

MARKING THE HIGH HOLIDAYS: FORGIVENESS

August 31, 2021



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Forgiveness by Aaron Samuels



From poet and Blavity co-founder, Aaron Samuels, *Forgiveness* interrogates the Jewish community's collective atonement journey, grappling with the pandemic of COVID-19 and the pandemic of racism, which were intertwined and hyper-present in the years 5780 and 5781. Samuels' *Forgiveness* explores the transitional spiritual space that we enter on Kol Nidre, during which we reckon with our shortcomings and enter a period of repair and reconciliation.

Forgiveness explores the transitional spiritual space that we enter on Kol Nidre when we move 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 the years 5780 and 5781. *Forgiveness* invites the listener to question their own processes of atonement and forgiveness.

Accompanying the short film, we have developed an **educational toolkit** to provide a framework for reflecting on the piece. Created by Kendell Pinkney and in partnership with Hillel International, the resource can be used by any audience. Download the toolkit [here](#).

You can listen to the poem on Spotify [here](#).

From the author, Aaron Samuels:

I wrote *Forgiveness* because I was searching for a transition. In the aftermath of the onset of COVID, I watched multiple viral videos of the murders of Black people. And despite still caring for

the collective indictment that we could no longer look away from—that the very structures that hold our society together are built upon a foundation of racism.

I believe the act of mourning is its own form of a transition. Mourning a lost life recognizes the transition from life to death. But it also allows us to transition from an emotional state of grief to a different emotional state. For some that may look like acceptance. For others it may look like anger or focus. And this past couple of years, for many I think it looked like a deep internal reflection and examination on our own institutions. Many of us asked, what can we do to repair the harmful systems that we have benefited from.

As a Jew, I have an obligation to reflect every year on the harm I have caused others. And I have a spiritual expectation to repair any harm I have caused and live in such a way moving forward as to not repeat the harm. We reflect collectively each year as a global Jewish community, not just to ask ourselves where we have fallen short as individuals, but also where we have fallen short as an entire community, as a people.

Forgiveness challenges the listener to confront the reality that we have more work to do to cure the pandemic of racism within our world, and invites the listener to consider the possibility that the Jewish community and perhaps all communities have an active responsibility in that work.

**Aaron Samuels**

Poet and Entrepreneur



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.

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Event Recap

Reboot Ideas Presents: Forgiveness

In honor of Yom Kippur, we gathered on Aug. 31 for the premiere of the short and powerful visual poem *Forgiveness* with a post-film talkback between the filmmaker, poet and Blavity co-founder Aaron Samuels, and Mahogany L. Browne, executive director of Just Media and Poet-in-Residence at Lincoln Center. *Forgiveness* interrogates the Jewish community's collective atonement journey, grappling with the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism. [Learn more.](#)



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Featured Event

Ctrl Alt Del: Tashlique 2021 at Ocean Beach

We are thrilled to gather together again for our modern spin on Tashlich. Mark the start of your new year with Reboot and the JCCSF at Ocean Beach in San Francisco. [RSVP Here.](#)

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