

A Sharp Arrow and a String Draught Horse: Unity through 'this day' of Shouting 10 Questions about Yom Teruah

1) What is Yom Teruah?

Also called the Day of Trumpets, Yom Teruah actually means a day of SHOUTING [#8643 TERUAH: clamor, acclamation of joy, the blowing of the Shofar (ram's horn) from #7321 RUA: to ROAR, to split the ears with sound, shout, blow an alarm, joy, triumph]. See Numbers 10:9-10 to see how both these extremes of warning and triumph are relevant.

It is the 5th special day that God declared that His chosen people the Israelites were to observe.

There are 7 Biblical 'Feasts' or Holy Days altogether as listed below:

1. Passover/Pessach
2. The Feast of Unleavened Bread
3. Firstfruits (celebrated during the Feast of Unleavened Bread)

4. Shavuot/Pentecost/Festival of Weeks

5. Yom Teruah/ Day of Shouting/Feast of Trumpets
6. Yom Kippur/Day of Atonement
7. Sukkot/Feast of Tabernacles or Booths/Ingathering

"Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me" (Exodus 23:14).

The first three occur together as do the last 3. There are also some interesting parallels in their structure:

The First 3:

- 1st day of 1st Month or Nissan (Start of year – 1st Biblical Month – was called Aviv)
- 10th Day of Nissan – The Lamb enters the house for 4 days
- 15th Day of Nissan – Passover
 - (7 days with ceremonial sabbaths on 1st and 7th day
- Firstfruits (Wave Sheaf offering) – 1st day after the Weekly Sabbath of Passover

50 days later comes Shavuot/Pentecost (Greek for 50)

The Last 3:

- 1st day of 7th Month – 'Shouting'/Trumpets
- 10th day of 7th Month – Day of Atonement
- 15th Day of 7th Month – Feast of Booths
 - (7 days with ceremonial sabbaths on 1st and 8th day – Simchat Torah – joy of Torah – dance around the Synagogue with the scrolls!)

The Day of Trumpets (from now on referred to by its Hebrew name Yom Teruah) is given as a memorial by God in Leviticus 23 & Numbers 29 (see below):

Lev 23:23-25 *"And Adonai spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to Adonai."*

Numbers 29:1-6 *"On the first day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a day for you to blow the trumpets, and you shall offer a burnt offering, for a pleasing aroma to Adonai: one bull from the herd, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; also their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, three tenths of an ephah (An ephah was about 3/5 bushel or 22 litres) for the bull, two tenths for the ram, and one tenth for each of the seven lambs; with one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering of the new moon, and its grain offering, and the regular burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offering, according to the rule for them, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to Adonai."*

2) Isn't it just a Jewish Festival?

Most would probably say yes. Certainly there are only a very small portion of Christians that celebrate this day with the Jews. Until the church split from its Jewish roots and became essentially a pagan religion sometime between 70 and 130 CE, the church did partake in this festival and all the Biblical festivals and Sabbaths. The Apostle Paul explains this in Col 2 – see my article, where I also refer to extra-biblical and historical evidence for this.

While as Gentiles we may think it unimportant to us, by celebrating it we are showing solidarity with the root of the Olive

Tree. But also it may have great potential significance¹, which I will come back to.

As well as a celebration though, this day should be a day of united prayer. In fact the Jewish people will traditionally have been reciting Ps 27 twice a day for the last month of Elul leading up to the first day of the month of Tishri.

Ps 27: By David:

1 ADONAI is my light and salvation; whom do I need to fear? ADONAI is the stronghold of my life; of whom should I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assailed me to devour my flesh, my adversaries and foes, they stumbled and fell.

3 If an army encamps against me, my heart will not fear; if war breaks out against me, even then I will keep trusting.

4 Just one thing have I asked of ADONAI; only this will I seek: to live in the house of ADONAI all the days of my life, to see the beauty of ADONAI and visit in his temple.

5 For he will conceal me in his shelter on the day of trouble, he will hide me in the folds of his tent, he will set me high on a rock.

6 Then my head will be lifted up above my surrounding foes, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing, sing praises to ADONAI.

7 Listen, ADONAI, to my voice when I cry; show favor to me; and answer me.

8 "My heart said of you, 'Seek my face.'" Your face, ADONAI, I will seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me, don't turn your servant away in anger. You are my help; don't abandon me; don't leave me, God my savior.

10 Even though my father and mother have left me, ADONAI will care for me.

11 Teach me your way, ADONAI; lead me on a level path because of my enemies

12 don't give me up to the whims of my foes; for false witnesses have risen against me, also those who are breathing violence.

13 If I hadn't believed that I would see ADONAI's goodness in the land of the living, . . .

14 Put your hope in ADONAI, be strong, and let your heart take courage! Yes, put your hope in ADONAI!

I suggest some meditation of the call of a repentant and trusting heart displayed through this prayer – the desire to trust the Almighty no matter what the external evidence; the trials or tribulations that you may be feeling right now; but rather to know that ultimately He is in control and He, the Creator and King of the Universe is the One to put your hope in.

In ancient times as they entered the Land of Israel, the Hebrews, as they surrounded Jericho and shouted in unison. Victory was theirs! Let us also, join together in prayer; prayer for repentance, both from us within the Body of Messiah and for the whole world to repent; to turn to Adonai and seek Him and His Kingdom.

May our hearts be filled with joy on Yom Teruah, as we too shout praises to our God, the King of the Universe and to our Lord and High Priest, Yeshua!

3) If it's important to Bible believers in the NT where is this mentioned in the NT?

Well, because of language changes, translations and the loss of the original Hebraic context, it is not always obvious. A hint though, when you see the term 'trumpet', it is most likely that the shofar is actually the instrument being referred to and often to this very day. Also Jewish sages believe that where we see the term 'this day' in the Tanakh it is actually referring to Yom Teruah. I will come back to this after considering some NT texts:

Matthew 24:29-31 "But immediately after the oppression of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet (shofar), and they will gather together his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."

1 Cor 15:51-52 "Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed."

1 Thess 4:15-16 "For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left to the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the

¹ It seems fitting and is even recommended by some Rabbi's that to fully celebrate the children should have 'fun' food, the women gifts of clothes and jewelry and the men eat meat and drink wine.

voice of the archangel, and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever."

Rev 10: 5-7 "And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

Also, we see some scriptures in the TaNaK referring to the same thing. For example:

Zeph 1: 14- 16 "The **great day** of the LORD is near, and hastening fast; the **sound** of the day of the LORD is **bitter**; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of **distress and anguish**, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements."

So what these scriptures appear to be suggesting is that the return of our Messiah will come with a great shout and with the alarm of the shofar.

Therefore, it seems reasonable that this day may well be Yom Teruah.

That is, I suggest that Yeshua will return on Yom Teruah and given that this will be the greatest day in the history of this present age; this would explain why Adonai had pre-ordained this day.

It will be a day of great fear and anguish for the world that has rejected Adonai. But a day of the most incredible joy for all who love Adonai, those who have the faith of Yeshua; for all who have died through the millennial with this faith and this hope, as they will be resurrected and join us in bowing down at the feet of our great Mediator and High Priest, our brother Yeshua.

Regarding the phrase 'this day'² referring to Yom Teruah, consider that generally on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashannah/Yom Teruah, the days of judgment of the whole world, this dramatic verse from the Torah portion of Nitzavim is read in the synagogues. "You stand **this day**, all of you, before HaShem your G-d: your heads, your tribes, your elders, your officers, and every Israelite man; your young ones, your wives, the stranger in your gate; from your wood hewer to your water drawer." (Deuteronomy 29:9)

Why did God ask them to stand? Were they not standing before God earlier at Mount Sinai? Were they not standing before Him at the shores of the Red Sea? Why are we told that they were standing on "this day"?

The concept of standing before G-d is a daunting and frightening concept when one takes into account who He is and who we are. In fact even the Israelites of Exodus could not muster the spiritual courage to "stand before G-d". They implored Moses to stand for them in their place, they said "You go near, and hear all that HaShem our God may say; and you will speak unto us all that HaShem our God may speak unto you; and we will hear it and do it." (Deut 5:23).

God responds favourably to their request and informs Moses "I have heard the sound of the words of this people that they have spoken to you; they have done well in all that they have spoken. Would that their hearts be like this, to fear Me and to keep all My commandments all the days, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deut 5:25-26).

Yet here we now hear the statement that "You stand this day, all of you, before HaShem your God ". The Rabbis' believe that these words were spoken in the last 24 hours of Moses' life.

If this is so, then perhaps Moses is 'passing the baton', that is he is telling them it is time they stood themselves before God, instead of his always being their mediator. Now from "this day" they are to become active participants the revelation of God through their establishment of the Land of Israel; their formation as the light to the Gentiles.

If this is so, it can also be seen that we all 'stand' before HaShem our God on this very day!

This is a most powerful, daunting and even frightening thought!. A true understanding of the implications of such a "stand" should be enough to overwhelm our spirit and silence our tongues. What could we say at such a moment? Could we develop the courage to look upward and forward without being daunted by feelings of inadequacy?

² The thoughts here on 'this day' are courtesy Moshe Kempinski – see <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/12183#.UFW9U46ZRdw>

There may also be a sense in which on "*this day*", on Yom Teruah we stand before the "King" who is none other than the ultimate King, and we stand here on behalf of our families; our friends our community who may not yet have the same awesome sense of the presence and power of the King and Creator of the Universe!

It is now, when the weight of this awesome responsibility hits, that we recognize the importance of our grafted-in-ness, through our Messiah Yeshua, so that we become part of the corporate soul that is the people of Israel.

Perhaps recognizing that we are only part of a greater whole can we acquire the courage to change and elevate our individual selves. This may well be the greatest secret of Yom Teruah; so powerful that it should make us Shout!

So before we enter into the days of Atonement and repentance we enter into the community at Yom Teruah through our shared prayer and vision, our shared will to 'stand' before the Almighty. Here together, as a people of many nations, we declare God to be Ruler and Majesty of the Universe. Within this corporate purpose lies the empowerment for individual growth. It is this shared 'standing' and 'shouting' before God that gives each individual the confidence and courage to step out and conquer their own world; to be all that they can be! What hope!

Yom Teruah, called Rosh Hasanah (meaning New Year) may also become the first day of the year, in the Coming Age!

Adonai made the 1st day of the month of Aviv (related to the barley harvest), the first day of the year and renamed it Nissan (meaning 'miracle') to mark the significance of the exodus from Egypt. The return of Yeshua and the exodus of believers from the grave and from slavery in this present evil age will be an even more significant event in history.

Therefore it seems at least possible that Adonai may change the start of the year to Yom Teruah and given that the language of the Millennium will probably be Hebrew, He may also rename it Rosh Hashanah!

Perhaps then, the naming of this day as Rosh Hashanah by Judaism is actually prophetic?

4) What proof of it's significance is mentioned in the Bible?

Intriguingly, it neither of these scriptures (Lev 23:23 & Num 29:1) where Adonai informs Moses and the Israelites about this holy day does He tell them what is so important about it. All of the other 6 Holy Days are explained and given one or two reasons for their introduction.

Take Passover for example. We know that this special time was set aside as a memorial to remember the exodus and release from slavery in Egypt. We as followers of Yeshua also recognize this as a shadow of the Passover of our Lamb. Note that both the original exodus and its memorial and the Cross/crucifixion all occur on the same days (or did at least). See my article 'Our Passover Lamb' for more detail on this.

But what about Yom Teruah? Why this day? Yes it is the first day of the seventh month, and in the same way that the seventh day of a seven day week is important and the 7th year and 49th years (7 x 7) are important in God's plan and instructions to Israel, we can see a possible link here as to why the seventh month might also be important. Coupled to this are the parallels in timing between the first 3 and last 3 feasts as highlighted above. This is not a totally convincing answer though.

Perhaps you can see some of it's great significance in my discussion of 'this day' above?

Evidence of its importance though is also seen in the reference in Nehemiah 8. It was on Yom Teruah that the priest Ezra read the Torah to the people and their ears were opened. The people heard the words of the Torah and wept, but Nehemiah and Ezra told them to be joyful, to celebrate because this day was holy to Adonai.

The shofar (whose root in Hebrew means beauty) was blown to: proclaim the Year of Jubilee; on Feast days and New Moons; the dethroning of wicked leaders; to escort processions (bridegrooms³ or kings); at the assembling of the tribes; and at the coronation of the King. John in Revelation tells us that Adonai's voice sounds like the shofar (Rev.1: 10).⁴

³ In the traditional Hebrew wedding ceremony a *shofar* blast and a shout that he is coming preceded the bridegroom's procession. Yeshua is coming to have the wedding supper with his Bride.

⁴ The Jewish sages teach that the left horn of the ram that was provided for Abraham when he went to sacrifice Isaac was blown at Mt. Sinai and the right horn of the ram was saved to be blown "in a time to come".

In Numbers 10:5 the shofar is sounded to signal the start of the journey in the Wilderness. In Jeremiah 4:19; 49:2 & Zec 1:16 it is sounded as a summons for war.⁵

We see another reference to the 'shouting' of the trumpet (actually a ram's horn, called a shofar) in Joshua 6: *It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall go up every man straight before him.*" (Joshua 6:5)

Perhaps, when Adonai first decreed the use of the shofar and the memorial of Yom Teruah, He was preparing the Israelites for the fall of Jericho when they would blow the shofar and shout together in unison to see the walls come crashing down.

Here we can see how the two extremes could come together. The inhabitants of the city of Jericho would certainly have had great fear and apprehension when they heard the shofar and the shouting of the Israelites. At the same time, Joshua and the Israelites would have experienced great joy as they saw their obedience to Adonai and their united voice bring down the fortifications of their enemies city.

What a time of fear of Adonai and also of joy at His blessings.

5) Can it be proven by the NT letters that these festivals play a role in the lives of early believers?

Yes, please check out my 'Colosians 2:16 and the Sabbath' article at www.circumcisedheart.info

I also think it vital to recognize the present tense used by Paul in Col 2:16-17 – the use of 'are' not 'were'.

Col 2:16-17 *"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Messiah."*

Note that Paul does not say that the festivals were (that is, in times before the Resurrection), a 'shadow', but that they are NOW a shadow, as in, as and when he is speaking and his audience reading. These festivals **are** occurring now, and are important pointers to an even greater time to come.

Some Christians argue that what was in the present (tense) to Paul in now past (tense) to us. This could only be if something had happened between then and now to bring in the Coming Age; the time of the resurrection; the time when true Shalom will cover the Earth. As at the writing of this article, this time has clearly not yet come. Therefore what was present tense for Paul is still present tense for us; that is, these Festivals ARE to be observed and enjoyed TODAY as in a sense a 'dress-rehearsal' for their even more complete enactment in the Kingdom of God, the great Coming Age.

6) If festivals are so important, why does Paul refer to them as shadows?

Paul uses the term 'shadows', because he is speaking to a Greek audience. The concept of 'shadows' is the Platonic idea that this is not the real world but everything here is just a shadow of the real 'spiritual' world – light shines down from the spiritual world to create 'shadows' here. Paul is not condoning this faulty concept, but using it to say that the festivals are 'shadow's of the same festivals in the spiritual world, meaning for Paul in the World to come. That is, in the World to come, in the Kingdom of God, we will celebrate similar festivals, including the Marriage Supper of the Messiah. So Paul/Sha'ul is saying enjoy the 'shadow' because it points to an even better version in the Coming Age!

7) Didn't Paul teach that Yeshua fulfilled these holy days and festivals, and if Yeshua did not fulfill these festivals what's the proof that he didn't?

No, Paul rather, just like Yeshua continued to observe these festivals and holy days – see my blog post at Global Truth International (globaltruthinternational.com).

For some examples see:

- Shabbat: Acts 13:14-16; Acts 18:4; 4:16 – Paul imitated Yeshua (1 Cor 11:1)
- Pesach (Passover) – 1 Cor 5:7; Acts 27:9
- Festival of Unleavened Bread – Acts 20:6
- Shavuot (Pentecost) – 1 Cor 16:8; Acts 20:16
- Yom Teruah – 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16 (New Moon Day, Rosh HaShannah)

⁵ The rules for the blowing of the shofar and sounding of the alarm are listed in Numbers 10:1-10.

- Yom Kippur – Acts 27:9 (the Fast Day)
- Sukkot – Acts 18:21

While this list does not include all 7 'Feast' days, as they are grouped into 3 (Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot), with the first and last being week long and including the others, attendance at Sukkot would by inference assume attendance at Simchat Torah (the Joy of Torah celebration) for example.

As Sha'ul/Paul said we should be imitators of him, as he was of Yeshua – 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6; 1 Thess 2:4; I would suggest we should consider the blessings of these Festivals of YHVH.

8) Why should a believer consider observing this festival, and how should one observe it?

As I have already stated, it was commanded by God that the Jewish people observe this day – as Gentiles grafted into this family, surely it makes sense that we seriously consider partaking in it as well.

As for what to do, consider:

1 Ch 15:28 "So all Isra'el brought up the ark for the covenant of ADONAI with shouting; blowing on shofars and trumpets; and cymbals sounding with lutes and lyres."

2 Ch 15:14: "They swore this to ADONAI in a loud voice, with shouting and blowing of trumpets and shofars."

Ezra 3:11-13: "They sang antiphonally (chanted), praising and giving "thanks to ADONAI, for he is good, for his grace continues forever" toward Isra'el. All the people raised a great shout of praise to ADONAI, because the foundation of the house of ADONAI had been laid. 12 But many of the cohanim, L'vi'im and heads of fathers' clans, the old men who had seen the first house standing on its foundation, wept out loud when they saw this house; while others shouted out loud for joy 13 so that the people couldn't distinguish the noise of the joyful shouting from the noise of the people's weeping; for the people were shouting so loudly that the noise could be heard at a great distance."

9) Didn't Yeshua free believers from the bondage of keeping these feast in the NT?

NO! How, where did state that we should not share in the joy of the Festivals of God! They are God's festivals, not purely the Jewish peoples! They help bring us closer to God – where did Yeshua say we don't need God! Where did he say that his Father and his Father's ways were not important! Did he not call us to be one with him; just as he and the Father are one? Doesn't that mean a 'oneness' of unity and purpose? Therefore, should we not enjoy fellowship with God in the same way Yeshua did; or at least seek to get as close through the helper, through the power of God's spirit in our lives that can enable such closeness when we are open to it.

Keeping the feasts is not bondage! How is it bondage to partake in a great celebration; to enjoy family and community as well as honouring and worshipping the Almighty. How is it bondage to walk as Yeshua walked. Yeshua didn't just observe the Festivals of God but also Hanukah (and possibly Purim).

10) Isn't the observance of such festivals a dishonoring of the Messiah who died to replace them?

Ah, the classic, Yeshua 'replaced Torah'! I implore our listeners to also listen to by 'The Times of Yeshua' where I discuss the very well known Matt 5:17, which is taken to mean that opposite of what it states! Yeshua said it did not come to abolish Torah! So how could his death end it! How could the death of a man, no matter how great; how perfect, change the eternal instructions of YHVH! To even suggest such a thing just shows how lost the Hellenistic church is!

Some further thoughts:

In Judaism the 10 days from Yom Teruah to Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement), are called the 'The 10 Days of Awe'⁶. They have established this as a time for restitution. In preparation for this time, perhaps we also would benefit from considering whom we have wronged over the past year and how we might seek to make restitution during these 10 days.

⁶ *The ten days starting with Rosh Hashanah and ending with Yom Kippur are commonly known as the Days of Awe (Yamim Noraim) or the Days of Repentance. This is a time for serious introspection, a time to consider the sins of the previous year and repent before Yom Kippur. One of the ongoing themes of the Days of Awe is the concept that G-d has "books" that he writes our names in, writing down who will live and who will die, who will have a good life and who will have a bad life, for the next year. These books are written in on Rosh Hashanah, but our actions during the Days of Awe can alter G-d's decree. The actions that change the decree are "teshuvah, tefilah and tzedakah," repentance, prayer, good deeds (usually, charity). These "books" are sealed on Yom Kippur. This concept of writing in books is the source of the common greeting during this time is "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year." Among the customs of this time, it is common to seek reconciliation with people you may have wronged during the course of the year. The Talmud maintains that Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and G-d. To atone for sins against another person, you must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs you committed against them if possible. <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday3.htm>*

We this in mind I would like to share part of a brilliant article by Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of London:

“More than any other, the sound of the shofar has been the signal of momentousness in Jewish history, italicising time for special emphasis. It was the ram’s horn that sounded at Mount Sinai when the Israelites heard the voice of God and accepted the covenant that was to frame our religious destiny. It was the ram’s horn that accompanied them into battle in the days of Joshua. And it would be the ram’s horn that would one day signal Israel’s return from exile, gathered once again in the promised land.

On Rosh Hashanah the shofar becomes a herald announcing the arrival of the King, for at this time of the year God is seen not as a father or creator or redeemer, but as the Sovereign of life enthroned in the seat of judgement. The imagery of the prayers is royal and judicial. The world has become a vast court, and its creatures pass before the King of Kings awaiting his verdict.

With trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn, Raise a shout before the Lord, the King . . . For He comes to judge the earth. (Psalm 98:6, 9)

Before Him are the books of life and oblivion, and we pray to be written in the book of life.

At times the imagery of the day can seem remote, because monarchy has become for us less judicial, majestic and grand. Kings and queens no longer enter palaces to the sound of trumpets and preside over issues of life and death. None the less, Rosh Hashanah still conveys a sense of expectancy and moment. Its two days are Days of Awe in which we are conscious of standing before God, our past exposed to scrutiny, our future unknown and in the balance.

The New Year and the Day of Atonement are vivid enactments of Judaism’s greatest leap of faith: the belief that the world is ruled by justice. No idea has been more revolutionary, and none more perplexing. There are questions that challenge faith, and there are questions that come from faith. Those who asked about the apparent injustices of the world were not figures of doubt. They were Judaism’s supreme prophets. Moses asked, ‘O Lord, why have You brought trouble upon this people?’ Jeremiah said, ‘Right would You be, O Lord, if I were to contend with You, yet I will speak with You about Your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?’

They did not ask because they did not believe. They asked because they *did* believe. If there were no Judge, there would be no justice and no question. There is a Judge. Where then is justice? Above all else, Jewish thought through the centuries has been a sustained meditation on this question, never finding answers, realising that here was a sacred mystery no human mind could penetrate.

All other requests Moses made on behalf of the Jewish people, says the Talmud, were granted except this: to understand why the righteous suffer.

As tenaciously as they asked, so they held firm to the faith without which there was no question: that there is a moral rule governing the universe and that what happens to us is in some way related to what we do. Good is rewarded and evil has no ultimate dominion. No Jewish belief is more central than this. It forms the core of the Hebrew Bible, the writings of the rabbis and the speculations of the Jewish mystics.

Reward and punishment might be individual or collective, immediate or deferred, in this world or the next, apparent or veiled behind a screen of mystery, but they are there. For without them life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. The faith of the Bible is neither optimistic nor naive. It contains no theodicies, no systematic answers, no easy consolations.

At times, in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes and Lamentations, it comes close to the abyss of pain and despair. ‘I saw’, says Ecclesiastes, ‘the tears of the oppressed — and they have no ‘comforter.’ ‘The Lord’, says Lamentations, ‘has become like an enemy.’ But the people of the Book refused to stop wrestling with the question. To believe was painful, but to disbelieve was too easy, too superficial, untrue.

So on Rosh Hashanah we live in the presence of this risk-laden proposition, that in goodness is the way of life. Knowing our failings, we come before God asking Him to find in us some act that we have done or that we might yet do for good. ‘Write us in the book of life.’” - <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/159902#UFXAUo6ZRdw>

The Blessing (Bracha) for Yom Teruah:

“May it be Your will, Adonai our Elohim, and the Elohim of our ancestors, to favour us with a good and a sweet year.”

Paul Herring
September 2012