



# FORGIVENESS

Educational Toolkit

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*Forgiveness* is a powerful visual poem by filmmaker, poet and Blavity co-founder Aaron Samuels, exploring the transitional spiritual space that we enter on Kol Nidre.

During Kol Nidre, we transition from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur as part of a larger transition from one year to the next. In this process, we reflect upon our shortcomings and enter a period of repair, atonement, and forgiveness. This piece interrogates the Jewish community's collective atonement journey as we grapple with the pandemic of COVID-19 and the pandemic of racism that were each intertwined and hyper-present in 2020 and 2021.

*Forgiveness* invites the listener to question their own processes of atonement and forgiveness. We invite you to watch the short *Forgiveness* film and then confront the issues raised through reflection. This reflection can come in the form of discussion or creation.

# CREATE

Watch the film and create a piece of art in response: a poem, a painting, collage, photography, sculpture, etc., or whatever expresses your feelings after seeing the film.

For those who want a little help: In part II, Samuels riffs on the ritual text *eileh ezkerah* - "These I (will) recall..." - from the Musaf service of Yom Kippur day. Instead of following the prayerbook and reciting the names and stories of the 10 rabbis martyred by ancient Roman authorities, however, Samuels swaps them with the names and stories of Black individuals who died from acts of police violence and/or white supremacy. The rabbis knew the power of saying names of those killed in acts of violence.

Come up with a list of 10 things that you will remember heading into this new Jewish year that opened your eyes to racial inequality in yourself, your community and society at large. After each entry, repeat the phrase: *eileh ezkerah* - These I will recall. Once you have completed the process, take 10 deep breaths.

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

I remember\_\_\_\_\_ . Eileh ezkerah

# DISCUSS

Reflect on the film in your community, in classrooms, around the dinner table or just by yourself. We have created conversation and reflection prompts to get you started. Pick what works for you or your community.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1) “Forgiveness” is an unusual poem in that it sanctifies the unique experiences of Black Lives with language from Jewish prayer, while also acknowledging how unsettling it can be for some Black Jews to encounter police and metal detectors when walking into a synagogue. *How do you feel when you encounter police, or walk through metal detectors? What was it like for you to experience, see, and hear this poem that sanctifies Black life and acknowledges how Black Jewish life is sometimes devalued even in sacred Jewish spaces?*

2) During the high holidays, Jewish individuals all over the world seek forgiveness from those they have harmed. *As you all look back over this year that some have framed as a “racial reckoning,” what are three ways you hope that people in your communities will seek forgiveness on matters of race? What are three ways that you are seeking out forgiveness on matters of race?*

3) The poem is titled “Forgiveness,” but the content of the poem references acts of racialized harm, violence, and white supremacy. Such extreme examples raise the question, *“What are the limits of forgiveness?” As you make your way through this season of self-reflection and forgiveness, how do you think about the limits of forgiveness in your life?*

4) The ancient sages considered the time around the high holidays the essential moment where every Jewish individual can and should do *teshuvah* - literally “return/repentance” (from their wrongs of the past year). This idea of *teshuvah*, however, is often presented as a very individualistic process. In a world where we are increasingly thinking about addressing systemic harm, individual acts of *teshuvah* can feel insignificant. Nevertheless, as *Pirke Avot* reminds us, just because the work is hard does not mean that we are free to stop doing it. *Given that ancient morsel of practical wisdom, what do you think are the most impactful ways to do individual and collective teshuvah that leads to systemic change?*

5) The shofar is the hallmark sound of the High Holidays, but historically, it wasn't only used during this time of year. Throughout the Jewish tradition, the shofar has also represented a call to battle, or the start of a specific time of year, etc. Regardless of the purpose, the shofar has always been a sign to pay attention. ***With that in mind, if you had one idea to “blast like a shofar” to the heavens this year, what would it be?***

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Check out organizations where you may be able to donate.

### GENERAL ORGANIZATIONS:

**NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund**

<https://www.naacpldf.org/>

**Equal Justice Initiative**

<https://eji.org/>

**Color of Change**

<https://colorofchange.org/>

**Movement for Black Lives**

<https://m4bl.org/>

**Southern Poverty Law Center**

<https://www.splcenter.org/>

**Undoing Racism: The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond**

<https://pisab.org/>

### JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS:

**Not Free to Desist**

<https://www.notfreetodesist.org>

**Jewish Liberation Fund**

<https://www.jewishliberation.fund/>

**Be'chol Lashon**

<https://globaljews.org/>

**Black Jewish Liberation Collective**

<https://www.blackjewishliberation.org/>

**Bend The Arc**

<https://www.bendthearc.us/>

**Reboot**

<https://rebooting.com>

### WHAT YOU CAN READ:

The Jews of Color Initiative recently released its report, ***Beyond the Count***, detailing the perspectives and lived experiences of Jews of Color. See their website for details: <https://jewsofcolorinitiative.org/>

## ABOUT AARON SAMUELS

Aaron Samuels is the author of *Yarmulkes & Fitted Caps*, released by Write Bloody Publishing. He is the recipient of fellowships from Cave Canem, Asylum Arts, and the Millay Colony for the Arts. Samuels is a founding member of the Dark Noise Collective and ranked 3rd place at the Individual World Poetry Slam. He currently lives in Los Angeles where he serves as Co-Founder of Blavity Inc. Aaron Samuels is Black and Jewish.

## ABOUT KENDELL PINKNEY

Kendell Pinkney is a Brooklyn based theatre-maker & rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He works and creates art at the intersection of race, Jewish identity and sacred text, and was most recently featured in the acclaimed Israeli docuseries "The New Jew" with comedian Guri Alfi. In addition to his creative work, Kendell is the founding Artistic Director of "The Workshop," a newly launched arts and culture fellowship for JOCISM (Jews of Color, Indigenous Jews, Sephardi, and Mizrahi) artists.

## ABOUT REBOOT

Reboot is an arts and culture non-profit that reimagines and reinforces Jewish thought and traditions. As a premier R&D platform for the Jewish world, we catalyze our Reboot Network of preeminent creators, artists, entrepreneurs and activists to produce experiences and products that evolve the Jewish conversation and transform society. These projects have engaged more than 4 million participants in the past five years and continue to inspire Jewish connections and meaning by encouraging participants to become creators in their Jewish experience.

## ABOUT HILLEL INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1923, Hillel has been enriching the lives of Jewish students for more than 90 years. Today, Hillel International is a global organization that welcomes students of all backgrounds and fosters an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning and Israel. Hillel is dedicated to enriching the lives of Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world. As the largest Jewish student organization in the world, Hillel builds connections with emerging adults at more than 550 colleges and universities, and inspires them to direct their own path.

Cover art by Kim Kyne

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