

And Di Zahav. (1:1)

Sefer Devarim is the last will and testament of Moshe *Rabbeinu* to his beloved nation. Concerned lest they succumb to the blandishments of the pagan nations which inhabited Canaan, Moshe spoke words of rebuke to them, pointing out areas of deficiency in their natural/national character which must be rectified. Rather than mention these sins explicitly – due to his concern about a negative reaction – he alluded to them by employing names of places which did not actually exist. These names allude to a variety of indiscretions, and areas in which they mutinied against Hashem. *Di Zahav* refers to the sin caused by an abundance of gold, the Golden Calf, which was their first act of dissent against the spiritual leadership of Moshe. When Moshe did not return at the appointed time (according to their calculations), they sought to create an intermediary to replace him. It is called *Di Zahav* because as Moshe pleaded with Hashem for their forgiveness, he said: “Had they not had a surfeit of gold, they would not have sinned.”

Why then is the word *Di* which means “enough” used? To quote the *Talmud Berachos* 32a, “Moshe said to Hashem, ‘Master of the Universe! The silver and gold that You lavished upon *Yisrael* until they said ‘enough!’ is what caused them to make the Golden Calf.” Thus, *Di Zahav* is expounded to mean, “enough gold.” In the wilderness, the Jews would never have been capable of making a Golden Calf had they not possessed the huge quantity of gold that Hashem had instructed them to remove from Egypt. Moshe was arguing that in fact, the Almighty was, as it were, partially to “blame” for their sin. Without all the gold, they would not have been able to sin.

Why intimate their sin with the word *dai*, enough, when the use of gold played such a leading role in catalyzing their sin. The Torah should have said *rov zahav*, “excess of gold.” Blaming “enough” seems inaccurate, since it did not function in the sin of the Golden Calf – or did it?

The **Shem MiShmuel** explains that indeed, excessive gold was not a sufficient reason to sin. On the contrary, the more (gold or anything) one has, the greater is his perceived need for more. One who has one hundred wants two hundred. This applies to all of life’s possessions: we never have enough. “Something” is always driving us further, higher, more. We do not realize that this inborn drive for “more” is Divinely ingrained in us for our good – so that it curbs our penchant for arrogance. As long as we are always seeking more – our passion for eminence, power, wealth, satisfying achievement, prominence and adulation – we are technically “safe” from arrogance. It is when we say, *Dai* I have enough! Whatever I have is sufficient; I am so far ahead of everyone that I can now sit back and enjoy the many fruits of my labor. I am so much ahead of the pack. I have more; I have achieved more: I am better.” This is when the danger of arrogance sets in – since we no longer are driven toward even greater and more exalted goals.

After receiving the Torah, at a Revelation unprecedented in human history, *Klal Yisrael* developed a stronger affiliation with and attachment to the spiritual dimension of life. This world and its materialistic frivolities meant little to them. They were above it. *Dai*; they had enough gold. They were beyond gold. This position sadly played against them. They thought they were “it.” They

were “there” – no drive; no passion. Such a situation leads to boredom and arrogance, so why not make an *eigel ha'zahav*, Golden Calf?

I recently came across a number of articles focusing on the pressing issue of failed leadership. There are individuals who despite achieving great success on a personal, communal, or even national and global level are sadly flawed. As long as one is human, the possibility for human deficiency is real. At times, it is dormant, silent, lying in waiting, until an opportunity for its release presents itself. If the leader is fortunate, it is never released, because he has taken great pains to ensure that the opportunity for its manifestation does not occur. Some however, have not been so fortunate, or, for some reason (which we will address), they did not care, or they thought they would get away with it. Regrettably, they were caught, accused, found guilty, and demoted – all at the expense of their family, community, friends and admiring congregation/students.

These articles have great merit, attacking the core of the problem. I have always wondered why someone who has devoted a lifetime toward achieving success would risk losing everything for self-gratifying, ephemeral pleasure. The usual answers are presented: pride goes before the fall; adulation leads one to believe in his own perfection; personal charisma germinates its own seeds of destruction. The power invested in a spiritual leader is immense, and we all know what power can do to a person's moral compass. Nonetheless, I continue to ask the hypothetical fallen hero: “What were you thinking?” “Where was your *seichel*, common sense?” “Did you forget you had a family, students, friends?” I have yet to hear a satisfying answer.

Perhaps, the *Shem MiShmuel's* exposition concerning the sin of the Golden Calf might illuminate for us the quandary surrounding the actions of the leader who has fallen prey to avarice or immorality, both shameless and iniquitous – the leader who has sullied himself and, by association, his colleagues.

As long as a person has a goal to reach, so long as his achievements have not plateaued, he continues to be driven by a passion for success. He is not satisfied until he climbs the mountain and is safely ensconced on its summit. Such an individual will not gamble away his life, family, career. He is too busy climbing to worry about arrogance and the pitfalls that result from lording oneself over others. It is the fellow who has achieved awesome distinction in his field, who has peaked – or – at least, in his mind has reached his plateau – who is in a dangerous position. Such a leader may be prone to haughtiness. He might fall prey to some of the blandishments that present themselves to those who have reached the pinnacle of power. The delusion that accompanies one who achieves a high position is often like the lightheadedness one experiences when he climbs a high mountain. His thought process changes, and he is now prone to make mistakes – which at any other phase of his life (or climb) would be anathema.