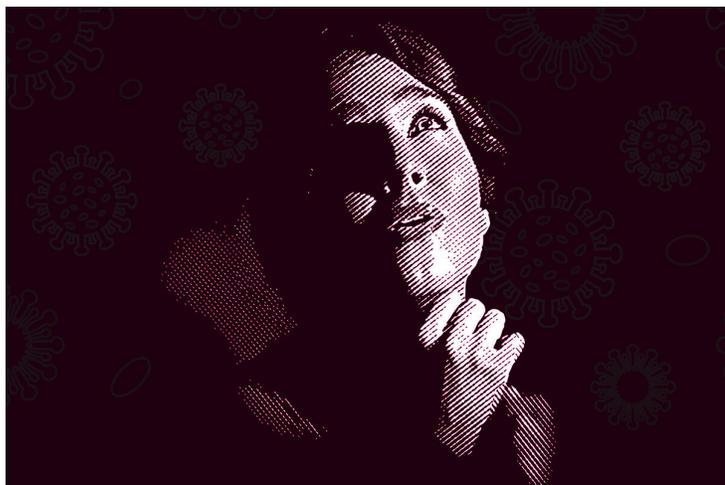


A Communal Confession for a Covid-19 Yom Kippur

By Jordana Horn Sep 24, 2020



I believe that prayer is something that is deeply personal: A true prayer is one where your soul resonates with its meaning and significance. That's not always easy to achieve, perhaps especially so when the language of prayer isn't your first language – which is how many Americans experience Jewish prayer.

The *Viddui* is the confessional component of Yom Kippur prayers. It is an attempt to reach each individual person who is praying, both as individuals and as part of the greater whole. Because on Yom Kippur, we are contrite about the ways we have failed in our obligations to God – but that means we are also contrite about the ways in which we have failed one another. We are all responsible for the way in which we lead our own lives – and we are all responsible for one another.

Part of the Viddui is the *Ashamnu* prayer, an alphabetical acrostic listing our collective sins – we have stolen, we have jeered, we have killed, among others. We say this confession collectively, even though we may not have all done all the things described in the prayer. We do it that way to convey the idea that our entire community is responsible for our individual failings. We all stand up and recite it together, lightly beating our breasts as a sign of sorrow.

In light of the circumstances in which we find ourselves in the beginning of 5781, I've written a Pandemic *Viddui*: a community confessional in which I have taken the words of the *Ashamnu* prayer and viewed them through the lens of Covid-19.

Ashamnu – We have ignored rules of social distancing when it suited our needs or whims of the moment.

Bagadnu – We have glossed over our own symptoms, or our child's, when filling out forms to enter a school or public place.

Gazalnu – We have robbed people of the comfort of our company, by failing to make an effort to connect by phone calls, FaceTime, or letters.

Dibarnu dofi – We have spoken poorly of people as people, rather than taking issue with their ideas.

He'evinu – We have hoarded supplies, precluding others from getting the things that they also need.

V'hirshanu – We have done wrong by not wearing masks in proximity to others.

Zadnu – We have assumed that everyone around us has the same level of privilege that we do.

Hamasnu – We have done violence to the idea that we are all one people, regardless of our level of Jewish observance, the color of our skin, or our religion of birth.

Tafalnu sheker – We have not told the truth about having taken Covid-19 tests, or awaiting results.

Yaatsnu ra – We have hosted gatherings that we knew ran the risk of people being too close to one another.

Kizavnu – We have allowed people in our presence to share incorrect information about Covid-19 without confronting them.

Latsnu – We have discouraged other people from wearing masks.

Maradnu – We have gone out in public even while we, or someone in our household, were awaiting Covid-19 test results.

Niatsnu – We have spoken indelicately about the pandemic in front of children, without considering the fear we might engender with our words.

Sararnu – We have failed to listen to the words and warnings of virologists, epidemiologists, and medical professionals.

Avinu – We have failed to comply with our state's rules on quarantining after traveling to other states.

Pashanu – We have not washed our hands enough, nor have we enforced our childrens' handwashing strictly enough.

Tsararnu – We have been silent in the face of Covid's disparate effects on poor communities and communities of color.

Kishinu oref – We have been complicit in spreading disinformation.

Rashanu – We have posted pictures on social media of our noncompliance with social distancing

Shichatnu – We have cut corners, moved residences, and established workarounds to benefit our own households, forgetting about those who are left behind

Tiavnu – We have failed to adequately comfort those whose losses are too great to bear alone.

Tainu – We have not sufficiently offered help to those who so desperately need our help.

Titanu – We have not encouraged others to take up their responsibility to help others who desperately need our help.

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