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Excerpted from the (unedited) manuscript of the upcoming
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וּנְתַנֶּה תֹּקֶף

Unesaneh Tokef: Our Choices Have Consequences!

This has become a central tefilah on Rosh Hashana (and Yom Kippur) because it describes the judgement of Rosh Hashna in very clear and straightforward terms, with no flowery vague poetry to soften the blow! It tells us that Hashem reviews all our deeds and judges us accordingly; and then it lays out all the options for next year – for better or for worse! If you do not understand the Hebrew, then just simply read the English and you will get the point.

So is this supposed to scare me to change? No! Rarely does healthy permanent growth come from a one-time scare. That wears off pretty quickly. But what it is supposed to do is to help us see clearly that today Hashem is deciding, based on our past performance, whether we will be "rehired" and under what conditions, as we explained in detail in the Introduction to this Machzor. If you are not worried – you believe did a great job and feel you are sure you will get a raise – great! But if you are like most of us, including me, we can think of plenty of areas in which we did not really respond to our circumstances in the best way possible.

So what am I supposed to now – it is already judgment day! Good question. Start with saying Unesaneh Tokef! Get out of the "somehow someday it will all work out" mindset and accept responsibility for your actions (or inactions). A performance review by the "Boss" is a good thing for someone who really **does** want to grow to the best they can be! Be happy that "the Boss Himself" is personally taking the time to look at your record. And understand that He judges each of us subjectively. Meaning: you cannot rely on the fact that, "*Hey, compared to others I am pretty good!*" because perhaps Hashem gave You more opportunities and therefore He expects even more from you! But also, do not give up because "*I'll never be as amazing as him or her!*" because Hashem knows the life He gave you and may not expect you to be him or her! Hashem judges us based on what He knows could be expected from each of us. You need to decide whether you were the best "you" you could have been. And with that in mind, then say the "punchline" of this *tefillah* with fervor – "Teshuvah, Tefilah and Tzedaka" can turn things around. All is not lost. But not because Hashem *chas v'shalom* does not know or care. But rather because He wants to give us as many opportunities as possible to fulfill our mission.

So read the scary description of the day and accept the reality that your actions have consequences. Then focus on the three-part plan to avert a harsh strict decree.

But how can those three things make a difference? That is **the** crucial question!
See the FAQ's when you get to that line and read the answers carefully.

In most shuls, we say the first paragraph followed by the chazzan (who either says it all or the last part) and then we say the next paragraph (בראש השנה) followed by the chazzan.

וּנְתַנֶּה תֹּקֶף קְדֻשַּׁת הַיּוֹם, כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאָיוֹם. וּבוֹ תִּנָּשֵׂא מַלְכוּתֶךָ, וְיִכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד כִּסְאֶךָ, וְתֵשֵׁב עָלָיו בֶּאֱמֶת: אֱמֶת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא דַּיָּן וּמוֹכִיחַ וְיוֹדֵעַ וָעֵד, וְכוֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם (וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֶה), וְתִזְכֹּר כָּל הַנִּשְׁכָּחוֹת, וְתִפְתַּח אֶת סֵפֶר הַזִּכְרוֹנוֹת, וּמֵאֵלָיו יִקָּרֵא, וְחוֹתָם יַד כָּל אָדָם בּוֹ: וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתָּקַע, וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה יִשָּׁמַע, וּמַלְאָכִים יֵחָפֵזוּן, וְחִיל וּרְעָדָה יֹאחֵזוּן, וְיֹאמְרוּ הִנֵּה יוֹם הַדִּין, לִפְקֹד עַל צְבָא מָרוֹם בַּדִּין, כִּי לֹא יִזְכּוּ בְעֵינֶיךָ בַּדִּין: וְכָל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעַבְרוּן לְפָנֶיךָ כִּבְנֵי מָרוֹן, כְּבַקָּרַת רוֹעֶה עֶדְרוֹ, מַעֲבִיר צֹאנוֹ תַּחַת שִׁבְטוֹ כֵּן תַּעֲבִיר וְתִסְפֹּר וְתִמְנֶה, וְתִפְקֹד נֶפֶשׁ כָּל חָי. וְתַחְתֹּךְ קִצְבָה לְכָל בְּרִיּוֹתֶיךָ, וְתִכְתֹּב אֶת גְּזַר דִּינָם:

וּנְתַנֶּה תֹּקֶף - Let us describe the power of this day's holiness, for it is awesome and frightening: On this day Your Kingship will be exalted and publicised *by the fact that we publicly accept You as our King and accept Your judgement*! Your throne will be strengthened when You do kindness *to Bnei Yisrael in their judgement* as You sit upon Your throne to judge the entire world with truth. It is true that You alone are the One Who judges, punishes, knows all, and bears witness; You alone are the one Who writes and seals, (counts and calculates) *all our deeds*; and Who remembers all things that were forgotten. You will open the Book of Records – it will read itself, and *there is no denying what is recorded because* everyone's signature is in it testifying to the truth of what it says! The great shofar will be sounded *to announce that it is Judgement Day*, and a silent gentle voice will be heard. The angels will rush *to do their jobs*, a trembling and terror will seize them – and they will say, "Behold, it is the Day of Judgment to judge *not only mankind but also* the heavenly hosts and angels!" *And they tremble* because even the angels cannot come out completely innocent in Your eyes in judgment. And all mankind will pass before You like young sheep. Just like a shepherd inspecting and counting his flock makes each one pass under his staff, so too You will have each individual pass before You to count, calculate his particular situation, and review his deeds *in the context of the entire "flock" as well as particular to each individual's unique resources and life situations that were given to each person by Hashem*. *Based on that* You will determine the length and quality of life for each individual, and You will write down the decree of their judgement.

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכָּתֵבוּן, וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כִּפּוּר יֵחָתֵמוּן, 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 יִשָּׁקֵט, וּמִי יִטָּרֵף, מִי יִשָּׁלֵו, וּמִי יִתְיַסָּר, מִי יֵעָנִי, וּמִי יֵעָשֵׁר, מִי יִשָּׁפֵל, וּמִי יָרוּם:

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה - On Rosh Hashanah *each person's decree* will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur it will be sealed: how many will pass away and how many will be created; who will live and who will die; who will die at his predestined time and who before his time *because of his sins*; who will perish by water and who by fire; who by the sword and who by wild beasts; who by hunger and who by thirst; who by earthquakes (and "natural" disasters) and who by plague; who by strangulation and who by stoning. *It will also be decided*: Who will be settled and at rest, and who will wander from place to place; who will live in peace and quiet, and who will be agitated and confused; who will have a life of tranquillity and who will suffer; who will be poor and who will be rich; who will fall from their high status and who will be promoted to a high status.

Us followed by Chazzan

וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וּצְדָקָה
מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה:

But repentance, and prayer and charity remove the evil decree.

FAQ: Teshuvah removes the evil decree - but teshuvah takes forever! How will that help me today? ANSWER: Really important question! See Appendix 2A.

FAQ: Tefillah removes the evil decree? Great! So I do not have to change – just ask Hashem nicely and all is erased? ANSWER: Well, that would be nice, but you know that is not exactly true. So how does it work? Great question, see Appendix 2A.

FAQ: Tzedakah removes the evil decree – why? You can't "bribe" Hashem and pay Him off! And if it is simply the reward for a mitzvah, then why this mitzvah more than Shabbos or anything else? ANSWER: That is an extremely perceptive question which makes a difference in a lot of areas! See Appendix 2A.

Us followed by Chazzan:

כִּי כְשִׁמְךָ כֵּן תְּהִלָּתֶךָ, קָשֶׁה לְכְעֹס וְנוֹחַ לִרְצוֹת, כִּי לֹא תַחְפֹּץ בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת, כִּי אִם בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדַּרְכּוֹ וְחָיָה. וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תְּחַכֶּה לּוֹ, אִם יָשׁוּב מִיַּד תְּקַבְּלוֹ:

כִּי כְשִׁמְךָ - Just as Your Name *(the Name of י-ה-ו-ה) signifies Your Trait of Mercy*,
כֵּן תְּהִלָּתֶךָ - so too that is how we all praise You, *as being merciful (רחום וחנון-א-ל)*;
קָשֶׁה לְכְעֹס וְנוֹחַ לִרְצוֹת - You are slow to anger and easy to appease;
כִּי לֹא תַחְפֹּץ בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת - for You do not want the wicked person to die,
כִּי אִם בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדַּרְכּוֹ וְחָיָה - but rather that he repent his evil ways and live.
וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תְּחַכֶּה לּוֹ - And until the day of his death You wait for him,
אִם יָשׁוּב מִיַּד תְּקַבְּלוֹ - and if he repents You will accept him immediately.

אֱמֶת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא יוֹצְרָם, וְאַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ יִצְרָם, כִּי הֵם בָּשָׂר וָדָם: אָדָם יְסוֹדוֹ מֵעָפָר וְסוֹפוֹ לֶעָפָר. בְּנַפְשׁוֹ יָבִיא לַחְמוֹ, מָשׁוּל כְּחֶרֶס הַנִּשְׁבָּר, כְּחָצִיר יָבֵשׁ, וּכְציץ נוֹבֵל, כְּצֵל עוֹבֵר, וּכְעָנָן כָּלָה, וּכְרוּחַ נוֹשָׁבֶת, וּכְאָבָק פּוֹרֵחַ, וְכַחֲלוֹם יָעוּף:

אֱמֶת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא יוֹצְרָם - The truth is, that You are their Creator, וְאַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ יִצְרָם - and therefore know their Yetzer Hara, כִּי הֵם בָּשָׂר וָדָם - and that they are simply flesh and blood – *and thus You understand their struggle to do the right thing.*
אָדָם יְסוֹדוֹ מֵעָפָר וְסוֹפוֹ לֶעָפָר - Man, his beginning is from dust and his end is dust; בְּנַפְשׁוֹ יָבִיא לַחְמוֹ - he risks his life to get his daily bread; מָשׁוּל כְּחֶרֶס הַנִּשְׁבָּר - he is like a broken piece of pottery *that is hard to put back together*; like grass that withers and like the flower that fades *that are hard to revive*; his life passes quickly like a passing shadow, like the cloud that vanishes in the wind, like the wind that blows and like dust that flies, and like a fleeting dream:

וְאַתָּה הוּא מֶלֶךְ אֵ-ל חַי וְקַיָּם:

But You are the King, the Almighty, the living and eternal God

Appendix 2A
Teshuvah, Tefila, Tzedaka

FAQ: Teshuvah removes the evil decree - but teshuvah takes forever! How will that help me today? **FAQ**: Tefillah removes the evil decree? Great! So I do not have to change – just ask Hashem nicely and all is erased? **FAQ**: Tzedakah removes the evil decree – why? You can't "bribe" Hashem and pay Him off!

Let's start by asking another question! "*Why did you make this Appendix 2A and not its own Appendix?*" Good question! Look back at Appendix 2. The topic is the famous and painful question of *Tzadik V'ra Lo* – why does it look to us as if Hashem is "not fair" and good people seem to have a lot of "evil" decrees. For many different reasons, some people are not bothered by that question. They have a healthy *emunah peshuta* that all Hashem does is for the best. They readily accept the idea that as human beings, why would we expect to understand Hashem's calculations? And that is great. But for others, that question gives them no peace. If that is you, then the confusion and pain caused by that question will make it hard for you to properly digest and put into practice what we are going to explain here. If you walk into Yemei HaDin feeling "Hashem is not fair" - then what **is** the point of trying to improve? So if *Tzadik V'ra Lo* is a non-issue, then just keep reading. But if it is a big deal, please go back to Appendix 2 and read that first! Once you have dealt with Appendix 2, you then will be open to Appendix 2A!

Sorry – but before we answer the three questions – a *mashal*! Imagine you pass by a store that sells beautiful paintings. You walk in and look around and the artist asks you what you think of his work. You answer, "Wow – these are beautiful. Amazing! I would love to have one!!" He tells you, "Great, they are only $50,000 each." "Oh – if I had that kind of money for sure I would buy – they are beautiful. But I am a poor guy and can't afford that. Sorry, have a nice day." A year later you walk by the store and the artist pulls you in and says, "Guess what? Your lucky day! We are having a sale and each painting is only $10! Which one do you want?" Now, if you really did like his paintings, and it was true that the price was simply too high – then once they were on sale you would grab them. But if you make some flimsy excuse and walk out of the store, then the artist realizes that you never really liked his paintings in the first place. You used the price as an excuse, but the truth is, you would not even take them for ten dollars! Which is quite insulting!

The *nimshal*: Full proper teshuvah is hard work and can take months, if not years. It has many ups and downs and can be quite complicated and frustrating depending on your particular life situation. To cleanse ourselves of our *aveiros* to be 100 percent worthy of Hashem's goodness seems like a nearly impossible task. And because of that, sometimes we give up before even trying – "I really want to, but it's too hard, I just can't!" But this time of year Hashem is "having a sale" on teshuvah, and you can be given a good judgment and a fresh start for much less work than it takes during the year. As all of us hear time and again during Elul, "דִּרְשׁוּ ד' בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ קְרָאֻהוּ בִּהְיוֹתוֹ קָרוֹב – Seek Hashem while He may be found; call out to Him while He is near" – that is now! Now it is **not** so hard, and you **can**! If you do not bother to take advantage of this time of year, you are showing Hashem that you really were never interested in change at all. Not bothering to take advantage of the Aseres Yemei Teshuva opportunity of Teshuvah, Tefilah and Tzedaka is a statement on your part that you are **not** part of *sifrei chaim* – you are not spiritually alive at all. And that could *chas v'shalom* have terrible consequences on your judgement for the coming year!

So what do these three things accomplish? There is a debate among the *meforshim* as to the understanding of "מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה". Do they completely cancel any evil decrees, do they push them off and give you time to improve, or do they soften the harshness of the decree. Obviously, we don't really understand the details of Hashem's calculations. But we do know the following: It is Rosh Hashana, and as explained in the Introduction to this Machzor, now is when Hashem is setting His plan for the coming year and where **you** fit in! Everything that was detailed in Unesaneh Tokef is being decided and put into place today! And now Hashem is "having a sale" and is prepared to give you a good year, write you in *sifrei chaim* and give you a chance to prove yourself, for much less than it takes during the year! Now all it takes is Teshuvah, Tefillah and Tzedaka as we will explain. If you can't be bothered to even do that, then you have announced to Hashem, and to yourself, that you really don't care. Or to put it in Rosh Hashana terms, you have written yourself into *sifrei meisim*, those who are spiritually dead. You have Free Will; it is your call.

Teshuvah: During the year complete Teshuva is a long process. But now, to prove to yourself and to Hashem that you **are** a member of *sifrei chaim*, I personally found the following understanding (heard from Rabbi Yisroel Reisman shlit"a in his phone-in chumash shiur before Rosh Hashana 5781) helpful. This idea comes from the Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron Rav Yechezkel Sarna *zatzal* (1890 - 1969) in his Sefer Daliot Yechezkel Cheilek Gimmel in the name of Rav Yisrael Salanter.

A *talmid* was once very sad on the Yomim Noraim and Rav Yechezkel asked him why he was so sad. The *talmdid* answered that the Rambam says that your teshuvah must be to a point where Hashem knows you will never do it again – and that is a very difficult level to reach! (Sound familiar?) Rav Yechezkel told him not to worry about the Rambam's level of teshuva because we don't *pasken* like the Rambam. We *pasken* like Rabbeinu Yonah's level of teshuva. What is that? Rabbeinu Yona writes (in Shaar Aleph in the Ikar HaBeis of his Shaarei Teshuva L'rabbeinu Yona) that Teshuva is שיתייצב על דרך טוב - that you should get yourself on the right path. Rabbeinu Yona points out that the Gemara tells us that Yom Kippur atones "לשבים" – those who are **doing** teshuva. It did not say "לשב" – to those who **did** teshuva – but rather those who are in the process, who are on the right path! He brings an amazing *mashal* from Rav Yisrael Salanter. A man wanted to travel from Warsaw to Vilna, which is a one-day trip. He traveled for two days, and he is not in Vilna! He asked somebody for help and the person told him that from Warsaw to Vilna **is** a one-day trip - but you have to travel east. You have been going west for two days so now you are three days away from Vilna! The man of course turned around and started to travel to the east.

Asks Rav Yisrael Salanter the following: When was this man closer to Vilna: when he started out or now? When he started out, he was only one day away – but facing the wrong direction. Now he is three days away, but he is facing in the right direction! So **now** he is closer to Vilna! It is the same thing with our connection to Hashem. Sometimes we feel closer and sometimes we feel far away. On Rosh Hashana, the Teshuva of שיתייצב על דרך טוב - that you should get yourself on the right path and face the right direction – that gets you closer to Hashem.
That is what is meant by "תשובה ... מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה" – such a teshuva, this time of year, can get you into *sifrei chaim* because you clearly are alive and closer to Hashem than before!

But Rabbi Feigenbaum – I know myself and I'm not going to stay on the right path for long! For sure I'll crash like every year! Me too! We will discuss this after we do tefillah and tzedakah.

Tefillah: Go back to Appendix 1 where we discuss how *tefillah* works. Simply put, the point of *tefillah* is that we are admitting that everything is in the hands of Hashem. True, we cannot rely on miracles and must do what we can. But in the end, רפאנו ד' only if Hashem heals us, only then ונרפא will we be healed. Accepting that brings us closer to Hashem and makes us worthy of His help. Focusing on that point and internalizing it is a crucial step to getting us facing in the right direction. If we really felt every minute of the day that the only reason we can speak or see or hear is because Hashem gives us that ability, which He could *chas v'shalom* take away any second, we would certainly be more careful with what we say, watch or listen to! Therefore, spending Rosh Hashana in *tefillah* to Hashem (when so many of the *tefilos* and *piyutim* stress the point that Hashem controls everything) helps us turn ourselves around and face the right way – moving towards the *sifrei chaim*! And again, not bothering to take advantage of this special time and special *tefilos* means we have chosen to keep walking in the wrong direction, getting us further from the *sifrei chaim*.

Tzadaka: "Don't tell me what to do with **my** money!" OH! But it's not **your** money! And it is not **your** free time, or organizational skills, or sense of humor, or social skills – or anything! They are all part of the "expense account" given to you by your "Boss" to be used for the good of the "company" as explained in the Introduction to this Machzor. Based on what you did with all of **His** stuff last year, He will decide if it is "worth His while" to give you more, the same – or less! Giving *tzedakah* (whether in the form of money if that is what Hashem blessed you with, or giving of the spare time Hashem has given you, or your natural empathy for others, your ability to cheer people up or be a good listener, or organizational talents) is a way of reinforcing the idea (to ourselves and showing Hashem) that we understand that all our "stuff" is not really ours, but is His! Therefore, even if you did not always use your resources so well last year, now is the time to get back on track and show Hashem that you **are** deserving of those resources again (and maybe even a "raise") because you **do** understand why He gave it all to you. "... צדקה מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה"

And don't forget Aseres Yemei Teshuvah! All this is to get a good judgement written. It still needs to be sealed. During Aseres Yemei Teshuvah we need to show Hashem we have a reasonable plan to move forward. This may mean practical changes, or learning more about a topic we struggle with, or asking the questions we have been avoiding asking because we do not really want to hear the answers! And it may mean seeking guidance. It is a very tricky balance of moving forward, but not so fast that you crash. A good mentor/guide is crucial. We will discuss this more in the Yom Kippur Machzor when dealing with the practical applications of *viduyi*.

But Rabbi Feigenbaum, next year I will be in same dumb place! Maybe. And maybe me too! And I have been doing this a lot longer than you have! But hopefully we all will have made two steps forward and only one step backward – so we **did** accomplish something! And even if not – if we would not be putting in effort to change, we would fall backwards. Treading water is also an accomplishment! And every year is different. Just because it did not work last year (or the year before, or the year before that) does not mean that it won't work this year! If we are making a sincere effort, if we are making sure we are now facing the right direction, using our resources as if they were simply a temporary expense account, and using our *tefilos* to accept Hashem's control, then He will see that we **are** very much alive and belong in the *sifrei chaim* - those who are alive and deserve to stay alive another year. **אמן. כן יהי רצון.**

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