

Read *Unetaneh Tokef* carefully. **Read it as a poem:** don't get caught up in trying to take it literally, but instead think about it as a dramatic word-picture with themes and imagery, full of symbols and metaphors, with rich subtext.

Questions to Prepare for Discussion

Kingship.

What does a king have to do with judging and justice?
What does a king symbolize?

What does it mean that God's throne (symbolic of kingship) is set on a foundation of *chesed* (lovingkindness)? What might the judgments of a kingship of *chesed* be like?

Judging.

What does it mean to be judged? Is it always bad (or always good) to be judged?
What is the purpose of courts of law (remembering that not all cases are criminal cases)?
What are the qualities that make a really good judge?
How can it be helpful to be judged?

What are some of the things the poet might be saying by showing not only human beings, but angels, and every kind of creature, even Heavenly creatures, as all being equally subject to judgment?

Voice.

Read 1 Kings 19:8-3. What do we learn about God in this story?
Why would the poet pick this particular image of God to use?
We have other poetic images of God that are more king-like, more human-like. What could alluding (referring) to this story in 1 Kings 19 tell us about how the poet wants us to understand God?

Shepherd.

How are a king and a shepherd similar?
Why do sheep need a shepherd? What does a shepherd do?
What kind of a shepherd knows each sheep in his flock by sight?

Who will...

What is the common theme of this paragraph? Hint: how many of the things listed are things that we have real and/or complete control over?

Evilness

What is the difference between averting "an evil decree" and averting "the evilness of the decree?"

What are *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, and *tzedakah*? What do those three things accomplish? How do you even do them? What can they symbolize if you understand them as metonymy (something that symbolizes a large thing or a group of things by representing one example or certain small part of it) for a whole lot of actions and behaviors, maybe a whole lifestyle, that might be like those three things?

Hint: what is the *shoresh* (root) of these three words? What do you think it implies for this poem that the word *lehitpalel* ("to pray") most literally means "to judge yourself?" And remember that even though we often translate *tzedakah* as "charity," "charity" comes from the Latin *caritas* = "compassion:" and that's not the same as *tzedek*, is it?

What kind of a life would you have if you did a lot of *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, *tzedakah*, and the various mitzvot or values they might represent? What kind of perspective might a person living that kind of life have about things beyond their control, even hard things?