

MORASHAH
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Parashat HaShavuah Series

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B'reisheet: In the Beginning

The first portion of the *Torah*, *B'reisheet*, is a story of beginnings. It tells us not only about the beginning of the Universe, but about the beginning of society, the beginning of humankind. As the book continues, it proceeds to tell us about two other beginnings – one, the start of the Jewish people, the other, the beginning of faith, of religion. We are taken on a spiritual journey, where we are introduced not only to an All-powerful Creator, but to a Supreme Being who is deeply concerned about the welfare of His creation. In keeping with this idea, we are initially presented with the essence of Biblical religion – ethical monotheism. This is followed eventually by the acceptance of that faith by an individual, Abraham, his family, and ultimately a nation, the entire seed of Abraham, the Jewish people.

Yet, as students of the *Torah*, we realize that to best comprehend its message, we must read it through Rabbinic glasses. For some, this may be the literature of *Midrash*, *Mishnah* and Talmud. For others, it may be the interpretations of the classical Medieval commentators, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Nachmanides, Sforno, to name only a few. Indeed, one may be struck by the fact that in commenting on the opening lines of this week's portion, Rashi focuses on the origin of the commandments and their connection with the Land of Israel. This would seem entirely incongruous for a commentator known to emphasize the "plain sense" of the text. It is in the broader context of the portion that Rashi's effort at exegesis is to be understood. For if our portion focuses on how the world was created, we must also understand why and for whom. It is not enough that we are presented with the Biblical origin of humanity, we must also comprehend that for a society to exist there need to be certain parameters and guidelines. Rashi's contribution then explains the origin of how the Jewish society must operate, not only with regard to belief in God but also the system of *mitzvot*, commandments, by which one relates to that God and one's neighbor as well.

Shabbat Shalom!

The Union for Traditional Judaism is a trans-denominational organization dedicated to bringing the message of open-minded Halakhic Judaism to the widest possible audience.