

Creation's Heartbeat

The Bible's Entry Code in Genesis 1:1

at the place of entry, the key is often hidden...

Dr Y Fass

Otto Rvf

© 2009 Y Fass

© 2009 Otto RvF

Cover design by Liezel Spangenberg. © 2009 Liezel Spangenberg

Layout by Otto RvF

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or stored in any manner whatsoever without prior written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles, reviews or essays.

<http://www.biblejolts.org>

Order via <http://creationsheartbeat.blogspot.com>

Published by Otto RvF

PO Box 5145, Laytonsville, MD 20882, USA

ISBN 978-0-473-15781-4

Printed in the U.S.A. and U.K. by Lightning Source.

Library of Congress catalog card 2009910952

BISAC: REL006060, REL006400, REL040090

An Enquiry into the First Verse of Genesis

“The beginning of Thy word is truth...” Psalm 119:160

“This verse says nothing but ‘Explain me!’ ” Rashi, Commentary, Bereishis

To my wife

at the place of entry, the key is often hidden...

Contents

Part 1: A Basis for Understanding

Outline	1
Gaining a Foothold	3
A Necessary Enquiry	11

Part 2: Ten Steps to Understanding

Outline	23
Step One: The Act of Creation	25
Step Two: The Burning House	37
Step Three: Family	51
Step Four: Broken Connections	63
Step Five: The Arrow	73
Step Six: The Creator's Heartbreak	81
Step Seven: The Sign	93
Step Eight: Hidden Names	103
Step Nine: The Barest Breath	113
"Here I Am": Assembling the Message	125
Step Ten: Recovering the Question	135

Part 3: Understanding Gained

Outline	145
The Entry Code	147
Conclusions	163
Shma	179

Appendices

Appendix A: The Hebrew alphabet	185
Appendix B: The twenty-six components	187
Appendix C: Objections	193

Note: Quotations from the Bible are usually taken either from the *Stone Edition Tanach*, Mesorah Publications, or *The Holy Bible: New American Standard*, Broadman and Holman. Where verse numbering differs between the two, the reference is given with a stroke, for example Hosea 14:8/9.

Other references are given in the footnotes.

Part 1

A Basis for Understanding

*“I stretch beyond the bounds of the world,
I’m smaller than a worm, clearer than the moon, swifter than
the sun...
I stretch across the region of angels; I fill the earth with
myself...
Say what my name is.”
Riddle 66 (concerning creation), The Exeter Book, (Anglo-
Saxon, 6th Century CE)*

The Creator of life knows how to compress, transfer and secure vital information. How might He speak to us in the beginning and how can we check our understanding of what is said? Is it possible to proceed in a methodical manner to explore the Bible’s opening statement?

Part One identifies five bases for a rigorous methodology so that our enquiry is tightly focussed and proceeds within strict principles and guidelines. Ten tests for the results are specified. Using traditional Judaic techniques, we examine the first four words of Genesis to see what they tell us. The Hebrew letters are considered in the order and form that they occur; there is no shake or shuffle or number counting.

The expectations of what the opening words can reveal are set unreasonably high in this enquiry. That way, they cannot be met by human reason or by a human author.

Gaining a Foothold

At the place of entry, the key is often hidden. Perhaps this is so with the most ancient of books, the Hebrew Bible. If there is a message encoded in the beginning, it would be the Bible's first and most urgent message to us; the key that opens our understanding to the treasures that lie beyond. The opening words set out the first act of creation by the Creator. In a world where Creator or creation seem to have failed, do these words still have mysteries to tell; could they give us hope?

The Hebrew sages are strangely troubled by the opening words of Genesis. Do they contain a secret not to be divulged or do they tell us to bring into the open that which is hidden? How is one to read the first words anyway, and why begin with such problematic Hebrew? Clearly there is much beneath the apparent simplicity of the first verse.

Science and the mind of God

The Bible's description of creation can astonish with its many layers. The great 13th Century CE Jewish scholar Ramban deduced from it that the universe was originally contained in a tiny seed, like a grain of

mustard, and then hugely expanded and changed in substance, to give rise to all matter. His explanation precedes by 700 years the 'big bang' theory of modern astro-physics which argues the same. Sir Isaac Newton held that, when properly deciphered, the Hebrew Bible and traditions contain founding knowledge of creation and the universe.¹

The opening of Genesis describes the creation of the heavens and the earth. Maybe it also sets out a founding principle that drives the universe: a linchpin or a peg on which it all hangs. Modern science is uncomfortable with any starting point save the sovereignty of human observation and reasoning used to make deductions from the material world. Some doubt that science will ever "be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation". For others, the aim is, as Stephen Hawking puts it, "the ultimate triumph of human reason ... [to] know the mind of God."² But, perhaps we can step beyond the autonomous world of science and human sovereignty to revelation. Perhaps the mind of the Creator is already made known to us and invites us to engage, not by abandoning our faculty of reason but – as with Sir Isaac Newton – by opening it to a different source of information.

An atheist will rule out the possibility of communication from the Creator as a matter of first principle. There is nobody there, so there is nothing to hear. Instead, we seek God's first principle. If there is a Creator, how might He speak to us and how can we check our understanding of what is said? This enquiry will demonstrate that, unlike the atheist's statement, God's first principle is testable.

Only the Creator is equipped to resolve the deepest questions of creation. The human heart can react in many different ways to the Bible's claim to be a series of communications from the Creator. We may ignore it or deny, defy, or disprove it. We may shift its sense or otherwise use it for our own purposes. Through all this, and despite the difficulties of interpretation, translation and contextualization, can God possibly be heard, if He is to be heard at all?

If He speaks, can we comprehend Him? The Bible identifies the core problem: "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways", declares the Lord. (Isaiah 55:8) The traverse between

¹ See: Nachmanides, (known as Ramban) *Commentary on Torah*, Gen 1:4. (Ramban lived 1194–1270, Spain and the Holy Land.) On Newton (1643–1727), see: Goldish, Matt (1998) *Judaism in the Theology of Newton*, Kluwer. Einstein was fascinated by this aspect of Newton's work (see his September 1940 letter to Yahuda, Albert Einstein Archives, Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

² Stephen Hawking, (1998) *A Brief History of Time*, Bantam, p210. The preceding quote is from Jastrow, Robert (1992) *God and the Astronomers*, Norton, N.Y., p107.

Creator and creation is not a matter casually to enter into. Our quest is to find a key that can lead us to the Creator's answers, even to His resolve towards humanity. But a key is concealed for a reason. To gain so great a key, what must we do and how can we prepare our understanding to grasp its message, if message there be?

Such a message would take us beyond the limitations of the material world and show us behind 'mere creation' to its purpose and its Creator. As a cosmological statement Genesis 1:1 looks safe: one can agree or not but it does not seem to matter much. By contrast, the reader may suffer from vertigo if faced with an invitation to engagement by the Creator concerning creation and its purpose. Such an encounter will have consequences.

The discussion has been hypothetical. There are many 'ifs' and uncertainties. These can be summed up in two questions. How can we determine whether the verse contains a hidden message of deep significance or establish the truth of what emerges? How can this enquiry proceed in a methodical way and with what guidelines and reference points to avoid speculation and minimize conjecture?

A sound foothold and a basis to review our findings are necessary. Perhaps unexpectedly for a modern mindset, these can be gained. Consider how the Creator can speak to us of that which is essential. A gram of DNA – the stuff of life – has the information content of a trillion DVDs, and has to be unpacked in a very particular way to provide life. The Creator of life evidently knows how to compress, transfer and secure vital information. If He wished, He could encode His intent for creation in less than a handful of words and reveal His own heart there to those who sought after Him.

We should expect His message to be trustworthy and to demonstrate its authority. The Creator would speak to us in a way that could penetrate through all the noise of successive generations and diverse cultures. Perhaps, He would speak at many levels and in various modes, both openly and in ways less evident. The language used, even the individual Hebrew letters, would provide resonances between the opening words and all that follows to show that they are parts of one great unity.

Precise, letter by letter, unpacking of DNA is required in order to read and apply its code to build life. Similarly, there is a way to unpack the Creator's code for creation. The enquiry focuses on the first four Hebrew words of the Bible with their unalterable primacy of place and importance in setting the scene for all that follows. It looks in meticulous detail at every component of the first part of the first verse

in the Bible: Genesis 1:1. We examine each meaning or hint that can be found there. To discover the rhythm underlying its opening words, let Scripture speak for itself.

Method

What method can apply so much attention to so small a space and give confidence in the results?

The primary sense of the first verse in the Bible is conveyed by a straightforward reading and by the best translations. Can anything substantive emerge from searching more deeply into half a verse? How can it be anything more than messing around with a few words, shuffling and changing their contents, so that almost anything might come out or any meaning be attached to it? Yet there is much that can be deduced, provided we are careful in how we treat the original Hebrew. This enquiry is not far-fetched, not mere speculation, not seeking the impossible, not beyond testing, and, in much of its technique, not unusual within the Hebraic tradition. We can make such assertions and proceed with confidence for five reasons.

First, the nature of the language and discourse: The basis of Hebrew words lies in short, root words which contain the core meaning, and which then have prefixes, suffixes or 'infixes' added, or are combined together. Hebrew text is inherently poetic and multi-faceted; different meanings can be explored (sometimes playfully) in the links between root words and in the words or letters added.³

In Hebraic (and some Christian) thinking there is not a single superfluous phrase, word or letter in Scripture. Each is worth examination because Scripture forms an integral whole. A traditional Hebraic approach views each part of the text as connected to the unity of the whole and as contributing to one grand discourse. The occurrences of a particular word or phrase or image or type are seen in relation to its other occurrences and to the overall themes. Each part within the whole can illuminate and be illuminated by every other part.

If there is a message, then its encoding will utilise the characteristics of the Hebrew language and Hebrew Scripture. Consequently, the enquiry proceeds within a traditional form of

³ The distinctives of the Hebrew language in terms of how the reader decodes its meaning and is able to identify root words and patterns are discussed in Shimron, Joseph (2006) *Reading Hebrew: The Language and the Psychology of Reading It*, Routledge.

Hebraic discourse that provides well tried methods to go deeper. This footing in the nature of the language and discourse gives a firm basis on which to proceed.

Second, in terms of traditional Hebraic discourse, we impose much more stringent rules than usual with this type of enquiry. This is discussed further in the next chapter. The enquiry remains focused on what Scripture says and minimizes speculation or the introduction of extraneous elements. This is an enquiry into, not an essay upon. To allow examination in depth, we limit the field of discussion and consequently the number of possible words and meanings to be explored.

The *third reason* is the focus on examining the detail and implications of only four specific words. These are not picked at random or on the basis of some theory. They claim primacy of attention because of their location as the first words in the Bible in the first statement about the universe. This tightly constrains the enquiry.

The *fourth reason* lies in the different approaches within this tiny canvas. To unpack and comprehend the first four words we apply four different approaches (outlined in the next chapter), going progressively deeper into the text. The restrictions mentioned apply to each approach. Collectively, these approaches provide their own cross-check on each other. If there is a message, then it should resound through all four approaches. The heartbeat should emerge with the depth and clarity of quadraphonic sound.

The *fifth reason* is the series of tests that are applied to the results of this enquiry. In combination, these ten tests are tough. We look for the results to be:

- *Inclusive*: Within the strict criteria outlined above, every element produced by applying this enquiry's method to the first four words must be considered. We do not select some findings and reject others. The results built from these findings should be comprehensive and include every component, rather than selecting some and ignoring others.
- *Precise*: Each component discovered should perfectly fit with every other component, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that mesh together precisely when correctly placed.
- *Coherent*: The pieces of the puzzle should combine to make a coherent whole. We seek a composition that uses all the findings in order to tell a meaningful story that is internally consistent. The story should be complete and without loose ends. Everything

should be connected, though this does not mean that every matter has to be resolved.

- *Robust*: The components should reinforce each other to build the overall architecture, so that the argument depends on no single component. Its themes and main topics should emerge even when some findings are excluded: an inescapable rhythm.
- *Appropriate*: The composition emerging should be in harmony with its location at the opening of the Bible, with the creation narrative of Genesis 1 as a whole and the questions that it raises, and with the wider text of the Bible and its core themes.
- *Powerful*: The message to be read from this composition should have richness and depth of meaning; a key that unlocks all that follows.
- *Relevant*: The message should address our deepest needs and questions, not be a theological stance or goal statement.
- *Elegant*: Scientific theories are often judged by their elegance in solving seemingly complex problems. This is applying Occam's razor: the simplest solution that works is preferred, provided it takes all the circumstances into account. Complexity should be reduced to simplicity. (This doesn't require the detail behind the solution to be simple, nor its consequences!)
- *Connected* to actual events: What is revealed should be prophetic, accurate, specific, and concrete, not a dream or aspiration.
- *Unique*: There should be no other way of bringing together the components we discover that meets the other criteria set out here. This test is an invitation to the reader to challenge our results.

If the code we uncover can meet all these tests, it will indeed be both remarkable and transformative.

In sum, there is a fivefold rationale and method to search for a key or code at the opening of Genesis, including ten tests for what we find. There are guidelines on how to proceed and reference points against which to consider what emerges. We have grounds for our enquiry and can examine the key that is found to ensure that it is correctly fashioned, that it fits the lock, and that it opens the door to a great house. Nothing less will do, for the purpose is to hear from God.

From an Hebraic perspective, the basis of the techniques employed is recognizable. A *midrash* (enquiry) delves deep into the

language of the Bible, according to set rules, to reveal its beauty and truth through explicating and harmonizing texts. For those coming from outside the Hebraic perspective, our enquiry demonstrates the rewards of approaching Scripture in its own terms in order to seek the truth from within its words. This contrasts with a typical Western analysis that uses an external viewpoint or standard in order to test Scripture and align it with a pre-determined philosophy or worldview. For the five reasons given, our enquiry is more rigorous, tightly focused, and less speculative than such a perspective. As with a Western analysis, the aim is to gather information and to proceed through deductive logic. But, there is less ‘wobble room’ and fewer assumptions imported from outside the text in this enquiry.

Equally, mystical speculation about symbolism or numerical ciphers hidden within Genesis can meet none of the five reasons for confidence set out here. Instead of imposing an external viewpoint on the text or pursuing an inwardly focused mysticism, we use the techniques specified to draw out what the text itself says. This enquiry does not ignore possible symbols within the text, but ties them to the context and subjects them to the stipulated methodology.

Style

The enquiry proceeds on the basis that the Creator may communicate with us through the detail of Scripture and aims to search out His opening message to us. The method adopted enables the enquiry to probe deeply without risk of losing balance or focus because the search is grounded in the text.

The style this produces has three levels. First, close attention is paid to the detail of the text in order to pursue the clues provided and respond to the puzzles and challenges. To ignore the detail is to miss or misunderstand the code we seek. As with DNA, the code has to be carefully unpacked to discover the basis of life and of its reproduction. Nothing is left out or ignored. What is compressed within the opening words is unfolded and the resulting links pursued through the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The detailed evidence is accumulated piece by piece.

Second, the enquiry seeks to build a broader view of the message and weight of the Bible’s opening words. Using the evidence gained, the entry code is assembled piece by piece. As the pieces fit together, a picture of increasing clarity emerges.

Third, the accumulation and assembly of findings from the two preceding levels of discussion are used to grasp the entry code as a

whole and to understand what its message – the heartbeat of creation – means for us.

The style adopted has purpose. Each level requires and builds on the previous level. The combination of levels and the underpinning methodology give reasons for confidence and facilitate discussion.

The first four words of the first verse are examined by proceeding through ten steps, each of which moves mostly between the first two levels. Shifting between the detail of textual points and 'big picture' questions may produce the vertigo remarked on earlier. That is why the enquiry remains anchored by the text throughout and multiple tests are applied to our findings. It is the accumulation, assembly, consistency and rigour of evidence coming from the detail that sustains and validates a wider view.

An intricate structure with a definite rhythm, emerges within the tiny frame of four words. The lens provided through these few words will hopefully give the reader much to consider as the underlying issues of Creator and creation are raised and new perspectives gained on perhaps familiar passages in the Bible. But this is not something merely to admire or ponder or debate. This is the Bible's entry code. It speaks of creation's heartbeat. It provides the key to reflect upon and investigate the rest of Scripture, a path to understand the Creator's heart and the nature of His plan for us from first to last. It is a plan that requires action. That is why it is stated first of all.

The message sets out the basis of the reality that we experience. It speaks to each of us about our relationship with the Creator and the rest of creation. It confronts and tests us and may be hard to bear. The message is an invitation to look beyond ourselves and fully realize our humanity. The reader is invited to join a voyage of discovery that is by its nature risky, a voyage into the heartbeat of creation.

A Necessary Enquiry

What do we most need to know? Faced with the really big questions, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* tells us that the answer is forty-two. Although fun, this cannot engage us. It voices a modern despair and solves nothing because nothing can be solved. The opening of Genesis invites us to go far beyond. The finite mind cannot expect to grasp God's purpose for creation but perhaps here in the beginning there is a key that is given to us. To know the Creator's purpose and plan would give us the basis for understanding both the physical universe and our own internal moral world. It could tell us the heartbeat of creation and perhaps explain our own heartbreak.

This is a necessary discussion. The opening words may seem an austere statement of cosmology: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Yet this verse says nothing but "Explain me!" according to the famous Judaic commentator Rashi, whilst Maimonides forbids the divulgence of its mysteries.⁴

⁴ Rashi, lived in Troyes, France, 1040–1105, Maimonides in Spain and Egypt c1135–1204. See: *Rashi's Commentary: Bereishis* and Maimonides *Moreh*, Preface to Part III. Maimonides is commenting on a passage in the *Talmud – Hagigah* 2:1 – which places limits on open discussion of the creation account. *Beresheith Rabbah* 1:10 understands the same passage as saying that we are to go forward from the

There is no riddle older than these words at the beginning of the Bible, whose layers of meaning no translation can begin to suggest. To quote a leading, contemporary rabbi: "The story in the first part of the Book of Genesis is very well known and still it remains a secret."⁵ What might this book of books, story of all stories, tell us in the beginning, and dare we look?

Unreasonable expectations

Let us set our expectations of what the opening words of Genesis can reveal to us unreasonably high. That way, our expectations cannot possibly be met by the human reason of a human author. We cannot trust a human author to get behind creation to its purpose or to its Creator.

What could our unreasonable expectations be? The opening statement of the Bible must speak profoundly. Suppose those few words pose and answer the core question of all existence, their message addressed to each of us. We might hope for a promise of history summed up, the essence and crisis of existence grasped, even the key to its resolution supplied, or maybe a hint of the end to all things. If written by the supreme Deity, we could dare to seek all of that captured in a few words: the key for all creation. And these words we unreasonably expect must speak in a way that is understandable and testable by human reason.

Our purpose is to discover the heartbeat of creation within the opening words of Genesis, the book of origins. This enquiry aims to provide reason and method and cause for reflection on creation and our place within it.

One of the founders of modern Western discourse, Immanuel Kant, states that:

opening *bet* of Genesis, and not enquire into what is above or below or before that. (*Beresheith Rabbah* is a *midrash* on the book of Genesis from the 4th–6th Century CE.) In practice, other great Judaic sages, such as Ramban, have not interpreted the *Talmud* as excluding them from writing on the deeper aspects of creation. The early text *Sefer Yetzirah*, possibly from the 2ndC BCE, is devoted to discussing the creation of the world. Lurianic Kabbalah (16thC CE onwards) speculates about "before creation".

⁵ Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz quoted in Goldberg, Hillel (2000) "Genesis, cosmology and evolution", *Jewish Action*, Summer, p1. Steinsaltz (born 1937 in Jerusalem) was for a time appointed President of a reconvened Sanhedrin.

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe: the starry heavens above and the moral law within. *Critique of Practical Reason, Conclusions.*

Perhaps they can be united by beginning at the beginning. To be fully human is to be both of the dust (Genesis 2:7) and in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

This enquiry applies neither the telescope to scan the skies, nor the inward eye to search within ourselves, but the magnifying glass to look more closely at what the words say. With this glass, we are not looking for minutiae. We pursue the big picture hidden within these words by considering their component parts, the consistencies and oddities that are revealed, and what emerges as the parts are brought together.

Entertaining as riddles may be, this is more: we are embarking on a spiritual voyage. Although covering only four words, the voyage is testing, even dangerous. The reader will come upon a deep puzzle, a succession of clues, and contradictions that challenge us to resolve them. As we proceed, the clues begin to cohere together and lead toward a complete yet simple solution, a solution with direct implications for each of us. The key turns and the door opens.

There are two questions for the reader:

- A proposition for the mind: Is this message contained within Genesis 1:1? How can this be and what light does it throw on what follows?
- A proposition for the heart: Is this significant: does it speak to our deepest need and to the pain and suffering of our world?

The opening words of Genesis are necessarily fixed in their location as the entry point to the whole book. They have inescapable primacy of place. Jewish sages such as the Vilna Gaon teach that the first time a word or letter appears in the Bible is its spiritual home, the place that tells us how to understand its depths.⁶ The first appearance is the key. We are invited to search for that key to unlock what is said.

The first four Hebrew words provide the key that we seek, so this enquiry does not go beyond them. They speak of the act of creation and the remaining words of the opening phrase speak of that which is created: the heavens and the earth. To examine the material nature of creation is not essential to the present enquiry. There are sufficient

⁶ Based on a remark in the *Talmud, Baba Kamma* 55a. The Vilna Gaon lived 1720–1797 in Vilna, Lithuania.

pieces to solve the puzzle without going beyond the first four words when looked at in the context of the *Tanach* as a whole. These words reveal a design that is woven throughout the *Bible*.

Let us search for the Creator's viewpoint by a relentless focus on the precise words and letters used at the beginning of the book. If this is the word of God, then it is His description of His creation and His worldview. To understand creation, we need to grasp what He says rather than attempt to assimilate His view with ours.

That something is hidden in the beginning is no surprise. The Hebrew word *olam*, meaning the 'universe' or 'eternity', comes from a root which means 'concealment' or 'hiding'. Here is a hint of something concealed about the nature of the universe or eternity.⁷ As this is inherent to the act of creation, we can expect it to be so at the beginning of creation and time, something hidden within the Bible's first verse.

Beneath the surface

Scholars have long known that the Bible provides a series of hints (*remaẓim*) and secrets (*sodot*). The text calls upon us to search out matters as far as we can. Some things remain secret: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us" (Deuteronomy 29:29). But, with diligence, much can be brought to light by those who search for riches: "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter." (Proverbs 25:2) There comes a time for such matters to be spoken of.

Debate is ongoing as to the precise meaning of the first words in Genesis. The grammar itself is obscure. However, our aim is to look beneath the surface of the grammar. Many are the modes of examination of the Bible but this enquiry sticks with the simplest and most ancient. Our enquiry is into the first few words and their component parts to discover what they can tell us when examined in Hebraic terms. It is tightly focused, based on tried methods, and subject to a tough combination of tests. The five aspects of this technique were laid out in the first chapter. We place the highest demands on it and the results are startling.

⁷ Some rabbis hold that an essential aspect of the Creator is to be hidden; for example Solomon Luria (1534–1572 or 1510–1574; Egypt and the Holy Land). The *Talmud Hagigah* 12a says that light by which one can see "from one end of the universe to the other" is concealed in the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible)