

ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות

פרשת פקודי

SERIES 1: ISSUE 23

HONESTY AND INTEGRITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Chapter 38

21) *These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of Testimony, which were counted at Moshe's instruction, the work of the Levi'im, [led] by Isamar, the son of Aharon the Kohen.*

(א) אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר פָּקַד עַל פִּי מֹשֶׁה עֲבַדְתָּ הַלְוִיִּם בְּיַד אִיתָמָר בֶּן אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן.

22) *And Betzalel, the son of Uri, the son of Chur, from the tribe of Yehuda did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe.*

(ב) וּבְצִלְאֵל בֶּן אֲוִרִי בֶן חוּר לְמִטֵּה יְהוּדָה עָשָׂה אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה.

23) *With him was Oholiav, the son of Achisamach, from the tribe of Dan, a skilled carpenter, weaver and embroiderer with turquoise, deep red, and crimson wool and with linen.*

(ג) וְאִתּוֹ אֹהֲלִיאָב בֶּן אַחִיסָמָךְ לְמִטֵּה דָן חָרָשׁ וְחָשֵׁב וְרָקֵם בְּתַכְלֵת וּבְאַרְגָּמָן וּבְתוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וּבַשָּׁשׁ.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does it say the word *Mishkan* twice in verse 21?
2. Why does the Torah call it *the Mishkan of Testimony*, a description usually reserved only for the *Aron* (as in, "the Ark of Testimony")?
3. Why does it say "*the accounts ... which were counted at Moshe's instruction*" instead of just saying "the accounts that Moshe counted"?
4. Why does it mention *the work of the Levi'im*? What does their job of carrying all the parts of the *Mishkan* while traveling have to do with *the accounts of the Mishkan*?
5. Why does it say (in verses 22–23), *And Betzalel, the son of Uri ... did everything... With him was Oholiav*, when all this was already mentioned in *Parashas Vayak'hel* (35:30–34)?

Our Sages (*Shemos Rabbah* 51:6) have told us, "Moshe saw the scoffers of the generation slandering him, claiming that he had misappropriated some of what was donated for the building of the *Mishkan*. Therefore, he calculated the exact amount of all the contributions (by weighing and measuring all the donated precious metals and cloth). But the question remains, why should they accept the validity of his calculations? They could still say that he falsified them. Therefore, the Torah tells us, "*which were counted at Moshe's instruction*" – to teach us that even if a community will **not** accept the calculations carried out by their leader, the leader himself should nevertheless see to it that an accounting is done, in order to demonstrate his integrity. **[This answers Question 3.]**

Even so, one could claim that the people should have protested to Moshe that there was no need to take any notice of the scoffers, since the Jews all knew that he was completely trustworthy. For this reason, the Torah continues here with the words "*the work (עֲבֹדָה) of the Levi'im*," referring to the fact that it was the *Levi'im's avodah* to carry all the gold, silver, and copper vessels through the desert, and thus they could be suspected of taking some of them for themselves.

In other words, **it was for the sake of the Levi'im** (not Moshe) that the accounting was necessary. To avoid any such accusations, it was necessary to make a precise accounting of the amount of all the silver and gold utensils before beginning to use them in the service of the Mishkan. Then, if suspicion would arise against the Levi'im in the future, the utensils could be weighed and counted again and the results compared to the initial accounting. [\[This answers Question 4.\]](#)

One could also ask of what use would Moshe's precise accounting be, since the precious metals would leave his custodianship and be given over to those who actually made the metals into vessels. They, too, could potentially misappropriate the donated metals! Why does there seem to be no concern voiced about these workers? However, our Sages (*Bava Basra* 9a) have taught us that there is no need to suspect any wrong-doing on the part of those who are involved in performing sacred duties on behalf of the community, and demand that they produce an accounting. But this is only when there are at least two people working together. (Editor's note: This is the reason the Sages in this same Gemara decreed that there should always be two people in charge of a community's tzedakah funds.)

This is why the Torah states in the next two verses that *Betzalel ... did everything... [and] with him was Oholiav*. Their names are being mentioned here for a different reason than in *Parashas Vayak'hel* – to show that since there were two people to oversee the construction, there was no need to suspect any of the workers. [\[This answers Question 5.\]](#)

The Levi'im, on the other hand, had only one overseer, as verse 21 points out: *Isamar, the son of Aharon the Kohen* and thus, as mentioned above, the accounting was necessary for their sake. Moshe, too, was a single individual – but he was beyond suspicion. Despite this, in order to serve as an example of professional conduct for all time, Moshe commanded that an exact reckoning of the material be made.

Finally, the wording in the beginning of verse 21 also forestalls a different challenge to the workers' integrity. Normally speaking, when gold or silver is used to make implements, a certain amount of material will be lost during the various stages of production. Similarly in the weaving and stitching process, there is always a certain amount of wastage. Potentially, the craftsmen could misappropriate some of the raw materials and claim that it was lost naturally. How, then, would it be known that Moshe was telling the truth that nothing was stolen? The Torah states, *These are the accounts of the Mishkan*. And what is the proof that these counts are true? It is *the Mishkan of Testimony* – the Mishkan itself is testimony to the truth of the counting. How so? Because the final amount of gold, silver, etc., that was in **the finished products** was exactly the same as the original amount contributed; there was no natural wastage in the production process whatsoever. [\[This answers Questions 1 and 2.\]](#)

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKadosh” (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

These sheets, distributed in memory of Yental *bas* Yitzchok, have been drawn from either the Alshich on Avos or Alshich on the Torah, published by Feldheim. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.

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