

# ETERNAL CYCLES

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

*"And God created the two great lights, the sun to serve during the day and the moon to serve during the night...And God saw that what He created was good (tov)." (Bereshith 1:16, 18)*

Each month when the new moon first appears we must recite a blessing in which we proclaim that God is true, therefore His actions are true. How does the reappearance of the moon express the truth of God's actions? Furthermore, our Sages tell us that when a person recites this blessing with the proper intention it is as if he greeted the Divine Presence.<sup>1</sup> Why is so much significance attributed to this particular blessing?

Every month the moon seemingly disappears, only to return the following month. Within the consistent and unchanging cycles of the moon, we see clearly that the handiwork of God is true. The perpetual repetition of this pattern can bring us to the ultimate recognition that the Creator Himself is True.<sup>2</sup> Because the lunar cycles can make such a striking impression, our Sages compared making this blessing to greeting the Divine Presence itself.

The antithesis of this consistency is false testimony, when people create a bogus reality through their own fabrications. Consequently, the Gemara says that if the Jewish People offer false testimony in a beith din, they are punished with an eclipse of the Moon.<sup>3</sup> Since they have associated themselves with falsehood, God reciprocates in a manner which parallels their behavior, by altering the usual functioning of His creation.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Sanhedrin 42a.

2. Rashi ibid.

3. Sukkah 29a

4. In this day and age we may think that an eclipse of the moon is not an interruption of the continuous functioning of creation. We consider it a normal, natural and predictable part of the functioning of creation, so how can it be a punishment for anything? The answer to this conundrum revolves around the issue of yediah (foreknowledge) and bechirah (free choice). God knows who will offer false testimony, and when that will take place, so therefore He specifically etched lunar eclipses into the universe at those times. The fact that we can predict it does not mean that it is not a punishment.

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