

By the Grace of G-d
18th of Teveth, 5720
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Greeting and Blessings:

I received your letter of January 10th, in which you ask my explanation of the reference to the four "basic elements" (Yesodoth) mentioned in Chapter I of the Tanya, and you ask me how is it possible to reconcile this with modern chemistry which recognizes over one hundred elements.

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Prefatorily, I must make at least two corrections in your letter. One, the origin of that statement in the Tanya is not as you write, but it is to be found in Midrash Rabba Bamidbar, and at greater length and in greater detail in many parts of the Zohar, and further explained in other books of Kabbalah. Two, modern chemistry does not recognize over one hundred basic elements, but a considerably fewer number if matter is to be reduced to its basic components or particles. [For the so-called elements are themselves made up of atoms, which are the smallest particles into which an element can be divided and yet retain its properties and characteristics. *But* the atoms themselves are further made up of smaller particles] such as electrons, protons, neutrons, etc.

Thus, the answer to your question already lies in the proper definition of the terms under discussion. For, as indicated above, *an* so-called element is not the most basic particle of matter. Even the term "atom" which originally meant something indivisible, is an archaism now employed only for convenience, as it no longer corresponds to its original meaning. Similarly, when we speak of an individual as being an element of society, this does not mean that the individual himself is not a composite.

This should be borne in mind when we consider the term Yesodoth in the Zohar, Midrash Rabba, Kabbalah, etc., and, of course, in the Tanya and other Chabad sources. This does not mean something which under normal circumstances are indivisible or unchangeable, but the actual so-called "bricks" or ~~truly basic~~ components which make up everything that exists in the world. I might also mention that there

is another school that conceives these four Yesodoth, not in their physical aspects, but rather qualitatively, that is to say, "fire," in the sense of the properties of ~~heat, namely,~~ hot and dry; "water," in the sense of coolness and humidity, and so on. was

I hope this will answer your question, and if you have any further question, do not hesitate to write again.

With all good wishes, and

With blessing,