



1

## Rosh Hashanah

### Life is for ourselves

**T**he prophet Amos exclaims, “If a Shofar is blown in the city, will not the inhabitants tremble?”<sup>1</sup> A day of judgment coupled with the awe-inspiring blasts of the Shofar graphically describe the nature of Rosh Hashana.

Yet, the prophet Nechemiah exhorts the people to celebrate Rosh Hashana properly by directing them to, “Go, eat rich foods.... and do not be melancholy for (this day which is) a joy for the Eternal is your security.”<sup>2</sup> How do we balance these two divergent visions of what Rosh Hashanah is supposed to represent?

There is a tendency in human nature to seek out and serve a cause even unto death. Being attached to something greater than oneself produces an easy sense of self-importance. However, the end result is that the person becomes swallowed up by the ideal and ceases to have his own separate identity. This is obviously unhealthy and self-destructive.

The Torah, on the other hand, teaches otherwise. We toil and show commitment, but we realize that ultimately it is all for our benefit. We grow wiser by studying the Torah. We gain introspection from our prayers. We refine our character through the discipline of fulfilling the Mitzvos (Commandments).

We are therefore obligated to make responsible decisions by seeking to maximize our growth, rather than mindlessly following a charismatic leader or working blindly for a cause.

The judgment of the Almighty exists not in order to punish, but to allow us to justify our existence. On Rosh Hashana, we feel awe and trepidation. We know that we are human and have fallen short of reaching our potential. Nevertheless, we feel extremely happy because we realize that G-d, in His overwhelming goodness, has given us life for our own sake.

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נחמיה ח, יב