



# WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A REBBE?

## THOUGHTS ON KORACH AND GIMMEL TAMMUZ

**THIS YEAR, GIMMEL TAMMUZ** coincides with the portion of *Korach*. What can we learn from that Torah reading that helps us to direct our thoughts properly on the day of the Rebbe's *hilulah*?

Korach, a prestigious member of the Levite clan, led an attempt to usurp the High Priesthood from Aharon. The movement successfully attracted over 250 prominent men. Their aim, in so many words, was to “democratize” the High Priesthood. They *all* wanted to be High Priest.

What was Moshe's response?

Moshe laid out a challenge, a sort of “priestly duel.” Let everyone come tomorrow and *try* to act as High Priests; bring the fire-pans of incense and see what happens. Of course, it was a dire warning to these men that they were risking their lives. The specific choice of the fire-pans recalled the service performed exclusively by the High Priest on Yom Kippur and the

grim fate that awaited anyone but the High Priest who engaged in this rite. After all, the whole nation had already witnessed how Aharon's own sons, Nadav and Avihu, died while violating this very law.

The 250 men weren't fools. So we must ask the question: **Knowing that they stood to lose their lives, why did the 250 men accept this challenge?**

Furthermore, in this exchange between Moshe and the 250 men, the *Midrash* tells us that Moshe said to them, “We have one G-d and one High Priest, and you *all* would like to be that High Priest?! I would also like [to be High Priest]!” (*Tanchuma, Korach* 5, brought in Rashi on *Bamidbar* 16:6)

So here's another question: What did Moshe mean by seemingly validating the aspirations of the rebels?

Both of these questions can really be answered at the same time. Basically, we have to understand what it means when every Jew, including Moshe, aspires to be a *Kohen Gadol*.

### A LITTLE TRUTH IN EVERY JOKE

It is told that when Golda Meir met Richard Nixon, the latter was quick to try to pull rank by boasting, “I am the president of 200 million people,” to which came the laconic reply: “And I am the prime minister of four million prime ministers.”

But there's a little truth to every joke (also, a little joke to every truth).

Being the High Priest of the Jewish people is rather like being the High Priest to a nation comprised entirely of High Priests.

Isn't that precisely what Hashem told us at Sinai? "And you will be a kingdom of priests." (*Shmos* 19:6). And the Baal HaTurim adds in his commentary on that verse that this doesn't just mean that all Jews became then like *regular* priests, but that at the moment of the Giving of the Torah, all Jews were elevated to the level of *High* Priests. It was only the effect of the Sin of the Golden Calf that later undid that. And indeed, as the Baal HaTurim also notes, quoting from the prophets, when Moshiach comes, all Jews will *again* be like High Priests – "And you will be called priests of G-d..." (*Yeshayahu* 61:6).

This was the core of truth within Korach's and his men's argument when they said, "The entire congregation are *all* holy, and G-d is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above G-d's assembly?" (*Bamidbar* 16:3.) As Rashi adds: "All of them heard G-d speak at Sinai... Not only the two of you [Moshe and Aharon] heard G-d say, 'I am the L-rd your G-d' – everyone heard it!" (Rashi on *ibid.* From *Tanchuma, Korach* 4.)

Now we can answer both of our questions: What powerful force enticed these 250 men to take up a challenge they should have known they could not win? And why did Moshe seem to *validate* that desire?

The yearning that the 250 men felt was the *genuine* yearning of the Jewish soul to express itself as a member of a Kingdom of Priests.

*Practically speaking*, there can be only *one* who serves as High Priest.

But in *concept*, every single Jew should *feel like* and *aspire to be* a High Priest.

And that's why Moshe condoned their *desire* – not its *realization* in the sense that they wanted it, but the genuine yearning of the soul which Moshe himself felt, too.

*There can be only one High Priest.* But every man, woman, and child – within his or her own function and role – must *desire* High Priesthood.

### WHAT EVERY JEW WANTS

So we've answered our questions. Every Jew should want to be like a High Priest; it means you were listening at Sinai when Hashem said, "I am your G-d." But what does it actually *mean* to be a High Priest? What is it exactly that our soul desires?

It's certainly not just a title.

What's the working definition of a High Priest?

It says: "*Vayibadel Aharon, Aharon was set apart, l'hakdish kodesh kadoshim, to consecrate the most holy, l'haktir lifnei Hashem, l'sharso, to bring incense before G-d and to serve Him (Divrei HaYamim I 23:13).*" In other words, the High Priest's entire function is to be of service to Hashem.

What does this mean in practical terms?

### FREDDY HAGER AND THE REBBE

Freddy (Efraim) Hager was an English businessman and the president of the London Diamond Bourse which is sort of like the New York Stock Exchange but for trading diamonds.

In 1969, at the age of 21, young Freddy had a personal meeting with the Rebbe in the Rebbe's room at 770 Eastern Parkway. The time was 2:45

a.m. and 770 was still bustling with visitors waiting their turn to meet the Rebbe.

At the beginning of the *yechidus*, the Rebbe asked Freddy if he was one of the Hagers from Galicia—a family of Chassidic Rebbes. Freddy, who happened to be carrying with him a small picture of his grandfather who had been a Chassidic Rebbe, took out the photo and handed it to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe looked at the picture, then looked up at Freddy, seemingly comparing the two. The Rebbe, who had been smiling up until then, suddenly appeared very serious.

"Do you know what it means to be a Rebbe?" asked the Rebbe. The Rebbe asked him three times but Freddy was unable to respond.

The Rebbe shrugged his shoulders and said, "Alright, I'll tell you what it means to be a Rebbe. The first Chassidic Rebbe was the Baal Shem Tov and the Baal Shem Tov had a custom that he never went to sleep with money in the house."

The Rebbe, who had been speaking in English, then switched to Yiddish and said, "*Altz voss er hut gehat in shtub hut er avekgegebnen far yenem farren laygen zich shloffen.* Everything that he had in his home he gave away to others before going to sleep. That's what it means to be a Rebbe. Maybe you'll follow in your grandfather's footsteps and become a Rebbe."

The 21-year-old Freddy didn't go on to become a Chassidic Rebbe—at least not in the conventional sense. Indeed, he didn't become a rabbi at all. He was a businessman.

So did he follow the Rebbe's suggested career path or not?

Of course he did. Because he became a Rebbe the way the Rebbe



Freddy and Louise Hager with the Rebbe, 19 Shvat 5751. Photo: JEMID #66562

defined the term Rebbe for him. Rebbe is not a title or a position; it's a way of life. Thus, in his role as a businessman, a philanthropist and a lay leader, Mr. Hager was a Rebbe, someone who devotes his entire self to service.

### WHEN WILL I BE LIKE THEM?

And this is the question, I believe, for each one of us. "Do you know what it means to be a Rebbe?" And the Rebbe's answer is the same for all of us – one who gives entirely of himself, with total devotion.

Just like the Rebbe looked at Freddy Hager and compared him to the picture of his grandfather, I don't think it would be presumptuous to say that the Rebbe is looking at all

of us and comparing what he sees to the "picture of a Rebbe," the very definition of selfless devotion.

Yes, there can only be *one* High Priest. But *every* Jew must yearn to be *like* the High Priest.

Where do we see devotion like the Rebbe's today? I think the Rebbe wanted us to see it in *ourselves*, each of us in our own way. This one in business and this one in the rabbinate; this one in medicine and this one in law; as a paramedic, as a teacher, as a parent or grandparent, as a *shliach* or *shlucha*, as a supportive community member and volunteer. We can't *be* the High Priest, but we must bring High Priesthood—total devotion to the service of G-d and His children—*into* the function and

role that we perform. Each of us must *become* the Rebbe in his or her own way.

### IN WHOSE POCKET IS THE KEY?

In 1957, just six years after the Rebbe had officially accepted the *nesius*, scholar and author Mr. Herbert Weiner came to 770 to find out how one becomes a Rebbe. The Rebbe smiled widely and answered a question with a question, "And what if they put the key into your pocket and walk away?"

Mr. Weiner took the Rebbe's statement as an obvious reference to himself being persuaded by *chassidim* to accept the role of Rebbe. If I may be so bold, however, I might interpret the Rebbe's words also as an answer to

how each one of us becomes Rebbe-like. Although even now, after his physical passing, he did not, G-d forbid, walk away, the Rebbe certainly did “put the key into our pocket.” And I am *not* talking about what happened on 3 Tammuz, 5754. I am not even talking about what happened on 28 Nissan, 5751, when the Rebbe said, “I have done all that I can.” I am talking about what happened on 10 Shvat, 5711, when the Rebbe first accepted leadership. He put the key into our pocket from day one!

**OUR OBLIGATION: MINE AND YOURS**

In his inaugural statement on the night that he accepted the position of Rebbe, the Rebbe mentioned a saying of the Sages: “Every Jew—man, woman, and child—must say, ‘When

will my deeds approach the deeds of my forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?’” (*Tanna d’Vei Eliyahu*, beg. ch. 25) That was the Rebbe’s message from the very beginning.

“Don’t think you’ve put the job on me and now you’re free to go... have a peaceful life thinking you found someone who will do the hard work while you relax...,” said the Rebbe. “Don’t get any big ideas. Nobody is relieving you of the duties that the [Previous] Rebbe placed upon you... We can work together and if I’m able to help I won’t be stingy. But the mission the Rebbe gave each of you, you must carry out with your *entire being*, with *all your body* and *all your soul*... There is no one to rely on. It is in your hands alone.”

Yes, there can only be one *Kohen*

*Gadol*. Now let’s try to be like the *Kohen Gadol*.

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*This article, based on Likkutei Sichos Vol. 18, pp. 187-195, is the seventh installment in a series of articles for the N’shei Chabad Newsletter entitled “Let’s Learn Chassidus With Rabbi Shais Taub.” Visit [nsheichabadnewsletter.com/archives](http://nsheichabadnewsletter.com/archives) to read the first six. Rabbi Shais Taub has delivered Torah classes and lectures on six continents and is one of the most sought-after speakers in the Jewish world today. He currently serves as scholar-in-residence at Chabad of Five Towns. For more teachings from Rabbi Taub, visit [SoulWords.org](http://SoulWords.org). For speaking engagements, contact [info@SoulWords.org](mailto:info@SoulWords.org).*



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