

Unetaneh Toqef as a Midrashic Poem

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Color highlights and fonts by Rabbi Kimelman, all indicating words re-used throughout *Unetaneh Toqef*.

Gray indicates source texts and their translations compiled by Noah Gradofsky from Sefaria based on references in Rabbi Kimelman's translation. **Bold words represent identical words from the source text used by *Unetaneh Toqef*.** Underlined words represent *Unetaneh Toqef* using synonyms parallel to the source text. Follow links for Sefaria text.

1. And so to You may our *Qedushah* ascend,
for You our God are King.

1. וּבְכֹן לָךְ תַּעֲלֶה קְדוּשָׁה,
כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ.

2a. Now, let us proclaim the power of the holiness of the day,
for **it is awesome and dreadful** [see [Habakkuk 1:7](#)].

2a. וּבְנִמְנָה תִקְרָא קְדוּשַׁת הַיּוֹם
כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאִים.¹

אֵלִים וְנוֹרָא הוּא מְמַנּוּ מִשְׁפָּטוֹ וּשְׂאֵתוֹ יֵצֵא:

They are terrible, dreadful; They make their own laws and rules.

b. On it **Your kingship is exalted** [see [Numbers 24:7](#)],

b. וְבוֹ תִנְשֵׂא מַלְכוּתְךָ

יְגַלְמִים מִדְּלִי וְזָרְעוּ בְּמַיִם רַבִּים וְיָרַם מֵאֲגַל מְלִכּוֹ וְתִנְשֵׂא מַלְכוּתוֹ:

Their boughs drip with moisture, Their roots have abundant water. Their ruler shall rise above
Agag, Their sovereignty shall be exalted.

as **Your throne is established by generosity** [see [Proverbs 20:28](#)]

וְיִכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד כְּסָאָךְ

חֶסֶד וְאַמֶּת יִצְרוּ מַלְךְ וְסַעַד בְּחֶסֶד כְּסָאוֹ:

Faithfulness and loyalty protect the king; He maintains **his throne by faithfulness**.

truly letting You reign from it [see [Isaiah 16:5](#)].

וְתִשָּׁב עָלָיו בְּאַמֶּת.

וְהוּכַן בְּחֶסֶד כְּסֵא וְיִשָּׁב עָלָיו בְּאַמֶּת בְּאֵהֶל דָּוִד שֹׁפֵט וְדָרַשׁ מִשְׁפָּט וּמִהָרָצֵדִק:

And a throne shall be established in goodness In the tent of David, **And on it shall sit in faithfulness** A ruler devoted to justice And zealous for equity.

c. Truly, You are He who is
judge, plaintiff, knower (of motives), and **witness** [see [M. Avot 4:22](#)].

c. אֱמֶת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא
דִין וּמוֹכֵיחַ וְיֹדֵעַ וְעֵד,

... הוּא הַמְּבִיֵן, הוּא הַדִּין, הוּא עֵד, הוּא בֶּעַל דִּין, וְהוּא עֹתִיד לְדוֹן.

... He is the discerner, He is the judge, He the witness, He the complainant, and that He will
summon to judgment.

You record and seal (count and number).²

וְכֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם (וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֵה).

d. You **adduce** all that has been **forgotten** [see [M. Ta'anit 2:4](#)]

d. וְתִזְכֵּר כָּל-הַנְּשָׁכְחוֹת

עַל הַשְּׁנִיָּה הוּא אוֹמֵר ... בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' זֹכֵר הַנְּשָׁכְחוֹת.

For the second blessing he recites ... Blessed are You, Lord, Who remembers the forgotten.

by opening the book of records
where each entry speaks for itself
having **its owner's signature** [see [Job 37:7](#)].

וְתַפְתַּח אֶת-סֵפֶר הַזְּכוֹרוֹת
וּמֵאֲלֵיו יִקְרָא
וְחוֹתֵם יָד כָּל-אָדָם בּוֹ.

¹ Note the reversal of איום and נורא from Habakuk to Unetaneh Toqef order to rhyme with היום from in the previous hemistich.

² These two are missing in many versions; see 4c.

בְּיַד־כָּל־אָדָם יִתְתּוֹם לְדַעַת כָּל־אָנָשִׁי מַעֲשָׂהוּ:

Is as a sign on every man's hand, That all men may know His doings.

3a. And the **great shofar is sounded** [see [Isaiah 27:13](#), [Exodus 19:19](#)] **3a. וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע**

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְקַע בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל וּבָאוּ הַקְּאָדִים בְּאֶרֶץ אַשּׁוּר וְהַנִּדְחִים בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהַשְׁתַּחֲוִוִּים לַיהוָה בְּהַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בִּירוּשָׁלַם:
And in that day, a **great ram's horn 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 GOD on the holy mount, in Jerusalem.
(Isaiah 27:23)

וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחִזַּק מְאֹד מִלְּפָנֵי יְהוָה וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְקוֹל:
The blare of the horn grew louder and louder. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder. (Ex. 19:19)
but a muted murmuring sound is heard [see [1 Kings 19:12](#), [Job 4:16](#)]. **וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה יִשְׁמַע.**

וְאַחַר הָרַעַשׁ אֵשׁ לֹא בָאָשׁ יי וְאַחַר הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה:
After the earthquake—fire; but GOD was not in the fire. And after the fire—a **soft murmuring sound**.

b. The angels panic **b. וּמְלָאכִים יִחַפְזוּן**
trepidation and trembling seizing them [see [Psalm 48:6-7](#)] **וַחִיל וַרְעָדָה יֵאָחֲזוּן**

הִמָּה רָאוּ בְּן תַּמָּהוּ גְבַהְלוּ נִחַפְזוּ: רְעָדָה אֲחֻזָּתָם לְשֵׁם חָיִל כִּי־לָדָה:
At the mere sight of it they were stunned, they were terrified, they panicked; they were seized there with a trembling, like a woman in the throes of labor,

c. as they declare: "Behold, the day of judgment."
to **arraign the hosts on high** in judgment [see [Isaiah 24:21](#)], **c. וַיֹּאמְרוּ: הִנֵּה יוֹם הַדִּין.**
לְפָקֵד עַל צָבָא מְרוֹם בְּדִין

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִפְקֹד יְהוָה עַל־צָבָא הַמְרוֹם בְּמְרוֹם וְעַל־מַלְכֵי הָאָרֶץ עַל־הָאָדָמָה:
In that day, GOD will punish The host of heaven in heaven And the kings of the earth on earth.
for in **Your eyes they will not be acquitted** in judgment [see [Job 15:15](#)]. **כִּי לֹא יִזְכוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּדִין.**

הֵן בְּקִדְשׁוֹ לֹא יֵאָמְנוּ אֲשֶׁר־יִזְכוּ בְּעֵינָיו:
He puts no trust in His holy ones; The heavens are not guiltless in His sight;

4a. And all who have come into the world **4a. וְכָל־בָּאֵי עוֹלָם**
will **pass before You as the angelic hosts/as a flock of** **יַעֲבְרוּן לְפָנֶיךָ כַּבְּנֵי מְרוֹן.**
sheep [see [M. Rosh Hashanah 1:2](#)].

... בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בָּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כַּבְּנֵי מְרוֹן ...
... on Rosh HaShana, **all creatures pass before Him like sheep...**

b. **Like a shepherd who checks his flock** [see [Ezekiel 34:12](#)] **b. כַּבְּקָרֵת רוֹעֵה עֶדְרוֹ**

כַּבְּקָרֵת רוֹעֵה עֶדְרוֹ בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא בְּתוֹד־צֹאנֹו נִפְרָשׁוֹת כֵּן אֲבַקֵּר אֶת־צֹאנֵי וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְהֶם מִכָּל־הַמְקוֹמֹת אֲשֶׁר נִפְצְוּ בַּיּוֹם עָנָן וְעָרְפָל:
As shepherds seek out their flock when some [animals] in their flock have gotten separated, so I will seek out
My flock, I will rescue them from all the places to which they were scattered on a day of cloud and gloom.
מַעֲבִיר צֹאנֹו תַחַת שִׁבְטֹו,
making each of his **sheep pass under his staff** [see [Leviticus 27:32f](#)].

וְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂר בְּקָרֶ וְצֹאֵן כָּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲבֹר תַּחַת הַשִּׁבְטֹו הַעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה־הַקֹּדֶשׁ לַיהוָה:
All tithes of the herd or flock—of all that passes under the shepherd's staff, every tenth one—
shall be holy to יי.

c. So You will have **pass** as you count, **number**, **c. בְּן מַעֲבִיר וְתִסְפֹר וְתַמְנֶה**
and arraign each living being [see [Jeremiah 33:13](#)]. **וְתִפְקֹד נֶפֶשׁ כָּל־חַי,**

בְּעָרֵי הַהָר בְּעָרֵי הַשְּׁפֵלָה וּבְעָרֵי הַנֶּגֶב וּבְאֶרֶץ בְּנֵי־מִנְיָן וּבְסֻבֵּי־יְרוּשָׁלַם וּבְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה עַד מַעֲבְרַת־הַצֹּאֵן עַל־יַדֵּי מוֹנֶה אָמַר יי:
In the towns of the hill country, in the towns of the Shephelah, and in the towns of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin and in the environs of Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, sheep shall **pass** again
under the hands of one who **counts** them—said GOD.

d. And determine each person's sentence and record their verdict.

d. ותחתך קצבה לכל-בריה ותכתב את-גזר דינם.

5. On *Rosh Hashanah* it is recorded

5. בראש השנה יכתבון

But on the fast of *Kippur* it is sealed: [see [B. Rosh Hashanah 16a](#)]

וביום צום כפור יחתמו.

ואדם נידון בראש השנה, וגזר דין שלו נחתם ביום הכפורים.

And mankind is judged on **Rosh HaShana**, and the sentence is **sealed on Yom Kippur**

6a. How many shall **pass** on [see [Psalm 104:9a](#)]

6a. כמה יעברון

גבול-שמת בל-יעברון בל-ישבון לכסות הארץ:

You set bounds they must not **pass** so that they never again cover the earth.

and how many shall **come into being**, [see [Psalm 104:30a](#)].

וכמה יבראו.

תשלח רוחך ובראו ותחלש פני אדמה:

send back Your breath, **they are created**, and You renew the face of the earth.

b. who shall **live** and who shall **die** [[B. Rosh Hashanah 16b](#)]

b. מי יחיה ומי ימות,

צדיקים גמורין — נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר לחיים, רשעים גמורין — נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה, בינוניים — תלויין ועומדין מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים, זכו — נכתבין לחיים, לא זכו — נכתבין למיתה.

Wholly righteous people are immediately written and sealed for **life**; wholly wicked people are immediately written and sealed for **death**; and middling people are left with their judgment suspended from Rosh HaShana until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are written for **life**; if they do not so merit, they are written for **death**.

who shall reach his end and who shall not:

c. מי בקצו ומי לא בקצו:

who by **fire** and who by **flood** [see [Psalm 66:12a](#)],

d. מי באש ומי במים,

הרפת אנוש לראשנו באנו-באש ובמים לתוציאנו לרוגה:

You have let men ride over us; we have endured **fire and water**, and You have brought us through to prosperity.

who by **war** and who by **beast**,

e. מי בחרב ומי בחיה,

who by **starvation** and who by dehydration [see [Jeremiah 15:2-5](#)],

f. מי ברעב ומי בצמא,

והנה כייאמרו אליך אנה נצא ואמרף אליהם כה-אמר יהוה אשר למנות למות ואשר לחרב לחרב ואשר לרעב לרעב ואשר לשבי לשבי: ופקדתי עליהם ארבע משפחות נאם-יהוה את-החרב להרג ואת-הכלבים לסתוב ואת-עוף השמים ואת-בהמת הארץ לאכל ולהשחית: ...

And if they ask you, 'To what shall we go forth?' answer them, 'Thus said GOD: Those destined for the plague, to the plague; Those destined **for the sword, to the sword**; Those destined **for famine, to famine**; Those destined for captivity, to captivity. And I will appoint over them four kinds [of punishment]—declares GOD — the **sword** to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the sky, and the **beasts** of the earth to devour and destroy. ...

who by shattering events³ and who by plague,

g. מי ברעש ומי במגפה,

³ רעש entails quaking but not necessarily a (rare) earthquake; see Ezekiel [12:18](#), [37:7](#). Qallir, the putative author of Unetaneh Toqef, uses רעש elsewhere to indicate quaking in general; see Goldschmidt, *Maḥzor Le-Yamim Ha-Nora'im*,: 1:215, line 180a; 1:216, line 4; and 1:217, line 14. Also *Hinneni*, the precentor's prelude to the High Holiday Musaf, has רעש ונפחד מפחד (ibid., 1:147). As רעש is not limited to earthquakes so בחניקה and בסקילה (#6h) are not limited to the official modes of execution.

who by choking and who by pelting,
who shall be at rest and who restless,
who shall be tranquil and who tormented,
who shall be at ease and who at dis-ease,
who shall wax rich and who shall wane poor,
who shall have an upturn and who a downturn.

h. מי בחניקה ומי בסקילה,
i. מי ינוח ומי ינוע,
j. מי ישקוט ומי יטרף,
k. מי ישלו ומי יתנסר,
l. מי יעשיר ומי יעני,
m. מי ירום ומי ישפל.

7. **But** *teshuvah*, *tefillah* and *tzedakah*
remove the harshness/hardship of the decree.

7. ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה
מעבירין את-רע הגזירה.

8a. For **as Your** (four-lettered) **name** (is one of mercy)
so is Your reputation [Psalm 48:11]:

8a. כי כשמה
כן תהלתך:

כְּשֵׁמֶךָ אֱלֹהִים כִּן תְּהִלָּתְךָ עַל-קְצוֹי-אָרֶץ צְדָק מְלֵאָה יְמִינְךָ:

The praise of You, God, like Your name, reaches to the ends of the earth; Your right hand is filled with beneficence.

hard to anger and easy to appease [M. Avot 5:11],

קָשָׁה לְכַעַס וְנוֹחַ לְרִצּוֹת,

אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּדַעוֹת. נוֹחַ לְכַעַס וְנוֹחַ לְרִצּוֹת, יֵצֵא שְׂכָרוֹ בְּהִפְסָדוֹ. קָשָׁה לְכַעַס וְקָשָׁה לְרִצּוֹת, יֵצֵא הֶפְסְדוֹ בְּשְׂכָרוֹ. קָשָׁה לְכַעַס וְנוֹחַ לְרִצּוֹת, חֲסִיד. נוֹחַ לְכַעַס וְקָשָׁה לְרִצּוֹת, רָשָׁע:

There are four kinds of temperaments: Easy to become angry, and easy to be appeased: his gain disappears in his loss; Hard to become angry, and hard to be appeased: his loss disappears in his gain; **Hard to become angry and easy to be appeased**: a pious person; Easy to become angry and hard to be appeased: a wicked person.

b. for You **desire** not the **sinner's death**,
but that in turning from his path he might live [see Ezekiel 18:23].

b. כי לא תחפץ במות הַמַּת
כי אם בשובו מדרכו וְחַיָּה.

הַחֲפִיץ אֶחֱפֹץ מוֹת רָשָׁע נֶאֱמַר אֲדֹנָי הַלֵּוָא בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדְּרָכָיו וְחַיָּה:

Is it my **desire** that the **wicked** shall **die**?—says the Sovereign GOD. It is **rather** that they shall **turn back from their ways and live**. (Ez. 18:23)

c. Indeed, to his dying day You await him,
were he to return You would welcome him at once.

c. וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תַּחֲסֶה-לוֹ,
אם ישוב מיד תִּקְבְּלוֹ.

d. Truly, You are their Maker
and know of what they are made [see Psalm 103:14a]
that they are (but) **flesh and blood** [see Psalm 103:14b].

d. אֲמַת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא יוֹצְרֵם
וְיֹדְעַע יִצְרֵם
כִּי הֵם בֶּשֶׂר וְדָם.

כִּי-הוּא יָדַע יִצְרָנוּ זְכוֹר כִּי-עֲפָר אֲנַחְנוּ:

For He knows how we are formed; He is mindful that we are **dust**.

9a. A person's origin - from dust; his end - to dust [see [Genesis 3:19](#)]. 9a. אדם יסודו מעפר וסופו לעפר.

בזעת אפיה תאכל לחם עד שובך אל-האדמה כי ממנה לקחת כי-עפר אתה ואל-עפר תשוב:

By the sweat of your brow Shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the **ground**—For from it you were taken.

b. **At the risk of his life he earns his bread** [see [Lamentations 5:9](#)]. b. בנפשנו נביא לחמנו מפני חרב המדבר.

בנפשנו נביא לחמנו מפני חרב המדבר:

We get our bread at the peril of our lives, Because of the sword of the wilderness.

c. (In Scripture, life) is said to be c. משול

Like a **shard – shattered** [see [Leviticus 6:21](#)] כחרס הנשבר

וכלי-תנרש אשר תבשל-בו ישבר ואם-בכלי נחשת בשלה ומרק ונטף במים:

An **earthen vessel** in which it was boiled shall be **broken**; if it was boiled in a copper vessel, [the vessel] shall be scoured and rinsed with water.

like **grass – withering**, [Isaiah 40:7] כחציר יבש

like a **flower – wilting** [Isaiah 40:7, see [Psalm 103:14](#), text above in 8d] וכציון נובל

יבש חציר נבל ציון כי רוח יהוה נשבה בו אכן חציר העם:

Grass withers, flowers fade When the breath of GOD's breath blows on them. Indeed, people are but grass. (Is. 40:7)

like a **shadow – passing** [Psalm 144:4b] כצל עובר

אדם להקבל דמה ימיו כצל עובר:

Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.

like a **cloud – fading** [Job. 7:9], וכענן כלה

כלה ענן ויגף בן יורד שאול לא יעלה:

As a cloud fades away, So whoever goes down to Sheol does not come up;

like a **breeze – fleeting** [see [Isaiah 40:7](#)] וכרוח נושבת

יבש חציר נבל ציון כי רוח יהוה נשבה בו אכן חציר העם:

Grass withers, flowers fade When the **breath** of GOD's breath **blows** on them.

Indeed, people are but grass:

like **dust – flittering** [see [Isaiah 5:24a](#)] וכאבק פורח

לכן כאכל קש לשון אש וחשש להבה ירפה שרשם פמק יהיה ופרחם כאבק יעלה כי מאסו את תורת יהוה צבאות ואת אמרת קדוש-ישראל נאצו:

Assuredly, As straw is consumed by a tongue of fire And hay shrivels as it burns, Their stock shall become like rot, And their buds shall blow away like dust. For they have rejected the instruction of GOD of Hosts, Spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel.

like a **dream – flying off** [Job 20:8]. וכחלום יעוף.

כחלום יעוף ולא ימצאהו ויגד כחזיון לילה:

He flies away like a dream and cannot be found; He is banished like a night vision.

10. **But You are king everlasting God.** 10. ואתה הוא מלך אל חי וקיים.