

# The Call for Reparations on the Day of Atonement, A Special Haftarah for Yom Kippur\*:

the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah,

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel,

Dreisen Heath (Human Rights Watch),

Ta-Nehisi Coates and Amanda Gorman.

יְאֹמֶר סְלוּ-סְלוּ, פְּנּוּ-דְרָךְ; הֲרִימוּ מִן שׁוֹל, מִדְרָךְ עַמִּי

Open, open Clear a path!

Clear away all obstacles

from the path of My People!<sup>i</sup>

הוֹי בְּנֵה בֵּיתוֹ בְּלֹא-צָדִק, וְעֲלִיּוֹתַי יוֹבֵלֵי אֶמֶשׁ פֶּט; בְּרִי

עֵהוּ יַעֲבֹד ח

נָם וּפְעָלוֹ לֹא

יֵת-לוֹ.

Woe to those who build their houses by unrighteousness, the upper rooms by injustice, making the people work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.<sup>ii</sup>

The failure to account for the historic racial and gendered injustices of slavery . . . has compounded the harm and fueled the persistence of racial inequality today.<sup>iii</sup> **Justice too long delayed is justice denied.**<sup>iv</sup>

קָרָא בְּגֵרוֹן אֶל-תְּהִי שֹׁפָר, כְּשׁוֹפָר הֵרֵם קוֹלְךָ  
הִגֵּד לְעַמִּי פִּי שֶׁעִם

וּלְבִי יִתְעַקֵּב חֵטְאֵתָם

Lift up your voice like the shofar!

Cry out, don't hold back.

Tell them what they are doing is wrong

Remind the people of this country of their misdeeds.<sup>v</sup>

There is immense silent-agony in the world, and our task is to be a voice for

the plundered poor, to prevent the desecration of the soul and the violation of our dreams of honesty.<sup>vi</sup>

In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.<sup>vii</sup>

1

לְמָה צִמְנוּ לֵאמֹר אֵת, עֲנִינוּ נֶפֶשׁנוּ לֵאמֹר  
הַיּוֹם צִמְנוּ כִּי צִמְנוּ אֶת-עַצְמֵנוּ, וְכָל-עַצְמֵנוּ יִכְרַם  
לְרֵיבֵנוּ וְיִבְיָאֵנוּ צִמְנוּ, וְלֵאמֹר אֵת רֵיבֵנוּ שֶׁ  
לֵאמֹר צִמְנוּ כִּי, לֵאמֹר שֶׁמֶת בְּרֵיבֵנוּ קוֹלְכֶם  
הַקָּזָה, יְהִי צוֹם אֶת-הַיּוֹם--יּוֹם עֲנוּת אֶת, נֶפֶשׁ  
הַלְכֵף כִּי מִן רֵאשִׁי  
שֶׁקֵּוֹ אֶת-יְעֵ--הַקָּזָה תִּקְרָא-צוֹם, וְיּוֹם רֵצוֹן לִיהוָה

They say, “Don’t you see we’re fasting?  
Don’t you see how holy we have become?  
But on your fast day you wear clothes that were made in sweatshops, And the books you hold in your hands are filthy with the tears of dying forests . . . And your investments fatten the rich, who are destroying the land.”<sup>viii</sup>

You think this is the kind of fast I want?<sup>ix</sup>

No!<sup>x</sup>

Prayer is no panacea,  
no substitute for action.  
Prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive,  
unless it seeks to overthrow  
and to ruin the pyramids of callousness,  
hatred, opportunism, falsehoods.<sup>xi</sup>

הַלּוֹא זֶה, צוֹם אֶת-הַיּוֹם--פִּיתְחֵם רֵצוֹן שֶׁ

This is the kind of fast that I desire:  
Unlock the handcuffs put on by  
wicked power!<sup>xii</sup>



The storm is rising against the privileged minority of the earth from which there is no shelter in isolation or armament. The storm will not abate until a fair distribution of the fruits of the earth enables men and women everywhere to live in dignity and human decency.<sup>xiv</sup>

## 2

The US economy still creates wealth from forced labor of enslaved Black people, including slave-built infrastructure such as railways, physical roads, government buildings, and ports.<sup>xv</sup>

הַ תִּרְאֵה גְדוֹת מוֹטָהּ וְשִׁלַּח צוֹצֵי יָמָי הַ פְּשִׁימִים

Untie the ropes of the yoke!  
Let the oppressed go free.

וְכָל-מוֹטָהּ תִּתְּנִי קוֹ: הֵ לֹא פָּרַס לָרֵעַ בִּלְחֵמָךְ

And break off every yoke! Share your bread with the hungry.<sup>xvi</sup>

An America that asks what it owes its most vulnerable citizens is improved and humane. An America that looks away is ignoring not just the sins of the past but the sins of the present and the certain sins of the future.<sup>xvii</sup>

וְעַנְיִים מֵרַו דִּים תְּבִיא בֵּית כִּי-תִרְאֵה עָרִים וְכִסֵּי יתוֹמֵי בְּשִׁרְךָ לְ  
אֶת תְּעֵלָם

Build affordable housing for the homeless,  
Support an eviction moratorium;  
And welcome back the people you have thrown out of your hearts,  
Even the ones in your own family.<sup>xviii</sup>

But true compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar . . . A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth.<sup>xix</sup>

What I'm talking about is more than recompense for past injustices—more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe. What I'm talking about is a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal. . . **Reparations would mean a revolution of the American consciousness.** . . .<sup>xx</sup>

אָ ז יבֿ קַ עֲפֹשֶׁת חַר אֹרֶךְ, וְאֵרֶ כְּתָר מְהֵרָה תִצְמַח וְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנֶיךָ  
צִדִּיקָךְ, כִּי בּוֹד יְהוָה יֵאָסֶפֶךָ.  
אָ ז תִּקְרָא וַיהוָה יַעֲנֶה, תִּשְׁוַע וַיֵּאמֶר  
רְהִיבִנִי

Then your radiance will burst through like the dawn.  
Then when you need healing, it will spring up quickly.  
And true righteousness will be revealed in your faces,  
As the Divine shines through you again.  
Then when you call, the Divine will answer gladly,  
And when you cry, She will reach out with her presence,  
In each moment whispering, “Here I am!”<sup>xxi</sup>

**When day comes, we step out of the shade of flame and unafraid.**

3

**The new dawn balloons as we free it.  
For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see  
it. If only we’re brave enough to be it.**<sup>xxii</sup>

\*Originally created and chanted in 2021, this haftarah continues to have relevance as demand for reparations continues not only in America but around the world.

Compiled and cantillated by Kohenet Shoshana Bricklin, Oreget ba’chochim (knitter in the thorns). I like to think of myself as a knitter in the thorns not only representing the tactile experience of knitting with yarn (which is also a transformative practice for me), but as a metaphor for my political priestessing—meaning the knitting together of many voices across time and space to speak truth to power, even and especially, at the most uncomfortable (i.e., “thorny”) moments. I am particularly grateful for the leadership and resources of Grassroots Reparations (<https://grassrootsreparations.org/>). It is my hope this haftarah can help shift our spiritual narrative and be part of their ongoing effort to make reparations a spiritual practice, understanding that “reparations is the midpoint between truth and reconciliation.”

For more information on creative haftarot, contact Shoshana at [sbricklin@comcast.net](mailto:sbricklin@comcast.net). For more information about Kohenet, see [www.kohenet.org](http://www.kohenet.org) and/or The Hebrew Priestess: Ancient and New Visions of Jewish Women's Spiritual Leadership by Jill Hammer and Taya Shere (Ben Yehuda Press)

<sup>i</sup>Isaiah 57:14. English adapted from translation by R. Arthur Waskow. All text from Isaiah is part of the traditional Yom Kippur morning haftarah; melody from an adaptation of the song 'Galeh' by Moshe Shur. See <https://soundcloud.com/batyalevine/open-up-the-gates-an-adaptation-of-galeh-words-by-joseph-berman-batya-levine>

<sup>ii</sup> Jeremiah 22:13

<sup>iii</sup>“H.R. 40: Exploring the Path to Reparative Justice in America,” Dreisen Heath, Researcher and Advocate on Racial Justice, US Program Human Rights Watch. Submitted to the US House Committee on the Judiciary

Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties, February 17, 2021

<sup>iv</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From A Birmingham Jail, 4/16/1963

<sup>v</sup> Isaiah 58:5. English translation adapted from translations by Rabbis Arthur Waskow, Shefa Gold and the Velveteen Rabbi <https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2010/08/new-translation-of-isaiah-for-yom-kippur.html> <https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2010/08/new-translation-of-isaiah-for-yom-kippur.html> <sup>vi</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Reason for My Involvement in the Peace Movement", (1972) Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, pp. 224-6, "the task of man" replaced with "our task."

<sup>vii</sup> Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, see above.

<sup>viii</sup> Isaiah 58:3-5. English translation/interpretation by R. Shefa Gold

<sup>ix</sup> Isaiah 58:6. English translation/interpretation by R. Shefa Gold

<sup>x</sup> English by R. Arthur Waskow,.

<sup>xi</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "On Prayer," Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, ed. by Susannah Heschel

<sup>xii</sup> Isaiah 58:6 English by R. Arthur Waskow

<sup>xiii</sup> Graphic from <https://www.umcjustice.org/what-you-can-do/advocacy/take-action/tell-congress-to-support-hr-40>

<sup>xiv</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., published posthumously in King's The Trumpet of Conscience, 1968 <sup>xv</sup> Dreisen Health,

<sup>xv</sup> "H.R. 40: Exploring the Path to Reparative Justice in America"

<sup>xvi</sup> Isaiah 58:6-7, translation by R. Arthur Waskow

<sup>xvii</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

<sup>xviii</sup> Isaiah 58:7. English translation/interpretation by R. Shefa Gold. "Support an eviction moratorium" added by Kohenet Shoshana Bricklin.

<sup>xix</sup> MLK, Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence, 4/4/67

<sup>xx</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy

<sup>xxi</sup> Isaiah 58:8-9. English translation/interpretation by R. Shefa Gold with the exception of "Then when you need healing it will spring up quickly;" which is translated by R. Arthur Waskow

<sup>xxii</sup> Amanda Gorman, The Hill We Climb: An Inaugural Poem for the Country, January 2021