Parashat Noah: Dangerous and Dissatisfied

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Bereishit 6:17	
וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵבִיא אֶת־הַמַּבּוּל מַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־בָּאָרֶץ יִגְוָע:	"For My part, I am about to bring the Flood—waters upon the earth—to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall perish.

1. Rain's Sense of Accountability

Job 5:10-11	
הַנּוֹתֵן מָטָר עַל־פְּנֵי־אֶרֶץ וְשֹׁלֵחַ מַיִם עַל־פְּנֵי חוּצוֹת: לָשׂוּם שְׁפָלִים לְמָרוֹם וְקֹדְרִים שָׂגְבוּ יֶשַׁע:	Who gives rain to the earth, and sends water over the fields; Who raises the lowly up high,so that the dejected are secure in victory…

Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 13:9	
רַבִּי חָנָן דְּצִפּוֹרִי בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָן אָמַר, מִפְּנֵי אַרְבָּעָה דְּבָרִים חָזַר בּוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁלֹּא תְּהֵא הָאָרֶץ שׁוֹתָה אֶלָּא מִלְּמַעְלָן, מִפְּנֵי בַּעֲלֵי זְרוֹעַ, וּבִשְׁבִיל לְהָדִיחַ טְלָלִים הָרָעִים, וְשֶׁיְּהֵא הַגָּבוֹהַּ שׁוֹתֶה כַּנָּמוּךְ, וְעוֹד שֶׁיְּהוּ הַכֹּל תּוֹלִין עֵינֵיהֶם כְּלַפֵּי מַעְלָה, הֲדָא הוּא דִכְתִיב (איוב ה, יא): לָשׂוּם שְׁפָלִים לְמָרוֹם.	Rabbi Ḥanan of Tzippori said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Rabbi Naḥman: The Holy One blessed be He reconsidered, [ordaining] that the earth should be watered only from above, for four reasons: Because of powerful people; in order to wash away harmful dew; so that the highlands could be watered just like the lowlands; and so that everyone would direct their eyes heavenward. That is what is written: "To raise the lowly on High" (Job 5:11).

Devora Steinmetz, *Why Rain Comes from Above: Explorations in the Religious Imagination*, 23
Imagining everyone looking upward creates an image of all people, large and small, high and low, reduced to the same size relative to the vast height of the heavens…rain equalizes, according to Job and this final explanation of this *midrash*, both in raising up the destitute through physical sustenance and in raising those who are low by bringing down those who are powerful and seek to take advantage of others.

2. Rejecting Rain, Rejecting Accountability

Pirke Rabbi Eliezer 22:2	
רבי ישמעאל אומר משת עלו ונתיחסו כל הבריות וכל דורות הצדיקים ומקין עלו ונתיחסו כל דורות הרשעים הפושעים והמורדים שמרדו במקום	Rabbi Simeon said: From Seth arose and were descended all the generations of the righteous. From Cain arose and were descended all the generations of the wicked, who rebel and sin, who rebelled against

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

ואמרו אין אנו צריכין לטיפת גשמיך ולא לדעת את דרכיך שנאמ' ויאמרו לאל סור ממנו.	their Rock, and they said: We do not need the drops of Thy rain, neither to walk in Thy ways, as it is said, "Yet they said unto God, Depart from us" (Job 21:14).

Bavli Sanhedrin 108a	
והיא גרמה שאמרו לאל (איוב כא, יד) סור ממנו ודעת דרכיך לא חפצנו מה שדי כי נעבדנו ומה נועיל כי נפגע בו אמרו כלום צריכין אנו לו אלא לטיפה של גשמים יש לנו נהרות ומעינות שאנו מסתפקין מהן אמר הקב"ה בטובה שהשפעתי להן בה מכעיסין אותי ובה אני דן אותם שנאמר (בראשית ו, יז) ואני הנני מביא את המבול מים.	**And that** success **caused** them **to say to God: "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Your ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto Him"** (Job 21:14-15). The members of the generation of the flood **said: Do we need Him for anything, even for** the **drop of rain** that He causes to fall? **We have rivers and springs from which we take our supply** of water; we do not fear Him. **The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: With the goodness that I bestowed upon them, with** that **they infuriate Me and with it I will sentence them, as it is stated: "And behold I will bring the flood of water"** (Bereishit 6:17).

Bavli Sanhedrin 109a	
דור הפלגה אין להם חלק לעולם הבא וכו': מאי עבוד אמרי דבי רבי שילא נבנה מגדל ונעלה לרקיע ונכה אותו בקרדומות כדי שיזובו מימיו מחכו עלה במערבא א"כ ליבנו אחד בטורא.	**The generation of the dispersion** [who built the Tower of Babel] **have no share in the World-to-Come.** The Gemara asks: **What** sin **did they perform?** Their sin is not explicitly delineated in the Torah. **The school of Rabbi Sheila say** that the builders of the Tower of Babel said: **We will build a tower and ascend to heaven, and we will strike it with axes so that its waters will flow. They laughed at** this explanation **in the West,** Eretz Yisrael, and asked: **If** that was their objective, **let them build** a tower **on a mountain;** why did they build it specifically in a valley (see Bereishit 11:2)?

Devora Steinmetz, *Why Rain Comes from Above: Explorations in the Religious Imagination*, 26
…rejection of God's gift of rain is evil because it is a rejection of God's judgment. It is an attempt to return to a state where water is always available, a state in which human beings are not called to make moral judgments and to act in accordance with what is right. Rejection of rain is the rejection of a consciousness of living in a state of accountability for one's actions.-

3. Dangerous and Dissatisfied

Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, 415
Today it [humanity] stands on the verge of becoming a god, poised to acquire not only eternal youth, but also the divine abilities of creation and destruction….[But] despite the astonishing things that humans are capable of doing, we remain unsure of our goals and we seem to be as discontented as ever…We are more powerful than ever before, but have very little idea what to do with all that power. Worse still, humans seem to be more irresponsible than ever. Self-made gods with only the laws of physics to keep us company, we are accountable to no one. We are consequently wreaking havoc on our fellow animals and on the surrounding ecosystem, seeking little more than our own comfort and amusement, yet never finding satisfaction. Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don't know what they want?