Israel, on the grounds that doing so would offend some people, or cause splits in our communities, instead of listening to Abraham Joshua Heschel's teaching that our responsibility is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

Sing together:

Ve'al kulam Elo-high seh'lee-chot, seh'lach lanu, meh'chal lanu, ka'peyr lanu

For all these ways we have missed the mark, we ask the spiritual reality of the universe to forgive, us pardon us, accept our atonement!

For the sin of believing the myth that we live in a meritocracy and that therefore those who are "less successful" than us (either economically or in some other way) are actually less deserving;

And for the sin of not recognizing that the pain people feel (that leads many of them to religious or nationalist fundamentalist movements) is in large part related to not being adequately respected or cared for, recognized and cherished;

For the sin of not taking the time to train ourselves with empathic skills and reach out to those who share different world views and to try to find that which is beautiful in them or that which is in pain and needs to be healed;

And for the sin of not responding with empathy to people whose pain has led them in reactionary directions, even as we rightly continue to oppose their concrete political actions and resist oppressive or evil policies of our government;

For the sin of not taking seriously the horrific sexual abuse faced by so many women and not developing educational methods to challenge sexism in our economic, political, cultural and social life;

And for the sin of not taking seriously the horrific abuse faced by African Americans, Native Americans, and most people of color in our society' and developing educational methods to challenge racism in our economic, political, cultural and social life, and not protesting more vigorously at the way our national government has been conspiring to reduce the rights and protections of these minorities;

For the sin of talking as though being white or being male makes all of us or them somehow wrongly privileged, thereby ignoring the huge differences in advantage between rich white males and middle income working people and poor people;

And for the sin of making men or white people feel guilty for crimes that some men and some whites have done but not all men or all whites;

For the sin of not having been involved in electoral politics sufficiently to have elected U.S. Senators who would block the nomination of reactionary judges to the federal courts and the Supreme Court who have already dismantled the voting rights that allowed African Americans and other people of color and poor people to vote, given corporations the rights intended by the Constitution only for human beings, and soon will be in a position to further weaken civil and human rights, environmental and worker protections, separation of church and state, and including the right of women to have easy access to terminate unwanted and/or dangerous pregnancies in their own localities.

And for the sin of not reaching out to neighbors and coworkers to share with them our ideas about the kind of world we really want, not just the world we are against!;

For the sin of being so concerned about our own personal tax benefits that we failed to oppose tax cuts that would bankrupt social services;

And for the sin of not taking the leaflets or not opening the emails of those who tried to inform us of events that required our moral attention;

For the sin of thinking that attending a march or demonstration for the environment or against sexism or racism or in opposition to war, is enough, without engaging in active ongoing support for fundamental changes,

And for the sin of not putting our money behind those organizations and publications which

articulate the ideals we support

Sing together:

Ve'al kulam Elo-high seh'lee-chot, seh'lach lanu, meh'chal lanu, ka'peyr lanu

For all these ways we have missed the mark, we ask the spiritual reality of the universe to forgive, us pardon us, accept our atonement!

For the sin of missing opportunities to support in public the political, religious, spiritual, or ethical teachers who actually inspire us and whose teachings would help others;

And for the sin of being passive recipients of negativity or listening and allowing others to spread hurtful stories about the personal lives of others;

For the sin of being "realistic" when our Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, secular humanist and other traditions call upon us to transform reality rather than accept it as it is;

And for the sin of being too attached to, too complacent about our own picture of how our lives should be—and never taking the risks that could bring us a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

For the sins of not showing up for our friends when they really needed our physical presence, or psychological support or love,

And for the sins of making friends primarily to advance our own interests rather than to really care for them, and for failing to see most people in our lives as embodiments of the sacred;

For the sins we have committed by not forgiving our parents for the wrongs they committed against us when we were children;

And for the sin of having too little compassion, nor too little respect for our parents, our children, or our friends when they acted in ways that disappointed or hurt us;

For the sin of holding grudges and not forgiving those who have personally offended us,

And for the sin of "lashon ha'ra," spreading negative stories about others,

For the sin of cooperating with self-destructive or addictive behavior in others or in ourselves;

And for the sin of not supporting each other as we attempt to change;

For the sin of being jealous and trying to possess and control those we love;

And for the sin of being judgmental when others need compassion;

For the sin of withholding love and support;

And for the sin of doubting our ability to love and get love from others;

For the sin of talking over women or not giving them adequate support to express their needs or insights,

And for the sin of ignoring the needs of people of color, or finding them scary or dangerous,

For the sin of insisting that everything we do have a payoff;

And for the sin of not allowing ourselves to play;

For the sin of not giving our partners and friends the love and support they need to feel safe and to flourish;

And for the sin of being manipulative or hurting others to protect our own egos.

Sing together:

Ve'al kulam Elo-high seh'lee-chot, seh'lach lanu, meh'chal lanu, ka'peyr lanu

For all these ways we have missed the mark, we ask the spiritual reality of the universe to forgive, us pardon us, accept our atonement!

For the sin of seeing anti-Semitism everywhere, and using the charge of anti-Semitism to silence those who raise legitimate (though often painful to hear) criticisms of Israeli policies;

And for the sin of not challenging people who deny or underestimate the real dangers of anti-Semitism as it comes out of hiding in Europe and North America, refusing to recognize that Jews have much historical reasons to worry about this as one of the oldest and most persistent and historically murderous forms of racism;

For the sin of letting the entire Jewish people take the rap for oppressive policies, inexcusable and vicious acts of murder, harassment, denial of human rights, and repression by the most reactionary and human rights-denying government the State of Israel has ever had;

And for the sin of blaming the entire Palestinian people for (inexcusable and vicious) acts of violence, kidnapping, and murder by a handful of terrorists;

For the sins that Israel committed by stealing West Bank Palestinian land and access to West Bank water; by creating settlements of ultra-nationalists who regularly harass Palestinian children, uprooting olive trees, and otherwise intensify the evils of occupation; and for imposing checkpoints for Palestinians and building West Bank roads that are only available for Jewish Israelis; and by taxing West Bank Palestinians while not allowing them to vote in Israeli elections, and then pretending to be on a higher moral level than the Palestinian people;

For the sin of not mobilizing against the new "Nationality Law" in Israel which asserts that Israel is the state of Jews and not of all its citizens who are Christian, Muslim and other religions and ethnicities and allows Jews to create communities, cities, towns, villages, kibbutzim that are explicitly only for Jews, moving Israel much closer to being an apartheid state;

And for the sin of not protesting more loudly and publicly when Prime Minister Netanyahu claims that he and Israel speak for all Jews everywhere in the world, thereby increasing the credibility of anti-Semites who can use the immorality of Israel's policies to legitimate their hatred of all Jews in the world;

For the sin of being silent when Israel prevents women from publicly reading Torah together at the Temple Wall in Jerusalem, and in dozens of other ways dismissing and disempowering non-Orthodox forms of Judaism and not allowing non-Orthodox rabbis from performing weddings and other important elements of Jewish religious life events, and preventing gays and lesbians to participate in surrogacy;

And for the sin of calling Israel "the Jewish state" when it so clearly violates Jewish ethical traditions, most significantly the most frequent command in Torah to "love the stranger" (the Other, the Refugee, the powerless);

And for the sin of not challenging the Jewish institutions and leaders who provide constant defense of oppressive Israeli policies that they would themselves oppose if these policies were to be imposed on the Jewish people;

For the sin of being liberal on everything except Israel, which characterizes many in the Jewish world and in the Democratic Party and many other liberal or progressive political parties;

And for the sin of supporting Jewish organizations that support social justice and/or environmental sanity or an end to racism in the US but refuse to allow discussion much less involvement in these same issues when people ask them to address the struggle for freedom or equal rights and dignity of the Palestinian people;

For the sins of tribalism, chauvinism, and other forms of identity politics that lead us to think that our pain (in whatever ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sexual preference, nationality) is more important than anyone else's pain;

For the sin of allowing people on the Left to only see Israel's sins without recognizing also the huge amount of good in Israel;

And for the sin of portraying Israel's human rights abuses as the worst in the world or the only one worth focusing on, when in fact Israel's inexcusable and immoral human rights abuses are far less than what is endured by the untouchables of India, the Rohingya in Myanmar, the treatment of women and minorities in many Muslim states (particularly in the U.S. ally Saudi Arabia), the repression of Buddhism by China in Tibet, the treatment of many of minorities in Russia, the brutal assaults on people seeking refuge in Europe, and of course, the ongoing saga of racism in the U.S. its police brutality, and its school to prison pipeline for African American young men!

And for the sin of allowing communal institutions, colleges and universities, government and politics, the media, and the entertainment industry to be shaped by those with the most money, rather than those with the most spiritual and ethical sensitivity;

For the sin of not removing ourselves once a week from the "getting and spending" of the capitalist marketplace—by giving ourselves the joy and spiritual and physical refreshment that comes from celebrating a 25 hour Shabbat, either with a community or with friends and family;

An for the sin of not learning more about the spiritual, intellectual and psychological wisdom inherent in the Jewish tradition, its teachings, its prayers, its ritual practices—rejecting the childhood versions we were taught at young children but never exposing ourselves to far more sophisticated and soul-nourishing versions of Judaism available to us as adults.

For the sin of not giving more energy and time to the Jewish spiritual community whose services or activities we attend;

And for the sin of not creating a Jewish spiritual community with services and activities we can enthusiastically support if the existing communities around us do not provide us with the spiritual/political integration, psychological depth, intellectual sophistication, Jewish wisdom, and prophetic empathy and activism that will in fact nourish our souls (even if that requires making an effort to build and sustain it);

For the sin of not putting our money and our time behind our highest ideals, and not aligning our intentions with our actions.

And for the sin of thinking that our path is the only path to spiritual truth;

For the sin of not recognizing and celebrating (with awe and wonder) the beauty and grandeur of the universe that surrounds us and permeates us;

And for the sin of focusing only on our sins and not on our strengths and beauties;

For the sin of not transcending ego so we could see ourselves and each other as we really are: already enough, beautiful beings, a part of the Unity of All Being, and a manifestation on this planet of God's/the universe's loving energy;

And for not seeing the beauty in everyone around us and the magnificence of this universe in which we are blessed to have a little time before we pass on and others take up our place on this awesome planet Earth.

Sing together:

Ve'al kulam Elo-high seh'lee-chot, seh'lach lanu, meh'chal lanu, ka'peyr lanu

For all these ways we have missed the mark, we ask the spiritual reality of the universe to forgive, us pardon us, accept our atonement!

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Written by Rabbi Michael Lerner for the Tikkun community, Beyt Tikkun Synagogue, and the interfaith and secular-humanist-welcoming Network of Spiritual Progressives. We invite everyone to share this version of the Al Cheyt (For Our Sins) prayer and add anything that has been left out. You can also find this on line at www.tikkun.org. IF YOU HAPPEN TO BE IN THE BAY AREA ON TUESDAY NIGHT SEPT 18 (KOL NIDRE) AND WEDNESDAY SEPT 19TH

and have not signed up for these holiday services at which these prayers of atonement are read, please register for services with Rabbi Lerner at www.beyttikkun.org/hhd.

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