

SEFER YETZIRAH 1.11



משנה י"א: שלש מים מרוח חקק וחצב בהן כ"ב אותיות
מתהו ובהו רפש וטיט חקקן כמין ערוגה חצבן כמין חומה סיבבם
כמין מעזיבה ויצק עליהם שלג ונעשה עפר שנאמר כי לשלג יאמר
הוא ארץ:

1.11: Three: Water from Breath. With it He engraved and carved [22 letters from] chaos and void mire and clay He engraved them like a sort of garden He carved them like a sort of wall He covered them like a sort of ceiling [And He poured snow over them and it became dust as it is written "For to snow He said, 'Become earth'" (Job 37:6).]

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

1.11: Three: Water from spirit/breath. IT decreed and shaped with it twenty-two letters, from inconceivable chaos to conceivable disorder, formless mud and formed soil. Decreed and engraved as like a furrow, shaped as like a wall, covered as like a fortress. And snow is poured upon them and it becomes dust since it is said, “‘To snow,’ IT exclaims, ‘Be earth (Job 37:6).’”
(Doc Benton translation)

As spirit begins to create, we first move from nothingness and no-perception to a state of perceived chaos which will in turn be superseded by more organized states of consciousness. Phrases such as *formless mud* refer to a disordered state without structure that is perceived first, while *formed soil* refers to the emergence of structure and order. Next, we see a brief outline of the steps involved in creation. It all begins with a *decree* which is equated to *engraving* and creating a space for something new.

Following this we have *shaping* where we mold and refine our creation. And lastly, *covering like a fortress* symbolizes the establishment of those boundaries that are necessary for solidifying the objects physical existence, and a covering also creates an inside and an outside with respect to the object.

And at the very end of this passage, we see *snow to earth* being used as a metaphor for this creation process. At the initial stage of creation our inspiration is like formless water. However, over time it acquires a more solid structure just as ice and snow can represent water that has been given form. And in the final stage we have an honest-to-goodness real world, physical object as symbolized by the words *dust* and *earth*.

An additional insight into this *snow to earth* transition comes from *Rav Huna* in *Genesis Rabbah*, the great rabbinical commentary on *Genesis*. *Rav Huna* makes the point that all creation originates on earth.

“Rav Huna said in Rabbi Joseph's name, “Whatever is in heaven and on earth was created from the earth alone, as it is written, “For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven (Isaiah 55:10).” Just as the rain's creation is from the earth, though it falls from heaven, so all that is in heaven and on earth was created from the earth alone.”

(Genesis Rabbah XII:11)

In *Genesis Rabbah*, Rabbi Judan goes on to say that the proof of this passage is found in *Ecclesiastes 3:20*, “*All are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.*” Furthermore, the message here seems to be that it is *intent*, namely our *intent* here on Earth, that is the real beginning of the creative process. This view is supported by the following passage from the *Zohar* that says that just as it is the mist that rises from the ground that turns into rain, so does it take our *intent* from below to get the ball rolling in the heavenly realms.

*“A MIST WENT UP FROM THE GROUND (Genesis 2:6), to repair the deficiency below, by “watering the whole face of the ground”. The rising of the mist signifies the yearning of the female for the male. According to another explanation, we supply the word “not” from the previous clause after “mist”, the meaning being that God did not send rain because a mist had not gone up, it being necessary for the impulse from below to set in motion the power above.
(Zohar I:35a)*

We can gain further insight into the connection between earth and creation by considering aspects of the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*. The spheres on this tree are related to the letters of the most holy name of God, *yud-hey-vav-hey*, and, in particular, the *sefirot* of *Binah* and *Malchut* are both represented by the letter *hey*. Thus, these two *sefirot* are seen as intimately connected. Additionally, *Binah* represents the highest level of the rational, left hemisphere of the brain where all the structure we impose upon our world is created while *Malchut* is identified with the earth, and in modern *Kabbalah* it is seen as entirely receptive. That is, it receives the influences of all the other *sefirot*.

However, once we understand the equivalence between *Binah* and *Malchut*, we can begin to understand that what is really being described here is a cycle of alternation between both creation and reception. In other words, think of *Binah/Malchut* as representing the conscious mind. Our conscious mind both creates our structured world and perceives our structured world, and in that way it engages in a continuous cycle of *running and returning*. Thus, all creation comes from the earth, and all creation returns to the earth.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not there, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; So shall my word be that goes out of my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

(Isaiah 55:8-11)

“All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; to the place from where the rivers come, there they return again.”

(Ecclesiastes 1:7)