

## Yom Kippur Morning Torah Study

### “G’mar Hatimah Tova”—Getting the Seal of Approval

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#### Part I: Will You Put That in Writing?

##### Text 1

##### Exodus 32:30-33 (Etz Chaim, page 536)

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have been guilty of a great sin. Yet I will now go up to יהוה; perhaps I may win forgiveness for your sin.”

Moses went back to יהוה and said, “Alas, this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold.

Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from **the record which You have written!**”

וְעַתָּה אִם־תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם־אֵין מְחַנֵּי נָא מִסִּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ:

But יהוה said to Moses, “Only one who has sinned against Me will I erase from My record.

##### Text 2

##### Sforno on Exodus 21:33

מִי אֲשֶׁר חָטָא לִי אִמְחַנּוּ מִסְפְּרִי, the idea that I will wipe out the merits of those who have not sinned against Me in order that through your loss of these credits they may qualify for My forgiveness is a non starter. This would be a brand new system of justice. The system of reward and retribution I have practiced is based on the fact that the sinner would have to pay for his sin, while receiving reward for his good deeds. I do not recognize a system whereby sins can be offset against previously accumulated merits, or vice versa. If I do not recognize such trade-offs of the sins and good deeds of the same individual against one another, I most certainly will not allow the transfer of other people’s merits to wipe out the debit balance of a third party. As a result of these considerations, your proposal is not acceptable.

##### Text 3

##### Seder Eliyahi Zuta, Chapter 4

During the last 40 days of Moshe’s second ascent to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the people of Israel decreed days of fasting. On the final day the people decreed a fast for the entire next day in order to overcome their evil inclinations...As Moshe approached them, they cried and Moshe cried too, and their cries ascended to the heavens. God was filled with mercy for them. The Holy Spirit brought them good tidings and consolations, saying, “My children, I swear by My awesome name that your crying shall be cries of joy, for this day shall be a day of forgiveness, atonement and pardon for you, your children, and your grandchildren until the end of time.

## Part II: The Good Book and Other Books

### Text 4

#### Mahzor Lev Shalem: High Holy Day Liturgy

##### Rosh Hashanah Ma'ariv Amidah: p.16

בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים בְּרָכָה וְשְׁלוֹם וּפְרִנְסָה טוֹבָה נִזְכָּר וְנִכְתָּב לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנַחְנוּ וְכָל עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וְלְשְׁלוֹם:  
May we and the entire House of Israel be called to mind and inscribed for life, blessing, sustenance, and peace in the Book of Life

##### Yom Kippur Ne'elah Amidah: p.398

בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים בְּרָכָה וְשְׁלוֹם וּפְרִנְסָה טוֹבָה נִזְכָּר וְנִכְתָּם לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנַחְנוּ וְכָל עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים וְלְשְׁלוֹם:  
May we and the entire House of Israel be called to mind and sealed for life, blessing, sustenance and peace in the Book of Life.

### Text 5

#### Avinu Malkaynu MLS page 243, note the change in Ne'elah, page 426

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים טוֹבִים  
*Avinu malkein* inscribe us in the Book of Good Life.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר גְּאֻלָּה וְיִשׁוּעָה:  
*Avinu malkein* inscribe us in the Book of Redemption and Deliverance.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר פְּרִנְסָה וְכִלְפָּלָה:  
*Avinu malkein* inscribe us in the Book of Maintenance and Sustenance.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר זְכוֹת:  
*Avinu malkein* inscribe us in the Book of Merits.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר סְלִיחָה וּמַחִילָה:  
*Avinu malkein* inscribe us in the Book of Pardon and Forgiveness.

### Text 6

#### Jerusalem Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 1:3

Rabbi Crispus said in the name of Rabbi Johanan, there are three ledgers. One for perfectly just people, one for perfectly evil people, and one for average ones. Those of the one for the perfectly just already took judgment of life from New Year's Day. Those of the one for the perfectly evil already took their verdict from New Year's Day. Those of the average ones already were given the ten days of repentance between New Year's day and the Day of Atonement. If they repented, they were inscribed with the just ones.

### Part III: Signed in Ink or Pencil?

#### Text 7

##### Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashanah 16b:11

And Rabbi Yitzḥak said: A man is judged only according to his deeds at the time of his judgment, and not according to his future deeds, as it is stated with regard to Ishmael: "For God has heard the voice of the lad where he is" (Genesis 21:17). Although Ishmael and his descendants would act wickedly in the future, his prayer was heard and answered because he was innocent at the time... And Rabbi Yitzḥak said: A person's sentence is torn up on account of four types of actions. These are: Giving charity, crying out in prayer, a change of one's name, and a change of one's deeds for the better.

Beit Shammai says: There will be three groups of people on the great Day of Judgment at the end of days: One of wholly righteous people, one of wholly wicked people, and one of middling people. Wholly righteous people will immediately be written and sealed for eternal life. Wholly wicked people will immediately be written and sealed for Gehenna, as it is stated: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall wake, some to eternal life and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Middling people will descend to Gehenna to be cleansed and to achieve atonement for their sins, otherwise they are inscribed with the evil ones.

Rabbi Simon said in the name of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi: The Holy One, praise to Him, only judges a person according to his present state.

#### Text 8

##### Psalm 69: 29

יִמְחוּ מִסֵּפֶר חַיִּים וְעַם צְדִיקִים אֶל-יִכְתְּבוּ:

may they be erased from the book of life, and not be inscribed with the righteous.

##### Bereshit Rabbah on Psalm 69:29

Bar Kappara opened: "May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be recorded with the righteous." "May they be blotted out of the book of life" - from the genealogy of the tribe. "And not be recorded with the righteous" - from the genealogy of the upper world. Another interpretation: "May they be blotted out of the book of life" - from the genealogy of Adam.

## Text 9

### Haftarah, Isaiah 58:3-10, MLS page 285-286

“Why, when we fasted, did You not see?  
When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?”

Because on your fast day  
You see to your business  
And oppress all your laborers!  
Because you fast in strife and contention,  
And you strike with a wicked fist!  
Your fasting today is not such  
As to make your voice heard on high.  
Is such the fast I desire,  
A day for people to starve their bodies?  
Is it bowing the head like a bulrush  
And lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
Do you call that a fast,  
A day when GOD is favorable?  
No, this is the fast I desire:  
To unlock fetters of wickedness,

And untie the cords of the yoke  
To let the oppressed go free;  
To break off every yoke.  
It is to share your bread with the hungry,  
And to take the wretched poor into your home;  
When you see the naked, to clothe them,  
And not to ignore your own kin.  
Then shall your light burst through like the dawn  
And your healing spring up quickly;  
Your Vindicator shall march before you,  
The Presence of GOD shall be your rear guard.  
Then, when you call, GOD will answer;  
When you cry, [God] will say: Here I am.  
If you banish the yoke from your midst,  
The menacing hand, and evil speech,  
And you offer your compassion to the hungry  
and satisfy the famished creature -  
Then shall your light shine in darkness, and your  
gloom shall be like noonday.

## Part V: The Greeting

### Text 10

#### Michael Strassfeld, The Jewish Holidays: A Guide & Commentary, page 98

During the month of Elul, the traditional greetings are *Shanah tovah* (“A good year”); or *Le-shanah tovah tikkatevu* (May you be inscribed for a good year [in the Book of Life],” or *Le-shanah tovah i’metukah tikkateivu* (“May you be inscribed for a good and sweet year [in the Book of Life]”); or - less common – *Ketivah tovah* (“A good inscription [in the Book of Life].”).

Between Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, some people add to the above: *Le-shanah tovah tikkateivu ve-tehateimu* (“May you be inscribed and sealed for a good life.”) Others use these greetings only through the first night of Rosh ha-Shanah; after that, it would be indelicate to suggest that a person is not already inscribed in the Book of Life, for on Rosh ha-Shanah all the righteous are so inscribed - only those whose records are closely balanced between and good and bad have their fate postponed until Yom Kippur.