

Interfaith Voices GT Column: The Great Eclipse was a Great Unifier

By Alice Henderson Rampton

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The Great American Eclipse has come and gone, but for those who simply gazed up for 1 minute and 40 seconds on August 21, 2017, it will be remembered forever. Like others, I was awestruck. It was more magnificent than imagined. In the days following the eclipse, I found that people wanted to rekindle the memory of that event, whether in a discussion with the young man at the grocery checkout or a neighbor walking by or someone pumping gas. We all wanted to hold onto that vision.

Even when the skies darkened and the temperature dropped, the sun was still so powerful that the small white ring of light kept us from being in total darkness. Later, I reflected how this applies in our individual lives. Often, in our darkest moments of grief or discouragement, a sliver of light can provide hope and direction. Sometimes that gift comes from the depths of our soul and sometimes from a friend, family member, counselor, or stranger.

The “Great Eclipse” was a great equalizer. Unless you found yourself with a cloud cover or without sight, everyone in the Path of Totality had an equal opportunity for an exquisite natural phenomenon. Specific income level, educational degree, political party, age or gender were not prerequisites when it came to seeing the eclipse. In a nation torn apart by natural calamities and political strife, the eclipse brought everyone together on an equal playing field. The scriptures say that we are to become like a little child and the eclipse allowed us to do that. My sense of awe was similar to my five-year-old granddaughter sitting nearby. A sense of unity prevailed as we appreciated this event together.

For those who believe in a God or Supreme Being, the power of divine creation was evident in the eclipse. But finding our place in that majestic creation is a dilemma. As humans, are we also majestic? Or simply specks in a vast universe? Elie Wiesel in his book, *Wise Men and Their Tales: Portraits of Biblical, Talmudic, and Hasidic Masters*, relays the following story: “Every person should have a piece of paper in each of his two pockets. On one piece, he should write down the Talmudic saying ‘The whole world was created for my sake alone’; but the other should carry the biblical verse ‘I am but dust and ashes.’” Wiesel went on to say, it is important not to confuse the pockets. I love this advice. The eclipse seemed to repeat this message. There was so much grandeur and beauty that allowed individual participation and yet we were literally overshadowed by something much bigger.

The eclipse needs no symbolic interpretation, but personally, the power of love and unity were evident that morning. I turn to the Bible and the wisdom of Jesus Christ when asked what is the greatest commandment. As relevant today, as in biblical times, the Savior replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Gordon B. Hinckley, former President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has said, “Love is like the Polar Star. In a changing world, it is a constant.” Being a speck in the universe, none of us have the power to re-create an eclipse, but we do have the power to try and re-create that sense of one-ness with a loving Heavenly Father and take his light and love to others.