WE BELIEVE.

This psiyut is 1500 years old, having been composed by one of the earliest liturgical poets, Yannai, who lived in the Land of Israel some time between the 5th and 7th centuries. The poem is a double alphabetical acrostic: the first line states an attribute of God, and the second uses the same letter to describe the human perspective. As much as he can, the poet alliterates an entire line, thus emphasizing the particular quality.

KNOWS OUR DEEPEST FEELINGS אֲלֹהֵינוּ אַלֹהִים לֱיַעַר יִשָּׂעֵנִי. Literally, “examines our kidneys.” Priests would examine the inwards of sacrificed animals to determine the future or to interpret messages from God.

THE STEADFAST REDEEMER פֶּרֶשׂ הָאָדָם. The poet is paraphrasing Jeremiah 50:34, where the prophet asserts that only God—no earthly nation—will redeem Israel.

SOLE JUDGE OF ALL THAT LIVES ON EARTH פֶּרֶשׂ הָאָדָם. This phrase, taken from the Mishnah, is echoed in U-netaneh Tokef: all that lives on earth passes before God, the sole Judge on this judgment day.

A PROMISE OF THE FUTURE פֶּרֶשׂ הָאָדָם. In God’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush, God replies to Moses’ question, “Who shall I say sent me?” with the phrase quoted here, explicating the name of God: יְהֹוָה. The phrase has been variously translated as “I am that which I am,” “I will be that which I will be,” or “I will be there with you in the way that I will be there with you.”