

Parashat Bereishit 5781, 2020:

To Serve Hashem

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shelaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, Dovid Shmuel ben Chasiyah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The Torah begins with the famous words, “*Bereishit bara Elokim ate hashamayim v’ate ha’aretz*. Translators and *meforshim* frequently disagree as to how to interpret the word *bereishit*. Does it mean “*b’techilah* — in the beginning,” or “*bishvil hareishit* — for that which is first?” Rashi (1040-1105) hints at this difficulty in his first gloss in his *Commentary on the Torah*: “*Ain hamikra hazeh omare elah darshani* — this text proclaims nothing other than, ‘Interpret me!’” He then summarizes part of a passage in *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4 that presents *bishvil hareishit* as the proper way to read our text: “*bishvil haTorah sh’nikrate reishit darko, u’bishvil Yisrael sh’nikrau reishit tevuato* — for the Torah that is called ‘the beginning of His way,’ and for the Jewish people who are called ‘the first of His grain.’” This reading of Rashi’s gloss is supported by one of his most celebrated supercommentators, Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (1455-1525): “The letter ‘*bet*’ at the beginning of ‘*bereishit*’ is like the *bet* found in the verse, ‘*va’ya’vod Ya’akov b’Rachel* — and Ya’akov worked [in order] for Rachel [to become his wife].’” (29:20)

The Maharal of Prague (died 1609) is another of the great Rashi supercommentators. In his classic work, *Gur Aryeh*, he cites Rashi’s focus upon Torah and the Jewish people as the

reason for Creation and notes that it is crucial to examine his choices. After all, opines the Maharal, is it not the case that “all actions of Hashem are for His own sake...” (*Sefer Mishle* 16:4) Moreover, it states in *Talmud Bavli, Yoma* 38a: “Everything that has been created in this world was created for the Holy One blessed be He, and for His glory was it created.” Then, too, did not Yeshayahu the prophet proclaim: “Everything that is called in my name was created in My honor.” (33:7) In short, why did Rashi limit his gloss to Torah and the Jewish nation and exclude all other aspects of the Universe, when the rationale for the creation of the world logically could have included everything the Almighty created?

The Maharal’s answer speaks to the essence of the unique relationship that obtains between Hashem and the Jewish people:

There is no honor from the created entities except when they fulfill His *mitzvot* and serve Him; and this is only possible with the Jewish nation, regarding whom it is said: “I formed this people in order that they would speak of My praise.” (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 33:21) ... And the Jewish people do not serve the Holy One blessed be He except through His mitzvot when they fulfill His Torah. This, then, is [why Rashi so clearly emphasized], the world was created *bishvil Yisrael* — for the Jewish people and *bishvil haTorah* — for the Torah ... (Translation my own)

Based upon the Maharal’s trenchant analysis we can now understand why Rashi underscored Torah and the Jewish people as the underlying cause for the creation of the world. As Yeshayahu prophesized, our nation was created to praise the Almighty; and as the Maharal notes, this can only be achieved through the Torah and the fulfillment of the *mitzvot*.

David HaMelech declared in *Sefer Tehillim* 35:10, “*kol atzmotai tomarnah* — all of my bones will say, ‘Hashem who is like You?’” I believe his message is unmistakable in its meaning, namely, that our very beings praise Hashem when we venerate Him through the

performance of the *mitzvot* found in His holy Torah. As such, let us remember Rashi's words, "*bishvil haTorah u'bishvil Yisrael*" did the Holy One blessed be He create the Universe, and may they ever be our guide as we strive to honor and serve Him. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>. They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.