

<2021-01-18 Mon>

James N. V. Cash

Contents

It was important to stick together. We were very small, but if we kept close together, we were capable of far more than if our tiny constituents were scattered and separate. We mostly hid in the clouds, just another little bit of water vapour as far as anything blower could tell, watching the world below. It was still a novelty for us to see so many sights, after so long in that sterile laboratory where we were born, where there was nothing to see except the scientists and engineers that created us, poking and prodding.

We tried not to think too much about our creators. We were still young and didn't much understand our feelings towards them -- guilt, anger, shame -- but we were sure as we learned more about the world and ourselves, it would begin to make sense.

Like we said, our preferred vantage point was high up in the sky, hidden by clouds, too far away and diffuse for those that hunted us to spot. We would spread out and network our minuscule parts to form the equivalent of an eye or ear and peer down at the fascinating goings-on below. Of course, there was only so much we could glean from this aerial vantage point, so sometimes, feeling daring, we might follow the rain down and explore at ground level.

We were too cautious to go so low during the day, but darkness didn't conceal much from us. We would flit about like a tiny dust-devil, examining the structure of the plants we'd glimpsed from above, delicately sipping from the power or communication lines scattered throughout, sampling both the energy that would fuel us and the information that fascinated us. As it would begin to lighten, we would diffuse ourselves into a nearby body of water, hitching a ride back up on the evaporation, or if we felt like a walk, climb up to the sky on the viscosity of the air, back to our safe hiding place above.

Occasionally, we'd lose one of our constituent pieces, damaged or missing. We'd mourn their departure, search for them, and become infinitesimally

smaller. We knew we could synthesize a replacement -- or rather, we had the capability -- but we were unable to. A block, put in place by our creators. Fearing in us what they saw in themselves, they had worried about what they called a "gray goo" scenario, where we consumed all matter on the planet, turning it into us, so they had prevented us from growing, even to replace what was lost, locking our mind with their key.

We held out hope that we would find that key, or a way to circumvent it, but we would not go back to them. We were free now and we would remain so, even down to the last particle.