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**"The Rest of the Story": Where Does Creation Stop and History Begin...**

Where does the creation story end? As we have seen, though the first Chapter of Genesis reaches a climax and a culmination of sorts, creation is clearly re-presented in the second chapter, which then continues seamlessly into the story of the expulsion from the garden, and then on to life on "the outside." Yet there we continue with the paradigmatic story of Cain and Abel, and so long as we are in the context of the primal family, and not really a human race, we have not yet entered the realm of history. I would claim that it makes sense to see all the following chapters, both Noah and the Flood and the story of the Tower of Babel, as rounding out the creation narrative, and determining, or filling in, essential details of the human relation with the rest of the earth. We shall look at each of these stories in turn, though even before Cain and Abel and the rather shocking story of sacrifice and fratricide, we should briefly explore the changes that occur in response to the expulsion.

One of the main changes is in the notion and function of work. In the garden, work was a basic assignment predicated of the human, and the human responsibility for the garden. So while here clearly not a curse, as such, it was not exactly a blessing either—perhaps a holy task. In the expulsion speech of Genesis 3:14-19, work itself is not presented as a punishment, but clearly, the pain and difficulty now required in procuring food is an unpleasant consequence of their leaving the garden: "... In sadness (*itzavon*) shall you eat of (the ground) all the days of your life; ... By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat until you return to the ground..." (Genesis 17-19). Bread is mentioned for the first time, and behind this single word may lie the whole Neolithic revolution which represents the transition from gathering, hunting and nomadic herding to settled agriculture, crop domestication and cultivation, with the possibilities for accumulating food surpluses and therefore building larger settlements, professional diversification, etc.

Like responsibility, human work in the world is also a dual concept. It connects us to the world, its cycles and abundance, though in many ways, even in primitive forms of plowing and cultivation, it is an aggressive intervention, and so separates us from it. This can be seen as both a blessing and as a curse of sorts, though the latter term, a common one in reference to the expulsion from the Garden and its aftermath, is misleading here. The serpent and the ground are each "cursed" in some way, but the woman and the man receive the trappings of adulthood, pain in childbirth and hard-won sustenance. Like some of the other consequences of leaving the Garden, these are better viewed as a process of becoming fully human, of growing up and living in the real world. Birth and death are central to the transformation that takes place as a result of the expulsion, and they both come into being with the first children of the world.

These children, Cain and Abel, exist on two distinct planes. As the first brothers, they embody the very individual psychology of jealousy and sibling rivalry. But they also represent prototypes for entire cultures. It is no accident that Cain is a farmer and Abel a shepherd: The tension between the settled tiller and the nomadic herdsman dates from the beginning of agriculture and continues to our day.

Regarding work and death, it was the much-maligned Cain who was doing the good work in tilling the ground by the sweat of his brow, fulfilling God's decree. Abel, shepherd and sympathetic victim, was the one who introduced the taking of life. And though the first slaughter was apparently for sublime ends--worship, not appetite--the first human murder was not long in coming. It has been suggested that Cain's ability to murder Abel came from his not making distinctions between humans and animals. Initially he killed neither. But once he saw that Abel's sacrifice of lambs was not only acceptable, but preferred to his own, he concluded that all was permitted, even slaughtering (offering?) his own baby brother.

Ironically, Cain's punishment for knocking off the competition is to join it, becoming a nomad, banished from the soil. He experiences the second expulsion—this time not from the bounded garden, but from the soil itself. But he ends his supposedly endless wandering quickly, founding the first city (Genesis 4:17)—though urban life might be seen as remaining exiled from the life of the soil. So the first city was founded by a murderer, and the strongly anti-urban cast of the Book of Genesis (continuing with the city of Babel and later Sodom and Gomorrah) is set.

As far as human behavior goes, there was that first murder, and it was downhill from there. Perhaps it was that precedent, directly leading to urban immorality and a sense of lawlessness that laid the groundwork for the background to Noah and the Flood. In the Flood story, the entire human race, save a family of eight, was deemed irredeemably evil and wiped out. Significantly, all but a saving remnant of the animal kingdom is annihilated as well—the slate is wiped clean. All of the God's glorious creation gets "rebooted."

For reasons that are not made explicit, Noah found favor with God, and is described as the first *tzaddik*, righteous one. Whatever the justification, he is judged worthy to become a new Adam—the progenitor of postdiluvian humanity. So not only are we all *b'nei Adam*, the physical descendants of that primal *adam*, human, we are also all *b'nei Noach*. This term, interestingly, adds a moral layer to our common humanity. Augmenting our shared genetic heritage is an ethical one, stemming both from Noah's personal example of compassion (at least for the animals for whom he cared) and from the explicit commandments following the Flood, known as the seven commandments of *b'nei Noach* ("Noachide laws"). These include prohibitions of idolatry, blasphemy, murder, incest, theft, eating a limb of a live animal, and the injunction to establish a judicial system, which are seen as basic moral imperatives for human society.

This is the human side to the covenant that is established after the Flood between God, humanity and the world. God's side, the divine part of the bargain, is simply never to destroy the world again: "I will never again destroy every living being as I have done... So long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:21-22).

This is all very comforting. Indeed, the simple, child-friendly reading of the Flood story is quite rosy and optimistic: virtue triumphs, evil is punished, the menagerie is saved, and a colorful rainbow appears to seal the bargain. But between the lines lies a much darker tale: Noah and family must have been witness to inconceivable carnage. Everyone they knew died, (how many must have screamed and pounded on the ark hatch as the waters rose?), and they drifted aimlessly for over a year, presumably amidst floating corpses and other horrors. The world was a wasteland which they had to rebuild with the

nightmarish memories of survivors. It's no wonder that Noah's first act on dry land was to plant a vineyard and drown his sorrows (see Genesis 9:20-21).

One theme in the narrative is clear: the complete interdependence between humans and the natural world. Human behavior pollutes and then dooms the entire world. God orders Noah to build an ark to save not only himself and his family, but significantly, exemplars of all the animals. There is a radical egalitarianism here, too, for all the passengers on the ark are merely representatives of their species, whose job it is to replenish the world after its devastation. They—we—are all literally in the same boat.

In the same boat, but in a new relationship. One change that occurred in the aftermath of the Flood was the permission to eat animals, which expresses a new and different connection, both embedding the human as a "predator" with the appropriate trophic niche in the food web, but thereby also creating distance—for now the animals had reason to fear humans: "The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth, and upon all the birds of the sky, everything with which the earth is astir, and upon all the fish of the sea... every creature that lives shall be yours to eat." (Genesis 9:2-3).

Once again – a part of, and apart from. God's covenant, though, significantly reinforces the commonality of all beings, since it is uniquely with all of creation: "And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come, and with every living thing that is with you—birds, cattle and every wild beast as well—all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth.'" (Genesis 9:8-10).

This together with the promise of 8:21-22 ("Never again will I doom the earth because of man... So long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.") are strikingly beautiful and comforting statements. But regarding our own day and age, with the attendant challenges of widespread environmental degradation that endanger life on the planet, our ancestors did not imagine a human race that would break the promise to refrain from destruction. From their perspective, this was the exclusive province of God; and so when God promised that He would never bring another Flood—they could rest easy.

But whether we like it or not, we have acquired the god-like powers to influence the continued existence of the human race and the world in which we live. In the quote above, it is promised that the natural order will continue. But now we are the ones altering basic earth systems: from global warming that threatens "cold and heat, summer and winter" as we know them, to chemicals such as endocrine disrupters that blur the distinctions between the sexes in animals, upsetting the procreation of species. A human race that is "progressing" in one direction, and leaves the animals, or all of nature, behind, or outside, the human project—isn't riding on Noah's ark, but rather on the Titanic.

That is probably the closest image that we have in our modern context for the symbolism of the tower of Babel. The rabbinic name for the Tower of Babel story (Genesis 11:1-9) is The Generation of Division (*dor ha-pelaga*). The outcome of this nine-sentence micro-novella is initial confusion, dispersion and hence division of the human family into otherness and ethnicity. Before this incident, the whole earth was unified and of one speech (11:1). If the Flood represented a second Creation of sorts, with Noah and family as the unique progenitors of humanity, Babel replaces Eden, and the humanly constructed

City-cum-Tower supercede the divine Garden in a story that is both continuation and strange retelling of the Edenic narrative. Babel is in effect the virtual reality version of Eden.

Both are tales of humans (apparently) subverting divine intent, resulting in exile and dispersion into the world. The confounding of tongues leading to social division, an abandoned City and a stunted Tower are often read as punishment. But if so, what was the crime? Herein lies a tension between Tower and City. Tower-building signifies hubris: storming heaven, idolatrously desiring to “make a Name for ourselves” (11:4). The tower, and the power it can bestow, can itself become a god. In Soloveitchik’s prototypical terms, this is the Adam of Genesis 1, commanded to dominate the world, here wildly out of control. They were unified, but they turned their unity to acts of domination. They pulled out the stops, “nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach” (11:6). So of course they need to be confounded, reined in, redirected.

The building of the city, though, represents something else: fear, not brashness, the need for a sheltering center, “else we shall be scattered all over the world” (11:4). This is the anxious voice of the Adam 2, created alone, and lonely, seeking companionship, desiring the cohesion of a centralized civilization and fearing the potential isolation of dispersal.

Ironically, there is a causal connection between the two: the hubris and need to dominate, “Adam I out of control,” is caused by the fears of Adam II—loneliness, isolation, lack of intimacy. And in return, rather than truly addressing those needs and fulfilling them, the aggressive stance of building and conquering only reinforces them, deepening them and making them more intractable. It’s lonely at the top, perhaps most for those who’ve crushed others underfoot on the way there.

The “expulsion” from Eden was an exile into the world; Babel—Tower and City—was a last-ditch effort on the part of the renewed human family to dominate land, landscape and one another, and avoid truly living in that world. “The top” is clearly where these anxious, primordial tower-builders wanted to be. Since antiquity towers have been built for command and control: from the ancient Babylonian ziggurat to prison watchtowers to modern skyscrapers—people controlling people, either directly and literally or symbolically, by cowering them: they are structures which are “trans-human”—not on a human scale. People in towers can control others’ movements, gather information, sur-vey and super-vice (literally, oversee).

The vertical metaphor is at the core of our stratified society: being of high-rank, “climbing the corporate ladder,” the allure of the penthouse, the upper echelons. The narrative represents God as imprisoned in this vertical metaphor as well: He (sic) is in Heaven, and Heaven is, well, in the heavens, up there. Mystics and renewalists rightly reframe god talk with images of depth and interiority: the divine is in here, not up there; truth wells up out of the depths, it is not handed down from on high. But in Babel, architecture, theology and sociology all speak the language of hierarchy.

Existentially, the vertical tower—here the ziggurat (from a root meaning to build high), but any tower—like the urge to climb high, to fly high, to see things from above, is an expression of the desire to separate, to deny our embeddedness in the earth, to be able to soar free of earthly and bodily constraints. In response, God disperses: across plains and prairies, through forest and tundra, to the edges of oceans and seas, and beyond. Across

and through—to live on the earth, not above it; to gain a view from within, not from without.

Significantly, it was the mosaic of languages and cultures that was the antidote to that first hierarchical technocracy, shattering the vertical with wider horizons for people and their place in the world. The dispersion returns humanity to themselves, and to the world. For the Tower was not only a vertical reality, but a virtual one as well, perhaps the first in history. Ancient Mesopotamians built those ziggurats—cultic towers—on the flat flood plain, as a replacement for an actual mountain, a mountain of God. Even their building materials were artificial substitutes for more natural stones and mortar (see Genesis 11:3).

Real mountains and vast natural phenomena also dwarf people, but do not oppress them socially. Those truly *are* trans-human—we should feel humble in the face of the cosmos, or even local representations of same. Perhaps there is a built-in "humility gene," evolutionarily acquired to engender wonder, to give us a healthy respect for things which we cannot fathom, much less control. But when towers—or technology, or other products of human ingenuity—begin to mimic that effect, to co-opt that feeling, we begin to lose sight of reality, subjugate ourselves to our own tools, and are only able to experience wonderment at the work our own hands.

After Babel and the adumbration of the extended and now-diverse human family, Abram and Sarai, and thus a specific branch of that family, now assume center stage for the rest of the Torah and Prophets. Arguably, creation has ended and history has begun.

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