

## **Why the Moon is Small and Dark When the Sun is Big and Shiny** *A Midrash for Rosh Chodesh*

In the beginning of the world, the sun and the moon were created as two great lights in the sky. But the moon was jealous of the sun and wanted to be the only light. One story says that She Who Created the Worlds was so angered by the moon's jealousy that She took away the moon's light. The moon would be lit only by the reflection of the sun when their paths crossed. That was the punishment She Who Created the Worlds created for the jealous moon.

Now that is what we might be told when we ask why the moon is small and dark, but what we are told is often not the same as what is true. The moon would no more be jealous of the sun than an oyster would be of an elm tree. Each is simply different than the other, each with her own work in the weaving of creation.

Tonight is Rosh Chodesh, the night when we welcome the moon back into her growing cycle. And now you want to know – why is the moon so small and dark when the sun is big and shiny? Nu, I'll tell you what I think is the true story. Who's to know for sure?

It is true that the moon and the sun started out as two great lights circling in the sky. They did discuss their light, and maybe sometimes the discussions became a little heated or loud. But there was never any jealousy between the moon and the sun. It was simply that they had traveled the same path since the beginning of time, always with so much to say to each other. You know how it can be with two old friends who have discussed everything a million times but still have lots of time to fill. They do love each other, but they also love nothing better than to talk, discuss, dispute – maybe even to have a good argument.

So there they are, the moon and the sun, circling, circling, always together. And to tell you the truth, maybe they are getting just a little bored. As they circle, they stir up dust, and the dust begins to form something solid. A tiny planet – our planet – the Earth. Or, if you prefer,

knowing they were bored and had millennia to travel, She Who Created the Worlds created our earth to give them something new to talk about.

However it happened, our little home emerged, and the sun and the moon were delighted to discuss the new planet. They would comment as the oceans were created, and the continents, the mountains and the huge forests. A few million circles later, they noticed other forms of life on what had been a pile of nothingness not so long before. They delighted in telling each other about what they saw as they passed the earth. It was such a pleasure to have this new planet to talk about. Each saw things the other hadn't seen, and for many cycles they had so much to say. But soon they wanted to get a better view of their world. It was hard to see much from so far away, and by now the clouds had been created and they blocked the view.

On one trip the sun decided to move in closer to the earth. Not much closer, you understand, but enough to begin a burning heat in the air, so hot that the earth below became parched and dry. The forests turned to ash, the waters dried up, and the rich black earth burned to a tawny golden color. As soon as the sun saw the damage she had caused she pulled herself back. But it was too late. That part of the earth seemed to be dead. For several million cycles the sun was so full of remorse and despair that there was no consoling her. She would barely speak to her beloved friend as they traveled together.

Time passed. The moon noticed changes in the burned spot. She observed through many cycles, saying nothing to the sun. Finally, the moon tried to persuade the sun to look down as they passed. The sun never answered, staring silently into space. The sun couldn't bear to see the damage she had caused. But the moon kept talking about changes and new life. One day as they passed the barren spot, the sun gathered her courage and looked down.

What she saw shocked her so much that she wobbled on her path! The burnt wasteland was gone, replaced by something new – dry, very dry, but definitely alive. There were a few trees of some new tougher-looking kind. There were patches of water and there were animals.

The sun was so thrilled at what she saw she began a song of exaltation. The moon caught her joy, and together they sang the haunting melody for many cycles.

Then, for a while, it was like old times. The sun and the moon would talk and discuss and, true, sometimes they even argued about what they had seen. How could such a burning waste become such fertile ground? They began to feel that this spot was special. It seemed to be dead, but instead revived and developed new life. They wondered what would happen next. How would the creatures below live? How did they spend their time? Had they learned the joys of talk and discussion, maybe even the pleasure of a loving argument?

Time passed. After another million cycles the sun and the moon again ran out of things to say. What they could see from so far away was so little and faint. Both of them knew how deadly it would be to get closer. But they both felt so drawn to this little planet and the creatures below. They dreamed of ways to get closer as they circled, circled, circled in silence.

One day the moon announced that she had a plan. Since she was the smaller of the two of them, her capacity to carry light was smaller. She was too small to carry the sun's light, but she could give her own light to the sun to carry. Then the moon would be dark and cool and she could go very close to the earth, listen and watch without doing harm to the creatures living there.

The sun laughed with delight at the moon's plan until she realized that they would no longer be companions as they had been since before there was time. The moon might learn everything about the earth: the kinds of trees upon it, and the animal creatures, but the knowledge would remain unshared. The moon would remain alone, dark and cool, hanging in the sky over the earth.

The sun and the moon grew melancholy, because they knew that knowledge without companionship is a cold barren comfort. They could see only two terrible choices: to travel together with no chance for new knowledge, or to move towards new learning but remain each alone. The sun and the moon circled in despondent silence for cycles unnumbered.

Very much later the moon spoke. She said, "Beloved friend, I may have a solution. I don't know where the idea came from..." Now some say that She Who Created the Worlds grew filled with compassion for the sun and the moon and planted the idea in the moon's dreams. Who would say? Wherever it came from, this was the moon's idea: she would give her light to the sun to carry, and set out on a new smaller circle around the earth. The sun would continue on their shared path, but make her cycle a bit more oval than round. These new paths would cross once each time the moon circled the earth. Every cycle they would travel together, though only for a very short time.

The sun smiled when she realized what a good plan this was. She sang a silent thank you to She Who Created the Worlds for helping them with their dilemma. The sun knew that she and the moon would lose their constant companionship, but she understood they would get closer to the earth and the creatures below. And when they met each cycle they would have new things to share. They could talk, they could discuss, maybe they could even have a good argument. It seemed like a very good plan.

The sun and the moon discussed this plan for many cycles, tossing the idea and turning it, sometimes simply moving together in silence as they contemplated their separation. Around and around they moved, sailing through their indecision until finally they turned and looked at each other.

The sun said, "My friend, my beloved Moon, I will miss your constancy more than I can say. I'll long for our time together. I'll treasure my time alone to think about what you tell me. And I'll hope that when we meet we can talk, we can discuss, maybe we can even have a little argument."

As the moon's great round eyes filled with tears she turned to her dearest friend and said, "I give you my light to hold for me in safekeeping. I'll study the earth and the creatures upon her. I'll tell them about us, how we've traveled together since before there was time. I'll

ask them to honor our cycles, the times we're together, our paths when we part. Through your light, I'll show them our beauty. Through me, they'll know both of us."

With these last words the moon began a great wrenching change in her path. She tore herself away from the sun, feeling as though she were tearing herself in two. As she moved farther away she took her light and tossed it through the sky to her beloved companion. As the sun caught the moonlight, she grew so bright that the moon was in awe. "We are beautiful together," the moon thought as her path took her farther away.

The moon began her cycles around the earth. She shined brightly with the sun's reflected light. Once her path was steady, the moon began a song to the earth. She sang about how she and the sun had traveled together since before there was time. She sang of their loneliness, of their yearning to learn more about earth. The moon sang the story of their parting and their reunions. Without cease, the moon sang her story, her love song, to earth. She was silent only during the moments when she and the sun met, circling together briefly as they had since before there was time.

Now you might ask, "How much did the creatures below understand the moon's song?" Well, the moon never knew, and I couldn't say. Do we know that the dark of the moon means that the moon and the sun are together, sharing their stories? Do we see that each month as the moon loses her light we witness the reunion of lovers? Have we learned that the cycle of darkness then light was created from the love of the sun for the moon?

Each month we pay homage to the path of the moon as she wanes and grows dark. At Rosh Chodesh we welcome her return from darkness to light.

The old stories tell us of jealousy and punishment when we ask why the moon has no light of her own. But maybe it's because of the love of the moon for the sun, and their love of a good argument. Which story is right? Who could say for sure?