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THE FIRST WORD IN THE TORAH

בראשית
BEREISHITH
'in the beginning'

'HE CREATED SIX'

The six days of creation, embodying six
divine attributes & spheres of reality



SHITH
'six'

BARA
'he created'

'TWO FIRSTS'

Creation is for the sake of Torah and Israel

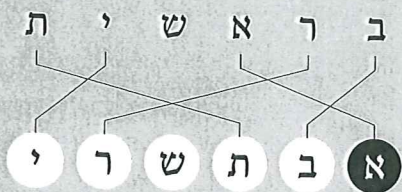


REISHITH
'first'

BEITH
'two'

'THE 1ST OF TISHREI'

Rosh Hashanah, the anniversary of creation



BETISHREI
'of Tishrei'

ALEPH
'1st'

THE FIRST LETTER IN THE TORAH



BEITH

Enclosed from three sides, indicating the
beginning of the knowable reality

Points up to the Creator; points back
to the first letter of God's name (א ~ aleph)

Has the form of a house (בית ~ bayith)
to be settled by man & made a home for God

ב = 2

Represents the pluralities
of creation, in contrast
with the oneness of the Creator

The בראשית (bereshith) of creation
is secondary to the אנכי (anochi)
of the Ten Commandments

Existence begins with בריאה (beri'ah),
the "world of creation,"
antecedent to which is אצילות (atziluth),
the "world of emanation"



Signifies berachah ('blessing') – the
essential goodness of creation and the
"profit" it yields in its fulfillment of
the divine desire

(berachah begins with a beith
and each of its root letters represents
a variation of the number '2')

fig. 7: EXEGETICAL INTERPERTATIONS OF THE WORD "BEREISHITH" AND THE LETTER "BEITH"

by the maxims "All your deeds should be
for the sake of Heaven" and "Know him in all

and settle them as a "holy land"—a place per-
meated with the goodness and perfection of

1:2

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וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תוֹהוּ וָבוֹהוּ
וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים
מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי אוֹר
וַיְהי־אוֹר:

2 And the earth was desolate and void
and darkness on the face of the deep
and the wind of God
hovered upon the face of the water
3 And God said, "There shall be light
and there was light.

2) Darkness is an actual creation, as the prophet Isaiah quotes, "I am God... who forms light and creates darkness."¹⁵

Hence the "query without resolution" cited in the Talmud. If darkness is but the absence of light, then light preceded darkness, since the concept "absence of light" has no meaning unless light already exists. On the other hand, if darkness is a created reality, then darkness preceded light, as indicated by the verse, "and it was evening, and it was morning."

In truth, both opinions are correct, for the second opinion is really an insight into the first. From our perspective, darkness is absence. But from the Creator's perspective, everything—including absence and non-existence—was created by the source of all.

-R. DOVBBER OF LUBAVITCH

The question is not just theoretical, but relates to our work in this world. If darkness is but the absence of light, then all we can do with the darkness in our lives is to banish it or annihilate it by generating light. But if darkness is a reality, then we are charged not just to overcome it, but to transform it into a force for good.

-R. YOSEF YITZCHAK OF LUBAVITCH

{also see commentaries to 1:4 below}

"Earth... darkness... wind... water"

The "darkness" referred to here is the invisible elemental fire. Thus we have the four primal elements in this verse: earth, fire, air and water.¹⁶

-MAIMONIDES; RAN

"The wind of God hovered"

This is the soul of Moshiach (the messiah).

-REISH LAKISH IN MIDRASH RABBAH

this approach, the verse from Isaiah describing God as "creating darkness" refers to his limiting of light so as to allow for a state of darkness to prevail.

¹⁵ This is the view expressed by Rav Yehudah in *Talmud* (see footnote 16), *Midrash Rabbah*, *Lekach Tov*, *Chizkuni*, *Maharsha*, *R. Menachem Azariah da Fano*, *R. Yaakov Emden* and *Gra*.

¹⁶ Rav Yehudah in *Talmud* identifies ten primal elements in verses 1-5, listing them as the ten creations of the

NOTES

1:2

DESOLATE AND VOID (תוהו ובוהו ~ tohu va'vohu) also • **empty** - *Onkelos*; *Ibn Ezra* • **astoundingly empty** - *Rashi* • **uninhabited and lifeless** - *Targum Yerushalmi* • **filled and covered with water** - *Saadia Gaon* • **primal matter and primal form** - *Nachmanides*; *Ralbag* • "tohu" is a **green line that encompasses the world** and "vohu" are **wet stones sunk in the deep** - *Talmud* • the **primordial world of tohu** (see discussion on pages 12-15) - *Ari* • the ten generations from Adam to Noah, and the ten generations from Noah to Abraham - *R Yitzchak Alfual*

WIND OF GOD (רוח אלהים ~ ruach elokim) also **breath and spirit**; denotes • the **divine throne of glory** - *Rashi* • the **soul of Moshiach** - *Reish Lakish in Midrash Rabbah*

HOVERED (מְרַחֶפֶת ~ merachefeth)

• an allusion to the 288 (רפח) sparks of holiness embedded in the physical world by the "shattering of the vessels" (see discussion on pages 12-15) - *Ari*

WATERS (מַיִם ~ mayim) • this Hebrew noun always comes in the plural form; see commentary from *Ibn Caspi* to 23:1

1:3

SAID (וַיֹּאמֶר ~ va'yomer) also • **desired** - *Zohar*; *Maimonides*; *Nachmanides* • **expressed, actualized** - *Nachmanides* • implies **effortlessness** - *Ibn Ezra*

What this means is that at all times and under all circumstances, the messianic world of divine wisdom, goodness and peace described by the prophets is within our grasp. For the soul of Moshiach stands ready and prepared from the very beginning of creation, "hovering upon the waters," awaiting only our actions to be immediately revealed and actualized.

-R. YAAKOV SCIL