

"רקע על מקורות הפיוט 'ונתנה תוקף'

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מעשה ברבי אמנון שחי בימי הבינים בעיר מגנצא שבגרמניה, והיה גדול הדור. החלו ההגמון והשרים של אותה עיר מבקשים ממנו שימיר את דתו; הפצירו בו ללא הרף. יום אחד, כשלא יכול היה לעמוד בלחצם, ביקש להסירם מפניו ואמר: תנו לי זמן שלושת ימים ואשיבכם דבר. ברגע שיצאו מילים אלו מפיו - הבין עד כמה שגה וחטא. האם בכלל יש אפשרות כזו?! ויצום ויתפלל ויבכה. למועד שלושה ימים - לא התיצב רבי אמנון ממגנצא בפני ההגמון. שלח ההגמון חיילים להביאו. לשאלת ההגמון - מדוע לא הגיע למועד, השיב רבי אמנון וביקש כי יכרתו את לשונו על כי אמרה את המשפט הנורא: "תנו לי זמן שלושת ימים". ויען ההגמון ויאמר: לא הלשון תיכרת אלא הרגלים אשר לא באו במועד! והידיים שסרבו לסמן את הצלב. ויכרתו את ידיו ואת רגליו של אמנון. אותו יום ערב ראש השנה היה. ובראש השנה בשעת קדושה של מוסף, ביקש רבי אמנון והעלוהו כרות ידיים ורגלים לבימה אצל ארון הקודש, ושם חיבר את התפילה הנפלאה: "ונתנה תוקף קדושת היום". בסיימו התפילה - יצאה נשמתו בטהרה.

The prayer 'Unetanneh Tokef' is now one of the most solemn prayers of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The prayer dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and was probably written by either the poet Yanai or the poet Elazar Ben Kalir. A copy of that prayer that dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century was found in the Cairo Geniza. It includes the stirring passage:

*"On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed:*

*how many shall pass on, and how many shall be born;*

*who shall live, and who shall die;*

*who in his time, and who before his time;*

*who by fire and who by water;*

*who by sword and who by beast;*

*who by hunger and who by thirst;*

*who by storm and who by plague;*

*who by choking and who by stoning...*

*Who shall rest, and who shall wander;*

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Unetanneh Tokef – Erez Cohen

*who shall be tranquil and who shall be harassed;*

*who shall be at peace and who shall suffer;*

*who shall become poor, and who shall become rich;*

*who shall fall and who shall rise...*

*But repentance, prayer and charity revoke the evil decree!"*

1. What is the main goal of the prayer?
2. What does the prayer emphasize between? The reward or the punishment?
3. Is this prayer still relatable today and why?

According to legend, recorded in the 13th century commentary Or Zarua, Unetanneh Tokef was composed by a purported 11th century sage named Rabbi Amnon of Mainz (or Mayence, in Germany) -- who, apart from this one story, is utterly unknown to history. Friends with the Bishop of Mainz, Rabbi Amnon was pressured to convert to Catholicism. As a delaying tactic, Rabbi Amnon requested three days to consider the offer; immediately after, he regretted intensely giving even the pretense that he could possibly accept a foreign religion. After spending the three days in prayer, he refused to come to the bishop as promised, and, when he was brought to the bishop's palace, he begged that his tongue be cut out to atone for his sins. Instead, the bishop ordered his hands and legs amputated — limb by limb — as punishment for not obeying his word to return after three days and for refusing to convert. At each amputation, Rabbi Amnon was again given the opportunity to convert, which he refused.

This event occurred shortly before Rosh Hashanah. On that holiday, as he lay dying, Rabbi Amnon asked to be carried into the synagogue, where he recited the original composition of *Unetanneh Tokef* with his last breath. Three days later, he appeared in a dream to Rabbi Kalonymus Ben Meshullam (died 1096), one of the great scholars of Mainz, and begged him to record the prayer and to see that it was included in the text of the High Holiday services. Thus, the legend concludes, *Unetanneh Tokef* became a part of the standard liturgy.

1. What is the message of the legend?
2. How does the legend change the context of the prayer?
3. Is there a change in emphasis when reading the prayer following the legend?

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Leonard Cohen – Who By Fire

And who by fire, who by water,  
who in the sunshine, who in the night time,  
who by high ordeal, who by common trial,  
who in your merry merry month of may,  
who by very slow decay,  
and who shall I say is calling?

And who in her lonely slip, who by barbiturate,  
who in these realms of love, who by something blunt,  
and who by avalanche, who by powder,  
who for his greed, who for his hunger,  
and who shall I say is calling?

And who by brave assent, who by accident,  
who in solitude, who in this mirror,  
who by his lady's command, who by his own hand,  
who in mortal chains, who in power,  
and who shall I say is calling?

Cohen's song was written and recorded following his visit in Israel during the Yom Kippur war in October 1973.

1. How is Cohen's song different from the prayer?
2. What effects of the war do you see in the song? What effects of Cohen's own life as a main stream singer?
3. What are the new elements inserted in the prayer?
4. Who do you think is calling? And what is the call?

Yom Kippur – Food For Thought  
Unetanneh Tokef – Erez Cohen

In October 1973, during Yom Kippur Egyptian and Syrian forces invaded Israel from two fronts. The Jewish state was fasting, most soldiers were at home or at synagogue and all TV and radio stations weren't working due to the holiday. Calling the reserves took almost full 24 hours. In that time Egypt occupied most of the Sinai and Syria occupied most of the Golan Heights.

The war lasted three weeks in which Israel managed to regain control of the Golan Heights and push the Egyptians back from Sinai to a 60 miles distance from Cairo. But the price Israel paid was very high. 2,800 Israelis died in the war.

Kibbutz Beit Hashita, a secular kibbutz in the north of Israel, didn't use to mark Yom Kippur before the 1973. It was just another work day in the secular kibbutz. 11 members of the kibbutz died in the front lines. Following the war the Kibbutz' community was heavily mourning the loss of the sons. In Yom Kippur of 1974 the Kibbutz joined the Israeli majority and held Yom Kippur services, reading U'Netaneh Tokef in memory of the fallen kibbutz members. Yair Rosenblum, an Israeli musician, created a new tune for the 1,300 years old tune.

1. What is the modern interpretation that the members of Beit Hashita gave to the prayer?
2. What are your thoughts about the transition the kibbutz made?
3. What do you think about adaptations of prayers to modern contexts?
4. Why do you think U'Netaneh Tokef was the prayer of choice to symbolize the fallen soldiers of 1973?