

A New Unetaneh Tokef for a Time of Terror

A Call to Collective *Teshuvah* presented by *Or Hadash USA*

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Introduction:

Now let us relate the power of this day's holiness, for it is truly Nora/Awesome. Stop! Enough denial! Life is real, and so is death. We are responsible. There is great suffering. We are all mortal. We are accountable for what we do, and for what we *fail* to do. What we notice and what we ignore. There is work to do. Work on ourselves. Work in the world. We don't have all day. Things are being done in the world, in our name, that must shock our conscience and move us to action.

This day calls us to self-reflection, self-examination, individually and communally. And in so doing, so we bring "*tokef k'dushah*," the power of holiness, holy power, to this day, calling ourselves to account for complicity through silence. Today we see beyond ourselves to things that are larger than us and recognize how much more important they are than we are. There is accountability, and for this we are judged. Today we face truths that cannot be ignored.

One of the Holy One's many Names is Truth. Truth itself is our Judge and Witness: recording and sealing, counting and measuring, recalling that which we would rather forget. What have we preferred to forget? What have we chosen not to see?

Each day it is written, each day it is sealed... Who shall truly live, and whose spirit shall die. Whose spirit shall die by silence, whose by complicity. Whose by denial, whose by justification. Whose by willful ignorance, whose by laziness, whose by pretending not to know, whose by deciding not to know. Whose by trivializing, whose by racism, whose by xenophobia, whose by chauvinism. Whose by deliberate blindness. Whose by mockery. Whose by failure to oppose, failure to resist, failure to protest. Whose by failure to stand up. Whose by trivializing the act; whose by trivializing the Other. The Book of Remembrance is opened and *it reads itself*, for the hand-seal of every person is upon it.

A great Shofar is sounded, but all that is heard is "a still small voice"! Is it possible that all we need is a still, small voice? Whose voice? Can we hear the still small voice in ourselves that tells us what we've been hiding from our consciousness? Has the still small voice been there all the time - needing the Shofar blast to enable us to hear it?

"Wake up ye slumberers! This day even angels are alarmed, seized with fear and trembling as they declare: "The Day of Judgment is here!" My God, my God! What have we done? What are we doing? We are playing God! How dare we determine the life and decree the destiny of living creatures! Each day with our silence we allow it to be written, each day with our complicity we allow it to be sealed:

Who shall live out the limit of his days and who shall not; Who shall die in our captivity, and who shall eventually be released. Who shall be forced to endure extremes of heat and cold, chained, crouching for 20 hours at a time, and who shall not. Who shall be deprived of sleep for days on end; and who will be terrorized by threats against family. Who shall endure torture by water, and who shall be cut. Whose body shall be ridiculed and exposed; and who shall be threatened by beasts. Who shall be beaten, and who have his sense of self and psyche taken from him. Who by forced feeding, and who by

food and water deprivation. Who shall die by strangling, and who from sensory deprivation. Who shall rest and who shall wander. Who shall be at peace and who shall be tormented.

But T'shuva/Repentance, T'fillah/Prayer and Tz'dakah/Righteousness can annul the severity of the decree. So must awareness and activism.

Closing:

We turn towards what is right and good; add our voices; seek justice; cry out, like the shofar –add each still small voice together so that all can hear, and no one can hide from the truth. It is not easy. Human life is fragile. We are distracted by the tasks of life. It is easy to feel we are nothing. We vanish in the end. But we can be part of the Chain which is Eternal. Therefore together we can and must turn from the wrong direction. The time to do so is now – during these Nora/Awesome Days. It is never too late to heal. Whenever we do so, that Oneness which is Goodness, Wholeness, and Truth will be waiting for us to return, to reconnect, to remember that we are bound up with each other and with the Divine. Kein yehi ratzon – may this be God's will.