

Larchmont Temple CHEVRAH TORAH 5779  
 LIVING in JEWISH TIME...HolyDays & Every-Days

**Shabbat B'REISHIT**

**GENESIS 1:1-5**

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**KEY KOSHI:**

*WHAT does B'Reishit teach us about Creation's purpose?  
 WHAT does B'Reishit teach us about living in sacred time?*

**P'SHAT...Entering the Timeless Text: HOW do we experience it this moment?....**

<p>1:1] When God began to create<sup>a</sup> heaven and earth 2] the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from<sup>b</sup> God sweeping over the water—3]God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4] God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. 5] God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.<sup>c</sup></p>	<p>1 בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם      וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ : 2 וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תֵהוֹ      וְבָהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ      אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם :      3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי־אֹר וַיְהִי־אֹר :      4 וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאֹר כִּי־טוֹב      וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין      הַחֹשֶׁךְ : 5 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יְוֹם      הַיּוֹם הַשֶּׁשִּׁי וַיִּבְרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב      וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד :</p>
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בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי וְצִוֵּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.  
 Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.  
 Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

## REMEZ...Living the Text's Truth: HOW do we make meaning of ~~Time~~....?

V.1 *When God began to create the heaven and earth...*

**RASHI...**This verse cries out: Interpret me!...According to the Midrash, the verse means, God created the heaven and earth for the sake of Torah which is called *Reishit Darko*...“*The Lord made me as Beginning of His Way.*” [Prov 8:22] ...

**RASHI...**The text is not saying that heaven and earth were created first, otherwise it would say “*Barishonah.*” In biblical Hebrew, *Breishit* only occurs in construct form...It must be understood as if BARA is a gerund: “*At the beginning of God’s creating...*”...Our verse says nothing about what was created when.

**ABARBANEL...** *Reishit*, does, indeed, mean “The Beginning of...as RASHI says:the Beginning of time.

**RAMBAN...**The difficulty with RASHI’s statement is in saying that REISHIT occurs only in the construct form...So now hear the straightforward explanation of this verse correctly and clearly. The Holy One created all things from absolute zero...*BARA* is the only word for *Creatio-ex-nihilo*... Nothing that is made under the sun or above it comes from nothing, [yet] the Holy One brought forth from complete nothingness...

**KIMCHI...** The noun *Breishit*, is not in construct form here, but in absolute form...To call it “Beginning” is pushing the boundaries of language, as that is a word of temporal sequence, and time itself began only with the movement of the spheres.

**IBN EZRA...**The philologists say that “in” is extraneous here..But “*In the Beginning*” is not the correct translation. Others say that our term must be understood “*In the beginning of... evening, or morning...*” But they have forgotten, “*God chose for Himself the beginning.*” [Deut 33:21] The mind, however, cannot actually conceive of a beginning in the abstract...

**RAMBAM...**There is a difference between *first* and *beginning*. The latter exists in the thing which it is the *beginning*, or co-exists with it; it need not precede it. ..In Hebrew, “*techilah*” is used in the sense of first and beginning is expressed by “*Resihit*,” derived from “*ROSH—Head.*” The Universe has not been created, therefore, out of an element that preceded it in time, since time itself formed a part of the Creation. For this reason, Torah employs “*B’Reishit.*” The true explanation of the first verse of Torah is as follows: “*In [creating] a principle God created the beings above and the things below.*” We find that some hold the opinion that time existed before Creation, but this is highly doubtful because time cannot be imagined without a beginning, as has been taught by Aristotle...As I made clear, the foundation of our faith is the belief that God created the universe from nothing; that time did not exist previously, but was [in fact] created; for it depends on the motion of the spheres...[Guide of the Perplexed, II:30]

**Rabbi EUGENE KORN...** RAMBAM’s Creation was hardly the traditional one of God acting at a specific moment in time, for time makes little sense in reference to God. Creation was the Divine overflow of God into the world, a continuous connection between Divine and humankind which never ceases

**VILNA GA’ON...**The word “*Reishit*” is used to indicate a definite beginning, before which we cannot imagine any form of existence....It cannot be a construct, but must stand alone, since it designates the very first state of existence, preceding all except for God. Thus, “*At the Beginning*”

**TANCHUMA...**Rav Yehudah and Rav Nechemiah differ. Yehudah taught: The universe was created in six days, for it is written after each day, “*And it was so.*” Nechemiah taught: The entire universe was created on the first day, citing, “*Let the earth spring forth...*” This is comparable to a gardener who planted six seeds simultaneously. One sprouted on the first day, another on the second....

**OR HaCHAYIM...**There was no sequence of time implied by Creation—nothing was created earlier or later. Understand, the use of “*Breishit*” teaches us that the potential for all Creation happened *B-Reishit*—with the first instance and utterance that we term “*Beginning.*”

## DRASH... Decoding the Message: *WHICH Way in the direction of Redemption...?*

### Prof AVIVAH GOTTLIEB ZORNBERG...

Boldly and lucidly, the originating acts of God are described. The narrative tells of an ordering and a goodness that shapes all the categories of Creation. Powerfully and seamlessly, the Genesis text, through repetition of key words and the leitmotif of “*Let there be...*” produces a good and ordered world...And yet RASHI begins his great work with “The text is nothing if not mysterious.” What Rashi claims, in effect, is that the opening sentence tells us nothing about beginnings, nothing about sequence...This mystery for Rashi is based on syntax: What is the grammatical form of the very first word? *B’Reshit* is in the construct form...As Rashi says, “You should be ashamed of yourself if you argue for a chronological ordering of creation.” What emerges is a sense of the gaps, the unexplained, the need to examine and reexamine the apparently lucid text. There is a tension between the benevolent power of the narrative and the acknowledgement of mystery that inheres in the very first word as the implications of “the Beginning” are realized... [The Beginning of Desire, pgs 3-4]

### Prof CAROL OCHS...

There is the all-too-common tendency to think of Creation as something done, once-and-for-all-time by a Force External to us...But creation is ongoing. And wherever else God may be found, we locate God within ourselves and our own creative efforts...The actual steps in our creation of meaning...are spelled out for us here, I suggest...in reading Genesis 1 not as a history but as a road map... “Now the earth had been wild and waste; darkness over the face of the ocean.” This tells us that we must accept chaos as a temporary stage. We must brave the terror of the unknown. We tend to read the first lines as describing the conditions God must overcome rather than recognizing it is all part of the creative process...

## SOD... Embodying the Mystery: *HOW is The Tree sustaining/re-cycling/sanctifying Life?*

### Rabbi M.M. SCHNEERSON...

The opening words indicate that creation is but the first phase in an ongoing process, for human beings are intended to be God’s partners in the work of Creation, helping the world become God’s dwelling. [BT, Shabbat 10a] God created the material world but left to humankind the task of revealing the spiritual within it. The ZOHAR teaches: “*God looked into Torah and created the world. Man looks into Torah and sustains the world.*”

### Rabbi SHLOMO RISKIN...

A Chasidic teaching provides an alternate way to read the Torah’s first three words, a reading that provides hope. Since there is an *etnachah* [the cantillation stop sign] under the third word, one could read “*Breishit Bara Elohim*” as “*God created Beginnings.*” That is, in creating our world, God created the possibility of starting over, getting second chances, renewing our lives...First and foremost, *B’Reishit*--God created a Beginning; the chance to face tragedy, life’s difficulty, life’s darkness, and overcome...by somehow finding light...In the very first word, God created the possibility of recreating ourselves...The glory and grace of Creation is the very first phrase, for such is the gift of our very being: “*God created Beginnings.*”