



Yom Kippur Forgiveness Meditation
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Our meditation this Yom Kippur afternoon will be a gentle focus on forgiveness. Threads of forgiveness practice run through Judaism, including the twin practices of *cheshbon hanefesh*, an accounting of the soul, and *tshuvah*, making amends. Done daily, we can keep our relational and spiritual airways clear of festering anger and resentments. The Holy Day period of Elul, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is thus an intensification of this process of spiritual housekeeping.

In Judaism, *mitzvot* (commandments, commonly also known as good deeds) are done in the context of two relationships: the relationships we have with other people (*bein adam l'havero*) and the relationship we have with the One whom we may call God (*bein adam l'makom*). The Vilna Gaon, the towering rabbi and teacher from eighteenth century Lithuania, added the importance of the relationship we each have with ourselves (*bein adam l'atzmo*). Together, our *cheshbon hanefesh* and *tshuvah* allows us to cover most of the important relationships in our lives.

Another traditional Jewish practice, the *the Kriat Sh'ma al haMita* (Bedtime Sh'ma) also addresses forgiveness. The Bedtime Sh'ma surrounds the recitation of the Sh'ma with many prayers. Relevant to us at Yom Kippur, Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, known as the Holy ARI, teaches us to begin the sequence of prayers with a forgiveness practice. In his "*Hareni Moheh*" (I hereby forgive) prayer, we offer forgiveness to anyone who has hurt us on that day. It allows for a short review of the day and a releasing of hurts and resentments.

Our meditation for this Yom Kippur afternoon combines the structure of The ARI's forgiveness prayer with the seeking and offering of forgiveness in all three types of relationships: with other people, with ourselves, and with the One whom we may call God. The linked audio will guide you through the meditation. While the meditation lasts about 20 minutes, you are encouraged to pause the recording in order to extend a portion of the practice, do some journaling, or take a break.

Living as we all are in a time of heightened isolation and concern, the order of the day is gentleness and compassion for ourselves and all beings on this earth. To this end, you are encouraged to take care of yourself during this practice: pass over any portion of the meditation that does not feel comfortable or helpful to you at this time. Allow this exercise to be gentle and compassionate to all; the work of the heart does not have to be harsh or painful to be authentic.

A word on the meaning of *chet*

The Hebrew word often translated as “sin” for which we make amends is *chet*. *Chet* actually means “missing the mark” as in an archer attempting to hit the center of a target. This implies that a hurtful action may be simply like an arrow gone astray. We always have the chance to practice, to take better aim, and hope to hit the mark next time.

A few words on forgiveness

Fred Luskin PhD, director of the Stanford University Forgiveness Project, defines forgiveness as “a conscious deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, whether or not they actually deserve your forgiveness...{it is} a long process of grief and outrage and sadness and loss and pain. Forgiveness is a deep process, which is repeated over and over and over again in our hearts. It honors the grief and it honors the betrayal. And in its own time, it ripens into the freedom to truly forgive.”

The esteemed meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg also refers to forgiveness as a process, “...which means that as you do the reflections, many conflicted emotions may arise...try to allow such states to arise without judging them.” We accept with compassion any feelings that arise. We are each at one particular point in our forgiveness journeys; may our journeys continue toward healing.

<https://sm.stanford.edu/archive/stanmed/1999summer/forgiveness.html>

<https://learningtoforgive.com/9-steps/>

<https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/forgiveness-meditation/>