

PARASHAS BEREISHIS

A Springtime of the Spirit

As the warm glow of summer gives way to the chill autumn winds, the world begins to withdraw into itself. People remain indoors, their doors and windows shut tight. Trees shed their leaves, and animals prepare food and shelter for the long cold winter. The cycle of the year has reached its descending phase, at the opposite pole from the flourishing days of spring.

Yet for the Jewish people, this is the time of year when we experience a great surge of renewal. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur our *neshamos* were cleansed and our slates cleared, and we realigned our priorities in life. But perhaps more than anything else, Shabbos Bereishis gives us a true sense of a new beginning. As we watch the Torah scroll rolled back to its very first parchment page, it is as if we are witnessing the entire year being rolled back to give us a fresh start. We open the pages of the Chumash and read about the creation of the world with a sense of excitement that does not diminish from year to year. If anything, it grows stronger. It is a springtime of the spirit, a time when Jewish souls blossom and bloom.

The prelude to this wonderful time was Simchas Torah, when we held hands in song and dance to honor the completion of the annual reading of the Torah and its commencement once again. But the question presents itself: Why do we choose this particular time for this great outburst of rejoicing? Why now more than on Shavuos, the anniversary of the actual Giving of the Torah to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, are we called upon to celebrate in such a festive manner?

The answer lies in the very first words of the Torah - "*Bereishis*, in the beginning, Hashem created the heavens and the earth." Our Sages point out that in Scriptures the word *reishis* sometimes refers to the Torah. Therefore, they explain, we are also being told that "with the Torah, Hashem created the heavens and the earth." What, however, is the connection between the Torah and creation?

Let us think for a moment about a suspension bridge. Many of drive across such bridges on our daily trek to work, but how often do we take notice of this marvelous piece of architecture? And even if we did take notice of this marvel of grace and solidity, would we have the capacity to appreciate it fully? Surely not. Unless we were personally involved in the actual building the bridge, we could not begin to imagine the enormous

amount of design, engineering and planning that went into the bridge, not to mention the daunting complexity of the actual construction.

The living world around us is, of course, infinitely more marvelous and complex than the greatest human architectural feats imaginable. It is a triumph of design that only Hashem could have accomplished. But where is the blueprint for this world? Where are the engineering plans? They are all in the Torah. "*Histakel b'Oraisa uvarah alma*," our Sages say. "He looked into the Torah and created the world." The laws, the concepts, the mystical secrets of the Torah are the keys to the universe. The spiritual Torah and the physical world exist in a state of perfect integration.

Simchas Torah is our crowning celebration of the Torah. On Shavuos, we commemorated the spiritual gift of the Torah, its *mitzvos* and teachings which represent our connection to eternity. On Simchas Torah, however, we commemorate the Torah as the very foundation of the physical world. We dance around it in a circle to signify that the Torah is the focal point of creation which controls and energizes everything around it.

Our joy is complete. Not only is the Torah our passport to eternity, it is also our key to the here and now. Torah is the basis of all creation, and connecting with it allows us to live in perfect harmony with our surroundings.

The nip of autumn may be in the air, but as we begin to read *Bereishis*, it is springtime in our hearts.