

*Unetaneh Toqef* as a Midrashic Poem  
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1. And so to You may our *Qedushah* ascend,  
for You our God are King.

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

b. On it Your kingship is exalted [see Numbers 24:7],  
as Your throne is established by generosity [see Proverbs 20:28]  
truly letting You reign from it [see Isaiah 16:5].

c. Truly, You are He who is  
judge, plaintiff, knower (of motives), and witness [see M. Avot 4:22].  
You record and seal (count and number).<sup>1</sup>

d. You adduce all that has been forgotten [see M. Ta'anit 2:4]  
by opening the book of records  
where each entry speaks for itself  
having its owner's signature [see Job 37:7].

3a. And the great *shofar* is sounded [see Isaiah 27:13, Exodus 19:19]  
**but** a muted murmuring sound is heard [see 1 Kings 19:12, Job 4:16].

b. The angels panic  
trepidation and trembling seizing them [see Psalm 48:6-7]

c. as they declare: "Behold, the day of judgment."  
to arraign the hosts on high in judgment [see Isaiah 24:21],  
for in Your eyes they will not be acquitted in judgment  
[see Job 15:15].

1. ובכך לך תעלה קדושה,  
כי אתה אלהינו מלך.

2a. ונתנה תקף קדשת היום  
כי הוא נורא ואים.

b. ובו תנשא מלכותך  
ויכון בחדק כסאך  
ותשב עליו באמת.

c. אמת כי אתה הוא  
דין ומוכים ויודע ועד,

וכותב וחומם (וסופר ומונה).

d. ותזכר כל-הנשפחות  
ותפתח את-ספר הזכרונות  
ומאליו יקרא  
וחומם יד כל-אדם בו.

3a. ובשופר גדול יתקע  
וקול דממה דקה ישמע.

b. ומלאכים יתפזזו  
וחיל ורעדה יאחזו.

c. ויאמרו: הנה יום הדין.  
לפקד על צבא מרום בדין  
כי לא יזכו בעיניך בדין.

<sup>1</sup> These two are missing in many versions; see 4c.

4a. And all who have come into the world  
will pass before You as the angelic hosts/ as a flock of sheep  
[see M. Rosh Hashanah 1:2].

b. Like a shepherd who checks his flock [see Ezekiel 34:12]  
making each of his sheep pass under his staff [see Leviticus 27:32f.],

c. So You will have pass as you count, number,  
and arraign each living being [see Jeremiah 33:13].

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

5. On *Rosh Hashanah* it is recorded  
**But** on the fast of *Kippur* it is sealed  
[see B. Rosh Hashanah 16a].

- 6a. How many shall pass on [see Psalm 104:9a]  
and how many shall come into being [see Psalm 104:30a].
- b. who shall live and who shall die [B. Rosh Hashanah 16b),
- c. who shall reach his end and who shall not:
- d. who by fire and who by flood [see Psalm 66:12a],
- e. who by war and who by beast [see Leviticus 26:6],
- f. who by starvation and who by dehydration [see Jeremiah 15:2-5]
- g. who by shattering events<sup>2</sup> and who by plague,
- h. who by choking and who by pelting,
- i. who shall be at rest and who restless,
- j. who shall be tranquil and who tormented,
- k. who shall be at ease and who at dis-ease,
- l. who shall wax rich and who shall wane poor,
- m. who shall have an upturn and who a downturn.

4a. וְכָל־בָּאֵי עוֹלָם  
יַעֲבְרוּן לְפָנַי כַּבְּנֵי מְרוֹן

b. כְּבִקְרַת רוּעָה עֹדְרוֹ  
מֵעֶבֶיר צֹאנֹו תַחַת שִׁבְטֹו,  
c. כֵּן תַעֲבִיר וְתִסְפֹר וְתַמְנֶה  
וְתַפְקֹד נַפְשׁ כָּל־חַיִּי,  
d. וְתַחֲתֹד קִצְבָה לְכָל־בְּרִיָה  
וְתִכְתֹּב אֶת־גְּזֹר דִּינָם.

5. בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן  
וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כַּפּוֹר יִסְתַּמְּוּן.

- 6a. כַּמֶּה יַעֲבְרוּן  
וְכַמֶּה יִבְרָאוּן.
- b. מִי יַחֲיֶה וּמִי יָמוּת,
- c. מִי בְקִצְוֹ וּמִי לֹא בְקִצְוֹ:
- d. מִי בְאֵשׁ וּמִי בַמַּיִם,
- e. מִי בְחֶרֶב וּמִי בַחַיָּה,
- f. מִי בְרָעֵב וּמִי בַצָּמָא,
- g. מִי בְרָעֵשׁ וּמִי בַמַּגָּפָה,
- h. מִי בַחֲנִיקָה וּמִי בַסְּקִילָה,
- i. מִי יָנוּחַ וּמִי יָנוּעַ,
- j. מִי יִשְׁקִיט וּמִי יִטָּרֵף,
- k. מִי יִשְׁלֹו וּמִי יִתְיַסֵּר,
- l. מִי יַעֲשִׂיר וּמִי יַעֲנִי,
- m. מִי יָרוּם וּמִי יִשְׁפֹל.

<sup>2</sup> רָעַשׁ entails quaking but not necessarily a (rare) earthquake; see Ezekiel 12:18, 37:7. Qallir, the putative author of *Unetaneh Toqef*, uses רָעַשׁ elsewhere to indicate quaking in general; see Goldschmidt, *Mahzor 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 נִרְעַשׁ וְנִפְחָד (ibid., 1:147). As רָעַשׁ is not limited to earthquakes so בַּחֲנִיקָה and בַּסְּקִילָה (#6h) are not limited to the official modes of execution.

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

7. ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה  
מעבירין את־רע הגזירה.

8a. For as Your (four-lettered) name (is one of mercy)  
so is Your reputation [Psalm 48:11]:  
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 Ezekiel 18:23].  
c. Indeed, to his dying day You await him,  
were he to return You would welcome him at once.  
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].

8a. כי כשמה  
כן תהלתה:  
קשה לכעס ונוח לרצות,  
b. כי לא תחפץ במות המת  
כי אם בשובו מדרך ונתנה.  
c. ועד יום מותו תחכה־לו,  
אם ישוב מיד תקבלו.  
d. אמת כי אתה הוא יוצרם  
ויודע יצרם  
כי הם בשר ודם.

9a. A person's origin - from dust; his end - to dust  
[see Genesis 3:19].  
b. At the risk of his life he earns his bread  
[see Lamentations 5:9].  
c. (In Scripture, life) is said to be  
Like a shard – shattered [see Leviticus 6:21]  
like grass – withering [Isaiah 40:7]  
like a flower – wilting [Isaiah 40:7, see Psalm 103:14]  
like a shadow – passing [Psalm 144:4b]  
like a cloud – fading [Job. 7:9],  
like a breeze – fleeting [see Isaiah 40:7]  
like dust – flittering [see Isaiah 5:24a]  
like a dream – flying off [Job 20:8].

9a. אדם יסודו מעפר וסופו לעפר.

b. בנפשו יביא לחמו.

c. משול

פחרס הנשבר

קחציר יבש

וכחצין נובל

קצל עובר

וכענן כלה

וכרוח נושבת

וכאבק פורח

וכחלום יעוף.

10. But You are king everlasting God.

10. ואתה הוא מלך אל תי וקיים.