

**A PROLOGUE TO "THE VISION OF
THE CHARIOT"**

(1) The story of creation should not be expounded before two persons, nor the chapter on the Chariot before one person, unless he is a sage & already has an independent understanding of the matter.

(2) Whoever ponders on four things, it were better for him if he had not come into the world: what is above, what is below, what was before time, & what will be hereafter.

(Talmud)

Ezekiel ben Buzi (Hebrew, fl. 590 B.C.)

THE VISION OF THE CHARIOT

in the 30th year
the fourth month
fifth day of the month
when I was with the captives
along the River Kvar
skies fell open
I saw
visions of ELOHIM
the fifth day of the month
fifth year after
Yoyakhin's capture
YaHVeH's word reached
Priest Ezekiel Buzi's son
was in Chaldea by the River Kvar

YaHVeH's hand was on him
 & I looked
 looked & saw a storm wind
came from the north
 a large cloud
 fire feeding fire
so bright around
 "electrum"
 in the center
at the fire's heart
 an image
 FOUR
were living creatures
 visioned
 in image of a man
each had four faces
 had four wings
 straight footed
their soles were like a calf's foot
 sparked into colors
 polished brass
a man's hands
 under their wings
 on all four sides
& other faces
 wings
 the wings were joined
like a woman to her sister
 they didn't turn when
 moving
each moved before its face
 had faces like
 a man
all four had lions' faces
 on the right
 all four
bulls' faces from the left
 & all four also had
 the faces of
an eagle

was how their faces were
wings stretched upwards
two wings joined
man to man
the other two were
covering their bodies
each moved out from his face
direction of the wind
they moved & didn't
turn when moving
these were like living creatures looked
like coals of fire
burning
lamps
flashed swung around among
the living creatures
brightness
of fire
lightning ran from it
the living creatures turned
raced back & forth
like the sighting of a lightning flash
I saw
& saw the living creatures saw one wheel
was on the earth
the four sides of the wheel
between the living creatures
the wheels were worked
were gold in color
jasper
all four looked alike
were like a wheel inside
a wheel
moving from side to side
on all four sides
they didn't turn when moving
rims were high
& dreadful
rims full of eyes all over

the living creatures moved
the wheels moved
if the living creatures left the earth
the wheels did
in the direction of the wind
they went
the wind would drive them
wheels were lifted up with them
because the living creature's
wind
was in its wheels
these went
those went
these stopped
those stopped
these lifted from
the earth
the wheels would lift with them
because the living creature's
wind was
in its wheels
an image
over the living creatures' heads
dome of the firmament
like ice
a terror stretched above
their heads above them
under the dome
their wings were straight
a woman to her sister
two were covering
their bodies from each side
I heard the voice the wings
was like the voice of many waters
Shaddai's voice
came with their movements
voice of thunder
voice of armies
when they stood

voices of the wings grew softer
 voice over the sky dome
 came above their heads
 when they were standing
 quieting their wings
 above the dome their heads
 the sighting of
 a sapphire stone
 in image of a chair
 on the chair's image
 image sighting
 of a man upon it
 was above I saw
 "electrum"
 sighting of a fire circle
 upwards from his crotch
 & downwards
 sighting of a fire
 glowing circle
 sighting of a rainbow
 in a cloud
 some rainy day
 yes sighting of
 the glowing circle
 that I saw
 I fell upon my face
 heard the voice of someone speaking

*Date of the vision: July 593 B.C.
 Babylonia.*

J.R./H.L.

COMMENTARY

(1) This, etc., from a stratum of Jewish image-making earlier than the sefirotic circles (see above, page 11), though the reader can likely sense their presence here & ready for transformation into such, like the geometrizing or abstraction of the basic form. The "vision of the chariot," for which the first chapter of Prophet Ezekiel was the traditional

biblical source, is the central image or *yantra* of Jewish mysticism from at least a century before the time of Jesus. As *ma'ase merkaba* (i.e., "the work of the chariot") it proliferated into attempts to "see" & "measure" the chariot, the throne, the wheels, the living creatures, the image of the man-god on the throne, the halls, the doors, the palaces, etc. The other great image-making areas of that time were apocalypse (visualizations, that is, of the end of our known world) & the so-called "work of creation": & these, along with talmudic exegeses, ritual & moral reinterpretations of the Bible, Hellenistic commentaries, poems & incantations, produce a work of such dimensions that the historian Michael Grant can conclude that Jewish *poesis* not only didn't end with the final transcriptions of the Bible but that "the Jews, almost uniquely among the subjects of Rome, had produced and were still producing an extensive literature of their own."

(2) For all its highly touted image-breaking tendencies—from Abraham's iconoclasting the Chaldean statues onward—the Jewish enterprise develops a range of phanopoeia (image-making) as fantastic as any going in the ancient Near East. Such traditions, usually called esoteric, may better be viewed as the surfacing, or the maintenance as hidden oral lore (kabbala), of those other, by then subterranean, cultures against which the makers of the Torah wrote: "You shall destroy their images & cut down their groves," etc. (Exodus 34.13.) It is now possible to see in the survival of those images the practice of a poetry subversive to the literalized monotheism that would displace the fantastic life of the gods (in Hebrew: *elohim*) & the individualized visions emerging therefrom with rules of behavior at the service of the hierarchic state. Of this survival & its resultant paradoxes—not only among the Jews but all others undergoing an accelerated civilization—D. H. Lawrence wrote in his description of the still very Jewish Apocalypse of Saint John (see below, page 600): "The Apocalypse is, in its movement, one of the works of the old pagan civilization, and in it we have, not the modern process of progressive thought, but the old pagan process of rotary image-thought. Every image fulfills its own little circle of action and meaning, then is superseded by another image. . . . Every image is a picturegraph, and the connection between the images will be made more or less differently by every reader. . . . We must remember that the old human conscious process has to *see something happen*, every time. Everything is concrete, there are no abstractions. And everything *does something*." (D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, page 83.)

Thus, too, the *concrete* question of the measurement of God.