

Parsha Ponders

Devarim | July 21, 2023 | 3 Av 5783

Golden opportunity¹

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל-כל-ישראל בעבר הירדן בערבה מול סוף בין-פארן ובין-תפל ולבן וחצרת ודי זהב

These are the words that Moshe told all of Israel, across the Jordan River, in *Aravah*, across from the Reed Sea, between *Paran* and *Tofel*, and *Lavan*, and *Chatzeiros*, and *Di Zahav*²

In the beginning of *Sefer Devarim* we are told that Moshe spoke to the entire Jewish people. The Torah is extremely precise with the location of this speech. Rashi explains³ that in fact, the Torah is not telling us geographical information. Really, Moshe was rebuking the people. The places that the Torah is telling us are allusions to prior sins that the Jews committed. Focusing on the last one, *Di Zahav*, we are told that it is a reference to the sin of the Golden Calf. The hint is that the Jews had so much gold from the Egyptians, that they yelled out “Dai”, meaning “Enough!”. They didn’t know what to do with it, so they ended up making a Golden Calf as an idol⁴.

This teaching seems to contradict another one from our Sages⁵. A person doesn’t leave this world⁶ with half of their desires in their hand. A person will seemingly never come to a state of satiation when it comes to worldly possessions and desires. If so, how could it be possible that the Jews exclaimed, “Enough!”, when it came to gold? How could they ever be satisfied, and felt that they had enough⁷?

Rav Elchanan Wasserman gives a clever answer. Our Sages tell us⁸ that the primordial snake in the Garden of Eden implanted in Chava, also known Eve, a type of spiritual contamination. This impurity continued through her descendants, and is in all of mankind. Rav Elchanan opines that this impurity is what gives a person this insatiable thirst for physical pleasure. When the Jews stood at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, this contamination was removed. Since this impurity wasn’t put back into them⁹ until

¹ Based on [Sha’ar Elchanan Kovetz Ma’amarim 2:29](#), which is elucidating [Rav Elchanan Wasserman’s Kovetz He’aros Dugmaos Al Derech HaPeshat 8:6](#)

² [Deuteronomy 1:1](#)

³ [Rashi ad. loc.](#)

⁴ [Berachos 32a](#)

⁵ [Koheles Rabbah 1:33, 3:12](#)

⁶ [יציא מן העולם](#). For some reason many sources, for example [Chanukas HaTorah Likkutei Ma’amarei Chazal § 197](#), [Gra to Jonah 1:4](#) and [Esther 1:3](#), [Panim Yafos to Genesis 33:9](#), as well as [Rav Elchanan](#), quote this instead with the word [מת](#). The intent is the same, it’s just interesting they all misquote it the same way

⁷ See [Toldos Ya’akov Yosef Nasso § 13](#)

⁸ [Shabbos 146a](#); [Yevamos 103b](#); [Avodah Zarah 22b](#)

⁹ This idea is problematic, as the *gemarra* in [Avodah Zarah](#) implies that even today, the Jews don’t have this contamination. To fit this idea with the *gemarros* that simply say the contamination was removed, the [Chessed L’Avaraham Mayan 1 Nahar 13](#), as well as this great-grandson the [Chida](#) in his [Nitzotzei Oros to Zohar III parshas Vayikra](#) p. 14b § 5 say that the spiritual contamination wasn’t *fully* put back into the Jews. The [Chida](#) subsequently cites his ancestor for this suggestion. The [Ohr HaChaim to Exodus 32:19](#) says the same. Indeed, [Rav Reuven Margaliyos](#) in his [Nitzotzei Zohar ad. loc. § 4](#) and to [Zohar I parshas Bereishis](#) p. 52b § 7 explicitly says this resolves the issue with the *gemarra* in [Avodah Zarah](#). The [Be’er Yosef to Leviticus 25:1-3](#) sees other sources which also show the effects of the Sinaitic experience on the contamination to be still in place. See [Nedarim 20a](#) and [Yerushalmi Kiddushin 4:1](#). See also [UBacharta BaChaim ad. loc. § 22](#). For another resolution to the *gemarros*, see [Ohr Yechezkel Torah V’Da’as](#)

they sinned with the Golden Calf¹⁰, their reaction to the gold makes sense. When the Jews received the Torah, they no longer had this humanly instinct¹¹. They could be satisfied with the tremendous amount of gold in their possession, and not require any more. It's not surprising then that they exclaimed: "Enough!"¹²

Once the topic has been brought up, one could ask why then did Hashem give the Jews so much gold? Was it merely to test them to see if they would give in to their lusts? The Chasam Sofer explains¹³ the real purpose. Our Sages teach us¹⁴ that the verse, "The words of Koheles, the son of David, everything is vanity"¹⁵, begins with this introduction so that we can appreciate what the author saying. How could anyone say that everything is vain? Only someone who was the son of David, king of Israel, who was the king over the nation at its greatest, ruling over the city of Jerusalem. Only someone in that position, who had it all, could come to the conclusion that everything is vain.

The same is true for the Torah. We frequently recite the verse¹⁶ that the Torah is more precious than gold and sweeter than honey. How could the Jews say such a thing with certainty? To ensure their confidence in the Torah they were to receive, Hashem gave them an astronomical amount of gold. Hashem subsequently gave them the *mun*, which was sixty times sweeter than honey¹⁷. Only then did Hashem bring them to Mount Sinai. Having had exposure to all of this worldly pleasure, only then could the Jewish people fully appreciate how great the Torah is. It's truly more precious than gold, and sweeter than honey.

Good Shabbos

¹⁰ I believe this idea was made famous by the [Nefesh HaChaim](#) 1:6, as I see many sources bring it from there, without citing an earlier source. Indeed, the editions of [Nefesh HaChaim](#) I've seen don't cite anything earlier. Someone once suggested to me the source is the [Alshich](#) to [Leviticus](#) 21:1. However, I subsequently discovered that the source is the [Zohar](#), and it appears in many places, such as [Zohar](#) I *loc. cit.*, *ad. loc. parshas Chayei Sarah* p. 126b, [Zohar](#) II *parshas Ki Sisa* p. 193b, and [Zohar Chadash](#) *Rus* p. 83b.

As an aside, the [Chida](#) in his [Nitzotzei Oros](#) to [Zohar parshas Chayei Sarah loc. cit.](#) § 1 asks that it sounds like from these sources that even the women received the contamination again, even though we are taught that they didn't worship the Golden Calf. He says that the [Zohar Chadash](#) asks this question (I'm not sure where), and answers that the women should have protested. That makes them equally culpable. The [Chida](#) disagrees and says that they did protest, as the men had to force the women's jewelry off their necks to make the idol. Instead he suggests that indeed the women of that generation had no contamination, but since their spouses had it, any future children of theirs received it regardless

¹¹ Although, I wonder, they received the gold at the Reed Sea, and they lost the contamination only when they arrived 33 days later at Mount Sinai. I guess they only said "Enough!" later? The [Sha'ar Elchanan](#) writes that indeed that had an incredible amount of gold and silver at the Sea, but only said "Enough" at Sinai

¹² See [Ayeles HaShachar](#) to [Deuteronomy loc. cit.](#)

¹³ [Toras Moshe](#) IV *parshas Beshalach* s.v. הנחמדים

¹⁴ See [Devarim Rabbah](#) 1:5. See also [Nachal Eshkol](#) to [Ecclesiastes](#) 1:2

¹⁵ [Ecclesiastes](#) 1:1

¹⁶ [Psalms](#) 19:11

¹⁷ [Berachos](#) 57b