

Introduction to Parsha #1: B'reshit¹

READINGS:	<i>Torah:</i>	Genesis 1:1 - 6:8
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	Isaiah 42:5 - 43:10
	<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	John 1:1-18



And the earth was without form and void . . .

[Genesis 1:2]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Avot* [the Prayer of the Fathers]

Welcome to a *new adventure*, Beloved son or daughter of the Great King!
Welcome to the study of Torah² - the Creator's instruction manual for life on earth.

A Season of New Beginnings and Great Expectations

For some the kind of approach to a Biblical Lifestyle that this series of studies entails may be new, unfamiliar, and at times a little uncomfortable. For others it may be like slipping into a well-worn pair of slippers. For all of us however the Book of Genesis finds us in a *season of new beginnings*. As we begin the exploration of Torah's amazing fountains of revelation again – or for the first time - at *“In the beginning . . .”* we will do well to realize that no matter how many times we - or our neighbor - have ‘been here before’ and how much we - or our neighbor - may have learned in the past, we have in reality comprehended only a small fraction of Torah's essence.

Torah is *inexhaustible*. It is *a well of living water with no beginning and with no*

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² Torah means teaching or instruction. When using the word Torah with a capital ‘T’, in these studies, the writer is referring to the first five books of the Bible – the books known to most English speakers as *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*.

end.

We will never comprehend or understand even the truths plainly evident on the surface of it, much less mine all the wisdom and prophetic insights present but hidden in layers under the surface of the words we read.

Nevertheless we are undaunted.

May we therefore begin the Great Journey through Torah again today with the determination to make our fraction in the year to come greater and more significant than that of any prior year. May we begin this year's study with the prayer that whatever we have learned from or concerning the Bible before the Creator of Heaven and Earth will increase our power to comprehend, and that this year He might graciously consent to take us deeper and deeper into the precious gold mine of His eternal Truth!

Do not be content with yesterday's manna. *Press on! Press in!* Find a new vein of gold each day this year! Instead let the revelation of all previous years you have studied merely whet your appetite for a more sumptuous banquet at the Holy One's Divine Table.

Once More . . . With Feeling!

Take comfort Dear Reader, for we are not alone in our quest. The study of Torah has gone on for centuries – indeed for millennia. Scholars and sages, theologians and truth-seekers, prophets and princes and kings - not to mention millions upon millions of common men, women, and children like us - have poured over its ancient texts. Its depths and nuances have been probed in Hebrew, and Greek, and Spanish, and German, and English and a hundred other languages, decade after decade after decade, by the best and brightest minds on earth. No library on earth could contain even a tenth of what has been written regarding the truths it contains.

The Torah of the Holy One is a treasure trove that has been mined by the wisest and the most devout people that have ever walked the earth. And yet it remains for us today as fresh as a virgin rain forest.

Torah's sweet melody is still calling for lovers of the Great Bridegroom King of Heaven to *awaken*, to *lift up the head*, to *arise from the ordinary and mundane*, and to *come away with the Lover of our Souls*. The Tree of Life at the center of the Creator's beautiful Garden of Delight wafts its fragrance and sings its siren song every year at this season.

This is the appointed time for the sons of Adam to once again breathe in Torah's intoxicating fragrance, drink deeply of its nourishing waters, and to begin again to dance to its perfect rhythm.

When it comes to the learning of Torah you see *we are all perpetual 'beginners'*. We are all infants. The most mature of us is at best the equivalent of a toddler. If we live 100 years – or 1,000 – we will remain just beginners. Though the text never changes, layers of meaning are constantly emerging, and 'new' realms of revelation are constantly manifesting. Like children in a candy store we grab all the sweetness we can hold – all the while knowing there is much, much more we have not even seen, much less laid hold of.

And so we approach Torah not as *scholars*, not as *theologians*, not as 'experts in the law', but as *little children*. We approach the Torah of God as *wide-eyed innocents*, with gaping mouths, and with a sense of delicious overwhelm.

And when the last strains of Deuteronomy begin to fade, and our tired minds and physical bodies would have us clap politely for the band, and sit the next one out to catch our breath, our childlike spirits will have none of it. For we find that with the opening lines of *B'reshit*, each year, no matter how our physical bodies protest our spirits deliriously declare to the Holy One: "*Once more! Oh, yes, yes, yes! Once more . . . with feeling!*" And the harps and lyres and timbrels of all generation flowing from Adam joyfully play along.

The Challenge of Torah

That being said, I feel constrained after doing this now for many years to warn you of something of which you may not yet be aware. This is not going to be just a friendly little garden variety Bible study. The study of the Holy One's instruction manual for life on planet earth is strategically designed by His infinite Mind to function as nothing less than a *consciousness-altering, life-changing immersion in an ancient river of revelation*.

Torah is Divine Energy. It changes everything – and everyone – it touches. It *releases creativity*. It *opens fountains of joy*. It *imparts wisdom*. It *restores hope*. It *fosters peace*. And it *awakens the heart and soul of man to the truest, noblest, most holy form of love*. From its opening parsha the Torah will *challenge us, judge us, and change us forever*.

Every one of Torah's 54 parshot has been jam-packed by the Master Writer with mysteries mortal men cannot – however much we study or pray – even come close to comprehending.

Take parsha ***B'reshit***, which we will study this week, for instance. The compelling revelations found in this parsha do not square with any doctrine or theology – Jewish, Christian or otherwise – which the mind of man has ever devised. If you read this parsha carefully, and pay close attention to what is actually said in it, I dare say it will confound your theology – whatever it may be – and will leave you with many, many more questions than answers.

Torah *does that* to people. That, I think, is the whole idea. That is in my opinion the primary reason why the Holy One gave the Torah to us in the rather unorthodox and question-provoking form He did. The Holy One did not, you see, create men and women to be *theologians* who can figure Him out, put Him in a tidy little box, remake Him in their own image, and treat Him like a genie that grants their selfish wishes.

The Holy One created human beings to be like *little children*, gazing up at Him with wide-eyed wonder. He created us to trust Him with child-like confidence - to always expect Him to know and steer us into what is best, what is *true*, and *wise*, and *right* and *just* and *good* - and to likewise tell us what is, and how to steer clear of, the opposite of those things.

And the Holy One created us, as well, to be like the *Serafim* surrounding His Throne – spiritually aware and sensitive beings who cannot help but fall down before Him in worship, then rise to blurt out words of awe and admiration and praise, then run to do His Will, then fall down before Him in worship, then rise to blurt out words of awe and admiration and praise, then run to do His Will, then fall down before Him in worship, then . . . oh well, you get the picture, don't you? The writer of the book of Hebrews expressed it this way:

*The word of the Holy One is **alive**, and [constantly] **active**.
More powerful than a two-edged sword,
It penetrates even to **dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow**;
It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*
[Hebrews 4:12]

Human beings who are separated from the Holy One tend to like things arranged in nice little packages, neatly sorted into classifications and categories, and clearly labeled in ways that allow us to apply our human intelligence, logic and sense of morality. Torah absolutely refuses to cooperate with, much less encourage, this human inclination. Torah *confounds our intellect* continuously, and *frustrates our quest to reduce it to doctrines and theological principles* at every turn.

He who seeks to derive doctrines or theological principles from the study of Torah

is, thus, the ultimate Don Quixote, tilting futilely at windmills. Plot, and strategize, and thrash all you will – I have news for you: *The windmills always win.*

We do not, cannot, will not ever, *master* Torah. Quite the contrary - *Torah inevitably masters us.* That is what it is for.

There are two primary responses of human beings to the power of Torah. Some surrender early on, plunging in headlong, and going with the flow. Others, alas, take the opposite approach. They struggle in vain all their lives against the current. They choose to ignore verses – or even whole chapters or books – in order to cling to their illusion of intelligence, and the presumptuous and precarious house of cards they call doctrines and theologies. Which of these responses will you make to Torah this year?

A Few Introductory Notes on Parsha B'reshit

Are you ready to start the adventure? If so, be prepared, this week, to be taken outside the convention we know as ‘time’ and to be shown the miracle of Creation from two perspectives - one prior to the advent of Messiah on earth, and one subsequent to that advent. In this week’s parsha Torah will give us that unique opportunity.

Let’s take just a short look at what lies ahead for us this week.

1. An Introduction to the Dynamic World-view of Torah

The six chapters of Torah known as parsha *B'reshit* contain the story of *primeval events*, of the period human beings think of as ‘the beginnings’. Written from the perspective of the Godhead and the Hebraic mindset of Moshe [Moses] the Torah neither argues for the existence of God nor admits of any other theory of genesis than the mind of God.

“In the Beginning, God ...” is stated in the Torah not as some theory or a possibility, but as incontrovertible historical fact. It is an essential part of the framework of ‘givens’ under which we operate.

The world-view of Torah is a world-view that begins and ends with God – and with complete assurance that **His Words are all-powerful**, that **His Will is all-important**, and that **His ways are all just**. The world-view of Torah has complete, childlike confidence that **His plans are all perfect**, and that **we mortals are absolutely privileged just to be invited along for the ride**. The worldview of the Torah is that every man, woman or child should be **overwhelmed with gratitude at the opportunity our Creator offers us to partner with Him** – as

the weaker partner in a covenant relationship - in fulfilling His Magnificent Plan for the Creation which He designed in perfect wisdom, and over which He both presides as a righteous King and Judge, and faithfully labors as a Perfect Priest and Intercessor.

2. An Introduction to the Two Primary Themes of Torah

The *central theme* of the Torah, and indeed all of Scripture, is ***the rule and reign of God over all created things***. Torah wants us to view the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov as nothing less than the Sovereign Lord over all the universe. And it wants us to therefore accept His Will as the ultimate and most powerful, as well as most beneficial, force that has ever or will ever exist.

The *secondary theme* of the Torah is that there is a special place of blessing - a garden of delight - ordained by God for occupancy by the descendants of the man Avraham. This special garden is a **stage of sorts** – a stage upon which the Holy One's Divine Passion Play is acted out according to a Script written before the foundation of the world. Through the acting out of this script the Holy One's Will – *i.e. that eternal energy source through Avraham and his seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed* - is fulfilled.

A distinct people of the Holy One who represent Him in His holiness and in His mercy, is, you see, the outworking of the divine plan which began with Creation.

These two primary themes are going to be very obvious in the first book of Torah, ***B'reshit*** [which Westerners call 'Genesis'] – a book which shows God not only creating the world, but calling forth from that world, unto Himself, a people [including gentiles such as Elazar, servant of Avraham, who bind themselves to serve Him] who become clearly distinguishable from others as every aspect of and event in their lives is penetrated by a clear and constant plan of divine government.

Welcome to 'Creation Week'!

The first thing to which the Divine Author of Torah introduces us in the opening parsha is not a list of do's and don'ts. What we are introduced to instead is a stunningly beautiful poetic description of 'Creation Week' - the 'seven-day' period in which the universe as we know it – not to mention the realm of 'time' - came to be.

Torah will encourage us to eavesdrop as it were upon conversations in Heaven relative to the great 'Design-and-build' plan of the Holy One for the Creation of the universe and all that is in it.

Torah will also introduce us this week to the life-changing concept of human responsibility to ‘**sanctify time**’ – confronting us right from the outset with the **Shabbat** [Sabbath] - a regularly recurring, Divinely ordained interval of time radiating supreme blessedness, rest, and peace which we must choose to either receive and enjoy as the free gift that it is, or resist, reject, and/or attempt to redefine on our own terms.

The Sabbath, you see, is both the ultimate *destination* of Creation and the ultimate *challenge* for man.

This week in Torah we will also get a front-row seat to watch the first man and woman in history interact with God. We will first see them in a blissful state of intimate commune with the Creator in a well-watered garden of delight. We will, however, very soon see the man and woman do the unthinkable, abandoning their communion with God in favor of a tryst with one of the creatures the Holy One created to be ruled by man, namely the Serpent.

We will also see the righteous – yet amazingly merciful and redemptive – judgment of God on the man and the woman for this course of conduct. We will see the man and woman sent forth from the garden into the world - much as Israel was subsequently sent out of the Land into *Diaspora*.

This week in Torah We will rejoice at the *first births* to occur on our planet. But we will also gasp in horror as we witness the *first murder*.

We then cringe in response to the proliferation of evil by the offspring of the two disobedient firstborn, whose perversions will lead to the Holy One’s selection of a man named *Noach* [English shorthand rendition, Noah] to rescue His beloved Creation – and the species of mankind - from the horror of rampant sin.

With the inspiration of the Holy One we will be called upon to consider, and meditate upon, and take counsel from, the prophetic implications of each of these events. So let us begin at the beginning. The Torah scroll opens with the following familiar words:

B’reshit bara Elohim

In the Beginning God created

et ha-shamayim v'et ha-eretz

the heavens and the earth.

[Genesis 1:1]

The opening phrase ***b’reshit*** [pronounced *beh-ruh-sheet*] is significant, as it establishes the context and sets the tone for all the mysteries we will study this

week. We have been taught to translate this phrase as ‘*in the beginning*’. But all of us know full well, if we just think about it, that this translation is woefully inadequate if not totally incorrect.

There is, of course, and can be, no ‘beginning’ and no ‘end’ with a Divine Being our English Bibles call “God”. “God”, as our English Bibles call Him, is *eternal*. He pre-existed, and will always exist. From His perspective – which is precisely the perspective from which Torah is trying to teach us to view the world - what happened in Genesis 1:1 was not the *beginning*, any more than what will happen in the closing chapters of Revelation is the ‘end’.

We must acknowledge from the outset, therefore, that to accept the translation of *b’reshit* as ‘*in the beginning*’ is thus to surrender to a Greek, humanistic mindset. It is to put earth and humankind on the throne of significance – a place where only the Holy One belongs.

And so forgive me if I refuse to surrender, or accept ‘*in the beginning*’ as an accurate translation. I believe, you see, the text says much more than ‘in the beginning’ can ever describe. Allow me, if you will, to confront the Hebraic mindset of the text, and to wrestle with the Hand that holds the curtain that shrouds the mystery.

What Meaneth the Hebrew Word ‘Reshit’

It is believed that the verb root from which the word *reshit*³ comes means to shake, or to tremble⁴. If we were to apply that word picture to the text of Genesis 1:1 we might say: “In **shaking**⁵, God created . . .” or “in **trembling**, God created . . .”

Is it possible that the events of Genesis were wrought out of eternity by the Holy One purposely causing a *shaking* of the eternal elements of the realm in which He alone exists? Is it possible that the Holy One is the ‘*big-banger*’ behind a ‘big bang’ bigger and more encompassing in scope than any astronomer or evolutionist could have ever dreamed – a ‘big bang’ that would make supernovas and starbursts and the collisions of vast galaxies look like child’s play in comparison?

Is it possible the Almighty shook *Himself*, and brought forth the physical things about which we read in Genesis?

³ The **b’** of *b’reshit* is a prefix meaning ‘in’ or ‘from’.

⁴ See Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, p. 751, discussing Hebrew the unused Hebrew verb root *resh*, *alef*, *shin*.

⁵ The Hebrew language has a definite article [something that corresponds to the English word ‘the’ as a modifier]. It is a *hey* [‘h’ sound] prefix, usually pronounced ‘ha’. There is no *hey* prefix before *reshit* [else it would read *b’hareshit*]; hence I do not translate *b’reshit* as ‘*in the shaking*’ or ‘*in the trembling*’.

Consider the ramifications of that, Dear Reader.

Meditate on how the Autumn wind shakes the leaves of a tree.

Ponder how a chill causes your body to tremble.

Contemplate how a tremor of the earth sends heavy objects crashing to the ground and buckles concrete. It comes, then it goes. But in the wake of the shaking everything appears to change. And then all is as it was again.

So it was in Genesis 1:1. And so it will be in Revelation 22:20. I do not know- or aspire to know - anyone who could wrap a theology around that. How about you?

Your Mission, Should You Choose To Accept It . . .

I challenge you this week to not just read the first 6 chapters of Genesis but to *marvel at the Creation story, and at Creation itself* - for both speak of the majesty of our King. I exhort you this week to set out on a quest to learn why it was that the Holy One chose the creature called man as the ‘crown jewel’ of Creation. Ponder **why the first man was placed on the earth**. Meditate concerning **what man’s real purpose and destiny here is**. Then prayerfully consider what that means for you – and for your purpose and destiny here on earth at such a time as this. And I adjure you to stop this week and listen carefully - listen to see if you can hear the sound of Creation groaning, groaning as a woman in travail, calling out for the shining forth of sons of the Holy One - sons who live in a garden of delight, in unity with the Godhead, with Torah as their form of government - sons who radiate the nature of the Holy One, and shine forth as a beacon to all the world.

I hope you can hear that sound, Dear Reader. Because the one Creation is groaning for, and calling forth - is YOU!

Awaken, O Sleeper! Arise, and shine! You are not ‘just here’. You are here *for a purpose*. Stop *being like everyone around you*. Stop *thinking like the society around you thinks*. Stop *being who others think you should be*. Accept no role model but the Holy One. Embrace no way of life but the one laid out for you in Torah. Be who you were *created* to be.

A Summary of This Week’s Haftarah

Isaiah 42:5 - 43:10

The Haftarah reading corresponding to parsha ***B’reshit*** is taken from *Ha-Navi*

Yeshayahu [the prophet Isaiah]. The prophet declares the last days' Word of the Holy One over both the people He has called to serve as Earthly ambassadors of His Heavenly Kingdom and His glorious but corrupted Creation. Concerning the Covenant People the Holy One declares:

*"I, the Holy One, have called You in righteousness, and I will **hold Your hand**;
I will **keep/cherish/keep watch over You**
and **give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles**"*
[Isaiah 42:6]

A **light to the Gentiles**? You mean the ones who hate us blame us for all the world's ills, and keep trying to either force us to accept their destructive ways or kill us? Yes, those are exactly who He intends to raise us up as a light for.

How will He do it? He tells us. He will use us '**to open blind eyes**'. Think about that one for a few moments! And using us to open blind eyes is not all He promises to do. He also promises to use us as His instruments to '**bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the dungeon**'. It is going to be quite a ride for people of the Covenant in the end of days, Beloved! But look at the next set of promises the Holy One makes:

*"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name; You are Mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.*

*"Since you are precious and honored in My sight,
and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you,
and people in exchange for your life.
Do not be afraid, for I am with You;
I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.
I will say to the North, 'Give them up',
and to the South 'Do not hold them back'."*
[Isaiah 43:1-2, 5-6]

We were born for such a time as this. Let's not miss it for the world!

Then turning His attention to His Glorious but corrupted Creation the Holy One says:

*"I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation;
I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools.

'I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them*

*and make the rough places smooth.
These are the things I will do . . .”*

[Isaiah 42:15-16]

If you will receive it, these ‘Creation’ passages speak of a future winding down of that which was “wound up” by the Holy One in the days we study in this week’s readings from the Torah - the stunning *Season of Creative Expression* that brought the world as we know it into existence.

As we start a new year of immersing ourselves in the Holy One’s Torah, let us be alert and prepared for whatever the Holy One our God releases over the earth in this historic hour.

A Brief Look at the Apostolic Writings Selected for This Week

John 1:1-18

I have selected John 1:1-18 from the Apostolic Writings of Y’shua’s *talmidim* [i.e. students, disciples, apprentices] to supplement parsha **B’reshit**’s Torah and Haftarah readings. These 18 verses provide for us an amplified summary of beginnings written from the perspective of a man we in the Western world have come to call ‘John’.

The scribe employed by the Holy One to write John 1:1-18 was not an Englishman, and the name by which his family and Y’shua knew him was most definitely not ‘John’. He did not speak or write in King James English – which of course did not even exist as a language when he lived. The writer of John 1:1-18 was a Hebrew, raised speaking Hebrew in connection with matters relating to religion. The name by which he was known was **Yochanan**. A Torah observant fisherman from a good Hebrew family, he was chosen from the foundation of the world to *encounter and walk the earth with the Messiah, the Living Torah, to become His ‘beloved disciple’, and to learn from Him – and pass on to us - some of the deepest secrets of creation.*

How Yochanan’s name became transformed over the centuries by English-speakers into the more familiar ‘John’ is a suspicious mystery. The fact that we only have a record of the truths Yochanan learned and wrote for us in Greek-language manuscripts [the Greek language was a hated ‘foreign tongue’ to Hebrews of his day] translated from the original by who-knows-who, with who knows what agenda, is a tremendous misfortune.

When we in 21st Century America read verses from the account of Yochanan in English translations are twice removed from the real thought-process and meaning of Yochanan. Yochanan thought and spoke and wrote like a Hebrew, using

Hebrew concepts. We do not have his actual Hebrew words. Much was lost when they were translated into Greek. And then centuries later when the Greek words the original translator had chosen to approximate what Yochanan had tried to tell us were translated into another foreign tongue, English, we lost much, much more.

An example of what I mean is found in the opening words of the account. We read the opening phrase in English, after two translations, as: “*In the beginning was the Word . . .*” Consider however that “*Word*” has to us both Anglo/American cultural and Christian theological connotations that would have been totally foreign to Yochanan, and which necessarily distort his message. Even if we go back to the Greek word ‘*Logos*’, which our English Bibles render as “*Word*”, we do not get back to anything within Yochanan’s spiritual frame of reference.

Realistically we must understand that what Yochanan was trying to communicate to us was ‘*in the beginning*’ was neither ‘*Word*’ nor ‘*Logos*’ – but was the Hebrew “*Ha-D’var*”. *Ha-D’var* means *the substantive, prophetically empowered word that transforms*. Yochanan would have said: “*B’reshit Ha-D’var!*”

Let’s see what a difference that one little correction would make in our understanding of what Yochanan was being told by the Spirit of God to record for us. If we substituted ‘the Torah’ – the Hebrew concept – for ‘*Logos*’ or ‘*Word*’, we would read:

*“In the beginning was the D’var, and the D’var was with the Holy One,
and the D’var was one with the Holy One,
The D’var and the Holy One were one together from the beginning.”*

Wow! Now if we understood ‘*in the beginning*’ from the Hebrew concept of ‘*B’reshit . . .*’, and if we understood ‘*one*’ [what Yochanan tells us the *D’var* and “*God*” were] from the Hebrew concept of *echad*, and if we understood ‘*God*’ from the Hebrew concept *Elohim*, and if you understood that the spirit of the prophetic word that transforms is the testimony of Y’shua [Revelation 19:10] . . . well, you begin to get the idea, don’t you? There is a vast realm of awesome revelation hidden for us in the Torah. Let’s spend the coming year engaged in a higher level of sorting through that treasure trove than ever before!

Shavua Tov! [Have a wonderful week] and *Shanah Tovah* [Have a wonderful year]!

The Rabbi’s son

Amidah Prayer Focus for Week of Parsha B'reshit

Avot – The Prayer of the Fathers

Baruch Atah Adonai

Blessed are You, O Holy One

eloheinu v'elohai avoteinu

Our God, and God of our fathers

Elohai Avraham Elohai Yitzchak v'elohai Ya'akov

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob

Ha-El ha-gadol, ha-gibor

The great, mighty God

v'han'ro El-Elyon gomel chasodim tovim

awesome, supreme God -Who bestows good things upon those He loves

v'konai ha-kol

and Who creates all things

v'zachar chasdai avot

Who remembers our ancestors' acts of covenant love

u'mayvi goel livnei v'nayhem

and Who brings a Redeemer to their children's children

l'ma'an sh'mo b'ahavo

for the sake of His Name, and out of love

Melech ezer u'moshiach u'mogan

O King, Helper, Messiah/Savior, and Shield/Defender

Baruch Atah Adonai Mogen Avraham

Blessed are You, O Holy One, Guardian of Abraham