

Eclipse 2017 — blessings

When the disk of the sun is hidden, the sun's corona is revealed. The moon ever so briefly "overpowers" the sun, but not all of the sun, so that the sun's concealment becomes a revelation. During the brief moments of "totality", the planets shine in midday. Some of the brighter stars and constellations visible only in the winter will show themselves in a summer sky.

Our ancestors sometimes saw an eclipse as a bad omen for the world, so they did not prescribe a blessing for it. But we understand an eclipse as a natural marvel that reminds us of the grandeur of Creation, so many rabbis now believe we should say a blessing. But which blessing? There are two candidates, but there are also two events: the eclipsing of the sun up until totality, and the revelation of the corona during totality.

The crown of the sun, in Hebrew, *`atarah*, becomes revealed only in the total eclipse. By all accounts, totality is a unique experience far different than witnessing a partial solar eclipse. It seems right therefore to say an additional blessing when one is privileged to see it. Here is one suggestion:

For the partial eclipse, when the sun's light still fills the sky:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית

*Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha'olam
`oseh ma`aseh v'reishit*

Blessed be You YHVH/Adonai our God, Ruler of all space and time, maker of the work of Creation

For the onset of totality, when the sun's *`atarah* becomes visible:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שְׂכֹחוֹ וְגִבּוֹרְתוֹ וְזִיווֹ מְלֵא עוֹלָם

*Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha'olam
shekocho ug'vurato v'zivo malei olam*

Blessed be You YHVH/Adonai our God, Ruler of all space and time, whose power and might and radiance fill the universe.

Eclipse 2017 — reflections, Scripture and midrash

A prayer:

May the revelation of the sun's wings bring us healing, as it says, וְזָרְחָה לְכֶם יְרֵאֵי שָׁמַיִם — “And the sun of righteousness will shine for you and will bring healing in its wings, and you will go out and gambol like calves set free.” (Malachi 3:20/4:2) May we recognize with awe the grandeur of Your works, as it says, וְרָאוּ מִי בְרָא אֱלֹהִים — “Lift on high your eyes and see: Who created these?” (Isaiah 40:26) so that we may filled with כֹּחַ אַמִּיץ courageous strength to heal the Earth from human destruction. May salvation arise for the heavens that shield us (atmosphere), so that sun's rays will shine for blessing for us and for all life.

The eclipse of 2017 also precedes the beginning of the new moon of Elul, the New Year for animals. These verses connect the sun and moon and heavenly bodies with the creatures on Earth:

Nehemiah 9:6

The hosts of the heavens bow before God

אֲתָהּ הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדְּךָ אֶתְ עֲשִׂיתָ (ק אֲתָהּ עֲשִׂיתָ) אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם וְכָל-צְבָאָם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הַיָּמִים וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם, וְאֲתָהּ מְחִיָּה אֶת-כָּלָם; וְצָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם, לְךָ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִיִּים

You are the One YHVH, alone by yourself you made the heavens, the heavens (beyond) the heavens and all their host, the Earth and all that is upon her, the seas and all that is in them, and You give live to them all, and to You do the host of the heavens bow.

Psalms 104:19-24

יֵט עֲשֵׂה יָרַח לְמוֹעֲדִים שֶׁשֶׁשׁ יָדַע מְבוֹאוֹ: (כ) תִּשְׁתַּחֲשָׁךְ וַיְהִי לַיְלָה בְּרוֹתְרַמֵּשׁ כָּל-חֵיתוֹ-יַעַר: (כא) הַכִּפִּירִים שֹׁאֲגִים לְטָרֶף וּלְבִקֵּשׁ מֵאֵל אֲכָלָם: (כב) תִּזְרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יֵאֱסָפוּן וְאֵל-מְעוֹנֹתָם יִרְבְּצוּן: (כג) יֵצֵא אָדָם לְפַעֲלוֹ וּלְעַבְדָּתוֹ עַד־עֶרֶב: (כד) מִה־רִבּוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ וַיְהוֶה בָּלֵם בְּחֻכְמָה עֲשִׂיתָ מְלָאָה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיָנְךָ

Who made the moon for seasons; the sun knew its setting. You set darkness and it became night; through it all the wild animals of the forest creep. The lion cubs roar for prey, and for seeking their food from God. You make the sun shine and they gather themselves and into their dens they crouch. A human goes out to their work, and to their service, until evening. How diverse are Your works YHVH! All of them You made with Wisdom; the Earth is filled with Your possessions!

Psalm 19:2-7

The heavens declare God's glory

(ב) הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֱלֹהִים וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדָיו מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ: (ג) יוֹם לְיוֹם יִבְיַע אֱמֶר וְלַיְלָה לְלַיְלָה יִחְוֶה־דַעַת: (ד) אֵין־אֱמֶר וְאֵין דְּבָרִים לְבַלִּי נִשְׁמַע קוֹלָם: (ה) בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ וְיֵצֵא קוֹם וּבְקֶצֶה תִּבְל מְלִיָּהֶם לְשֵׁמֶשׁ שָׁם־אֶהְל בָּהֶם: (ו) וְהוּא בְּחַתָּן יֵצֵא מִחַתָּתוֹ יֵשִׁישׁ כְּגִבּוֹר לְרוּץ אֶרֶץ: (ז) מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמוֹצָאוֹ וְתִקְוַתּוֹ עַל־קְצוֹתָם וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִחַמָּתוֹ:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the works of God's hands are retold by the sky. Day to day utters speech, and night to night gives life to knowledge. There is no speaking and there are no words — their voice (goes out) without being heard. In the all Earth their rays go out, and to the edge of the world their words, for the sun God made a tent in them. And he goes out like a groom from his canopy, like a warrior to run his course. From the edge of the heavens is his going out and his highest height is at their extremes, and there is none hidden from his heat.

Yalkut Shimoni 396

Why is it that Moses could not behold God's face?

ומה השמש שהוא אחד מאלף אלפים ורבוה רבון ממשמשין שמשמשין לפניו אין כל בריה יכולה להסתכל בו הקב"ה שזיוו מלא עולם על אחת כמה וכמה ואימתי הוא מגלה כבודו כשיאבדו אלילים מן העולם

Just as with the sun, which is just one among thousands of thousands and millions of million of servants that serve before the One — no creature is able to stare at the sun, (so too) the Holy One blessed be, whose radiance fills the universe, is all the more so (impossible to see). But then when will the Holy One reveal this glory? When breathless (false) gods are purged from the world.

Baal Shem Tov, Keter Shem Tov 1, 246

Why is God called "sun and shield"?

It's written: "Sun and Shield are *YHVH Elohim*" (Ps 84:11). It's explained: the name *Havayah (YHVH)* is called sun/*shemesh*...and what's written, "sun and shield", means that there is something like a barrier protecting against the light of the sun. The sun is like an image of *Hashem (YHVH)*, meaning to say, that it is impossible to look on the sun, because of the greatness of his light's brightness... Similarly so is the brightness of the name *HVYH*: its light is very great...therefore it was necessary to contract it and limit it within the name *Elohim* — אלהים — the same gematria/numerology (=86) of Nature *Hateva* הַטֵּבַע, which is the shield.

Maimonides/Rambam, Guide for the Perplexed 1:54

A last word: we know God by knowing God's creation, or, God's goodness = the goodness of Creation itself

When Moshe asked for knowledge of God's attributes, God told him: "I will make all My goodness / *kol tuvi* pass before you" (Ex 33:19) "All My goodness" means the display to Moshe of all existing beings of Creation, about which it says: "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it is very good." By their display, I mean that Moshe would be able to apprehend their nature and the way they are mutually connected, so that he will know how God governs them in general and in detail.