



## ROSH HASHANAH: A NEW BEGINNING AND WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM IT IN THE TNUA

Dalia Stekel – Rosh Chinuch Tzeirei Ami B'Chile

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year and is commemorated by the majority of Am Israel throughout the world on the first and second days of Tishrei<sup>1</sup> (the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar). This chag focuses on two main ideas: it is the first day of the New Year, and it is the Day of Judgment – a day of introspection. This is when, at the beginning of the New Year, the balance of our actions in the previous year is examined, and we set our actions for the upcoming year.

An essential aspect of Rosh Hashanah is that, on this day of reflection, we ask God for one more year of life. Although we can repent of many things we have done throughout the year and know that we wish to do better, we also know that we will make mistakes again. Why does God, knowing that we will make mistakes again, forgive us and give us one more year of life? To explain the previous question, I will use Parashat Vayera from the Book of Bereshit. In this parashah, Sarah asks Abraham to expel his son Ishmael from his house since she thought he would have a bad influence on Yitzhak (her second son). God tells Abraham to listen to his wife, and he eventually casts Ishmael out of the house. After seeing Ishmael in the desert, about to die of thirst, God decides to save him and promises that he will be the progenitor of a powerful nation. But why did God, knowing that Ishmael would belong to a people that would be a major enemy of the Jews, decide to save him? The answer is that God saw Ishmael as a child who, in that moment, had done nothing wrong and decided to save him.

This chag and the values that derive from it are deeply related to the tnuva. Firstly, Rosh Hashanah is the time of the year when we are offered a chance to change for the better and grow as a people; we seek personal and spiritual improvement, for this is a fundamental principle in Judaism. While we wish to improve and be in a constant state of growth, God grants us one more year of life (in which we must apply what we have learned, so that the coming year is better than the last). Undoubtedly, this is one of the primary tasks that we have as educators of tnuot noar: the shaping of a human being who constantly aspires to improve both himself and the environment in which he lives. Another common factor between this holiday and the tnuva is the motivation to learn. On Rosh Hashanah, we repent for the bad things we did during the year. God knows we will be making mistakes again – we are human, and this is inevitable – but as He judges us, God sees in us that we want to grow, learn from our mistakes and improve, and at the end, that is for what God judges us every year. In this sense, I believe that the tnuva is a unique space that enables us to learn through our experiences, the successful and the not-so-successful ones.



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I wish that, in this coming year, we will enjoy and value life, learn from our experiences, make amends and be better educators, better people.

Chag Sameach!