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## **A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Hillel D. Gold**

Friday April 12, 2024 ~ Parsha: Tazria

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

### **Thoughts on the Eclipse and passing the Six-month Threshold of “The War”**

Monday, April 8, was a most anticipated day by millions, especially Americans, myself included. It was the final time until 2044 that a total solar eclipse would be experienced in North America. People traveled far and near to find spots to view the eclipse. The excitement was palpable. I could even feel that excitement as I followed the special coverage here in Jerusalem. But in reality, Jewish tradition does not embrace excitement at the thought of a solar eclipse. It was, for the ancient rabbis, a time of darkness and uncertainty.

The great 16<sup>th</sup> century rabbi, Rabbi Yehuda Loew, maintains that the Sages understood that the phenomenon is natural, but the Talmud is explaining the “reason of the reason,” that is, why God created the orbits in such a way as to produce occasional eclipses. He explains that light symbolizes reality and existence, and darkness symbolizes chaos and illusion. Providing humans with freedom of will, God knew that sin would be inevitable, and that people would often choose chaos over order, and illusion over reality. God created a system that would remind us regularly that our choices can create darkness, even at times when there should be light.

We as a nation here in Israel, as well as Jews around the world, have been ensconced in a period of prolonged darkness, now measuring over 180 days. Though we are now just days before Pesach, we are still deeply affected by the events that took place here on Simchat Torah, with the wanton destruction, torture, and murder of over 1,200 people, most of whom were Jews, and the subsequent loss of over 250 members of the Israel Defense Forces in the time since then protecting our State and trying to free the abductive captives, whether they are alive or not. The light of what had been a beautiful Sukkot holiday went out with a flash, as the sun’s light quickly went dark on April 8. The light symbolizing the comfort that Jews have felt in the United States has also been diminished over these past six months. These last several months have been a time of great darkness, a darkness which humanity has itself voluntarily created. We now read of individuals afraid to go out in public wearing a Star of David pendant or a kippah and expressing their Jewishness due to fear of being harmed, either physically or emotionally, or both. We hear of students being intimidated in their schools simply because they are Jews, and we read or hear of individuals

threatening Jews merely because of their existence. Rallies are held in front of synagogues and in town squares intimidating Jews, leaving Jews feeling intimidated and feeling threatened. The light that made the US such a special place for Jews has shrunk, not unlike what the sun did on Eclipse Day, when the moon passed over it.

Great uncertainty hangs over us like humidity in a rain forest. What are the long-range prospects for Israel? For Diaspora Jewry? The current situation that Hamas' actions have brought, now lasting **over six months** feels like the period of totality that people were looking forward to experiencing during the eclipse, but for Jews, this period of totality is neither exciting, nor is it only 3 minutes long, nor does it have a definite moment of conclusion.

The question arises will we ever see a conclusion to the world-wide Jew hatred that has become the norm of 5784? Will a future light eventually be able to overcome the current darkness? Many are familiar with the *Bracha* that immediately follows the recitation of *Barchu* at the beginning of Shacharit. "yotzer or u'vorei hoshech oseh shalom oo'vorei et ha-kol". (Praised are You O God who is the creator of light and of darkness, who makes peace and creates all things.) Lesser known is the fact that this blessing is a paraphrase of a verse from Isaiah. There, in the Bible, the phrase is "yotzer or u'vorei hoshech, oseh shalom oo'vorei ra". In the Bible, the word is **ra** (evil). The composers of the siddur felt that this wording was too harsh to be included in our daily liturgy and so **ra**, evil, was replaced by "ha-kol" (all things). But it seems that there is currently an undercurrent of **ra** in the world at this point in time, regardless of whether or not this concept is expressed explicitly in our liturgy.

On the day after "Eclipse Day" Jews observed Rosh Hodesh Nisan, the first day of the Jewish month of Nisan, a day of particular significance and hope. Nisan is the first month of the Jewish year. It is also the month in which we observe Pesach, and the month that marks our redemption from slavery. We Jews were released from bondage once during Nisan. Will or can that miracle again be duplicated?

May we, *acheinu kol beit Yisrael*, the entirety of the House of Israel, in Israel and in the Diaspora, be privileged to see the darkness that engulfs us soon fade and for there to be a return to light reminiscent of the sun emerging from the moon's shadow at the conclusion of the eclipse. This is our hope and our prayer as we begin to prepare for Passover, and as we continue to mark the ongoing war with Hamas and the cruel abduction of innocent Israelis now held hostage for over 186 days. Let us all prayer for their release and reunification with their families and loved ones.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Hillel D. Gold