

The Torah tells us about the Creation.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת-הַמְּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמַשְׁלַת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת-הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַשְׁלַת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים:

“And the Lord created two giant luminaries; a great luminary to rule over ‘Day’ and a smaller luminary to rule over ‘Night’ and also (rule over) the stars.” (Genesis 1:16).

This verse appears to have an inherent contradiction in its terminology. We already learned “And the Lord called the light ‘Day’ and the darkness He called ‘Night.’” (Genesis 1:5). Further, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate Day from Night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:14-15). Clearly, the luminaries are meant to shine light upon the earth. Giant luminaries will provide a great amount of light. Concordantly, it is contradictory for a ‘luminary’ to rule over the night. Night is “darkness” (verse 5) so that ruling over it with light will make it ‘Day.’

We know that the second ‘smaller’ luminary is the moon. The moon does provide light during the night, and it is still dark. How then, can that be considered “ruling” over night? Additionally, how can the sun (the primary luminary mentioned in our verse) rule over Day? If Day is light (verse 5) then how can the sun compete? Day is already light. Perhaps if the verse said “a luminary to create day” or “herald in day” it would be more easily understood. How can the sun rule over day (light ruling over light)? The term *mimshelas* to rule is seemingly incongruous.

The verse is further conflicted when we read the next two verses. “And the Lord set them in the firmament of the sky to light up the earth, to rule the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And the Lord saw that this was good.” (Ibid 1:17-18). Again, how can a great luminary separate between day and night, if both provide light, and both day and night will have light? Further, they were set to provide light and then also to separate light from dark. These appear to be contradictory functions.

We also know (or at least presume based on the best observations—i.e. scientific study—we have) that while the sun is a star, the moon is not a star. How can the moon, a non-star, rule over the stars? If there were two luminaries, they should both be stars, one larger and one smaller.

The Gemara Chullin 60b add a further complexity. “Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi raises a contradiction between two verses. It is written: “And the Lord made the two great lights” (Genesis 1:16), and it is also written in the same verse: “The greater light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night,” indicating that only one was great. Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi explains: When the Lord first created the sun and the moon, they were equally bright. Then, the moon said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: ‘Master of the Universe, is it possible for two kings to serve with one crown? One of us must be subservient to the other.’ He therefore said to her, i.e., the moon: If so, go and diminish yourself.” This Gemara clearly teaches that the moon was as a great a luminary as the sun, just as bright. How would it be possible for another sun to ‘rule’ over the night, to separate light from darkness? Night is darkness and a great luminary would light it up. Further, the moon does not create night as the sun creates the day. It is hard to suggest the moon ‘rules’ over night when it does not create darkness. We also still need to

understand the *havamina* the initial thought in Creating the moon equal to the sun to fulfill the same goals of separating day from night and establishing the holidays/*moadim*.

Rashi learns the Gemara that that the moon “complained” and so was reduced as punishment. The stars mentioned in our verse were to serve as some sort of compensation to the moon for this reduction. (Stars do not create a lot of light, either.) Daas Zekeinim agrees that the reduction in size was a punishment. Rashi and Daas Zekeinim are difficult to understand because what type of compensation are luminaries that do not give off any useful light? Also, the stars are actually supernova stars, larger than our sun. Our moon cannot be seen as ruling over them. Additionally, if the moon was punished, why did she deserve a compensation prize of stars that really do not do much in terms of providing light anyway?

Bartanura learns that our verse implies that at first the moon was equal to the sun but then was made smaller. The stars are her army to compensate her for her reduction in size.

Bekhor Shor learns “the moon and the sun were both massive luminaries. One was simply smaller than the other.” According to this, the moon was always meant to be smaller, provide less light, and would be able to separate the light from dark; day from night. Rashbam also learns that our verse means the “smaller luminary;” still great in size but smaller than the sun.

Chizkuni explains the verse in a way to understand the role of the sun and the moon. “The large luminaries, according to Rashi, this means that they were originally of equal size and strength. Other commentators say that the meaning of the word גדולים is that they remained as large as they had been created. Rashi also states that the moon was downsized as it had claimed that it is impossible for two queens to rule side by side with equal powers as this would lead to jealousy and friction between them. HaShem agreed and suggested that the moon downsize itself

in order for harmony to continue. Some commentators claim that the moon downsized itself at the beginning of each monthly orbit. 'Great luminaries' is a term used to describe how the sun and moon appear to us when compared to the stars. "To rule by day" is to enable the fruit to ripen due to receiving the sun's warmth. "To rule by night" is in order to cool off the plants so that they would not generate worms. The light created on the first "day," could not be described as "ruling," as it did not generate any fruit, or otherwise demonstrate tangible benefits to man."

Based on the Chizkuni's explanation, the moon was created as a smaller luminary to give light to the night, but also to rule over it, i.e. helping plants with the night cycle and creating oxygen and absorbing carbon dioxide. The sun rules the day by providing light for photosynthesis. We can start to understand how our verse gives the essence of the great luminaries.

Ibin Ezra says, "The sun and the moon are called the great lights in contradistinction to the stars." From man's perspective on earth, they provide much more light than do the stars. Taking on the obvious, the stars are far greater in size and light than the moon, he says, "The sun rules during the day and not at night because it is not seen. Conversely, the light of the moon and stars are not seen during the day. One may ask, do not the astronomers teach that all the stars are larger than the moon? Why, then, is it written the great lights? The implication from Scripture is clearly that the moon is larger than the stars. The answer is that the term great does not refer to size but to light, and the light of the moon is many times greater than their light because of its proximity to the earth. Thus we see that Scripture describes them as lights." Here the Ibin Ezra provides a clue as to why the moon is called a 'luminary' and how even a luminary can rule the nighttime.

Radak says the same thing. The moon is great in compared to the other stars because of its proximity to the earth. It does not give off any of its own light but reflects the light of the sun, thus it can still be termed a ‘luminary.’ The sun is by far greater in size and in creating light than the moon is, and thus it rules over day and is the larger luminary. The moon is the smaller luminary, per our verse. Further, it says “He made” in our verse because they were already ‘created’ earlier. They were made to be placed in our solar system’s firmament to provide light to planet earth. “When the Torah speaks of ממשלה in connection with these luminaries, it refers to the commanding influence the light of these luminaries have during the periods when they are functioning as providers of light.”

The Ramban and Sforno give more reflection to how and when the sun and moon were created. This will help us understand their true function and essence. Ramban teaches that, our verse “teaches us that these lights were not made from the body of the firmament, rather, they were bodies set into it.” They also need not be made of the same substance, both to be stars.

The Sforno teaches, “The Torah first writes: ויעש, seeing that up until that point sun and moon had simply been part of all the other celestial bodies which had been created on the second day. This is the reason why at this stage the Torah does not call the development of these luminaries an act of creation, ויברא or something similar, but merely writes ויעש, which describes the completion of a process that had already been begun previously. At this stage, HaShem singled out these two luminaries from among all the planets and stars and assigned them their function. The word כי טוב “that it was good,” describes HaShem’s impression after He had removed these luminaries from their original place in the universe, given them spherical shape so that they can orbit, and function as luminaries.”

Creation having been conducted through *teva* / nature, we see that the masses were swirling in space, in the Great Light that was created (ibid. 1:3), then followed waters being separated (verse 6), mass forming into planets (verse 9), land masses rising out of water (verse 10), etc. It should be noted that Day and Night were created before the sun and the moon. The sun and the moon were set near earth merely to ‘rule’ over them.

Shadal (a great great nephew of Ramchal) says, “To rule the day and to rule the night means not that it should have ruler ship over the lowly beings, but rather that the day should be under the ruler ship of the sun and the night under the ruler ship of the moon. This means that the light of the day be from the sun and the light of the night from the moon.”

When parsing the words of the Gemara it appears the moon was correct. The prior verses 14 and 15 already said the purpose of the sun and the moon was to separate light from dark, day from night, and to set the days, nights, years, months, and eventual holidays/*moadim*. How can two great luminaries do that? It was a valid point by the moon. Further, it appears the moon won the argument, because she was made smaller and she is the one that the Jewish calendar follows. The lunar calendar is the Jewish calendar but also was followed by many great civilizations including the ancient Babylonian, Egyptian, and Chinese calendars. We also point out that HaShem did not reduce the moon. According to the Gemara, HaShem told the moon “reduce yourself.” Thus, the moon won the argument and was rewarded with being the one that days, night, months, and *moadim* are subjective to. Halachic night is not sunset but heralded in by the stars; months are based on the lunar cycle of waxing and waning—with the first of the month announced upon seeing the new moon. The new month is established by sighting the moon, even when it appears during daytime, and thus heralds in the new month. The *moadim* are based on

the months. (The English the word “month” is based on “moon.” In Hebrew the word *chodesh*/month is based on *new moon*.)

We can learn either that, (1) the argument by the moon was all part of creation, or (2) the moon was always its current size, or that (3) HaShem wanted two great luminaries from all the planets, asteroids, stars, and celestial bodies roving through the universe and the moon won the job by pointing out its smaller size lack of inherent light was important. The sun rules the day because it gives the light, helps plants grow and the weather cycle to flow. The moon rules the night because it provides some light and even in its disappearance it provides the much needed source for calculating months, years, and *moadim*.

The sun is super strong but can never appear in the night time. The moon, however, appears by daytime. It also can block out the sun through a solar eclipse. It is the moon that dominates all. We can derive from verses that the stars were also created earlier, the same time as the sun and moon. The moon rules over them because its light is greater in perspective with earth dwellers, and the months are based on it, while only *mazalos*/luck or destinies are based on the stars.

We can learn we all have our place. We are different sizes and have different talents. They are all useful and should be used to better ourselves and others and the world around us.