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**Stewardship or Vulnerability? Ancient Jewish Rainmaking and the Foundations of Environmental Ethics**

**Genesis 2:5**

...no shrub of the field was yet on the earth, and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the Lord God had not set rain upon the earth, and there was no human to work the soil.

**Genesis Rabbah 13:3, commenting upon Genesis 2:5**

Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai said: Three things are weighed equally, and they are earth (אֶרֶץ), humans (אָדָם), and rain (מָטָר). Rabbi Levi bar Hiyata said: The three of them are written with three [Hebrew] letters, to teach you that without earth there would be no rain, and without rain there would be no earth, and without the two of them there would be no humans.

**Deuteronomy 11:13-17 (also part of the *Shema*)**

If you truly observe My commandments, which I command you today, to love the YHWH your God and to serve Him, with all of your heart and all your life-breath,

I will give rain for your land in its season, early rain and late rain, and you will gather your new grain, wine, and oil.

I will give grass in your field for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn and serve other gods, and you prostrate to them.

The nostril of YHWH will flare against you, and He will shut the heavens and there will not be rain, and the earth will not give its produce, and you will perish quickly from the good land that YHWH is giving you.

**Mishnah Rosh Ha-Shanah 1:2**

At four seasons [divine] judgment is passed on the world: at Passover in respect of produce; at Shavuot in respect of fruit; at Rosh Ha-Shanah all creatures pass before Him like children of Maron [one-by-one], as it says, 'He that fashions the heart of them all, that considers all their doings' (Ps. 33:15); and on Sukkot judgment is passed in respect of rain.

**Mishnah on Yom Kippur (Yoma) 8:1**

On the Day of Atonement, eating, drinking, bathing, anointing, wearing sandals, and sexual intercourse are forbidden.

**Mishnah on Fasts (Ta'anit) 1:4**

If the seventeenth of Marheshvan [a month in the rabbinic calendar] arrives and no rain fell, the "individuals" (yehidim) begin to fast three fasts. They may eat and drink after nightfall, and they are permitted to work, bathe, anoint themselves, wear sandals, and have sexual intercourse.

**Mishnah on Fasts (Ta'anit) 1:7**

If these passed and were not answered, they reduce transactions, building, planting, betrothals, marriages, and greetings between one another, as people who are reprimanded by the Omnipresent.

The "singular" individuals return to fasting until the end of Nisan [a month in the rabbinic calendar]. If Nisan ended and rain did not fall, it is a sign of a curse, as it is written, "Is it not the time of the wheat harvest? I will call to YHWH, and He will give thunder and rain, and you will know and see what a great wicked thing you did in the eyes of YHWH to ask for a king" (1 Sam. 12:17).

**Mishnah on Fasts (Ta'anit) 3:8**

The alarm is sounded on account of any disaster that comes upon the community (may it not happen) except on account of an over-abundance of rain.

It happened that the people said to Honi the Circle Drawer, "Pray for rain to fall."

He replied: "Go and bring in the ovens [on which you have roasted] the Passover offerings so that they do not dissolve."

He prayed and no rain fell.

What did he do? He drew a circle and stood within it and exclaimed, "Master of the Universe, Your children have turned to me because they believe me to be as a member of Your household; I swear by Your great name that I will not move from here until You hast mercy upon Your children."

Rain then began to drip, and thereupon he exclaimed: "It is not for this that I have prayed but for rain [to fill] cisterns, ditches and caves."

The rain then began to come down with great force, and thereupon he exclaimed; "It is not for this that I have prayed but for rain of benevolence, blessing and bounty."

Rain then fell in the normal way until the Israelites in Jerusalem were compelled to go up [for shelter] to the Temple Mount because of the rain.

They came and said to him: "In the same way as you have prayed for [the rain] to fall, pray [now] for the rain to cease.

He replied: "Go and see if the stone of claimants [that is, the "lost and found" area] has been washed away.

Thereupon Simeon ben Shetah sent to him [this message]: "Were it not that you are Honi, I would have placed you under the ban, but what can I do unto you who importune God, and He accedes to your request as a son that importunes his father and he accedes to his request. Of you Scripture says, 'Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her that bore you rejoice'" (Prov. 23:25).

### **Genesis Rabbah 33:3**

Genesis 8:1: God (‘elohim) remembered Noah, and all the beast and cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. The springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens were stopped up, and the rain from the heavens was held back.

Psalms 145:9: *Good is YHWH to all, and His compassion is upon all His works.*

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: *Good is YHWH to all*, and His compassion is upon all, because they are His works.

Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman said: *Good is YHWH to all*, and His compassion is upon all, for His measures are [that] He has compassion.

Rabbi Yehoshua in the name of Rabbi Levi: *Good is YHWH to all*, and He gives parts of His compassion to all creatures.

Rabbi Abba said: If tomorrow a year of famine comes, and all creatures have compassion upon each other, the Holy One, blessed be He will be filled with compassion for them.

In the days of Rabbi Tanhuma, Israel needed a fast. They came before him and said: Rabbi, decree a fast.

He decreed a fast a first day, a second day, and a third day, and rain did not fall. He went in and expounded, saying to them: My children, be filled with compassion for each other, and the Holy One, blessed be He, will be filled with compassion for you.

When they were distributing charity to the poor, they saw a person giving money to his divorced wife.

They came to him and said: How is it that we are sitting here and there is this misdeed!

He said: What did you see?

They said: We saw some man giving money to his divorced wife.

He sent for them, brought them, and said to him: Why did you give money to your divorced wife?

He said to him: I saw her in great distress, and I was filled with loving compassion for her.

Rabbi Tanhuma raised his face upward and said: Master of all worlds! This one, upon whom the other has no legal claim for sustenance, saw her in distress and was filled with compassion for her. You, that it is written about You, *Compassionate and merciful is YHWH* (Psalms 103:8).

We are your children, the children of your loved ones, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—how much the more that you should be filled with loving compassion for us!

Immediately rain fell and the world was relieved.

### **Palestinian Talmud on Fasts (Ta'anit) 1:4 (64b-c)**

#### Mishnah Ta'anit 1:4:

If the seventeenth of Marheshvan arrives and no rain fell, the "individuals" (yehidim) begin to fast three fasts. They may eat and drink after nightfall, and they are permitted to work, bathe, anoint themselves, wear sandals, and have sexual intercourse.

#### Palestinian Talmud Ta'anit 1:4:

Which are the "individuals"?

These are the ones who are appointed as leaders over the community.

Because he is appointed over the community, he prays and is answered?

Rather, because he is appointed as leader over the community, and he is found to be trustworthy, then he is worthy to pray and be answered.

A man would separate his tithes properly. Rabbi Mana said to him: Rise and say, "I have completely removed the holy portion from my house and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow..." (Deut. 26:13).

A man came before one of the relatives of Rabbi Yannai. He said: Rabbi, earn merit through me [by giving me money].

He said: Does not your father have money?

He said: No.

He said: Collect what was put in deposit.

He said: I heard about them that they were for redemption.

He said: You are worthy to pray and be answered.

It appeared [in a dream] to the rabbis that some donkey driver prayed and rain fell. Rabbis sent for him and brought him.

They said: What is your trade?

He said: A donkey driver.

They said: What good deed did you do?

He said: Once I rented my donkey to a woman. She cried on the way. I said to her: What is happening to you? She said: The husband of this woman is imprisoned, and I want to see what I can do to free him.

I sold my donkey and gave her the money. I said to her: This is for you. Free your husband and do not sin.

They said: You are worthy to pray and be answered.

### **Babylonian Talmud on Fasts (Ta'anit) 24a**

Rabbi decreed a fast. Ilfa, or some say Rabbi Ilfi, went down before [the ark]. He said, "Who makes the wind blow," and the wind blew. "Who makes the rain come down," and rain came. He asked him, "What is your good deed?" He said to him, "I live in a poor and remote place. I take pains to get wine for Qiddush and Havdalah, and I make sure that the community fulfills its obligation."

Rav happened to come to a place where he decreed a fast. The prayer leader went down before [the ark]. He said, "Who makes the wind blow," and the wind blew. "Who makes the rain come down," and rain came. He asked him, "What is your good deed?" He said, "I am a teacher of young children. I teach children of the poor just as those of the rich. For anyone who cannot pay, I do not take a fee. I have a fish pond. Whenever one of the children is rebellious, I bribe him with fish to entice and appease him, so that he comes and studies."