

FORGIVENESS

BY AARON SAMUELS

1

Each year my Yom Kippur begins with white
Linen pants, canvas sneakers, a kepeh, a tallis

I walk covered in white to the temple steps
I walk past four police officers. I see their weapons

How they make the community feel safe.
I ready my body to pray. Long before Kol Nidre

melodies, we inscribed chants in Aramaic,
to request annulment from the divine

I empty the metal from my pockets. my keys, my phone.
Each item that could have been a gun

I walk towards the metal detector.
And I am on a dark road

my hands on the wheel, my eyes in the rear view
as the officer approaches. I walk through the metal detector.

And I am buying candy in a new neighborhood. I exit
The metal detector, and I am asleep in my own bed

This is my place of worship. These are my people
my vows no longer vows; my oaths no longer oaths

Forgive me.

2

This year we said black lives matter with lower case letters
and we said Black Lives Matter with capital letters.

And we said All Lives Matter. Said we were afraid
to say the Black, what it could mean for the All

what it could mean for our people, our safety. We were afraid
but we said it regardless. And we argued with our parents.

And we lost friends. And we said Black to apologize.
And we said Black to mourn. Before our temple was destroyed,

we offered sacrifice. Now, instead, we offer a service, a Musaf. A Torah
wrapped around a burning man. As the letters rise from the scroll

We mourn, ten martyrs.
Ay-Leh Eh-z-kih-Rah

These martyrs I will remember
And pour out my soul within me

This Musaf for Ahmaud Arbery, who ran towards the horizon
This Musaf for Breonna Taylor, who brought us back from the edge of death

This Musaf for George Floyd, who molded safety into the night
This Musaf for Tony McDade, who built a home for those who needed

This Musaf for Philando Castile, who gave nutrition to the students
This Musaf for Sandra Bland, who filmed the truth

This Musaf for Eric Garner, who planted flowers for the city
This Musaf for Michael Brown, who made music with his mouth

This Musaf for Trayvon Martin, who repaired bicycles for his family
This Musaf for Emmett Till, who stuttered and bought groceries

3

And while we still ask for forgiveness
we continue to perpetuate the harm

we still ask for forgiveness for the oaths we made for some,
that created curses for others; a begrudging eye; a scoff

a moment where I wanted what was not mine
wanted it nonetheless

I still ask for forgiveness for all in which I was complicit
Knowingly. Yes knowingly.

How many shall pass?
Who by fire and who by plague?

This world, we built with our hands
And we have the audacity to ask

Forgive me
Forgive me
Forgive me