

SEFER YETZIRAH 1.12



משנה י"ב: ארבע אש ממים חקק וחצב בה כסא הכבוד
שרפים ואופנים וחיות הקודש ומלאכי השרת ומשלשתן יסד מעונו
שנאמר עושה מלאכיו רוחות משרתיו אש לוחט:

1.12: Four: Fire from Water With it He engraved and carved the Throne of Glory Serafim, Ophanim, and holy Chayot and Ministering angels From these three He founded His dwelling as it is written: "He makes His angels of breaths, His ministers of flaming fire" (Psalms 104:4).

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

1.12: Four: Fire from water. IT decreed and shaped with it the Throne of Glory, Seraphim, Ophanim, and the holy living creatures (Chayot), and the messenger/angels that serve, and from these three (air, water, and fire), IT established a dwelling since it is said, "IT makes his messenger/angles of spirit/breath, his servants of flaming fire (Psalm 104:4)."

(Doc Benton translation)

Before creation there is only that which is unknowable and inconceivable. This is the level that is referred to as *spirit*. At the next stage of creation, perception comes into existence, but what is perceived is unordered and chaotic. It lacks form and structure. This level is called *water*. But finally, we succeed in imposing order on the unordered and structure upon chaos, and we call this level *fire*. Just as disorder is transformed into order, so does *fire* transform the elements. And this is what we see going on in this passage.

Instead of disorder and *formless mud*, we see specific structures mentioned. In particular, the *Throne of Glory*, *Seraphim* (*fiery angels*), *Ophanim* (*wheel angels* that carry the *Throne of Glory*), and *Chayot* (the *holy living creatures* of *Ezekiel's* vision). We also have a reference from *Psalms 104:4* to *messenger angels* and *servant angels*, and this implies that a dwelling place for *God* has been created, a dwelling called the universe, and within the context of this dwelling we now have a *God* that has been objectified and that seems more conceivable. A world of finite objects has come into existence.

Footnote 1: The name *Elohim* refers to both the universe and to the *God* that has been objectified and given structure and attributes by our mind (see *Zohar 1:15a* in the commentary on *1:1*). It is identified with *Binah* on the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*, and it is the *God* that we see as separate from us and judging us. But beyond the objectified *God*, there are higher perceptions of divinity that are found on those paths that lead us first to love and then to oneness.

Footnote 2: The word *Chayot* in Hebrew is spelled *chet-yud-vav-tav*. However, if we rewrite it as two words and spell it as *chet-yud aleph-vav-tav*, then we can translate that as “life signs” or “signs of life.” In *Ezekiel 1:4* we read, “*And the living creatures (Chayot) ran and returned like the appearance of a flash of lightning.*” If, instead, we translate that as, “*And the signs of life ran and returned,*” then this is a reminder that living beings are characterized by a continual movement of matter and energy. Decades ago, Nobel Laureate *Iliya Prigogine* explained how such constant movement is necessary for the maintenance of all complex living structures. Once we stop moving, we die.