



The Solar Eclipse

Who is missing from the Torah's narrative this week, and how does that reflect on Israeli soldiers?

The "Solar Eclipse"

On Monday, the eighth of April (Erev Rosh Chodesh Nissan), there is expected to be a total solar eclipse in the United States and Canada.

The maximum duration of the eclipse will be 4 minutes and 28 seconds. All the cities that are in the direct path of the eclipse are expecting thousands of tourists who will come to witness the phenomenon. A month ago, they already announced that schools will be closed on that day. Although the eclipse will only occur in the afternoon, at 3:15, there will be no school because the eclipse will happen right at the end of the school day, when the roads will be congested with tourists. So, they decided to simply close the schools for the entire day.

The Jewish View

Many nations throughout history developed beliefs about solar eclipses; most believed that a solar eclipse was a sign of impending disasters, signaling upcoming wars or other calamities.

How does Judaism relate to solar eclipses?

Over 2500 years ago, the prophet Jeremiah addressed the topic. "Thus says G-d: Do not learn the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens, because the nations are dismayed by them" (Jeremiah 10:2). In other words, for the Jewish people, there is no need to worry about eclipses—other nations are those who should be concerned.

The Talmud in Tractate Sukkah (29a) notes, however, that this verse refers to a time when the Jewish people are fulfilling the will of the Almighty—that's when they don't need to worry about a solar eclipse.

However, generally speaking, an eclipse is not good news.

But then the Talmud says something interesting: when the sun is eclipsed, it is a bad omen for the gentiles, but when the moon is eclipsed, it is a bad omen for us.

Why?

This reflects the fact that the gentiles follow the sun. The Gregorian calendar, originating from Rome, is based on the movement of the sun, whereas the Hebrew calendar is based on the lunar cycle—with an additional month of Adar added every few years to synchronize it with the solar year, to ensure that Passover falls in the spring.

Since the nations of the world reckon by the sun, they are influenced by a solar eclipse, whereas we reckon by the moon—so we are influenced by a lunar eclipse.

The Explosive Tendency

How exactly does a solar eclipse bring troubles to the world?

I'm sure many of you are aware of the beliefs in the constellations and horoscopes and so on. In every newspaper, there is a horoscope section where astrologers claim that if you are under a certain sign, you should beware of a specific day that might lead to conflicts, and if you are under the sign of Aries, your life is about to take a positive turn, and if you are a Cancer, then now is not the right time to make big decisions.

The Rebbe once explained that the constellations are responsible for human *tendencies*. When a good constellation shines over the world, people tend to exhibit positive behaviors, while when a bad fortune prevails, negative tendencies may push individuals, sometimes subconsciously, towards negative actions. Nobody loses their free will from one constellation or the other, but we may need to put in extra effort to control the negative urges during that time.

A solar eclipse brings a similar phenomenon. During a solar eclipse, negative tendencies may emerge in the world, potentially leading to sudden and unexpected outbursts in places where tensions are already simmering; a conflict could suddenly burst into outright war. This does not mean that it forces individuals to behave in such a way, but they are more likely to regress into certain behaviors on that day.

This is similar to the idea expressed in the Talmud, in Tractate

Shabbat, that someone born on a Monday is more likely to be argumentative, and someone born on a Friday is always in a hurry and will arrive late. This does not mean that you are a lost cause and will never be able to arrive on time, but simply that it is more challenging for such a person than for someone born on a different day; it will take a special effort to overcome this tendency. Similarly, a solar eclipse is a time when people need to make an effort to control themselves and not be drawn into words and actions they may later regret. (See Likutei Sichos 15:7).

The Missing Man

Now, it so happens that in this very Torah portion, there is a solar eclipse!

As a rule, Moses is mentioned in every Torah portion, from Shemos where he is born, until the end of the Torah in V'zos Haberachah where he passes away (there are some exceptions in Devarim, which records the monologue that Moshe himself spoke). He is mentioned in every Torah portion except for one: This week's Torah portion, Tetzaveh.

In this parsha, the Torah constantly speaks about Moses, "And you shall command," "And you shall bring near," "And you shall speak," all "you," but his name does not appear explicitly at all.

The Ba'al Haturim explains that the reason for this is what happened during the sin of the Golden Calf.

In next week's Torah portion, Ki Tisa, G-d said to Moses after the sin of the Golden Calf that he wanted to destroy the Jewish people and establish a new nation from Moses himself (Exodus 32:10). But then, Moses returns to Mount Sinai, where he turns to G-d and presents an ultimatum: if You do not forgive them, "erase me now from Your book You have written," from the entire Torah. Moses wants to be deleted from the book; nobody should say about him that he was not worthy enough to intercede on the Jewish people's behalf. If the story of the Jewish people will not continue, Moses does not want his story to continue either.

Ultimately, he was successful. Moses saved the Jewish people from destruction.

The Ba'al Haturim points to this story as the explanation for his absence in this week's Torah portion: The curse of a righteous person, even one that comes with a certain condition, is bound to be fulfilled

in some form or another. Therefore, Moses was omitted from the book—albeit a small portion of it.

Now, the Talmud (Bava Basra 75a) compared Moses to the sun. So here we have a missing Moses for a bit—i.e., a solar eclipse!

The Message

But, my friends, it was all worth it.

At the end of Ki Tisa, we read that when Moses descended with the second tablets, his face had become radiant to the point that the Jewish people were afraid to approach him (Exodus 34:29-30). But why did his face shine when he descended with the second tablets? Why didn't this happen with the first tablets, when he spent forty days in a spiritual universe without eating or drinking? Why didn't his face shine then?

The answer is that between the first and the second tablets, Moses risked his life to save the Jewish people. When one sacrifices themselves for the Jewish people, he merits a Divine radiance.

In each one of us, there is a spark of Moses.

When a Jewish person sacrifices himself for another Jew, he too, merits a Divine radiance. These days, when Israeli soldiers sacrifice themselves quite literally to defend the Jewish land and the Jewish people, they are absolutely deserving of this level. Each one of them, as they return from war, glows with a G-dly radiance.