

אלה פקודי המשכן

*These are the accountings of the Mishkan (38:21)*

Noting the Torah's use of the exclusionary term "אלה" – *these* – in introducing the accounting of the Mishkan's donations, Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, better known as the Ohr HaChaim, teaches:

אומרו "אלה" לפסול כל מנינים שבעולם, כי כל מה שימנה אדם מקנינים המדומים אין מניינו מנין וישמו מורה עליו "מה אתה מונה", אבל מנין זה עומד לעולם, והטעם: להיות מנין המשכן המופלא אשר שכן שם אלקי עולם ה':

*The Torah uses the word "אלה" to exclude [the significance of] all other [financial] counts in the world. For whatever a person may count from his apparent possessions is not a true count. And the [very] name [of money] reflects this, [as the Hebrew term for money, ממון] is a contraction of the words "what are you counting?" But this count (the materials for the Mishkan) stands forever. And the reason for this is that the count served [to build] the wondrous Mishkan where the G-d of the Universe dwelled.*

Citing a Midrash, the Ohr HaChaim explains that the Hebrew term for money, "ממון," is a contraction of the words: מַה אתה מונה? אינו כלום – *what are you counting? It is nothing!* The Torah therefore refers to the accounting of the Mishkan's donations with the emphatic word "אלה," signifying that the only true and enduring acquisitions in this world are those which serve spiritual goals, such as the donations to the Mishkan. All other forms of wealth are fleeting and ultimately insignificant.

When the Midrash teaches that money is "nothing" – אינו כלום – it does not mean that money entirely lacks significance. Money can be very important. G-d created the world in a way in which we need money to survive and support our families. The Talmud describes the incredible care of the righteous to not waste any of the limited money that they had. And while there is never shame if a person falls upon hard times and needs to accept charity – it can happen to anyone – deliberately relying on the charity of others is certainly not the Torah way.

Rather, the Midrash's intent appears to be that money, *in and of itself*, is worth nothing. True wealth in this world comes from all the things that money cannot buy: Love. Health. Holiness. Serenity. Time. Peace. If money is used as a vehicle to help cultivate these unpurchasable treasures, money attains value. But if money distances us from these values, creating anxiety, divisiveness, and selfishness, it is worthless metal. The value of money lies solely in how we use it.

The Kabbalah teaches that building the Mishkan symbolizes the concept of creating for G-d a dwelling place in the lower world (Tanchuma Naso 16) – *a dwelling place in the lower world*. Anything that brings G-d's Presence into our world can itself be thought of as a form of a Mishkan, allowing G-d to "dwell" in

our consciousness. If we use our money to lift the spirits of others; to deepen the bond of love between our loved ones and ourselves; or to increase Torah and Mitzvot observance – we are bringing the Divine Presence into the world, effectively building our own Mishkan, and our money takes on significant value. If, however, our money is used for self-aggrandizement; for profligate extravagance; or to serve as a false substitute for the emotional investment required to build genuine love; it creates distance, removing G-d's Presence from our lives and destroying our Mishkan. Indeed, it becomes *אינו כלום*.

As the Ohr HaChaim suggests, money can confuse us in so many ways. It gives us the illusion of security, when true security comes only from G-d. It gives us the illusion of self-importance, when true importance comes from our soul and the goodness that we perform in this world. Its pursuit gives us the illusion of having purpose in life, when true purpose comes solely from spiritual pursuits, and *what we do* with our money. To describe someone as “successful” solely on the basis of his or her bank account is to confuse the means with the ends, completely forgetting what life is all about.

When we see money as a means towards spiritual ends, we are able to maintain a healthy relationship with it and to avoid excessive attachment. By contrast, when money becomes an end unto itself, we develop an unhealthy attachment, and become susceptible to major consequences: sleepless nights full of worry; rage and unrelenting regret over having lost money; frustration and jealousy towards others who seem to have more; a myriad of physical and emotional health problems; and insufficient time for spiritual growth, to name a few. The less importance we place on money as a value in and of itself, the less room there is for anxiety and other negative emotions to take hold in our lives – we simply don't care about it all that much, and would rather get some sleep.

The consequences of over-attachment to money appear to be especially perilous in the realm of child-rearing. Sometimes, parents can invest so much time and energy into earning more money than they need, leaving themselves physically and emotionally absent from their children. In a world in which it is so easy for children to fall into mental health pitfalls, it seems critically important for parents to try to be present in their children's lives. While there are never guarantees in raising children, a parent's presence and attention can provide stability and nourishment to a child, in much the same way sunlight nourishes young plants.

Investing time in one's children is worth infinitely more than any financial investment. After all, money can always be earned later. *But in raising our children, we only get one chance.* They are only young once, and if we miss opportunities to raise them in their youth because we are too distracted by pursuing unnecessary riches, we don't get to do it over. What could be more deserving of our time than that? Of course, sometimes a parent may have no choice but to take a job that will make immense demands on his or her time. But to whatever extent possible, we must weigh all the factors very carefully.

פקודי המשכן "אלה" serves as an annual reminder of the spiritual potential and danger inherent in money. Like almost everything in G-d's world, the question surrounding money is not whether it is good or bad, but rather, how we utilize and relate to it. May we each always be blessed with a stable livelihood that invites the Divine Presence to dwell in our lives.