



Bereishit

We can say more about: "In the beginning [God created the heaven and earth]" (Gen. 1:1).

"In the beginning" (*Bereishit*): we can read this as "two beginnings" (*b'reishit*): the blessed One pours out abundant, flowing blessing (*shefa*), and we, in our prayers, limit and shape this *shefa*, each of us, according to our needs. One person may constrict the flow with the letters of "life" for Life; another one with the letters of "wisdom" for Wisdom; and yet another one with the letters of "wealth" for Wealth. And, so it is for all good things, each of us according to our needs.

Now, just as this is so in the spiritual realm, it is also true in the physical. Thus, in the physical realm there are the qualities of sound (voice) and speech. "Sound" ("voice"; *kol*) is all-inclusive, while "speech" (*dibbur*) is the constriction or shaping of the sound through the letters of speech. Similarly, on Rosh Hashanah, the sound (*kol*) of the shofar is the outpouring of blessing (*shefa*) from the blessed Creator, and it is all-inclusive. But, our prayers of *Malkhuyot*, *Zikhronot*, and *Shofarot* are the constriction of this flow that we bring about through the letters (of speech), each of us shaping and constricting the flow from the blessed Creator according to our needs.

The all-inclusive *shefa* that comes forth from the blessed Creator is the Written Torah. And, the manner by which we constrict and shape the *shefa* is the Oral Torah. We create the Oral Torah according to our will, according to our interpretation of the Written Torah. This is the meaning of *Bereishit*—*b'reishit*, "two beginnings": Written Torah and Oral Torah.

R. Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev
"Kedushat Levi"
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Questions for Hevruta

1-What is your experience of hearing shofar?

How is it different from hearing the prayer leader/*baal tefila*?

2- How does seeing written Torah as undifferentiated expression, rather than a book of laws and stories, affect your relationship with the text and interpretation of the text? Have you experienced interpretation of Torah as the process of Creation?

3- When in conversation with someone, how much do you listen to the words and how much to the tone, quality, and non verbal communication? Can you recall trying to communicate something that words can't express?

In light of this, how might you understand Torah study and prayer?