



The Torah speaks in Parashat Bereishit of God's creation of "the two large luminaries: the large luminary to govern by day, and the small luminary to govern by night" (1:16). The Sages were troubled by the reference to the sun and moon in this verse as "the two large luminaries." As Rashi cites in his commentary, the Rabbis explain that the sun and the moon were initially created equal in size, as suggested by the phrase "the two large luminaries." The moon, however, objected to its having to share its "authority" with another being, and in response God reduced the moon's size. Hence, the "two large luminaries" ultimately became "the large luminary...and the small luminary."

The *Da'at Zekeinim Mi-Ba'alei Ha-Tosefot* commentary associates this remark with a passage in the Talmud (Shabbat 88b) which states, "Those who are insulted but do not insult, who hear ridicule and do not respond – regarding them the verse states, 'and those who love Him [shall be] like the sun going forth in all its might' (Shofetim 5:31)." The Talmud points to the sun as the paradigm of the quality of *ne'elavim ve-einam olevim* – ignoring insults. As opposed to the moon, the sun accepted its "partial" authority status. It felt no need for honor and distinction, and humbly consented to whichever role it was assigned. Accordingly, those who show no interest in fame and prestige, and are not preoccupied with their social rank, are likened to "the sun going forth in all its might." Like the sun, they gladly accept their stature without seeking further fame, notoriety or power.

This insight brings to mind Maimonides' remarks in his commentary to Avot (4:4) concerning the virtue of humility. He reiterates in this context the view he expressed in his introduction to Avot (chapter 4) concerning the importance of extreme humility. Whereas with regard to other human qualities it is advisable to conduct oneself with moderation, when it comes to humility Maimonides advocates an extreme approach, distancing oneself as far as possible from arrogance. To exemplify this ideal, Maimonides relates a startling incident of a wise scholar who voyaged with a group of successful merchants. He was consigned to the lowest, dingiest quarters on the ship, and at some point in the voyage one of the wealthy passengers relieved himself on this scholar. The scholar testifies to feeling no anger or resentment towards that merchant; his self-esteem and temperament were unaffected by the otherwise offensive treatment he had suffered. Maimonides comments, "There is no doubt that this is the ultimate lowliness of spirit, such that one distances himself from arrogance."

The Torah ideal of humility means following the example set by the sun, of not feeling threatened by the competing statures of others. It means feeling confident in oneself regardless of the recognition he has earned, and irrespective of how others perceive him. The moon produces no light of its own, and can only reflect the light of the sun. Similarly, many people cannot feel satisfaction independently; they depend upon the approval and respect of others to "shine" and experience joy. But the humble person, like the sun, is capable of shining its own light, of feeling secure and content regardless of

how others view him. Only such a person can feel consistent joy and satisfaction, and radiate confidence and vitality "like the sun going forth in all its might."