

Lessons from solar eclipse 2024

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On April 8, 2024, a solar eclipse visible from much of the continental United States. The path of totality passed through a number of population centers including Dallas, Texas. As of a month prior to the event, there were no hotel rooms available in the Dallas area. Millions of people travelled to Dallas to view this eclipse. Figure 1 is a photograph taken during totality from Dallas using a phone camera and solar filter. I will present three lessons to be learned from this photo.

The first lesson from the photo comes from Charles Barkley who “dismissed the phenomenon [eclipse] as being for losers.”¹ Barkley’s rationale was, “Hey, we’ve all seen darkness before. Stop it.” The photo illustrates the splendor of a very rare event. Millions of people did not travel to Dallas to see darkness for an extra 4 minutes on Monday. Those people valued the experience of seeing something very rare and beautiful. As one of the observers, I was not even aware of the darkness during totality as I was mesmerized by the splendor of the Sun’s corona, can be seen only during a total eclipse. Although the Moon casts its shadow somewhere all the time, the image in the photo can be observed on Earth only a very small percentage of time—something like 4 minutes every 10 years and only in select locations. Granted, there were many more people who chose NOT to watch the eclipse—for those people the effort and expense was not worth the difference between a live experience and a recorded photo or video. The beauty of the photo is purely subjective. The extra value of a live experience vs. a recording is purely subjective. Mr. Barkley should be grateful for this subjectivity as he would not have made a lot of money playing a game unless a few people were willing to pay to experience and witness his performance. Live performances offer “something” that people value beyond

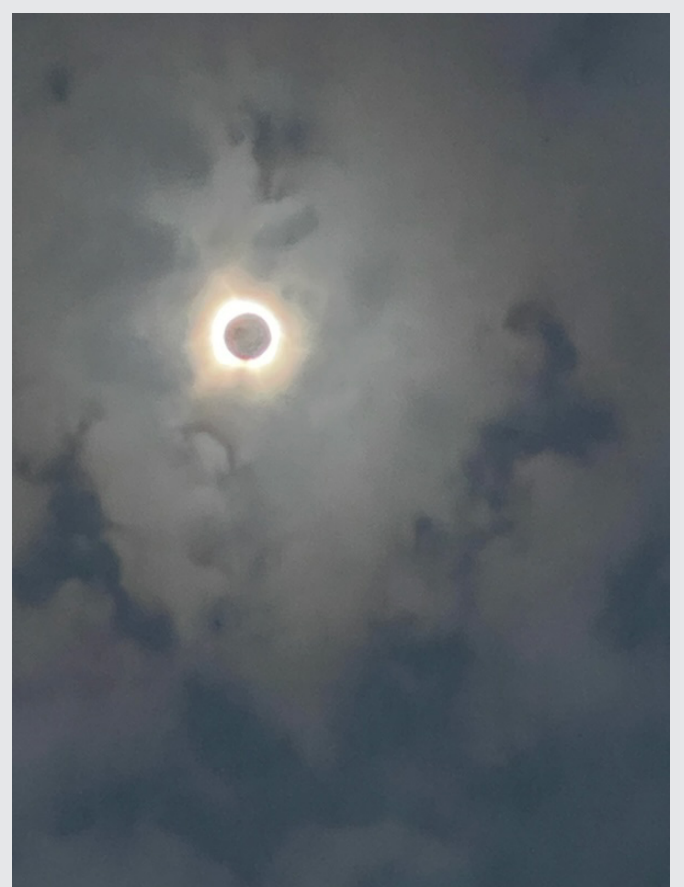


Figure 1. Solar eclipse during totality as seen from Dallas, Texas on April 8, 2024.

what can be obtained from a recording. It is true for athletic competitions, it is true for concerts (rock and orchestral), and it is true for a solar eclipse.

The second lesson is spiritual. Notice in the photo that the Sun is completely surrounded by clouds. One hour before the eclipse started in Dallas (two hours before totality) the sky was so completely overcast that I was unable to determine where the Sun was in the sky. I prayed that God would let me witness this event—and the clouds parted. Throughout Texas people were amazed how the clouds seem to part during the eclipse and come back together immediately after

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DOI: 10.12746/swrccc.v12i51.1309

the eclipse. My wife and I had to drive through thunderstorms to return to Lubbock following the eclipse. Did God answer my prayer? Did God answer a similar prayer by another person? Did Allah answer a prayer by a Muslim? Or was the fortuitous parting of clouds a matter of serendipity. Science cannot answer these questions; they are questions of faith. When the eclipse started—about an hour before totality—the Sun was visible about half the time. Would the Sun be visible during the 3–4 minutes of totality? Looking at the photo, one would think that the chance of seeing any part of totality was a longshot. For the entire duration of totality, the Sun was unobstructed by cloud cover. I am grateful that I was able to witness this event.

The third lesson has to do with charity and cooperation. I spent considerable time the day prior to the eclipse scouting out convenient locations to my daughter's apartment for viewing. I set up our chairs early on Monday morning, which is why I was aware of the cloud cover. About the time the eclipse started a few neighbors came out. They did not have safety glasses. We had plenty of extra pairs. I had safety glasses because some entrepreneur realized a profit could be made by selling them. I could have attempted to recoup my cost at the last minute, but the thought never entered my mind. Most likely, had I attempted to charge for the glasses, the neighbors would have watched the event on TV. Was I a sucker for giving up the valuable glasses for free? Charity is given freely because the giver gets contentment or pleasure from being kind. However, in this case, I was materially rewarded for my charity. It turned

out that one of the neighbors was a wizard with a phone camera. My wife was struggling to make the camera and filter work as one cannot see anything (other than the Sun) while wearing the safety glasses. The neighbor, however, was able to work the camera and filter by feel and took many beautiful pictures. The photo in Figure 1 is one of those pictures. The photo would not have happened without my charity. Sometimes charity comes back full circle. Groups of people can accomplish many things through cooperation that would not be possible if everyone were isolated and self-centered.

Keywords: eclipse, sun, darkness, charity

Article citation: Berdine G. Lessons from solar eclipse 2024. *The Southwest Respiratory and Critical Care Chronicles* 2024;12(51):29–30

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Submitted: 4/9/2024

Accepted: 4/10/2024

Conflicts of interest: none

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1. Charles Barkley Disses 'Losers' Who Watched Solar Eclipse. <https://www.si.com/college/2024/04/09/charles-barkley-eclipse-losers-uconn-purdue>. Accessed 4-9-2024.