

UNETANEH TOKEF FOR BLACK LIVES

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Friday would've been the 65th birthday of my first wife and her yahrzeit is this week. As I thought about the beauty of her laugh and the pain of her end, so different from those on whose behalf we cry out, the words of the Unetaneh Tokef—a prayer that inspires fear and awe during the High Holidays—came to me.

Each day we hazard our Black lives in the Court of the White World

We know our worth

Yet the white world is judge-self-appointed

We pass before you to be counted

12.5 million bodies stolen

1.8 million mercifully avoided your shores

Stolen shores, stolen land

10.7 million arrived unsafely

...times 401 years

...times infinite human indignities

...times $\frac{3}{5}$ of a human being

We now number 47.8 million

In the morning it is written and by curfew it is sealed

Who shall die while jogging (#AhmaudArbery)

Who shall die while relaxing in the comfort of their home (#BothamJean #AtatianaJefferson)

Who shall die while seeking help after a car crash (#JonathanFerrell #RenishaMcBride).

Who shall die while holding a cellphone (#StephonClark).

Who shall die while decorating for a party (#ClaudeReese).

Who shall die while leaving a party (#JordanEdwards #SeanBell)

Who shall die while enjoying music (#JordanDavis).

Who shall die while selling music...trying to make a way outta no way (#AltonSterling).

Who shall die while sleeping (#AiyanaJones)

Who shall die while worshipping the Lord (#Charleston9).

Who shall die for a traffic violation (#SandraBland).

Who shall die while coming from the store (#MikeBrown and #TrayvonMartin).
Who shall die while playing cops and robbers (#TamirRice).
Who shall die while lawfully carrying a weapon (#PhilandoCastile, #FreddieGray).
Who shall die while on the shoulder of the road with car problems (#CoreyJones #TerrenceCrutcher).
Who shall die in the first hours of the new year (#OscarGrant)
Who shall die while shopping at Walmart (#JohnCrawford).
Who shall die while cashing a check in peace (#YvonneSmallwood).
Who shall die while reading a book in their own car (#KeithScott).
Who shall die while taking a walk with their stepfather (#CliffordGlover).
Who shall die while reaching for their wallet (#AmadouDiallo).
Who shall die while running away (#WalterScott).
Who shall die while asking a cop a question (#RandyEvans).
Who shall die while begging for their life, their breath (#EricGarner #GeorgeFloyd).

Who shall die by the effects of supremacy, greed, and apathy
...who by beast, indeed

“But repentance, prayer and charity temper judgment’s severe decree”

“But repentance, prayer and charity avert judgment’s severe decree?”

But turning, connection and giving, these return us to our Gd?

Whose repentance? Whose prayer? Whose charity?

Temper, please temper

Temper already! Temper...

For sins against God, the Day of Atonement brings forgiveness; for sins against one’s fellowman, the Day of Atonement brings no forgiveness till he has become reconciled with the fellowman he wronged. (Mishnah Yoma 8:9)

“The Day of Atonement brings no forgiveness

till he has become reconciled with the fellowman he wronged.”

When will you atone? How will you atone?

For you, like us, will be judged.

You, like us, will return to dust.

Check out [Episode 7 of The Dybbukast](#) where you’ll find educational exercises and you can listen to the author, Imani Chapman, discuss the creation of this work and related historical and societal considerations.