TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART
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This sermon is available in video format at: https://youtu.be/tOnzFhRk94E

An internet meme has been making the rounds these last few days, it reads humorously: "Dear God if you want us to impeach Trump give us a sign like blot out the sun… anytime in the next few days."

It's funny, in a gallows humor kind of way, and I assume infuriating to some people as well. Whether you laugh, cry or are enraged the underlying premise that a solar eclipse, like the one we will experience Monday is a sign from God is rooted in Torah and ancient astronomy.

BTW just that statement, 'the solar eclipse we will experience Monday' illuminates the point (no pun intended) that the certainty we have in the sun rising and setting in its proper position in the heavens is by itself an act of faith.

In his book A Rumor of Angels, Peter Berger writes of the child who wakes up in the middle of a nightmare. His mother runs to comfort him. "There, there. There, there. Everything will be alright." Berger asks the question: Can she really be sure that everything is going to be alright? Or is that statement an act of faith?

I don't know for certain that the moon will eclipse the sun late Monday morning. The sun might not rise that day, but I have faith that it will. My confidence that the system setup by God or nature or whatever you believe is the source of order in our natural world, that faith is what allows me to sleep at night. If I wasn't certain there would be a tomorrow, I highly doubt I could make it through today, let alone sleep at night.

But for our ancestors who lacked the scientific understanding of these things, a cosmic anomaly like a solar eclipse was a sign of great uncertainty and perhaps doom.

Kings trembled when they saw an eclipse. In the Bible, King Hezekiah was on his death bed. He prayed for healing – and as a sign that he would be healed of his illness, God sent a sign, in the form of a shadow that fell upon his house.

The son of Charlemagne, Louis, most likely died during the eclipse of May 5, 840.

The French king, Louis XIV (14), the "sun king" who chose the sun as his emblem, ironically died right after an eclipse.

Its no wonder that Shakespeare thought that an eclipse was a "stain on the sun that portended no good."

Likewise, our Jewish ancestors were afraid of eclipses. The sages of the Talmud were sure that it was human behavior – human sinfulness, to be exact – that caused eclipses.

Rabbi Jeff Salkin our Scholar In Residence this coming November and who's essay on this topic enumerated the above examples notes, "The darkness of the sun arouses the worst of our primitive fears – that the sun is leaving, and that the darkness will be permanent. For that is the origin of the word "eclipse." It comes from the Greek word for "abandonment."

Look closely at the evening prayer, Maariv Aravim that Noam read earlier, its there to help us cope with our fear of the dark and night.

"God rolls light in front of darkness and darkness in front of light, and causes day to pass and brings on the night."

Have no fear. It is God – and not a demon – who creates the night. God will bring back the day, as well, you can rest easy the sun will rise again in the morning.

But what if God is absent? What if God in the words of the great theologian Martin Buber - is hiding the divine face. Eclipsed by our actions towards God's world, towards God's beloved creation, our fellow human beings?

For a moment this past weekend in Charlottesville, it seemed like human hatred was eclipsing God. That the darkness of Nazism, Anti-Semitism, Racism, White Nationalism was again blocking out the light of humanity.

Skinheads and Nazis marched through the streets of an American city. Dozens were injured, Heather Heyer violently murdered; all to prevent the removal of a statue to a Confederate War General which is itself an eclipse. For much of this past week, from marches to press conferences it seemed that the forces of darkness had eclipsed the forces of light. That the American president was blind to the evil that surrounded and supported him.

This is about much more than a statue; America's unresolved racial conflict has been playing out in the streets of its cities for generations. The statue, geographically at the center of this week's confrontation celebrates a failed and heinous ideology. It celebrates a man, Robert E Lee for his heroism in defense of slavery and racism, and in so doing it obscures the fundamental evil and moral bankruptcy of his cause.

In Judaism when a person dies we say, 'zicron livracha / may their memory be a blessing'. The implication is that those who do good in their lifetimes are remembered after them for that goodness. To those who do bad, to the racists, the anti-Semites, the terrorists, propagators of violence and hate, our tradition has another response. 'Y'mach Shmo / may their name, their memory be blotted out, may it be eclipsed by better more honourable things.

I am always reluctant to use Hitler analogies, he is *sui generis* amongst evils in the world, but since our context for this current social debate is neo-Nazis, comparisons to Hitler are necessary.

If you walk the streets of Berlin today or at any time since the fall of Nazi Germany you will not see any statues to Hitler lining the streets of Berlin. That it would be woefully inflammatory and hurtful to have them on display is without question.

And so it begs the question, why has the US erected hundreds of statues to men who led a rebellion against America and its principles however yet unfinished and unfulfilled, "that all men are created equal"? It is unfathomable and shameful.

The United States has over 700, statues to 'Heroes of the Confederacy'. Each one is an eclipse, an obstruction of the light of justice and equality that millions have fought and died for throughout its history.

These totems do not simply celebrate the men, but they celebrate what those men died in the context of defending the American stain of slavery, lynchings and racism. Their reverence, like biblical idols reminds me of the verse from our old Gate of Prayer siddur at the end of the Aleynu.

> *May the time not be distant O God, when Your name shall be worshipped in all the earth… when corruption and evil shall give way to integrity and goodness, when superstition shall no longer enslave the mind, nor idolatry blind the eye.*
> *(Gate of Prayer p. 617)*

American Civil War Statues should be removed from the places of honour and put properly in museums, places of education where we learn from history, but it doesn't obscure and eclipse our ability to see the needs of the present, the promise of the future.

Robert E. Lee, the man whose statue was the focal point in Charlottesville held the same position. He wrote of monuments to confederate soldiers, "[they would only] keep open the sores of war" and the ill will [The Civil] war engendered, which he thought should be consigned to "oblivion."

I would add, our present society must reflect the progress of our values not the myopathy of our past.

'zicron livracha'; remember what is good and who was good for blessing.
'Y'mach Shmo'; blot out the name of those who sought to destroy us, divide us.

We no longer fear the eclipse as literally, a foreshadow of some divine judgement day, our understanding of science and the cosmos has matured, it has evolved, it has been corrected.

We don't think the world is flat anymore, nor that our actions can reorder the stars in the heavens.

Those that do, those that hold on to these failed theories, and simply wrong-headed ideas with no basis in reason or reality, let alone science. We reject them without impunity. Its just wrong and has no place in our world today.

Similarly, the racist, anti-Semitic, bigoted views of White-Supremacists and Neo Nazis and those that defend them. They have no place, like statues of confederate soldiers, they must be torn down, relegated to the dustbin of history, studied so that we can recognize the evil when it reappears, but never celebrated, never justified, lest they be allowed to eclipse and obscure the goodness of humanity and our progress toward a better and more just society for all of God's creations.

The Aleynu Prayer from that old reform siddur, ends with the verse:

> *O God, may all, created in Your image, become one in spirit and one in friendship, forever united in Your service.*

Ken Yehi Ratzon – may it be God's will, may it be our will.