

Jewish Texts on Forgiveness - all taken from Machzor Ruach Chadashah

Jewish tradition teaches that God alone is righteous. All human beings are in need of forgiveness for our wrong-doings, which are inevitable, given that we are flawed human beings. However, before we can ask for forgiveness, we must be willing to let go of hurts and grievances that we may hold. The following is an adaptation of a traditional prayer said before the Bedtime Shema, our affirmation of the One God.

Ribbono shel olam,
I hereby forgive
Whoever has hurt me
And whoever has done me any
wrong,
Whether deliberately or
accidentally,
Whether physically, financially
or emotionally,
Whether by word or by deed.
May no one be punished on my
account.
May it be Your will,
Eternal One my God and God of
my ancestors,
That I sin no more,
That I do not revert to my old
ways,
Nor anger You any more with
my actions,
Nor do that which is evil in Your
sight.
Wipe away my sins
With Your great compassion
Rather than through sickness or
suffering.
May these words of my mouth
And the prayers that are in my
heart
Be acceptable before You, O
God,
My Rock and my Redeemer.

רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, הֲרִינִי מוֹחֵל
לְכָל־מִי שֶׁהִכְעִיס וְהִקְנִיט
אוֹתִי אוֹ שִׁחָטָא כְּנֶגְדִי, בֵּין
בְּגוֹפִי בֵּין בְּמִמוֹנִי, בֵּין בְּכַבּוּדִי
בֵּין בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר לִי, בֵּין בְּאָוֶןס
בֵּין בְּרִצּוֹן, בֵּין בְּשׁוּגְגַת בֵּין
בְּמִזִּיד, בֵּין בְּדַבּוּר בֵּין
בְּמַעֲשֵׂה, לְכָל־בֶּן־אָדָם. וְלֹא
יַעֲנֹשׁ שׁוֹם אָדָם בְּסִבְתִּי. יְהִי
רִצּוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי
אֲבוֹתַי, שְׁלֹא אֶחָטָא עוֹד וְלֹא
אֶחְזוֹר בָּהֶם וְלֹא אָשׁוּב עוֹד
לְהִכְעִיֶסְךָ, וְלֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה הָרַע
בְּעֵינֶיךָ. וּמִה־שִׁחָטָאֲתִי לְפָנֶיךָ
מִחֹק בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים, אֲבָל
לֹא עַל יְדֵי יְסוּרִים וְחֻלָּיִים
רָעִים. יְהִי לְרִצּוֹן אִמְרֵי־פִי,
וְהִגִּיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ, יְהוָה, צוּרִי
וְגֹאֲלִי.

Abraham Danzig

This attitude towards transgression and forgiveness is already shown in Psalm 130:

Out of the depths I call to
You, Eternal God; O God,
hearken to my voice.
*Be attentive to my prayers of
supplication.*

מִמַּעַמְמֵקִים קָרָאתִיךָ יְהוָה,
אֲדֹנָי שְׁמַעֲהָ בְּקוֹלִי.
תְּהַיְיָנָה אֲזוּנֶיךָ קִשְׁבוֹת
לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי.

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Who could endure, O God, if
You kept count of every sin?

*But forgiveness is Yours;
there-fore You are revered.*

I wait for the Eternal One; my
soul waits. And in God's word I
have hope.

*I wait for the Eternal One
more eagerly than those who
wait for the morning.*

O Israel, put your hope in the
Eternal One, for with God is
loving-kindness and great power
to redeem.

*For God will redeem Israel
from all their sins.*

אִם-עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמַר-יְהוָה,
אֲדַנִּי מִי יַעֲמֹד?
כִּי-עֲמֹךְ הִסְלִיחָה;
לְמַעַן תִּזְכָּר.
קוֹיִתִי יְהוָה; קוֹתָה נַפְשִׁי.
וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחֵלֵתִי.
נַפְשִׁי לֹא-דַנִּי מִשְׁמָרִים לְבַקֵּר
שׁוֹמְרִים לְבַקֵּר.
יַחַל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יְהוָה,
כִּי-עַם-יְהוָה הַחֲסִד
וְהַרְבֵּה עֲמוֹ פְדוּת.
וְהוּא יִפְדֶּה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו.

We have a special prayerbook used at the High Holy Days, when all of our prayers are full of supplications for forgiveness. This is NOT to say that Jews only repent once a year; self-examination and prayer is part of Jewish daily life. However, texts like the following show the general attitude taken to forgiveness:

*You, Eternal One, are right-
eous; the blame is ours alone.
How can we complain? What
shall we say? What can we
plead to justify ourselves? Let
us search our ways and
examine our con- duct, and
return to You, for Your right
hand is stretched out to
welcome back those who
repent.*

*Not with virtue and good
deeds do we come before You,
but like the poor and needy do
we knock at Your door. At
Your door we knock, O
merciful and gracious One; do
not send us away
empty-handed. From Your
presence, O our Sovereign, do
not dismiss us empty, for You
listen to our prayer.*

לָךְ יי הַצְדָּקָה, וְלָנוּ בְּשֵׁת
הַפְּגָמִים. מִדֵּ-נִתְּאוּנוּ,
מִדֵּ-נִאֲמַר, מִדֵּ-נִדְּבַר
וּמִדֵּ-נִצְטַדֵּק? נִחַפְּשָׁה דְרֻכֵינוּ
וְנִחַקְנָה, וְנִשׁוּבָה אֵלֶיךָ, כִּי
יְמִינְךָ פְּשׁוּטָה לְקַבֵּל שׁוֹבִים.
לֹא בַחֲסִד וְלֹא-בְמַעֲשִׂים בָּאנוּ
לְפָנֶיךָ, כְּדָלִים וּכְרָשִׁים דְּפָקְנוּ
דְּלִתֶיךָ. דְּלִתֶיךָ דְּפָקְנוּ רַחוּם
וְחַנוּן, נָא אֶל-תְּשִׁיבֵנוּ רִיקִם
מִלְּפָנֶיךָ. מִלְּפָנֶיךָ מִלְּכֵנוּ רִיקִם
אֶל-תְּשִׁיבֵנוּ, כִּי-אַתָּה שׁוֹמֵעַ
תְּפִלָּה.

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Forgive us, our Creator, for in our great folly we have gone astray. Pardon us, our Sovereign, for our sins are many.

In Your great mercy we trust, on Your kindness we rely, to Your forgiveness we look, and for Your salvation we hope.

Forgive us, our Creator, for we have sinned; pardon us, our Sovereign, for we have transgressed; for You, Eternal God, are good and forgiving, and You respond with endless love to those who call upon You.

Who can say: 'I have purified my heart, I am free of sin?'

There are none on earth so righteous that they never sin.

Cast away all the evil you have done, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.

A new heart will I give you; a new spirit put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

For thus says the Eternal God: 'I, I Myself will search for My sheep, and seek them out.

As shepherds seek out their flock when they go astray, so will I seek out My sheep.'

סִלַּח לָנוּ, אֲבִינוּ, כִּי בָרַב
אֵילָתָנוּ שָׁגִינוּ. מִחַל לָנוּ,
מִלְכָנוּ, כִּי רַבּוּ עֲוֹנוֹנוּ.

כִּי עַל רַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים אָנוּ
בְּטוֹחִים, וְעַל צְדָקוֹתֶיךָ אָנוּ
נִשְׁעָנִים, וְלִסְלִיחוֹתֶיךָ אָנוּ
מִצְפִּים, וְלִישׁוּעָתְךָ אָנוּ מְקוּיִם.

סִלַּח לָנוּ, אֲבִינוּ, כִּי חָטָאנוּ;
מִחַל לָנוּ, מִלְכָנוּ, כִּי פָשַׁעְנוּ;
כִּי אַתָּה אֲדוֹנֵי טוֹב וְסִלַּח, וְרַב
חֶסֶד לְכָל־קְרֹאָךְ.

מִי־יֹאמֶר: זָכִיתִי לְבִי,
טָהַרְתִּי מִחַטָּאתַי?

כִּי אָדָם אֵין צְדִיק בְּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
יַעֲשֶׂה־טוֹב וְלֹא יִחַטָּא.

הִשְׁלִיכוּ מֵעַלְיֶכֶם אֶת־כָּל־
פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר פָּשַׁעְתֶּם
בָּם, וַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם לֵב חֲדָשׁ
וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה.

וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חֲדָשׁ; וְרוּחַ
חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם. וְהִסַּרְתִּי
אֶת־לֵב הָאֲבִן מִבְּשָׂרְכֶם,
וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר.

כִּי כֹה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהִים:
הִנְנִי־אֹנִי וְדַרְשֵׁתִי אֶת־צֹאנִי,
וּבְקִרְתִּים.

כְּבִקְרַת רֹעֵה עֶדְרוֹ
בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא בְּתוֹךְ־צֹאנֹו
נִפְרָשׁוֹת, כִּן אֲבַקֵּר אֶת־צֹאנִי.

In the Mishnah (part of the Talmud), it says:

"The Day of Atonement atones for sins against God, not for sins against man, unless the injured party has been appeased" (*Mishna Yoma* 8:9). This teaches that we must first put right, as best we can, what has been done wrong, and THEN ask forgiveness.