The Experience of Jewish Liturgy

Studies Dedicated to Menahem Schmelzer

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U-N'TANEH TOKEF AS A MIDRASHIC POEM

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1.

And so to You may (the recitation of the) K'dushah ascend
for You our God are King.

וּבְכֵן לְךָ תַּעֲלֶה קְדֻשָּׁה, .1
כִּי אַתָּה אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ.

2.

[a] Now let us proclaim the power of the holiness of the day,
for it is awesome and dreadful [see Hab 1:7].
[b] On it Your kingship is exalted [see Num 24:7]
for Your throne is established in kindness
letting You reign from it securely [see Isa 16:5].
[c] It is true that You are
judge, accuser, discerner of motives, witness [Jer 29:13],
inscriber, sealer, (counter and enumerator).[1]
[d] You adduce all that has been forgotten
by opening the book of records
where each entry speaks for itself
with each person's signature [see Job 37:7].

וּנְתַנֶּה תֹּקֶף קְדֻשַּׁת הַיּוֹם .2
כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאָיוֹם.
וּבוֹ תִנָּשֵׂא מַלְכוּתֶךָ
וְיִכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד כִּסְאֶךָ
וְתֵשֵׁב עָלָיו בֶּאֱמֶת.
אֱמֶת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא
דַיָּן וּמוֹכִיחַ וְיוֹדֵעַ וָעֵד
וְכוֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם (וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֶה).
וְתִזְכֹּר כָּל-הַנִּשְׁכָּחוֹת,
וְתִפְתַּח אֶת-סֵפֶרהַזִּכְרוֹנוֹת,
וּמֵאֵלָיו יִקָּרֵא
וְחוֹתַם יַד כָּל-אָדָם בּוֹ.

3.

[a] And with the great shofar it is sounded [see Isa 27:13;
Exod 19:19]
but a muted murmuring sound is heard [see 1 Kgs 19:12;
Job 4:16].
[b] The angels are alarmed,
dread and trembling seize them [see Ps 48:6–7]
[c] as they declare: "Behold, the day of judgment,"
to assess the hosts on high in judgment [see Isa 24:21],
for in Your eyes they will not be vindicated in judgment.

וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתָּקַע .3

וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה דַקָּה יִשָּׁמַע.

וּמַלְאָכִים יֵחָפֵזוּן
וְחִיל וּרְעָדָה יֹאחֵזוּן
וְיֹאמְרוּ הִנֵּה יוֹם הַדִּין.
לִפְקֹד עַל צְבָא מָרוֹם בַּדִּין
כִּי לֹא יִזְכּוּ בְעֵינֶיךָ בַּדִּין.

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[1] The two verbs in parentheses, which are missing in some versions (see E. D. Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 2 vols. [Jerusalem: Koren, 1970] 1:169, line 40), match the middle two verbs of 4c. If the two verbs are retained in this strophe, then it contains four terms, as the previous strophe does.

4.

[a] All who enter the world will pass before You
as the angelic hosts/ as a flock of sheep/ as soldiers in formation.
[b] Like a shepherd who checks his flock [see Ezek 34:12]
having them pass under his staff [see Lev 27:32],
[c] so You will have (them) pass as You count, number,
and assess each life.
[d] You then determine each person's sentence
and inscribe their verdict.

.4

וְכָל־בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעַבְרוּן לְפָנֶיךָ
כִּבְנֵי מָרוֹן.
כְּבַקָּרַת רוֹעֶה עֶדְרוֹ
מַעֲבִיר צֹאנוֹ תַּחַת שִׁבְטוֹ,
כֵּן תַּעֲבִיר וְתִסְפֹּר וְתִמְנֶה
וְתִפְקֹד נֶפֶשׁ כָּל־חָי.
וְתַחְתֹּךְ קִצְבָּה לְכָל־בְּרִיָּה
וְתִכְתֹּב אֶת־גְּזַר דִּינָם

5.

On Rosh ha-Shanah it is inscribed
but on Yom Kippur it is sealed:

.5

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכָּתֵבוּן
וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כִּפּוּר יֵחָתֵמוּן.

6.

[a] How many shall pass on
and how many shall come into being,
[b] who shall live and who shall die,
who shall reach his limit and who shall not,
who (shall perish) in a flood and who in a fire,
who by war[2] and who by wildlife,
who by starvation [see Ezek 14:21; Jer 15:2]
and who by dehydration,
who by earth-shattering events[3] and who by epidemic,
who by asphyxiation and who by execution,
who shall be at rest and who restless,
who shall be composed and who discomposed,
who shall be at ease and who ill at ease,
who shall wax rich and who shall wane poor,
who shall experience an upturn and who a downturn.

.6

כַּמָּה יַעַבְרוּן
וְכַמָּה יִבָּרֵאוּן,
מִי יִחְיֶה וּמִי יָמוּת,
מִי בְקִצּוֹ וּמִי לֹא בְקִצּוֹ,
מִי בַמַּיִם וּמִי בָאֵשׁ,
מִי בַחֶרֶב וּמִי בַחַיָּה,
מִי בָרָעָב וּמִי בַצָּמָא,

מִי בָרַעַשׁ וּמִי בַמַּגֵּפָה,
מִי בַחֲנִיקָה וּמִי בַסְּקִילָה.
מִי יָנוּחַ וּמִי יָנוּעַ,
מִי יַשְׁקִיט וּמִי יִטָּרֵף,
מִי יִשָּׁלֵו וּמִי יִתְיַסֵּר,
מִי יַעֲשִׁיר וּמִי יֵעָנִי,
מִי יָרוּם וּמִי יִשָּׁפֵל.

7.

But t'shuvah, and t'filah, and tz'dakah
let the harshness/hardship of the decree pass.

.7

וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וּצְדָקָה
מַעֲבִירִין אֶת־רֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה.

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[2] Literally "sword," which is a synecdoche for war (see Lev 26:6) and thus contrasted with peace; see below, n. 34. Some versions add "wars"; see Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:170, variants, line 17.

[3] רעש entails shaking but not necessarily an earthquake; see, e.g., Ezek 12:18; 37:7; and especially the cantor's prayer, known as the *Hineni*, before the High Holiday *musaf*: הנני העני ממעש נרעש ונפחד (Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:147).

8.

[a] For as Your (four-lettered) name (is one of mercy)
so is Your reputation [see Ps 48:11],
(namely) hard to anger and easy to appease [*m. Avot* 5:11],
[b] for You desire not the sinner's death,
but that in turning from his path he might live
[see Ezek 18:32, 23; 33:11].
[c] And up to his dying day You await him,
for were he to return You would welcome him at once.
[d] Truly, You are their Maker
and know what they are made of [see Ps 103:14],
that they are but flesh and blood.

9.

[a] Man, his origin is from dust; his end is to dust
[see Gen 3:19].
At the risk of his life, he earns his bread [see Lam 5:9].
[b] (In Scripture, life) is said to be
like a shard—broken [see Lev 6:21], like grass—withering,
like a flower—wilting [Isa 40:7], like a shadow—passing
[Ps 144:4b],
like a cloud—fading [Job 7:9], like a breeze—fleeting
[see Isa 40:7],
like dust—flittering [see Isa 5:24a], like a dream flying away
[Job 20:8].

10.

But You are King, the everlasting God.

.8

כִּי כְשִׁמְךָ
כֵּן תְּהִלָּתֶךָ,
קָשֶׁה לִכְעֹס וְנוֹחַ לִרְצוֹת.
כִּי לֹא תַחְפֹּץ בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת
כִּי אִם בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדַּרְכּוֹ וְחָיָה.

וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תְּחַכֶּה־לּוֹ,
אִם יָשׁוּב מִיַּד תְּקַבְּלוֹ.
אֱמֶת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא יוֹצְרָם
וְיוֹדֵעַ יִצְרָם
כִּי הֵם בָּשָׂר וָדָם.

.9

אָדָם יְסוֹדוֹ מֵעָפָר וְסוֹפוֹ לֶעָפָר.

בְּנַפְשׁוֹ יָבִיא לַחְמוֹ
מָשׁוּל
כַּחֶרֶס הַנִּשְׁבָּר כֶּחָצִיר יָבֵשׁ,
וּכְצִיץ נוֹבֵל, כְּצֵל עוֹבֵר,

וּכְעָנָן כָּלֶה, וּכְרוּחַ נוֹשָׁבֶת,

וּכְאָבָק פּוֹרֵחַ, וְכַחֲלוֹם יָעוּף.

.10

וְאַתָּה הוּא מֶלֶךְ אֵל חַי וְקַיָּם.

Historical Background

U-n'taneh tokef is to Rosh ha-Shanah what *L'khah dodi* is to Shabbat. Both poems capture the spirit of the day more memorably than the classical rabbinic liturgy. Each epitomizes what its respective day has come to mean by providing its most poignant imagery. *L'khah dodi* provides the imagery for the transformation of Shabbat into a rendez-vous between God and Israel;[4] *U-n'taneh tokef* provides the imagery for the transformation of Rosh ha-Shanah into a trial between God and humanity.

In its economy of words, its simplicity of rhyme, its lucidity of expression, and its remolding of Scripture and rabbinic tradition, *U-n'taneh*

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[4] See Reuven Kimelman, *The Mystical Meaning of Lekhah Dodi and Kabbalat Shabbat* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003), 1–32.

tokef reflects the classic poetic style of the Byzantine period before the Islamic conquest of Eretz Yisra'el. Its themes and expressions evoke the period's three outstanding representatives: Yose b. Yose, Yannai, and Eleazar ha-Qallir.[5] In particular, it is similar to the *piyutim* of Yose b. Yose for Rosh ha-Shanah (*Efḥad b'-ma'asai*) composed for the Zikhronot of *musaf*,[6] that of Yannai for the first night of Rosh ha-Shanah (*Eimat boker*),[7] and that of Eleazar ha-Qallir (*Upad me-az*) located at the beginning of *musaf* of the first day of Rosh ha-Shanah,[8] and what may be his *Asher mi ya'aseh k'-ma'asekha*, a *siluk* for the second day of Rosh ha-Shanah.[9] In terms of Ashkenazic liturgical development, *U-n'taneh tokef* displaced *Mi lo yirakha*, the *siluk* of Qallir's *Upad me-az*.[10]

It is hard to determine which way the influence runs among these poems[11] since so many of the shared themes and expressions are biblical or rabbinic. To date *U-n'taneh tokef* by its simplicity or universalism is also problematic since there is rarely a simple linear development from simple to complex or from particular to universal or vice versa. Universalism is an especially problematic criterion for dating, as it characterizes early material such as the Rosh ha-Shanah Amidah as well as late material such as the *piyut*, *V'-ye'etayu*.[12] The fact is that

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[5] See Joseph Yahalom, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibutz ha-m'uḥad, 1999), 237; and Joseph Yahalom and Benjamin Lafler, " 'Mi Lo Yirakha Melekh [Who Shall Not Fear You, O King]': A Lost *Silluq* by Kallir for Rosh Hashanah" [Hebrew], ed. Ephraim Hazan and Joseph Yahalom, in *Studies in Hebrew Poetry and Jewish Heritage in Memory of Aharon Mirsky* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2006), 127–158, esp. 136.

[6] See Aharon Mirsky, *Ha-Piyyut: The Development of Post Biblical Poetry in Eretz Israel and the Diaspora* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990), 151–154; idem, ed., *Yosse ben Yosse: Poems* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1977), 99–100; and Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:253.

[7] See Zvi Meir Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai according to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holidays* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1985–1987), 2:198–201. Also the end of Yannai's *Asher eimatkha* parallels much of the end of *U-n'taneh tokef*; see Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 2:376. For another parallel, see Yahalom and Lafler, "Mi Lo Yirakha Melekh," 136.

[8] Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:157–158.

[9] Ibid., 1:114.

[10] See Yahalom and Lafler, "Mi Lo Yirakha Melekh," 133. For the term *siluk*, see below, n. 18.

[11] Cf. Avraham Frankel, "R. Amnon and the Penetration of *U-n'taneh tokef* into Italy, Ashkenaz, and France" [Hebrew], *Zion* 67 (2002), 125–138, at 129; and Yahalom and Lafler, "Mi Lo Yirakha Melekh," 132n7. For an argument for attributing *U-n'taneh tokef* to Yannai, see Ya'akov Spiegel, "Clarification of the Words of the Piyyut: 'And Repentance and Prayer and Charity Avert the Evil Decree' and the Commitment of the Poet to the Halachah" [Hebrew], *Netu'im* 8 (Marcheshvan, 2002): 23–42, at 28; and Yahlom and Lafler, "Mi Lo Yirakha Melekh," 136.

[12] Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:227–228.

the literature of most periods, whether Second Temple, medieval, or anything in between, attests to the mixture of the universal and particular.[13]

U-n'taneh tokef has an affinity with each of the three sections of the *musaf* service: Malkhuyot, Zikhronot, and Shofarot.[14] Like Malkhuyot, it begins and ends on the motif of God's eternal rule over all. Like Zikhronot, it refers to the book of records that chronicles our lives, it notes there is no forgetting by God, and it shows how judgments are made and destinies determined. Like Shofarot, it mentions the blast of the shofar and alludes to the Sinaitic revelation.

Nonetheless, instead of introducing them, *U-n'taneh tokef* serves as a *siluk* introducing the K'dushah though ostensibly it has nothing to do with the K'dushah.[15] This liturgical role may be ascribed to the story of the martyrdom of R. Amnon of Mainz. In his book *Or Zaru'a*,[16] R. Yitzḥak b. Moshe of Vienna (1189–1250), a student of the great liturgical scholar R. Avraham b. Azriel, attributes the story to R. Ephraim of Bonn. Ephraim, who lived through the Second Crusade of 1146 in his youth and chronicled it in his *Sefer z'khirah*, tells that R. Amnon recited *U-n'taneh tokef* as he was dying.[17] Since Amnon died for the sake of *k'dushat ha-shem* (the sanctification of the Name), the Hebrew term for martyrdom, for his refusal to apostatize and convert to Christianity, *U-n'taneh tokef* became associated with the K'dushah[18]

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[13] See Kimelman, *The Mystical Meaning of Lekhah Dodi and Kabbalat Shabbat*, 97–106.

[14] See *Perush al ha-piyutim* (Hamburg MS 153), *Taqanat seder ha-t'filah u-ferush maḥzor m'yuḥas l'-Raban*, introduction by Avraham Rot (Jerusalem: Kiryat Arba, 1980), 113a.

[15] Admittedly, Qallir's *siluk*, *Melekh b'-mishpat ya'amid aretz* (Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:80–86), also deals with these three themes, except its middle alludes to the K'dushah (ibid., 85, line 59), and its end fully introduces it (ibid., 86, lines 77–80).

[16] "Laws of Rosh Hashanah," #272 (Zitomir, 1862), 1:63a.

[17] Ephraim may have also introduced the liturgical response to the Crusades, the *Av ha-raḥamim*, into the Sabbath service before *musaf*; see Avraham b. Azriel, *Sefer arugat ha-bosem*, ed. E. Urbach, 4 vols. (Mekizei Nirdamim: Jerusalem, 1963), 4:49.

[18] The association may have been fostered by a play on *siluk*, the title of a *piyut* that introduces the K'dushah; the word literally means "ascent" and may have been linked to the ascent of the soul (*histalkut*) in the wake of R. Amnon's martyrdom; see Ivan (Yisrael) Marcus, "Kidush ha-shem b'-Ashkanaz v'-sipur Rabe Amnon mi-Magentza," in *Sanctity of Life and Martyrdom: Studies in Memory of Amir Yekutiel*, ed. Isaiah Gafni and Aviezer Ravitsky (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1992), 142. Moreover, in Mainz the term *siluk* was thought to correspond to its Hebrew equivalent תַּעֲלֶה in the introductory phrase to the K'dushah: לְךָ תַּעֲלֶה קְדֻשָּׁה; see Avraham b. Azriel, *Sefer arugat ha-bosem*, 4:42. Appropriate to the content of *U-n'taneh tokef* is the interpretation that the *siluk* elevates the worshiper to the level of the angels of the K'dushah; see Shulamit Elizur, *A Poem for Every Parsha* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1999), 355.

and his own martyrdom.[19] This is supported by the strophe that transitions from the *U-n'taneh tokef* to the *K'dushah*: "Sanctify Your name by virtue of those who sanctify Your name." "Those who sanctify Your name" refers to those who recite the *K'dushah*, which begins, "We will sanctify Your name," as well as to those who are martyred for *k'dushat ha-shem*.[20] The request itself is based on a feature of the theology of Ezekiel, that God must sanctify His name (i.e., clear his name) by redeeming Israel lest their exile be attributed to God's inability to redeem His people, entailing a desecration of the divine name (i.e., a tarnishing of God's reputation).[21]

Inserting *U-n'taneh tokef* after the standard opening to the *siluk* of the *K'dushah* ("And then [*u-v'-khen*] to You may our recitation of the *K'dushah* ascend, for You our God are King"), evokes the mention of *u-v'-khen* in Esther 4:16b: "*U-v'-khen* (And then) I shall go in to the king…and if I am to perish I shall perish." Esther's entrance in trepidation to the quarters of the king of Persia casts its ominous shadow over our entrance into the presence of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed-be-He.[22] The insertion of *U-n'taneh tokef* here correlates with the fact that the linkage between the liturgical and biblical *U-v'-khen* was made, or confirmed, by R. El'azar b. Yehudah (of Worms),[23] who was born in Mainz (c. 1160) around the time *U-n'taneh tokef* was making its way into the Ashkenazic liturgy.[24] It was also in Mainz that

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[19] See Frankel, "R. Amnon and the Penetration of *U-n'taneh tokef* into Italy, Ashkenaz, and France," n. 55, and the literature cited in n. 56.

[20] See Michael Sheishar, *"U-n'taneh tokef v'-Eleh ezkerah," Yedi'ot Aḥronot*, September 20, 1985, 20, 22. Sheishar shows the extent to which the story of R. Amnon is embellished by expressions drawn from *Eleh ezkerah*.

[21] See especially Rashi's French colleague, R. Yosef Qara (1055–1125) to Ezek 36:23 (*Sefer Yeḥezkel, Mikra'ot g'dolot ha-keter*, ed. M. Cohen [Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2000], 241).

[22] See the formulation of *Siddur of R. Solomon ben Samson of Garmaise, including the Siddur of the Haside Ashkenas* [Hebrew], ed. Moshe Hershler (Jerusalem: Hemed, 1971), 226.

[23] *Perushei sidur ha-t'filah la-Rokeah*, ed. M. and Yehudah Hershler, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Machon ha-Rav Hershler, 1992), 2:643. Significance has also been attributed to *u-v'-khen* in terms of its numerical equivalents; see Simḥah me-Vitry, *Maḥzor Vitry*, ed. A. Goldschmidt, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Otzar ha-Posqim, 5764–5769), 3:611–612n2.

[24] I use the expression "making its way" since *U-n'taneh tokef* was not incorporated throughout Ashkenaz at one time nor in the same way. In the *Amsterdam Mahzor* (*The Amsterdam Mahzor: History, Liturgy, Illumination*, ed. A. Van Der Heide and E. Van Voolen [Leiden: Brill, 1989], folio 167a), for instance, *U-n'taneh tokef* appears without an *u-v'-khen* introduction.

El'azar's father, R. Yehudah b. Kalonymus, sat on the same court with R. Ephraim.[25]

It therefore may be more than chance that the opening strophe of *U-n'taneh tokef* overlaps the opening strophe of *Mi y'taneh tokef t'hilatkha*, a *piyut* by the late-tenth-century Italian R. Meshulam b. Kolonymus.[26] It was his son, R. Kolonymus b. Meshulam of Mainz,[27] who introduced *U-n'taneh tokef* into the Ashkenazic liturgy in the next century. Like *U-n'taneh tokef*, his *piyut* also serves as a segue into the K'dushah, but that of the morning service of Yom Kippur.

In a chronicle of the Crusades, the author notes that the martyrs of Worms willingly gave up their lives "in sanctification of the Eternally Awesome and Sublime Name of Him Who rules above and below, Who was and will be, Whose Name is Lord of Hosts, and is crowned with the graces of the seventy-two names."[28] The number seventy-two corresponds to a contemporaneous understanding of *u-v'-khen* that discounts the initial *vav* (= *u*) to arrive at seventy-two in order to match that divine name.[29] In the wake of the horrors of the Crusades, the rabbinic authorities promoted a *piyut* to introduce the K'dushah that evokes the recent mass martyrdom and the vicissitudes of life while promoting the idea that a life of piety and God's mercy can temper the evil decree.[30]

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[25] On the relationship between the two, see Victor Aptowitzer, *Mavo l'-sefer Rabiyah* (Jerusalem, 1984), 319–320.

[26] Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 2:156. On the impact of Meshulam's *piyutim* in Ashkenaz, see Avraham Fraenkel, "Tashlum ma'arekhet ha-yotzer 'Afiq renen v'-shirim' l'-R' M'shulam bar Kolonymus," in *Higayon L'Yona: New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah, and Piyyut in Honor of Professor Yona Fraenkel*, ed. Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum, and Galit Hasan-Rokem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2006), 551–565.

[27] On the relationship of their *piyutim*, see Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), 76–77.

[28] A. M. Haberman, *Sefer g'zerot Ashkanaz v'-Tzarfat* (Jerusalem, 1945), 100. The translation is from *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades*, ed. and trans. Shlomo Eidelberg (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1996), 109.

[29] See Yehudah b. Yaqar (ca. 1150–ca. 1225), *Perush ha-t'filot v'-ha-b'rakhot*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Me'orei Yisra'el, 1968–1969), 2:83; Avraham b. Azriel, *Sefer arugat ha-bosem*, 3:460, with n. 84. On the number seventy-two and the name of God, see Menaḥem Kasher, *Torah sh'lemah*, 42 vols. (Jerusalem: Beth Torah Sh'lemah, 1949–1991), 14:284–286. *Sidur ha-m'kubal R. Hertz Shatz* [Eleazar Hertz Treves] (1560; repr. Israel, 1971), ad loc., which cites El'azar of Worms extensively, sees in the same word the numerical equivalent of חֶסֶד (= 72).

[30] For a comparable phenomenon, see Jeffrey Hoffman, "*Akdamut*: History, Folklore, and Meaning," *JQR* 99 (2009): 161–183. Hoffman explains the tale about the introduction of *Akdamut*, by R. Meir b. Isaac of the German communities of the

Midrashic Background

The significance of *U-n'taneh tokef* is not simply a function of its liturgical position. As a good poem, the meaning of *U-n'taneh tokef* jells out of the interaction of its thematics and poetics. Its specific agenda emerges through its masterful manipulation of language and imagery, part of which is its striking universalism. Its universalistic vision lines up, as noted, with much of the Rosh ha-Shanah liturgy, as do the *piyutim* of Yose b. Yose.[31] *U-n'taneh tokef* presents Rosh ha-Shanah as a day of divine kingship and judgment for all. The kingship theme derives from the creation of the world,[32] the judgment theme from the creation of humanity.[33] *U-n'taneh tokef* adopts the midrashic position that maintains that Rosh ha-Shanah commemorates Adam's birthday as well as his day of judgment and pardon:

> On the first day of Tishrei, New Year's Day, sentence is pronounced upon the countries of the world—those destined for war[34] and those destined for peace, those for famine and those for plenty, those for death and those for life; on this day the lives of mortals are scrutinized to determine who is to live and who is to die. This day was chosen because the first human was created on Rosh ha-Shanah. [What happened?] In the first hour it occurred to God to create him...in the ninth, God gave him

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Rhineland, after the First Crusade, as seeking "to provide an etiology of the *piyyut* and its connection to the *Shavuot* liturgy." Relevant to *U-n'taneh tokef* is the tale of a monk who threatened the Jews of Worms with death were they to lose a contest in sorcery, whereupon "they fasted and engaged in deeds of *t'shuvah, t'filah,* and *tz'daqah.*" The order of the three reflects the influence of *U-n'taneh tokef;* see below, nn. 79–82. For the rabbinic response to the First Crusade, see Avraham Grossman, "Shorshav shel kidush ha-shem be-Ashkanaz ha-k'dumah," *Sanctity of Life and Martyrdom: Studies in Memory of Amir Yekutiel,* ed. Isaiah Gafni and Aviezer Ravitsky (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1992), 99–130, esp. 119–127.

[31] See Mirsky, *Yosse Ben Yosse: Poems,* 15–16.

[32] See *b. Rosh Hash.* 8a (R. Eliezer), 10b, 27a; *y. Rosh Hash.* 1:1, 56b; 1:3, 57a; *b. Avod. Zar.* 8a; *y. Avod. Zar.* 1:2, 39c. Sa'adya Ga'on made this explicit; see Dovid Abudarham, *Abudarham ha-shalem* (Jerusalem: Usha, 1963), 269.

[33] The midrash (see n. 35 below) reused the talmudic material (n. 32 above) to transform Rosh ha-Shanah from the birthday of the world to the birthday of humanity. See R. Dovid Luria (Radal) to *Pirkei d'-Rabi Eli'ezer* 8, ed. D. Luria, p. 18a, first note. The move from creation to judgment is summarized by Yannai in his *piyut* for Rosh ha-Shanah, *Eimat boker,* in a single rhyming couplet: ביום אשר בו נברא העולם /העולם בו תדין לכל באי העולם (Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai,* 2:205, line 16). The same move occurs in the opening strophe of the post-shofar *piyut:* היום הרת עולם היום יעמיד במשפט (Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im,* 1:244). On the paytanic proclivity for combining different calendrical approaches, see *Tosafot Rosh Hash.* 27a, s.v. *k'ma'an.*

[34] Literally "sword"; see n. 2 above.

a command; in the tenth, he transgressed the command given him; in the eleventh, he was brought to judgment; in the twelfth, God pardoned him. The Holy One said to him: Let this be an omen for your descendants that as you entered this day for judgment and were pardoned so will your descendants come before Me in judgment on this day and be pardoned. When will this be? "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month" (Lev 23:24).[35]

But how was Adam pardoned if he was banished from Eden? Another version of this midrash explains that banishment was really a mitigation, for

> when Adam sinned, God judged him according to both the measure of justice and the measure of mercy. He judged him according to the measure of justice in saying to him, "For in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). Indeed as soon as he ate, he decreed death for him. How did He judge him according to the measure of mercy? By joining it with the quality of justice. For He did not tell Adam whether [the day of his death] was to be the day that mortals know or the day of the Holy One, blessed be He, the day which is a thousand years, as it is said "For a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday" (Ps 90:4).[36]

Stretching the human day to the thousand-year divine day is an act of mercy. It commutes Adam's sentence without waiving it. The crime remains on the books; it is neither pardoned nor expunged. There is only a reprieve involving a stay of execution, a postponement not a cancellation.[37] Still, as an auspicious day for reduced sentencing, the

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[35] *P'sikta d'-Rav Kahana* 23.1, ed. B. Mandelbaum, pp. 333–334, and parallels, esp. *y. Rosh Hash.* 1:3, 57a, with the Zikhronot of Musaf Rosh ha-Shanah (Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:257). This source grasps Rosh ha-Shanah as a day of judgment for countries and individuals, whereas *U-n'taneh tokef* focuses on the individual alone as does *Lev. Rab.* 30.1, ed. M. Margulies, p. 688; and *b. Betzah* 16a, according to the version of R. Alfasi (Rif).

[36] *P'sikta Rabati* 40, ed. M. Friedmann, p. 167a; ed. R. Ulmer, p. 864, with *Gen. Rab.* 19.8, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 178.

[37] The idea that an extension or suspension of the punishment is a manifestation of divine mercy is primarily based on the divine attributes "slow to anger" of Exod 34:6 and Num 14:18 as well as "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children" of Exod 34:7, which was taken to indicate a postponing of the punishment of the fathers to the children. For the classical commentators, see Abraham Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Ramban to Num 14:16–18. For the Talmud, see *y. Ta'an.* 2:1 (R. Aḥa in the name of R. Yoḥanan) with Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1969), 404 (ET: 457). For the midrash, see *Mishnat Rabi Eli'ezer*, ed. H. G. Enelow, 2 vols. (New York: Bloch, 1933), 1:95, with Kasher, *Torah Sh'lemah*, 22:69n*79. For recent discussions, see Yochanan Muffs, *Love and Joy: Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America,

midrash goes on to explain, Rosh ha-Shanah was selected as the day of judgment for Adam's descendants.[38]

These midrashim that inform *U-n'taneh tokef* appear explicitly in the opening strophes of Qallir's aforementioned *Upad me-az*[39] as well as in the *siluk, Akhen atah el mistater* of Binyamin b. Shmuel (11th c.).[40] As fate would have it, both of them were replaced or displaced by *U-n'taneh tokef.*

By now it should be clear that *U-n'taneh tokef* cannot be fully understood without reference to midrash, and thus the title "*U-n'taneh Tokef* as a Midrashic Poem." This obtains also to its use of verses. When verses, or fragments of verses, are disengaged from their original context, they can assume new midrashic meanings. When these midrashic meanings displace the original ones, as so often happens in *piyut* in particular and in the liturgy in general, midrash becomes *p'shat.*[41]

The Poetry

The impact of *U-n'taneh tokef* is due to the bluntness of its message, the density of its language, and the simplicity of its poetics. All our anxieties and apprehensions on this day of judgment are mediated through its rhythm and images with horrifying exactitude. These graphic images and vivid expressions are transmitted through a deceptively simple rhyme scheme. Rhyme structures the material by yoking together strophes that otherwise might be wrongly associated with what precedes or succeeds them. Nonetheless, one has to be careful not to be taken in by the appearance of equivalences, as when the same word appears in adjacent passages but bears a different meaning in each. Such is the case with the use of *be-emet* at the end of #2b and the use of *emet* at the beginning of #2c. Based, as we shall see, on the overall thrust of *U-n'taneh tokef* and especially #8, the words from Isaiah 16:5

1992), 20–24; and Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 342–343, with Jer 46:28d.

[38] See also Abraham b. Nathan (of Lunel), *Sefer ha-manhig*, ed. Yitsḥaq Raphael (2 vols., Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978), 1:308, lines 92–93.

[39] Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:157.

[40] Ibid., 1:207–208.

[41] For an illustrative example, see Reuven Kimelman, "Mah Tovu as a Psychological Introduction to the Prayer," *Continuity and Change: Festschrift in Honor of Irving Greenberg's 75th Birthday*, ed. Steven T. Katz and Steven Bayme (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2011), 189–202.

cited in #2b—"Your throne is established in kindness (*b'-ḥesed*), letting You reign from it securely (*b'-emet*)"—should be taken as affirming that it is God's kindness (*ḥesed*) that secures (*emet*) His rule. The alternative would be to interpret the last word of #2b, *b'-emet*, as "in truth" because of its link with the first word of #2c, *emet* ("truly").[42]

Often the rhythm of meaning emerges through the coordination of the rhythm of reading with the rhythm of breathing. It is this convergence of sounds and movements of breath that spurs the poem on. A good example is #2a where the biblical order of the word pair "dreadful and awesome" (Hab 1:7) is reversed,[43] but the adjectives are not applied to God, as they are in the Bible and in many *piyutim*.[44] Rather, in this context they are applied to the day[45] in order to forge an acoustical pair between "dreadful" and "the day."[46] As is obvious from the above layout of the poem, the rhyming units (2a, 2b, 2d, 3a, 3b, 3c, 4a,[47] 4b, 5 with 6a, 6e–h, 7, 8c, 8d, 9a [2×]) are sufficiently pervasive to constitute the constructive device of the poem.[48] The layout also illustrates the phenomenon of isosyllabism, which uses a recurring number of syllables for each strophe.[49] Laying out the poem according to its rhyme scheme and stress pattern highlights the correlation between meaning and rhyme showing the blending of sound and sense. The rhyme patterns draw attention to the verbal texture of the message itself. It allows us to sense the internal bond between

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[42] Following *Maḥzor Ramḥal*, ed. Yosef Avivi (Jerusalem 1995), 126: ותשב עליו באמת למה? כי הוא דיין אמת.

[43] To נורא ואיום.

[44] See Israel Davidson, *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry*, 4 vols. (N.p.: KTAV, 1970), 1:125–126; and the *Hineni* (Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:147). God's face is also dubbed "dreadful" in Qallir's *Upad me-az*; see ibid., 1:157, line 2.

[45] As happens elsewhere, but according to the biblical order; see Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 2:296; and *Ayom v'norah tzom he-asor*, in Joseph Yahalom, "The World of Sorrow and Mourning in the Genizah: Transformations of Literary Genres" [Hebrew], *Ginzei Qedem* 1 (2005), 117–137, at 132.

[46] היום // ואיום. For the same phenomenon of the reversal of the order of Hab 1:7 for purposes of rhyme, see Mirsky, *Ha-Piyyut*, 160. Note that in Habakkuk and in the *Hineni*, the terms modify God whereas here they modify the day.

[47] For the rhyming of the similar-sounding nasal phonemes *mem* and *nun*, see Isa 41:17; and Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai according to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holidays*, 1:19n6.

[48] There are even several cases of internal rhymes (4b, 8b–c, 9a).

[49] This poetic device characterizes Qallir and the Italian Sh'lomo ha-Bavli; see Ezra Fleischer, *The Poems of Sh'lomo ha-Bavli* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1973), 86–89.

the two. So common is rhyme that the shape of the sounds shapes the meaning of much of the poem.

U-n'taneh tokef intensifies the drama of judgment and the ambience of a trial by simulating the opening chapter of the book of Job, where the judgment scenes shift back and forth from heaven to earth. The shifting of scenes takes on a narrative quality. As one passes through the vertical vector of heaven and earth, one advances on the horizontal vector of time from present to future. The first scene (#2a–b) contrasts the dreadfulness of the day with the kindness of God's kingship. The contrast between the day's awesomeness and God's goodness sets the tone for the whole poem. The latter part of the scene (#2c–d) now shifts into a trial mode. It spells out how all our deeds and intentions will be adduced in the divine court where God—who knows all—is judge, accuser, and witness. He recalls precisely what we are inclined to forget, adducing the book of records wherein we have signed off on our every deed.[50]

The dreadfulness of the day is furthered heightened by projecting the trial on high (#3). The scene and choice of terms is based on Psalm 48:6–7. There, however, the *dramatis personae* are *m'lakhim* ("kings"); here they are *malakhim* ("angels"). There the kings panic at the impending attack; here the angels are terrified at the impending judgment. The ensuing havoc confounds even the rhyme scheme. The rhyming verbs of #3b are *yeḥafezun* and *yoḥezun*. Each appears with the suffix *-zun* but once in the Bible. *Yeḥafezun* appears in Psalm 104:7 to indicate how the waters of the flood struck with terror retreated before God's thunderous voice. *Yoḥezun* appears in Isaiah 13:8 to indicate how, on the Day of the Lord, people will be seized by pangs and throes. The parallel structure creates the expectation that *yoḥezun* of the second strophe will match *yeḥafezun* of the first, an expectation that is heightened by their phonological equivalence. In actuality, where they most overlap phonologically, the final *-zun* phoneme, is where they most differ syntactically. The latter is just a verb (the angels *panic*), with the *-zun* simply elongating the verb, whereas the former is a verb plus its object

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[50] Based on Job 37:7. In rabbinic sources, the verse refers to the final judgment; see *Sifrei Deut.* 307, ed. L. Finkelstein, p. 345, lines 16–18; and *b. Ta'an.* 11a. According to *P'sikta Rabati* 8, ed. M. Freidmann, p. 29a; ed. R. Ulmer, p. 102, God maintains a brief on each person wherein his deeds are recorded. According to *Tanḥuma B'reshit* 29, ed. S. Buber, p. 21, God brings the books and shows everyone's deeds with their signatures.

expressed as *-zun* (alarm and trembling *seize them*).[51] This undermining of the phonological parallel by the syntactical difference throws the reader off, giving him a tinge of the jitteriness of the angels.

In contrast, the three strophes of the next unit (#3c) converge on a single unequivocal word. They form an epistrophe, all ending with the same morpheme *din*, which has the same meaning (judgment) each time. The threefold *din* welds together the three strophes to explain why there is a day of judgment on high.

These various uses of parallelism characterize the poetic dexterity of *U-n'taneh tokef* and its uncanny capacity to astonish us. Sometimes it deploys parallelism for emphasis and explication; other times for yoking together disparate elements. Similar is the contrasting use of the conjunction *waw* or *vav*.[52] Most often, it joins together strophes to mold units of meaning, functioning as a "conjunctive *waw*." Other times its strategic use as a "disjunctive *waw*" (translated as "but"), as in #3a and #5, unexpectedly unyokes what the parallelism ostensibly yoked. In still other cases, such as #7 and #10, the disjunctive *waw* concludes a thought by contrast or by presenting an alternative. Its use in #10 provides superbly the surprise conclusion. It is preceded by four phrases all beginning with a conjunctive *waw* meaning "and." The next word (#10) also begins with a *waw*, which the reader presumes means once again "and," but realizes that only the disjunctive *waw*—"but"—will do. The frustration of expectation necessitates a rereading that has to reconstruct the contrast between the fleeting nature of humanity and the lasting nature of divinity. Both uses of the disjunctive *waw* induce the type of defamiliarization that prolongs the reading, indeed forces a rereading in order to figure out the flow of the strophe. The result is a guarded recitation never knowing what to expect. In fear and trembling, we gingerly advance from strophe to strophe.

Instead of contrasting heaven and earth, #3 follows the model of the K'dushah, where the earthly realm takes its cue from the heavenly

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[51] This is exactly how the Targum and Radak to Isa 13:8 take it.

[52] Although the letter was originally *waw*, in Ashkenaz it was surely pronounced as *vav* as it may have already been in Byzantine Palestine. As is the case for early *paytanim* (see, e.g., Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai according to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holidays*, 1:38), *U-n'taneh tokef*'s use of the *waw* is biblical in its range of meanings, including "and, but, now, then, by means of," and possibly "indeed"; see Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 1:257–259.

one. It begins with the blast of the shofar. But since it is not the shofar of Rosh ha-Shanah, which shofar is it? Some say it is the eschatological shofar of Isaiah: "And in that day, a great shofar shall be sounded; and the strayed who are in the land of Assyria and the expelled who are in the land of Egypt shall come and worship A-donai on the holy mount, in Jerusalem" (27:13).[53] In that case, what was slated to transpire "in that day" is now transpiring in heaven. Because of the upcoming alarm of the angels, however, others prefer the allusion to the shofar of Amos: "Were a shofar to be sounded in a city would the people not be startled?" (3:6). This allusion takes on added meaning in the light of the midrash[54] that identifies the time of this verse as Rosh ha-Shanah and the people as Israel. Indeed, that very midrash goes on to cite Ezekiel 33:11, which is the basis of #8b.

In either case, it is peculiar that what gets heard is not the shofar but "a muted murmuring voice." Why allude here to 1 Kings 19:12–13, where God appears to Elijah at Mount Sinai "not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in a muted murmuring voice" which then addresses Elijah, saying: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Here, too, God is not in the blast of the shofar, but in the muted murmuring voice,[55] a voice that asks (on this day of judgment), "What are you doing here?"

The parallelism of the strophes of #3a in length and rhythm creates the illusion of equivalence only to be undermined by the paradox of the sounding of a shofar which is not heard. The last words of the two strophes overlap phonologically and morphologically but not semantically. The sounding of the great shofar is thus contrasted with the hearing of the muted voice by linking the two acoustically through an assonant rhyme that ends on leaving the mouth agape in wonderment.[56]

Following the midrashic-mindedness of *U-n'taneh tokef*, we can conjecture that the allusion to the voice that Elijah heard and to the shofar is to conjure up the verse that combines both voice and shofar, namely, Exodus 19:19: "The blare of the *shofar* grew louder and louder. As

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[53] Based on *b. Rosh Hash.* 11b; see Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:169n7.

[54] *Shuvah, P'sikta d'-Rav Kahana* 23.1, ed. B. Mandelbaum, pp. 347–348.

[55] Following *Perush al ha-piyutim* (Hamburg MS 152), 113a; and *Maḥzor Ramḥal*, p. 126b. For the advantages of a subdued voice in prayer, see *Zohar* 1:210a with *Nitzutzei zohar*, n. 2.

[56] יתקע // ישמע.

Moses spoke, God would respond to him in a *voice*." There it also says, "And the entire people shuddered" (Exod 19:16). Reading the Moses allusion through that of Elijah transmutes the divine voice that Moses heard at Mount Sinai into the muted murmuring voice that Elijah heard there. The allusion to Sinai is confirmed by the Shofarot section of the *musaf*, which also begins by referring to the revelation at Sinai, citing the same verse, Exodus 19:19. Saadyah Gaon also hears in the blast of the shofar reverberations of the shofar at Sinai.[57] The association of the shofar with Sinai is seconded by Yannai's *piyut* for Rosh ha-Shanah, *Eimat boker*, albeit as the location of the wedding of Israel and God.[58]

What is clear is that when the great shofar is sounded, we are to attune our ears to hear the hushed voice of God. In a similar vein, the Talmud[59] cites the very verses from 1 Kings 19:11–13 to show that the norms of earthly majesty follow those of heavenly majesty, in that the king's entrance is not accompanied by a great hullabaloo but by the hushed sound of "a muted murmuring voice."

The alternative intertext is Job 4:16, which may be translated as "a soft sound and a voice I heard," or "there was silence, then I heard a voice.[60] Midrash also saw in this verse a reflection of the experience of the Sinaitic revelation.[61] In favor of this reference is the fact that the very next verse of the book of Job informs the background of this scene and the last scene of *U-n'taneh tokef*: "Can mortals be acquitted by God? Can man be cleared by his Maker? If He cannot trust His own servants, and casts reproach on His angels, how much less those who dwell in houses of clay, whose origin is dust" (Job 4:17–19). Moreover, the book of Job supplies the precedent for the change of scenes from heaven to earth. Indeed, as noted below, the day of Job's accusation fell on Rosh ha-Shanah. The reference to the book of Job may also have contributed to the juxtaposition with the shofar that is implied in "a voice I heard."

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[57] Cited by Abudarham in *Abudarham ha-shalem*, 269.

[58] See Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai*, 2:201, line 34.

[59] *b. Ber.* 58a.

[60] דַּקָּה is absent in some manuscripts; see Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:169, variants, line 7; and *Maḥzor APa"M* in E. D. Goldschmidt, *On Jewish Liturgy* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980), 90.

[61] *Avot d'-Rabi Natan*, ed. S. Schechter (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997), Version B, 38, p. 101.

Notwithstanding, there is no necessity to choose between the Elijah scene and the Job text.[62] Liturgical midrash delights in enriching the text by compounding meanings through multiple allusions and making new connections. A good example of the latter in *U-n'taneh tokef* is the understanding of the judgment of the angels at the end of this scene. The idea that the angels stand in judgment before God on the first day of the year is found in the Targum to Job 1:6 and echoed by Rashi and other commentators.[63] The expression itself, "even the hosts of heaven are arraigned in judgment," follows the language of Isaiah 24:21 which, as here, goes on to locate the judgment in heaven. Isaiah, however, provides no explanation for this judgment of the angels. In good midrashic fashion, *U-n'taneh tokef* provides an explanation by juxtaposing a strophe based on Job 15:15 which states: "He puts no trust in His holy ones; the heavens are not free of guilt in His sight." To grasp the *a fortiori* application to the human condition, it is important to recall also the end of the following verse: "What must he think of foul and disgusting man, who guzzles sin like water?"[64]

Paytanic allusion can revel in multiple sources. This requires the reader to bring to bear several sources to grasp its intention.[65] Note that both allusions to Isaiah, the great shofar of 27:13 and the judgment of the angels of 24:21, begin with "in that day." In both cases, the temporal focus moves from the eschaton to the day of judgment, but instead of the ultimate judgment, it is the imminent one making "that day" today. In order to figure out the intention of a paytanic allusion one has to take into consideration all its sources, biblical and rabbinic, its original context, its new context, and any adjustments.

The next scene (#4) shifts back to earth where all humanity passes in review before God either as the angelic hosts, as a flock of sheep, or as soldiers in formation. The three suggested translations are based

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[62] R. El'azar b. Judah (*Sodei Razaya*, ed. Sh. Weiss [Jerusalem: Sha'are Ziv, 1988], 172) saw the two as complementary.

[63] See Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1968), 5:385n18. The Targum to Job 2:6 assumes the day was Yom Kippur.

[64] An example of a *piyut* that makes the *a fortiori* application explicit is the *piyut* of Erev Rosh ha-Shanah, *Adon din*, by Zevadiah (southern Italy, ca. 900); see Avie Gold, *The Complete ArtScroll Selichos, Sefarad* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1993), 298 at nn. 8–9; and Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:100.

[65] For the paytanic practice of combining sources, see Zvi Meir Rabinovitz, *Halakha and Aggada in the Liturgical Poetry of Yannai* [Hebrew] (Tel Avi: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1965), introduction, 65.

on the various understandings of *b'nei maron* in the parallel passage in *m. Rosh ha-Shanah* 1:2. The first is based on the Hebrew *marom*, assuming the common switch between the Hebrew nasal letters *nun* and *mem*.[66] The second is based on the Aramaic word for sheep, as noted in *b. Rosh ha-Shanah* 18a. And the third is based on the Greek for soldiers, an understanding supported by Mar Samuel in the Talmud there and by the manuscript tradition as well.[67] Whatever its meaning in the Mishnah, it is clear that in *U-n'taneh tokef* the first two have the context in their favor since angels were just mentioned and sheep are about to be mentioned.

In the previous heavenly scene, God as judge does not spare even the angels. In this earthly scene, God counts and recounts as a shepherd who makes sure that all his flock is present and accounted for. As no sheep goes uncounted, so no person goes unaccounted for. The transition to the human realm in #4b takes place through the word "so." There follow four second-person verbs expressing the idea of counting, all in the future tense, creating a pounding alliteration of *t*'s, in which the last three begin with *v'-ti*: (*v'-ti*[*spor*] *v'-ti*[*mneh*] *v'-ti*[*fkod*]). The last one also initiates three alliterative clauses: *v'-tifqod*, *v'-tikhtov*, *v'-tahtokh*. This polysyndetic repeated use of conjunctions speeds up the reading, giving it a breathless or headlong quality and producing a fearful sense of imminence. The first verb, *ta'avir* ("pass"), echoes the "pass" of #4b with regard to sheep; the fourth *tifqod* ("assess")[68] points back to its use with regard to the hosts of heaven in #3c. All humanity now constitutes God's flock. And since the divine shepherd misses nothing, all humanity will be sentenced.[69] Although #4d moves on to the actual sentencing, it continues the alliteration of #4c while nuancing it to

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[66] See above, n. 47. Accordingly, the place name *Merom* can be spelled in Mishnaic Hebrew as *Meron*. This corresponds with the interchange between the plural endings ים- and ין-, which may be more phonological than Aramaicizing.

[67] See Naftali Wieder, *The Formation of Jewish Liturgy in the East and the West: A Collection of Essays* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1998), 1:440–446.

[68] The semantic field of the verb פָּקַד includes assessing, counting, calling to account, and recalling, all of which resonate here. Its use here with regard to humanity echoes its use in Ps 8:5 and Job 7:17.

[69] In section #4, there are no less than three similar references to humanity, each with the morpheme *kol*:

וכל באי עולם 4a
נפש כל חיי 4c
לכל בריה 4d

If 4a echoes its usage by Yannai (above, n. 33), then it indicates a universal day of judgment.

create its own couplet by having the first four Hebrew letters of "inscribe" in the second strophe echo those of "determine" in the first strophe,[70] thereby merging sound and sense to make the point that the sentence is now being determined by inscribing the verdict.

Since "inscribed" is associated with "sealed" in #2c, one might think that the association obtains here especially in view of the talmudic opinion that national and individual destinies are judged and sealed on Rosh ha-Shanah.[71] At the moment when it seems that all is over, the next strophe (#5) surprisingly proclaims that though the verdict is inscribed on Rosh ha-Shanah, it is not signed and sealed until Yom Kippur.[72] What a relief! There is still time to make amends.[73]

Now that the verdict has been issued, the drama becomes ever more excruciating as it turns to the spelling out of the consequences in grippingly specific terms. The opening line of section #6 continues the rhyme scheme of the previous two asking with regard to those who were initially inscribed (and possibly sealed), "How many shall pass on and how many shall come into being?"[74] Twelve couplets follow; the first seven refer to life and death, the last five to the quality of life. All begin asyndetically, without the conjunctive *vav*. Except for the second, all have four words. Each begins with the individual-focused question "who shall,"[75] followed by "and who shall." The corresponding

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[70] ותחתך / ותכתב

[71] *y. Rosh Hash.* 1:3, 57a. See above, n. 35.

[72] Following *t. Rosh Hash.* 1:13 (R. Meir), ed. S. Lieberman, p. 308; *b. Rosh Hash.* 16a; and the original version of *Ha-yom harat olam* (Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:244, variants, line 5, with Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisra'el: M'korot v'-toldot*, 8 vols. [Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1989–2007], 1:121–124, 2:272–273).

[73] See *Shuvah, P'sikta d'-Rav Kahana* 24.3, ed. B. Mandelbaum, p. 351, and parallels with *P'siqta Rabbati* 40, ed. Friedman, p. 169a, ed. Ulmer, pp. 881–882.

[74] Deriving יעברון from עובר (fetus), Berliner understood it as "Who shall be still-born and who shall emerge alive." Abraham Berliner, *Selected Writings* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1969), 1:130. This volume was originally published in Berlin in 1912. By 1914 it was already accepted as an alternative in a traditional commentary; see *Sidur u-maḥzor kol-bo l'-rosh ha-shanah nusakh Ashkanaz* (Vilna: Rom, 1914), 1:260. The context, however, makes this unlikely. Moreover, the two verbs appear in the same elongated form in Ps 104:9a, 30a where they clearly mean "pass" and "create." The verb in that form also appears in a strophe of Yose b. Yose (Mirsky, *Yosse Ben Yosse: Poems*, 237, line 10) which, like *U-n'taneh tokef*, contrasts human transience with divine permanence. Besides, a form of עבר appears five other times in *U-n'taneh tokef*, always denoting "to pass." Its use here specifically recalls its use in 4a, יעברון לפניך. Here also, the juxtaposition of the two verbs creates a merism unified by virtual homonymy: יעברון יבראון.

[75] In contrast to the precedent in the midrash and *musaf* (see above, n. 35), which dealing with the fate of nations says *eizo* ("which").

Hebrew *mi* and *u-mi* are hammered out twelve times, with the *u-mi* forcing an additional breath. The result is initial humming /m/ sounds broken or blocked by /ū/. This starting and stopping prolongs the articulation, slowing the chanting to *lentissimo*. Each plight gets to be individually savored, considered, and dreaded. As every cantor knows, tone, pitch, and pace make it the drama it is.

The first couplet is transitional; it repeats the content of the previous strophe, but is structured like the upcoming couplets that ask, "Who shall live and who shall die?" The second couplet asks with regard to those who die whether their death will be timely or untimely.[76] These two illustrate the mixing of references to the coming year and to the rest of life. They fold so easily into each other that it is never quite clear throughout which is being referenced. The second also sets the sound pattern for the next six. Each *mi* or *u-mi* is followed by the preposition *b'-*, which by virtue of following the conjunction *u-* is pronounced as *v'-*. Shocked by the images of our impending death, we stammer *mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi v'-v'-v'-v'-v'-v'-v'-v'-v'-v'-v'-v'*. In contrast, the last four couplets of the unit's first part end rhyme is *ah, ah, ah, ah*, leaving the mouth open as if there were some question, creating an opening for hope. The poet was so intent on rhyming with *ah* that he rearranged the biblical order of *ḥerev ra'av ḥayah* (Ezek 14:21) into *ḥerev ḥayah ra'av*, and added *tzama* to create the first two *ah* couplets. Seeking to approximate its consonance and assonance, we have translated the four as war, wildlife, starvation, and dehydration. The unit as a whole is characterized by a large number of staccato expressions, each with its jolting image of untimely death, rattling us to our very being, as nothing less than our very lives are at stake. It is precisely this sometimes collision, sometimes blending of vowels and consonants that rivets our attention, marks the units, and drives *U-n'taneh tokef* forward.

The last five couplets are structured antonymically. They shift from the positive to the negative[77] in contrast to the comparable antonymic structure of the midrash and *musaf*, which shifts from the negative to

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[76] For this use of קֵץ, see Pss 35:9, 119:96.
[77] Some recent versions, oblivious to the import of the "but" of the next strophe, have reversed the order of the penultimate and/or ultimate one to end on a positive note. They could also be taking their cue from the order and the juxtaposition of the two in 1 Sam 2:7.

the positive.[78] Each couplet contains two verbs in the future tense. As the first part is unified by the twelvefold presence of an initial *bet*, so this part is unified by the tenfold presence of an initial *yod* which with the two initial yods of the first mi strophe adds up to twelve for perfect balance. In the first part the verb (to perish) is implicit; here the verbs are explicit. They deal with the spectrum of our physical, mental, psychological, material, and social situation by spelling out the vagaries of human stability, serenity, suffering, salary, and status. As the previous transitional couplet, they are connected by final rhyme, beginning rhyme, or the consonance of letters. The omission of the expected conjunction reinforces the staccato rhythm. Coming in clipped phrases of four words divided into demi-couplets, they sound out the brevity of life and its rapid twists. They demonstrate verbally how even the lives of those spared can be rocked by downturns. For *U-n'taneh tokef*, these unforeseen turns of fate strike at the nerve of our vulnerability and fragility. The poeticity is so powerful that its thumping rhythm pulsates through our veins, tightening the sinews of our being. So much of this is sensed, albeit not totally understood. One does not have to articulate its meaning to feel its trembling power and to be shaken by its images.

Nonetheless, confronted with such a fatalistic vision we wonder why we were just granted an extension from the inscribing of Rosh ha-Shanah to the sealing of Yom Kippur. The startling answer is an anaphoric rhyming couplet: "*u-t'shuvah, u-t'filah, u-tz'daqah*—and repentance, and prayer, and charity—make the harshness/hardship of the decree pass."[79] Not only is everything not foreordained, we have a hand in the outcome.

This signature line of the *U-n'taneh tokef* represents a revision of several rabbinic antecedents. According to the Bavli, "Four things rip up (*m'qarim*) a person's decree: *tz'daqah*, crying out, change of name, and change of deed"; some add "change of place."[80] According to the Yerushalmi, "Three things abrogate (*m'vatlin*) the harsh decree: *t'filah*,

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[78] See above, n. 35. For the purposeful structuring of this material in Yose b. Yose and Qallir, see Mirsky, *Ha-Piyyut*, 154, 158.

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Note that the three all begin with an /ū/ sound, producing the same elongation as the *u-mi* discussed above, with the same result.

[80] *b. Rosh Hash.* 16b. Rambam, "Laws of Repentance," 2.5, changes the order of the first two.

tz'daqah, and *t'shuvah*."[81] Later midrashim[82] combine this last statement with the changing of name, of deed, and of place—elements that entail adopting a new persona, instituting an alternative pattern of behavior, and changing venue.[83] In sum, *U-n'taneh tokef* introduces three changes. It places *t'shuvah* first, it changes the verb from *m'vatlin* (abrogate) to *ma'avirin*, and adds *ro'a* to *ha-g'zerah* ("the decree").

What is gained by these three changes? With regard to the first, it could be argued that placing *t'shuvah* first makes it correspond more closely to the *minḥah* haftarah of Yom Kippur where the book of Jonah (3:5–8) records that Nineveh first fasted, then called out to God, and finally restored stolen goods. More likely, *t'shuvah* is prioritized to ensure the flow of the poem, since it paves the way for its prominence in the next section.[84] There is no further comment about *t'filah* and *tz'daqah*. By keeping the number to three, it also evokes the famous triad of *m. Avot* (1:2): "The world/age stands on three things: Torah, *avodah*, and *g'milut ḥasadim*." As expected, Torah is replaced by *t'shuvah*, but the remaining two are comparable albeit more specific.[85] The point is to affirm that the outcome of the judgment stands on all three: *t'shuvah*, *t'filah*, and *tz'daqah*.

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[81] *y. Ta'an.* 2:1, 65b; see *y. Sanh.* 10:2, 28c.

[82] See *Gen. Rab.* 44.12, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 434, with parallels and notes; and *P'sikta d'-Rav Kahana*, 28.3, ed. B. Mandelbaum, p. 425 and parallels.

[83] See *b. Sanh.* 25a (Rav Idi bar Avin).

[84] Otherwise, it is hard to understand the altering of the original order, which itself is based on the order of 2 Chr 7:12–14. Moreover, there is the argument that it is precisely *t'filah* and *tz'daqah* that bring about complete *t'shuvah*; see Avraham b. Azriel, *Sefer arugat ha-bosem*, 2:119. Admittedly, the order of *U-n'taneh tokef* does appear in *Tanḥuma*, *Noah* 8, but since the parallel in Buber's edition (*Noah* 13, p. 37) follows the standard order, it can be assumed that some scribe just copied from memory the well-known version of *U-n'taneh tokef*. Similarly, *Midrash Psalms* 17.5, ed. S. Buber, p. 127, presents the three in the order of *U-n'taneh tokef* while the parallel in *Yalkut ha-Mekhiri* 17.5, ed. S. Buber, p. 95, reads תשובה מעשים טובים ותפילה; *Yalkut Shimoni* 2:669, p. 893b, reads just תשובה ומעשים טובים. The insertion of the *U-n'taneh tokef* text in *Midrash Psalms* can be attributed to the fact that it goes on to cite the same mishnah (*Rosh Hash.* 1:2) that is cited in *U-n'taneh tokef*. Alternatively, the order of *U-n'taneh tokef* can be explained, as R. Jacob Moelin does, by arguing that *t'shuvah* prepares the ground to enhance the efficacy of the other two; see his *Sefer Maharil: Minhagim shel R. Ya'akov Mo'elin*, ed. Sh. Spitzer (Jerusalem, 1989), 294–295. A homily, however, can always be concocted to justify any order. What is needed to account for the order is either past authority (a verse or a midrash) or present reality (the needs of the poem).

[85] See Reuven Kimelman, "The Penitential Part of the Amidah and Personal Redemption," in *Seeking the Favor of God*, vol. 3, *The Impact of Penitential Prayer beyond Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Mark Boda, Daniel Falk, and Rodney Werline, SBLEJL 23 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 71–84, at 79.

The second change weakens the force of the verb. The decree is mitigated, not abrogated. The allied expression, *ma'avir rishon rishon*, found in the Talmud[86] and in the *Maḥzor*[87] also denotes mitigation.[88] Although there is disagreement, famously among Rashi, Rif,[89] and Rambam,[90] on how to compute the mitigation, all concur that it results in a reduction in the number of counts a person is charged with, especially for a first offender, either by combining the charges or by eliminating the initial one(s).[91] Still, the charges are not dropped, only reduced as in the case of Adam in the midrash. Similarly, based on the expression in Mic 7:18, *nose avon v'-over al-pesha*, the midrash states that upon repenting Cain's sentence was reduced, not dropped.[92]

The problem is that replacing the verb *m'vatlin* ("abrogate") with *ma'avirin* makes the word *g'zerah* ("decree") inappropriate. Decrees, as mentioned in the *Avinu malkenu*,[93] are torn up or abrogated, not made to pass or mitigated.[94] The solution was the third change, the addition of *ro'a*, since the harshness or the hardship that results from a decree can be mitigated.[95] Here, it is mitigated through the alliterative asso-

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[86] *B. Rosh Hash.* 17b.

[87] See *Asher mi ya'aseh khe-ma'asekha*, a *siluk* for the second day of Rosh Hashanah (Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:116, line 42); and *El melekh yoshev al kise raḥamim* and *Shofet kol ha-aretz* of the Yom Kippur liturgy (ibid., 2:24, 272). Related are the expressions מעביר עונות עמו (ibid., 2:18, line 4) and the formulation of the peroration of the Yom Kippur Amidah, מעביר אשמותינו (ibid., 2:6). In his *piyut*, *A-donai elohei tz'va'ot*, Rashi also states: צוי להעביר עונות ראשונים; see Gold, *The Complete ArtScroll Selichos*, 272.

[88] Based on Job 7:21 and Zech 3:4.

[89] To *b. Rosh Hash.* 4b.

[90] *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Repentance," 3:5.

[91] Up to three, based on Exod 34:7; see *t. Kipp.* 4:13, ed. S. Lieberman, pp. 253–254, with Avraham b. Azriel, *Sefer arugat ha-bosem* 2:99–100, 103; and Kasher, *Torah sh'lemah* 22:67n73.

[92] *Deut. Rab.* 8.1. The verse is not cited in the parallels; see *Lev. Rab.* 10.5, ed. M. Margulies, p. 205, n. 3. The debate is over what reduces the crime and what eliminates it, *t'shuvah* or *t'filah*. See also *Gen. Rab.* 97, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1215–1216.

[93] Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:131.

[94] מעביר את הגזירה does occur in a medieval midrash (*Midrash Mishlei* 2 [end], ed. B. Visotzky, p. 32, line 61), but from the context it should read מסיר את גזירה; see the end of line 59.

[95] The rhyme scheme highlights the relationship between the second hemistich and the first:

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In the first, each word begins with ū and a sibilant plus t', making for a three-fold alliteration ūt', ūt', ūt', followed by ū -ah, ie-ah, a-ah. The three /-ah/ sounds in the first hemistich, as opposed to the one /-ah/ (or two /-ah/ sounds, if רע is

nant triad *t'shuvah*, *t'filah*, and *tz'daqah*, either because they can lead to a reconsideration of the original judgment of Rosh ha-Shanah, or because they can provide the resilience to bear the ups and downs of life.

Before we ask about the mechanics of mitigation, we need to note that rabbinic literature uses *g'zerah* to refer to a host of factors that inform one's destiny, such as dreams, astrology, human evil, and of course the divine.[96] One source cites our triad to show that *t'shuvah* is the antidote to the *yetzer ha-ra* (the inclination for evil).[97] Apparently, the other two also figure in the cure.

What, then, is the relationship among the three that is relevant to the thesis of *U-n'taneh tokef*? *T'shuvah* starts with our relationship with the self, *t'filah* addresses our relationship with God, and *tz'daqah* works on our relationship with others. The focus moves inward, upward, and outward, for *t'shuvah* is inner-directed, *t'filah* is God-directed, and *tz'daqah* is other-directed. The first involves the mind, the second the tongue, and the third the hand, thereby advancing from thought to word to deed. *T'shuvah* means we care enough about ourselves to strive for our ideal self. *T'filah* means we care enough about God to make ourselves worthy of His concern and assessment. *Tz'daqah* means we care enough about others to help them in their need. In turning to others, God turns to us. Putting ourselves in order, repairing our relationship with God, and working on improving our relationship with others help overcome our isolation, cushioning the impact. By enhancing our capacity to withstand the vicissitudes of life, we are able to muster the fortitude to believe this too will pass. Otherwise, faced with calamity, we might have given up on ourselves, on God, and on others.

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included) at the end of the second hemistich, suggest that the גזרה (or רע הגזרה) is outnumbered by and thus can be overpowered or mitigated the triad of ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה. Poetically there is something else going on here too, insofar as the series of demi-couplets preceding this one has been in a gloomy sort of double meter: mi-…ū-mi-, mi-…ū-mi-, etc. This last couplet comes as a surprise, because it is not in double meter but in triple meter, and the three pairs of /ū-/—/-ah/ sounds in ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה powerfully emphasize that shift from double meter to triple. And the shift in meter corresponds to a shift in mood: the decree can be mitigated. I owe much of this analysis and formulation to Gene McGarry, the copy editor of this volume.

[96] See Menahem Schmelzer, "Penitence, Prayer, and Charity," in *Minḥah le-Naḥum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna in Honour of His 70th Birthday*, ed. Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 291–299, at 293–294.

[97] *Tanḥuma, Noaḥ* 8, ed. S. Buber, 13.

Adversity is most disruptive when striking those bereft of religious and social support systems. All the more reason to recite *U-n'taneh tokef* with the congregation as it rises for the K'dushah.

U-n'taneh tokef goes on, in #8, to answer why God is so receptive to our *t'shuvah*. *U-n'taneh tokef* provides an explanation for God's receptivity by portraying it from the divine perspective in an astute combination of biblical and rabbinic cadences. It begins with virtually citing Psalm 48:11, "As Your name, E-lohim, so is Your reputation," except that "E-lohim" is missing. Since E-lohim is the divine epithet that rabbinically stands for justice, its absence allows for a reference to its alternative, the tetragrammaton, A-donai, which rabbinically stands for mercy, as it says: "He called upon the name of A-donai…compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in *ḥesed* and truth" (Exod 34:5–6). The strophe is thus rendered: "For as Your (four-lettered) name (is one of mercy) so is Your reputation." *U-n'taneh tokef* then ascribes to God the related characteristic of the *ḥasid* from *m. Avot* 5:11, "slow to anger and quick to forgive," for surely God is not less than his *ḥasid*, especially since, as #2b states, God's kingship itself is founded on *ḥesed*.

There follows (#8b) a merging of two to three verses from Ezekiel. The first strophe, "Since You desire not the death of the sinner," reformulates in the second person 18:32a, "Since I desire not the death of the sinner (literally, the dead one)." The second strophe, "but that in turning from his path he might live" reformulates 33:11, "but that the wicked turn from his path and live," by inserting "his" from "his turn" of 18:23b.[98] The only part not from Ezekiel is the change of person from first to second. The purpose of the change is to get God to live up to His claim. Mention of the wicked is eliminated, since *U-n'taneh tokef* assumes the position that the ten days of repentance are not for the wicked or for the righteous, but for those in between,[99] which obviously entails everyone, for no one would presume on the day of judgment to be all righteous or all wicked.[100]

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[98] Ezekiel   *U-n'taneh tokef*

    18:32a   כי לא אחפץ במות המת   כי לא תחפץ במות המת

    33:11   כי אם בשוב רשע מדרכו וחיה   כי אם בשובו מדרכו וחיה

    18:23b   הלוא בשובו מדרכיו וחיה

[99] This follows *Shuvah, P'sikta d'-Rav Kahana* 24.2, ed. B. Mandelbaum, p. 351.

[100] See Abraham b. Nathan, *Sefer ha-manhig*, 1:327, with n. 45.

As expected, sound and intention converge. Since section #8 comes to explain the doctrine of repentance, the explanatory *ki* is its most recurring term (five times). Its repetition echoes the repeated use of *mi* in #6. The fivefold appearance of *ki* is matched by that of the final -*o* (his/him) in #8b–c, which creates its own internal rhyme. Since neither sound elides easily into what follows, it restrains any rushed recitation.

The point of the whole section is that since mercy is, as it were, God's middle name,[101] the gates of repentance never close.[102] This divine perspective on *t'shuvah*, however, paradoxically undermines the very idea of an annual verdict's irrevocability, as it says: "Up to his dying day You await him, for were he to return You would welcome him at once." The point is all the more powerful, expressed in a rhyming couplet[103] reverting back to the life-and-death option that initiated the twelve *mi* couplets. Suddenly, we discover that even Yom Kippur is not the final chance; the real deadline is the day we die. No longer in the witness stand at our annual assessment, anxious about the upcoming year, we find ourselves projected forward to the ultimate day of judgment. As *U-n'taneh tokef* (#3) had used the day of judgment on high to adumbrate the one below, so *U-n'taneh tokef* now integrates the final judgment into the annual one, maintaining that the annual day of judgment prefigures the final one. It is precisely the folding of the one into the other that enables the poet to apply images from the judgment "on that day" to this *day* of judgment.[104] The result is the integration of time and space under the canopy of divine judgment.

This raises the issue of simultaneity versus sequentiality of the two judgments. In theory, they are simultaneous. Since the poem, however, is a linear creation, they are experienced sequentially. Thus it is the heavenly apprehension that sets the stage for the earthly one. According to the sequence of the poem, the judgment on high is succeeded by the one below, which in turn is followed by the future one. It is of course the last two that are the focus of the poem, for as now so then *t'shuvah* makes the difference.

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[101] See *Sifrei Deut.* 26, ed. L. Finkelstein, p. 41 with n. 6.

[102] Again *Shuvah*, that section of *P'sikta d'-Rav Kahana* (24.2, ed. B. Mandelbaum, p. 349) that informs much of *U-n'taneh tokef*.

[103] וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תְּחַכֶּה־לּוֹ,
אִם יָשׁוּב מִיַּד תְּקַבְּלוֹ.

[104] Goldschmidt, *Mahzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 1:169 (introduction and n. 6), ascribes this innovation to *U-n'taneh tokef*.

Section #9 poignantly describes man's lowly origin emphasizing the brevity and fragility of life. Its linkage with section #8 is based on Psalm 103:13–19:

> [13]As a father has compassion for his children,
> so A-donai has compassion for those who fear Him.
> [14]For He knows our nature;
> mindful that we are dust.
> [15]Man, his days are like those of grass;
> he blooms like a flower of the field;
> [16]a wind passes by and it is no more. . . .
> [17]But A-donai's loving-kindness is for all eternity. . . .
> [19]A-donai has established His throne in heaven,
> and His kingship extends over all.

Accordingly, section #8 implicitly compares God to a compassionate father who understands our *yetzer*. As our Maker, God knows what we are made of; and as a mother who—knowing her child's shortcomings—always receives him back, so God is forgiving till the very end.[105] Based on its usage in Genesis 8:21, *yetzer* refers to God's understanding of our *yetzer*, which the Targum knowingly renders as *yetzer ha-ra*. Based on its usage in Genesis 2:7, it refers to God having created (*yatzar*) humanity from the dust of the earth.

Rhetorically, section #8 makes two moves. One move binds the unit together; the other links this near-ending to the near-beginning of the poem through an envelope figure. The former move integrates through rhyme the three strophes of #8d into a single thesis: as their creator (*yotzram*), God knows their (evil) inclination (*yitzram*), for they are but flesh and blood (*basar v'-dam*). Actually, context demands a formulation in the singular as in 8b–c,[106] but that would have precluded the linkage with the third strophe. The linkage of the three was so important that the poet deviated from his norm of paralleling two rhyming strophes, a phenomenon which otherwise occurs only in #3a

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[105] This is a common motif. For the *Maḥzor*, see Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 2:117; for rabbinic literature, see *t. Qidd.* 1.16, ed. S. Lieberman, p. 281; *b. Qidd.* 40b; *y. Pe'ah* 1:1, 16b; *Song Rab.* 5.16; and *Num. Rab.* 10.1. For the expression that God's hand is always extended to receive penitents, see Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor la-yamim ha-nora'im* 2:763, line 23; Mirsky, *Yosse Ben Yosse: Poems*, 239, line 19; *Sifrei Num.* 134, ed. H. Horowitz, p. 180; *M'khilta Shira* 5, ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 133; *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* 22, ed. M. Friedman, p. 37; and the beginning of *Pirkei d'-Rabi Eli'ezer* 43.

[106] אֱמֶת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא יוֹצְרוֹ
וְיוֹדֵעַ יִצְרוֹ

in linking the three mentions of *din*. Linking the three here makes the point that were any sympathy for the machinations of human creatureliness to be forthcoming, it would come from their creator.[107] The other move involves #8d reproducing the construction of #2c.[108] The virtual lexical, semantic, phonological, and grammatical equivalences[109] merge the two salient images of God on Rosh ha-Shanah—judge and creator.[110] Together, they appeal to God the judge (#2c) to take into consideration the frailties of the accused, in which God their creator had a hand (#8c). The goal is to induce God to be forbearing of human shortcomings by adjusting his expectations. Human transience and tribulation are hence contrasted with God's permanence and eternal reign. As master of all, nothing can impede God from being forgiving.

Section #9 can also be fleshed out through the prism of Psalm 103, except that the psalm makes no mention of *t'shuvah*. For *U-n'taneh tokef*, it is precisely *t'shuvah* that tilts the scales. Here today, gone tomorrow, we dare not procrastinate. When Rabbi Eliezer urged his students to repent one day before their death, they asked, How does one know? Precisely: tomorrow may be too late.[111]

The evanescent sense of being here today and gone tomorrow now grabs center stage. Section #9 is studded with images of human frailty. Not only is human life portrayed as a movement from dust to dust, but it is also visualized and vocalized as the acme of temporality, articulated through no less than eight fleeting similes garnered from all three parts of the Tanakh.[112] The translation deliberately maintains

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[107] See Radak to Pss 103:14, 33:15.

[108]   אמת כי אתה הוא דין 2c
                                                                          אמת כי אתה הוא יוצרם 8d

[109] For the four and their interrelationship, see Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 127 and passim.

[110] See above, n. 33.

[111] See *m. Avot* 2.10 with Urbach, *The Sages*, 411 n. 71.

[112] These are all biblical expressions of evanescence except for the first, חרס הנשבר, which is not biblical at all even though it deceptively passes as such. Its closest biblical reference is Lev 6:21: כלי חרש אשר תבשל בו ישבר. The subject there, however, is not evanescence. So why did the poet feel the need to coin a novel expression when the common biblical expression כלי חרש was so readily available? The answer lies in his sense of sound and balance. For balance he needed eight; for sound he needed one that would segue into the second. The result is כחרס הנשבר, which is a metathesized semi-homonym of the second, כחציר יבש. Based on the Midrash (see *Gen. Rab.* 14.7, p. 131, lines 9–14), the idea is that it can be reconstituted, which is how it is taken in the later Yom Kippur *piyut*, *Ayom v'-norah tzom he-asor*, where it appears as נישברנו כחרש ולך יכולת לחדש (see Yahalom, "The World of Sorrow and Mourning

the structure of the Hebrew, with the modifier following the noun. The dash (—) between the two indicates a brief suspenseful pause. In each case, the comparison is with a neutral noun only to be followed by a despairing modifier presenting our lives as broken, withering, wilting, passing, fading, fleeting, flittering, and flying away. By sound and subject the similes divide essentially into four units. In the first two, sibilant sounds predominate; in the last two, guttural sounds prevail. Accordingly, the concordance of sounds augments the poem's auditory impact through a complex criss-crossing of alliteration and assonance. Indeed, every simile adds some form of each to chain the sounds together and forge a seamless link of human fragility,[113] only to conclude with a proclamation of divine eternity. The contrast between the ephemeral nature of our life and the eternal nature of the Divine goads us to seek permanence in the everlasting, proclaiming "But You are King, the everlasting God."[114]

Rather than beseeching God's mercy directly, *U-n'taneh tokef* makes the case obliquely. By underscoring the gap between the human and the divine, it calls on God to tolerate our shortcomings and judge us charitably.[115] The magnanimity of God's forgiveness stands in stark contrast to our human creatureliness. The nexus between human lowliness and divine forgiveness that constitutes the conclusion of *U-n'taneh tokef* parallels the conclusion of the *ne'ilah* liturgy on Yom Kippur.[116]

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in the Genizah," 136, line 53, with note). Lurking in the background is the notion that impure earthenware vessels can be purified by being broken: שבירתן היא טהרתן (*m. Kelim* 2:1). Its Aramaic equivalent חסף תביר (see *Mahzor Vitry*, 1:19, n. 19) also indicates a lack of substance.

[113]
כחרס הנשבר / כחציר יבש
וכציץ נובל / כצל עובר
וכענן כלה / וכרוח נושבת
וכאבק פורח / וכחלום יעוף

The poeticity of these similes on human fragility compares well with the earlier efforts of Hos 13:3, Ps 90:3–6, and Yannai (above, n. 7), as well as the later effort of Sh'lomo ha-Bavli, "Ta'alat tzarie"; see Fleischer, *The Poems of Sh'lomo ha-Bavli*, 338–339, lines 29–32.

[114] This contrast follows the model of Isa 40:8; Pss 90:2; 103:17; and the Yom Kippur confessional, which states: אנו ימינו כצל עובר ואתה הוא ושנותיך לא יתמו (Goldschmidt, *Mahzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 2:46).

[115] The eleventh-century *piyut* by Elijah the Elder, *Atah mevin ta'alumot lev*, makes this explicit: יוצרנו ועושינו יודע יצרנו יהמו רחמיך ואל תשחיתנו. (Goldschmidt, *Mahzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 2:48, line 10).

[116] Goldschmidt, *Mahzor la-yamim ha-nora'im*, 2:726:

ואתה יודע שאחריתנו
רמה ותולעה
לפיכך הרבית סליחתנו

Both conclusions point to the same verses of Ezekiel (33:11; 18:23, 32) except the *ne'ilah* service cites them in full along with their mention of the wicked. Indeed, they are introduced with the words, "And You desire the repentance of the wicked."[117] The awareness that the *ne'ilah* Amidah also ends with an explicit statement about divine forgiveness, "For without You we have no king who forgives and pardons," makes its absence here all the more conspicuous. To compensate for its absence, the introductory *u-v'-khen* strophe of *Maḥzor APa"M*[118] adds to "for You our God are King" the identical phrase, "who forgives and pardons." This addition, however, just underscores its absence in *U-n'taneh tokef*. It also increases our appreciation of the subtlety of *U-n'taneh tokef*'s oblique request for special consideration.

The throwing of divine compassion into relief brings us full circle to the opening lines, where God's throne is secured through kindness. Together they frame the poem, providing cohesion for the whole. This inclusion is reinforced by the outer ring *in situ*, which contains the only mentions of "God" and "King." *U-n'taneh tokef* resisted till the climatic finale the explicit mention of the two thematic divine epithets "God" and "King." It begins with "You our God are King" and climaxes with "You are King, the everlasting God," making our God the everlasting king, which itself leads into the K'dushah with its climax, "God will be king forever."

This High Holiday *piyut* succeeds in detailing the distinct roles of Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur; it opens with the motifs of the former and closes with those of the latter. Just like *U-n'taneh tokef* stretches the period of judgment from Rosh ha-Shanah to Yom Kippur, so its motifs stretch from the former all the way to the latter. There is thus a kind of poetic justice in *U-n'taneh tokef*'s success in insinuating itself into both the Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur liturgies. Cognizance of the High Holiday liturgy as the background for *U-n'taneh tokef* allows us also to witness the shift from a focus on the wicked of *ne'ilah* to that on the Everyman of *U-n'taneh tokef*, a shift that epitomizes the thrust of *U-n'taneh tokef*. This thrust highlights its unifying idea that God's eternal and universal kingship entails a universal day of judgment above, below, now, and in the future.[119]

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[117] Ibid., 2:727.
[118] See Goldschmidt, *On Jewish Liturgy*, 90.
[119] In consonance with the special perorations of the third and eleventh blessings of the Amidah for the intervening days between Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur

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where, according to an early version, "the holy God" who "loves justice/judgment" becomes "the holy King" and "the King of judgment/justice." See Yechezkel Luger, *The Weekday Amidah in the Cairo Genizah* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Orhot Press, 2001), 65, 120; and Joseph Tabory, *Jewish Festivals in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), 221nn25–26.

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