



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 18 | Korach | Sichah 1

The Paradoxical Pursuit

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1.

THE MOTIVE OF KORACH'S REBELLION

As known, the Torah is one. The four branches of Torah interpretation, *pardes*,¹ constitute a single, complete Torah. This idea is underscored by the metaphoric terms that the *Zohar*² uses to refer to the inner and revealed dimensions of the Torah: *nishmasah*, and *gufah*. Meaning, these two dimensions of Torah are the *soul* and *body* of one entity.³

Accordingly, we need to make sense of the nature of Korach's dispute described in our Torah portion: The inner dimension of Torah speaks at great length about the exalted level of Korach⁴ and about the sublime nature of the complaint he lodged. His complaint is explained as being so elevated that it is maintained that his indictment was predicated on his demand for a social order that can and will exist only in the Ultimate Future when levites will become *kohanim*. But in the present era {when the emphasis is on action, characterized by the adage} "today is {devoted to} carrying them out," the type of order he strove to implement was altogether premature, as elucidated in Chassidic literature.

In contrast, according to the simple meaning of the text, we learn about the tremendous fall of Korach, and about the severity of his punishment and that of all of his cohorts who took part in his revolt. This very different interpretation emerges from a straightforward understanding of the relevant passages, and even more so from the explanation of these passages given by the commentators.

In truth, these contradictory approaches to this dispute are not so problematic. Although the Torah is one, nonetheless, each of the four branches of Torah interpretation is linked with a different spiritual (world

¹ {An acronym for *pshat*, *remez*, *drash* and *sod*.}

² Vol. 3, 152a.

³ See *Bachya*, Introduction.

⁴ **Similar to all this** is true also of the Spies, the *meraglim*.

and) plane (just as each branch contains its own special,⁵ interpretive principles). However, explanation is required all the same: The four branches of Torah correspond to the four spiritual worlds. And every world emanates and springs from the other. Consequently, even in the branch of *pshat*,⁶ there should be some evidence of the merit of Korach and his grievances, along the lines elucidated in *pnimiyus haTorah* {the deeper ideas of Torah elucidated in the branch of *sod*}.

2.

HOW COULD HAVE IT HAPPENED?

The matter will be understood first considering a number of difficulties and nuances concerning the simple meaning of the passages:

- a) How could the 250 men have agreed to Moshe's proposal to test them by offering the incense?⁷ Certainly, they must have known that the {divinely unsanctioned offering of the} incense was responsible for the death of Nadav and Avihu,⁸ and that any outsider who presumed to offer the incense would incur a penalty of death! [The explanation given by the *Midrash* and of Rashi are enigmatic: "They were not fools, disbelieving Moshe's warning about the consequences. But even so, they still presumed to offer the incense. Thus, they were responsible for their own deaths because of their {deliberate} transgression." How is this to be understood? What brought them to such a sin — to throw away lives?]

- b) Moshe told Korach and his party: "Do this, take censers..."⁹ The *Midrash* and Rashi comment that Moshe appealed to them: "We have

⁵ And likewise within each branch itself, e.g., the prohibitive laws may not be derived from monetary laws (*Brachos* 19b, near the end), etc.

⁶ {The plain meaning of the Torah.}

⁷ Obviously, Moshe had wanted them to withdraw from the dispute. This is clearly understood, *a fortiori*, since afterward, we find explicitly that Moshe also went to Dasan, etc., to dissuade them.

⁸ *Bamidbar* 16:7.

⁹ *Ibid.* v. 6.

only one G-d and one High Priest and you 250 men are seeking the High Priesthood? **I, too, want this.**”

This is puzzling: The 250 men disputed the High Priesthood of Aharon and sought to usurp it. How is it possible that Moshe associated himself with them, articulating (albeit only verbally) that he also wanted it? Moreover, did Moshe have to interject this remark? How could it have a bearing on the 250 men?

c) We have to clarify a more general point about Korach’s dispute:

Hashem had promised Moshe that the Jewish people would forever believe in him {i.e., in the legitimacy of his prophecy}.¹⁰ So how was it possible for Korach to rebel against Moshe, and for Korach and his henchmen to disbelieve that Moshe did everything as a messenger of Hashem?¹¹ This question is particularly perturbing considering that the 250 men were chief judges¹² — important leaders.

Also, Korach’s rebellion is particularly baffling according to the explanation of the *Rambam*¹³ (and the Torah commentators)¹⁴ that the Jewish people’s abiding belief in Moshe {and in his prophecy} was a consequence of having personally experienced the revelation of Hashem. As *Rambam* writes:¹⁵

Our eyes saw, and not a stranger’s; our ears heard, and not another person’s. There was fire, and thunder, and lightning. He entered the thick clouds; the Voice spoke to him; and we heard, “Moshe, Moshe! Go tell them the following:....”

¹⁰ *Shmos* 19:9.

¹¹ *Bamidbar* 16:28.

¹² {In the original Hebrew, “*roshei Sanhedrin*.”}

¹³ “*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*,” ch. 8, par. 1

¹⁴ See *Ibn Ezra*, *Ramban* and *Ohr Hachaim* on *Bamidbar*, loc. cit.

¹⁵ {*Ibid.*}

The *Rambam* goes on to say that the truth of this belief was so firmly established that:¹⁶

...if a prophet arises and attempts to dispute Moshe's prophecy by performing great signs and wonders, we should pay him no attention. We know with certainty that those signs were performed through magic or sorcery. [This conclusion is reached] because the prophecy of Moshe, our teacher, is not dependent on wonders, so that we could compare these wonders, one against the other. Rather we saw and heard with our own eyes and ears just as he {Moshe} heard.¹⁷

Since this core belief is inviolate in all generations, how much more so in Moshe's generation.

This being the case, how could Korach come along after all this and incite a whole assembly of Jews to reject Moshe as Hashem's prophet and His messenger?

3.

MODIFYING OR ADDING TO MOSHE'S DEEDS

The explanation: As Scripture describes explicitly, the motive behind (the dispute of) Korach and his party was not to dissolve the priesthood. Rather, they sought to have themselves installed as (High) Priests. {This idea is echoed in Moshe's question to them:} "And you also seek the priesthood?"¹⁸

On this basis, we can posit that in his argument with Moshe, Korach did not repudiate Moshe as Hashem's messenger. Nor did Korach question the validity of Moshe's institutions (including the priesthood, which Moshe established) by alleging that they were not Divinely ordained. Korach did

¹⁶ {Ibid., par. 3}

¹⁷ Further analysis is needed to explain why *Rambam* doesn't write, "as he heard and saw."

¹⁸ *Bamidbar* 16:10. Scripture doesn't say explicitly that he sought the **High** Priesthood, but this is the explanation given by *Targum Onkelos* and *Targum Yonason ben Uziel*, ad loc.

maintain, however, that Moshe enjoyed the latitude of being able to add to or detract from what he was told to do.¹⁹

We know that prayer and supplication can lead to Hashem changing a decree or rescinding it. The results of Moshe's prayer after the sin of the Golden Calf, and after the sin of the spies, already proved the efficacy of prayer. In this vein, Korach believed that to prevail upon Hashem to transfer the High Priesthood from Aharon to Korach was also possible. Its reassignment seemed feasible particularly because the service of the priesthood, originally assigned to the first-born males, had already been transferred due to sinfulness²⁰ to the tribe of Levi, to Aharon and his sons.

Justification to transfer the priesthood to Korach would be further understandable because Aharon, who had been instrumental in having the priesthood taken from the first-born and delegated to the *kohanim*, had also been {indirectly} involved with the sin of the Golden Calf. In contrast, the entire tribe of Levi, including Korach, was completely blameless. And on the contrary, "all the sons of Levi" took up arms against those who had sinned, against those about whom it says,²¹ "Aharon had exposed {their latent shortcomings publicly}, making them an object of disgrace."

[True, Moshe had presumed that he had been challenged by Korach and his men because they believed that he, Moshe, was not really Hashem's messenger — as Moshe said, "{they imagine that} Hashem did not send me." But Moshe's assumption sprung from his profound humility, as it says,²² "and the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth." Because of his humility, Moshe was of the opinion that Hashem's assurances that the people would always believe in him — "and they will believe also in you forever" — were not fulfilled. Although Hashem had **promised**, Moshe believed that the promise was not realized for the same reason that Yaakov had been afraid that Hashem would not fulfil His

¹⁹ Along the lines of Rashi's commentary on *Bereishis* 49:3, at the end; Rashi's commentary on *Shemos* 4:14. Also note the commentary of *Ohr Hachaim* on our *parshah* 16:28.

²⁰ See Rashi on *Bamidbar* 3:12, et al.

²¹ *Shemos* 32:26; *ibid.*, v. 25.

²² *Bamidbar* 12:3.

promise to him, viz., because of a spiritual lapse, because “perhaps he had been tarnished by sin.”²³]

4.

THE DESIRE TO BE A *KOHEN GADOL* IS PRAISEWORTHY

In this context, it is understood that the 250 men did not intend to revolt against Moshe. Their ambition was simply to become High Priests, as Rashi emphasizes, “and you 250 men seek the High Priesthood.”

[Korach himself, we can posit, wanted to become the sole High Priest **in place** of Aharon, while the 250 men wanted to become High Priests **in addition** to Aharon.]

Regarding the desire to fill the role of the High Priest, Midrashic literature and Rashi say that Moshe had also aspired to be a High Priest,²⁴ “I also **want** this.” To be a High Priest was something positive and lofty. The ambition of Korach and his men for the High Priesthood had not been for the sake of exercising power over other Jews. Rather, it was because the High Priest was set apart from the Jewish people, “{sanctified} as most holy.”²⁵ Continuously, he stood before Hashem ready to serve Him. The 250 men were striving to reach the level of the most holy, the rank of a High Priest.

Moshe, however, answered and explained that although the desire to be a High Priest was commendable — “I also want this” — nevertheless, in actuality, there could be only “one High Priest.”

²³ Rashi on *Bereishis* 32:11.

²⁴ Obviously, since Moshe epitomized the truth and spoke the truth.

²⁵ *Divrei Hayamim I* 23:13.

5.

AN INTENSE LONGING TO BE HOLY

However, their longing was so intense that they agreed to offer incense, appreciating full-well the gravity of Moshe's warning that "they would all perish." Yet, they were ready to suffer this dire consequence, as long as in the meantime they could stand before Hashem and serve Him. In this way, they could "draw close to Hashem"²⁶ as Nadav and Avihu had done.

(Their ambition was similar to what would be experienced by anyone who occupied the office of the *Kohen Gadol* during the period of the second Temple. The Talmud relates that during this time, "no *Kohen Gadol* ever lived out his year."²⁷ Still, these individuals sought to be *Kohen Gadol*, and even paid handsomely to be appointed.²⁸

This is baffling: They saw that the previous *Kohen Gadol* did not survive the year; they also knew that given their spiritual level, they were unworthy of this role. So how could they have still wanted to be the *Kohen Gadol*? Their persistence, however, was driven by their deep desire to enter the Holy of the Holies on Yom Kippur. To be able to enter the place where the *Shechinah* was manifest made it all worthwhile in their eyes, even if their choice meant not living out the year.)

6.

THE NARRATIVE ALSO SHOWS A POSITIVE SIDE

Similarly, we can understand how, in the simple understanding of the narrative, the positive side of the dispute of Korach and his men was expressed. For as explained, the cause for their dissent was their drive to reach the level of a *Kohen Gadol*, sanctified to Hashem, Holy of the Holies.

²⁶ {*Vayikra* 16:1.}

²⁷ *Yoma* 9a; Jerusalem Talmud, ad loc, ch. 1, *halachah* 1.

²⁸ This is the version found in the Jerusalem Talmud, *ibid*; similar to the version in *Ein Yaacov*, and also according to the version of the *Bayis Chadash* of the *Talmud Bavli*, *Yoma*, *ibid*.

Korach's own words underscore how this desire to be High Priest came to be: "For the entire congregation is holy and Hashem is {dwelling} amongst them, so why do you exalt yourselves...?"²⁹ *Midrash Tanchuma* and Rashi explain, "*the entire congregation is holy* — at **Sinai**, everyone heard the words of Hashem." "*So why do you exalt yourselves...* You should not have chosen Aharon for the priesthood,³⁰ since, at **Sinai**, not just you heard, 'I am Hashem your L-rd,' but the entire congregation heard this":

At the *Matan Torah*, Hashem declared,³¹ "You shall be for Me a kingdom of **kohanim** and a holy nation." *Baal Haturim*³² says that at Sinai, during the giving of the Torah, every Jew attained the rank of a *Kohen Gadol*.

And since all Jews are connected essentially to the level of a *Kohen Gadol*, except that sinfulness {the sin of the Golden Calf} precipitated a downfall,³³ this innate connection aroused in Korah and his men the desire to be *Kohen Gadol*.

7.

WHAT THE NAME OF THE *PARSHAH* TEACHES US

In light of the above, we can better appreciate why the name of this *sedra*, according to Jewish custom (which is Torah),³⁴ is not *Va'yikach*, ויקח {"he took"}, or *Va'yikach Korach*, ויקח קורח {"Korach **took**"}. This phrase means, according to *Targum*, "Korach separated himself." Or as Rashi puts it, "He took himself off to one side to separate from the assembly of Israel by raising objections regarding the priesthood." Rather, the *sedra* is called just *Korach*. Thus, its name makes no mention of (or allusion to) Korach's sin,

²⁹ *Bamidbar* 16:3; cf. *Ibn Ezra*, ad loc.

³⁰ See *Sifsei Chachamim* who cites *Nachlas Yaacov* that Korach's intent with this statement was to limit his dispute to contesting Aharon's appointment as *Kohen Gadol*. Korach did not mean to dispute Moshe's kingship.

³¹ *Shemos* 19:6.

³² *Ibid*, ad loc.

³³ See *Baal Haturim* and the *Mechilta*, ad loc.

³⁴ See Jerusalem Talmud, *Pesachim*, ch. 4 *halachah* 1.

nor his dispute with Moshe — Korach’s challenge of the priesthood. {Why is this?}

Because the lesson we need to glean from (*parshas*) Korach is not just a negative one — “do not be like Korach and his assembly.”³⁵ Rather, there is also a **positive** point. This desire of Korach and his 250 men, and **of Moshe**, needs to be experienced by every Jew.³⁶ And on the contrary, having this desire demonstrates that we all heard Hashem speak at Sinai... “I am Hashem your L-rd.” *Hashem* became *your L-rd*³⁷ — your strength and vitality.

However, to *actualize* this desire in the way indicated by the words ויקח קורח — to dispute and challenge the priesthood — is forbidden. So, too, regarding the *Kohen Gadol* who was chosen by Hashem through Moshe, one should not want to **actualize** this desire to be the *Kohen Gadol*. For there can be only “one High Priest” who Hashem selected. This desire, however, needs to persist. As Moshe had said, “I also want this.”

8.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE AVODAH OF LEVI AND THE KOHEN GADOL

The following question can be asked regarding the above explanation. Concerning the tribe of Levi, *Rambam* writes:³⁸

... they were set aside to serve Hashem and minister unto Him and to instruct people at large in His just paths and righteous judgments.... Therefore, they were set apart from the ways of the world... they are Hashem’s legion.

³⁵ *Bamidbar* 17:5; and see *Sanhedrin* 110a; *Tanchuma* on our *parshah*, 10; *Bamidbar Rabbah* ch. 18, sec. 20.

³⁶ Along the lines of the teaching of our Rabbis that **each and every** Jew is **obligated** to ask himself, “When will my deeds match the deeds of our patriarchs Abraham, Yitzchak and Yaacov” (*Tanna D’Bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, beg. of ch. 25).

³⁷ {In the Hebrew original, “*Elokecha*”; the Divine name denoting strength and power,}

³⁸ “*Hilchos Shmita Veyovel*,” ch. 13, par. 12.

Rambam goes on to explain:³⁹

Not only the tribe of Levi, but any one of the inhabitants of the world whose spirit generously motivates him, who understands with his wisdom to set himself aside and stand before Hashem to serve Him and minister to Him and to know Hashem... casting off the burden of the many concerns that people pursue, **he is sanctified as holy of holies.**

So we see that concerning spiritual service, every individual has the potential to engage in the *avodah* of the tribe of Levi, to “stand before Hashem and serve Him,” thereby becoming, “sanctified as holy of holies.”

Accordingly, the same principle should hold true about the *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol*. It, too, should be attainable, to some degree, by every individual. Why, then, should we only have the desire for this level, while in actuality, the inference is that also in the spiritual realm {regarding one’s *avodah*}, there is only one *Kohen Gadol*?

This matter will be understood by explaining that according to the above, the *avodah* of the tribe of Levi and of the *Kohen Gadol* have an opposite attribute: Concerning the tribe of Levi, *Rambam* writes, “any one... whose spirit generously **motivates** him,” **will attain** the level of the tribe of Levi.⁴⁰ However, he does not say that everyone **must** desire and **strive** to attain the quality and rank of a levite. In contrast, concerning the rank of the *Kohen Gadol*, we’ve seen that everyone must “want this.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*, par. 13.

⁴⁰ *Rambam*’s explanation refers to the tribe of Levi as a whole, including *kohanim*.... But he doesn’t explain the *avodah* of the *kohanim* separately, but only as they are part of the tribe of Levi.

9.

THREE WAYS IN WHICH WE SERVE HASHEM

The explanation is this: When it comes to serving Hashem, we find three general categories — *mitzvos*, Torah, and *mesiras nefesh*.⁴¹

- a) *Mitzvos* are commands from Hashem that are clothed in physical items, such as *tzitzis* in physical wool, *tefillin* in physical parchment, etc. The fulfillment of *mitzvos* entails *avodah* in and with worldly matters, to refine and purify the physical articles, and make the world into a vessel for G-dliness.
- b) Torah is higher than (enclothment in) the world.⁴² Even after it “journeyed in a descent through hidden stages, stage after stage... so that every human thought... speech and action are... able to grasp them,”⁴³ the darkness of the world does not conceal Torah.⁴⁴ As the law says,⁴⁵ “the words of Torah are not susceptible to contracting impurity.”⁴⁶ In a person’s divine service, this {otherworldly dimension of Torah} nurtures abstinence and separation from worldly matters.
- c) *Mesiras nefesh*, **according to Torah**,⁴⁷ transcends the parameters and limitations of Torah and *mitzvos*. Its theme is uniting with and cleaving to Hashem immeasurably and unrestrictedly.

⁴¹ {Self-sacrifice; consummate devotion.}

⁴² “The *investment* of Torah {in the material world} does not entail *involvement* with it. Rather the Torah positions itself such that it can adjudicate worldly matters. So when the term *investment* is used {regarding the Torah vis-a-vis the world}, the term is used just figuratively” (*Maamarim* 5704, s.v. “*Vayomer Moshe*,” ch. 20).

⁴³ *Tanya* ch. 4.

⁴⁴ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Reeh*,” 20a: Torah is the Tree of Life... and *kelipah* lacks the power to prevail over it.

⁴⁵ *Brachos* 22a.

⁴⁶ Note *Zohar*, vol. 3, 80b, near the end.

⁴⁷ Similar to *teshuvah*, which **according to the Torah**, “Nothing withstands the effectiveness of *teshuvah*” (even if a person transgressed the entire Torah).

10.

THREE RANKS OF JEWS

These three above mentioned types of *avodah* correspond, in general, to the three broad ranks of Jews:

- a) Most of the Jewish people serve Hashem while busy with the usual social conventions.⁴⁸ To start, this is reflected simply by their involvement with physical labor, “a person plows and a person plants.”⁴⁹ And (even) in this environment, one fulfills *mitzvos*. Also, as all Jews, they carry out the directives that “all of one’s deeds should be done for the sake of Heaven,”⁵⁰ and “in all your ways, know Him.”⁵¹ These folks are “masters of good deeds.”⁵²
- b) The *avodah* of the tribe of Levi concerning which it says:⁵³

They were set aside to serve Hashem and minister unto Him and to instruct people at large in His just paths and righteous judgments as it states:⁵⁴ “They will teach Your judgments to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel.” Therefore they were set apart from the ways of the world.

Broadly speaking, this is the level of the “masters of Torah”⁵⁵ {Torah scholars}.

- c) The *avodah* of a *kohen*, and in particular, of a *Kohen Gadol*,⁵⁶ who is not allowed to leave the precincts of Jerusalem,⁵⁷ ירושלים, so called because it symbolizes the consummate awe of Hashem, ירא שלם. A

⁴⁸ *Brachos* 35b. As it says there, “**many** conducted themselves according to the teaching of Rabbi Yishmael and succeeded.”

⁴⁹ Cf. *Brachos*, *ibid*.

⁵⁰ *Avos* ch. 2, *mishnah* 12.

⁵¹ *Mishlei* 3:6; *Tur Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” end of sec. 231.

⁵² {*Maggid Meisharim*, “*parshas VaYakhel*”; in the Aramaic original, “*maarei uvdin tavin*.”} See *Iggeres Hakodesh*, epistle 5.

⁵³ *Rambam*, “*Hilchos Yovel*,” 13:12.

⁵⁴ {*Devarim* 33:10.}

⁵⁵ *Iggeres Hakodesh*, *ibid*.

⁵⁶ Every ordinary *kohen* was eligible to become a *Kohen Gadol*.

⁵⁷ See *Rambam*, “*Hilchos Kli Hamikdash*,” ch.5, par. 7.

consummate awe of Hashem is essentially the *avodah* of *mesiras nefesh*. Moreover, a *Kohen Gadol* may not leave the Sanctuary.⁵⁸ His position requires that he stands unified and joined with Hashem, and that he performs the special *avodah* assigned to the *Kohen Gadol*. Namely, **one**⁵⁹ day a year, on Yom Kippur, he enters the Holy of the Holies, a visible expression of *mesiras nefesh* — “the one people affirming Your Oneness.”⁶⁰

11.

SOLVING THE PARADOX

In this context, we can explain the two polarities mentioned above concerning the *avodah* of the tribe of Levi and the *avodah* of the High Priest. On the one hand, feasibly, one can actually implement the *avodah* of a levite as one’s regular regime, whereas one only needs to have a desire for the *avodah* of a *Kohen Gadol*. On the other hand, the *avodah* of a levite is not mandatory or indispensable for everyone unless “his spirit generously motivates him.” In contrast, everyone must have a desire for the *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol*:

In *olam ha’zeh*,⁶¹ the *avodah* of the Jewish people is carried out in the two above-described ways: the *avodah* of the person with himself, and the *avodah* of the person within the world. In general, the distinction between these is the same as the distinction between the “masters of Torah” and the “masters of good deeds.” The main *avodah* and lesson for every Jew is to be involved in doing *mitzvos*,⁶² because this is the way to go about making a dwelling-place for Hashem.⁶³

⁵⁸ *Vayikra* 21:12; see *Rambam*, *ibid*; “*Hilchos Biyas Hamikdash*,” ch. 1, par. 12. {*Sanhedrin* 18a. A *Kohen Gadol*, while serving, is exempt from other sorts of obligations (such as attending the funeral even of a parent), which would require him to leave his post.}

⁵⁹ *Vayikra* 16:34.

⁶⁰ *Hoshanos* liturgy, 3rd day.

⁶¹ {Lit. “this world”; the era preceding the coming of Mashiach.}

⁶² Nevertheless, understandably, they also need to schedule regular times for Torah study, learning at least one chapter in the morning and one chapter at night.

⁶³ See *Tanya*, ch. 37 at length.

But if someone’s “spirit generously motivates him,” then his **main avodah** can also follow the footsteps of the “masters of Torah,” who are utterly divorced from worldly affairs.

The *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol*, cleaving and connecting to Hashem in a way of *mesiras nefesh*, is not meant to be a **routine, daily practice in everyone’s** service of Hashem.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, there needs to be a desire for this.

In both types of *avodah* {of Torah study and the performance of *mitzvos*}, a person needs to want to cleave to and be connected with G-dliness with *mesiras nefesh*.⁶⁵ However, Hashem’s essential intention and will is for a person to remain “a soul vested in a body,” involved in the material world, and while there, to fulfill Hashem’s will. Therefore, in this lower world, a person performs his *avodah* in one of the two modes described above: His *avodah* either focuses on {transforming} material things by performing *mitzvos*, making this world into a home for Hashem; or at any rate, as with a minority of people, his focus is like that of the “masters of Torah,” and he disengages from materialistic matters.

Only when we exemplify Moshe’s wish, “I also want this,” when our desire and passion is to cleave to Hashem, do we completely fulfil each one of these two types of *avodah*. Because the world is not an end in itself and neither is asceticism.

⁶⁴ Interestingly, *Rambam* concludes “*Hilchos Shemitah Veyovel*” — “...something that is adequate for him.” *Radvaz* there comments, “he shouldn’t throw himself at the public {as a charity case}.” In other words, “he does... a bit of work... any one whose heart is set on occupying himself with Torah, and not work... such a person is...” (*Rambam*, “*Hilchos Talmud Torah*,” ch. 3, pars. 9, 10). In contrast, a “*Kohen Gadol* (or someone comparable) needs to be greater than all his brethren.... If he doesn’t have money, then all the other *kohanim* give him from their own, each according to his financial ability, until the *Kohen Gadol* is wealthier than the wealthiest among them” (*Rambam*, “*Hilchos Kli hamikdash*,” beg. of ch. 5).

⁶⁵ To put it a little differently: The principal *avodah* and lesson for every Jew is the *avodah* of performing *mitzvos*, making a dwelling place in the lower realm. But in order to ensure that *mitzvos* are performed properly, the *avodah* (of at least a minority of people) of the levites is also needed. They are the ones who are “masters of the Torah,” divorced from worldly affairs. This *avodah* of theirs protects the *mitzvos*, and prevents those swimming in the waters of worldly affairs from sinking in them. Nonetheless, every person’s power to transform the world into a home for His Essence, relies upon the feeling, “I also want this,” a person’s cleaving to and connection with G-dliness.

“In the place where a person’s desire resides, that’s where he is.”⁶⁶ In either mode of *avodah*, our will and thoughts are to cleave to G-dliness.⁶⁷ Then we will merit to bring about the revelation of the Future Era in actuality, a time when the levites will become the *kohanim*. Moreover, every Jew then will reach the stature of a *Kohen Gadol*. As the *Baal HaTurim* writes, “In the Future Era, it (the idea of the High Priesthood) will be restored to them, as it says,⁶⁸ “And you will be called *kohanim* of Hashem.” This will come about with the true and complete redemption by our righteous Mashiach, when Moshe and Aharon will be with us.⁶⁹

– From a talk given on Shabbos, *parshas Korach* 5733, 5734 (1973, 1974)

⁶⁶ An adage of the Baal Shem Tov, cited in *Keser Shem Tov*, addendum, sec. 38; et al.

⁶⁷ Note *Likkutei Torah*, *parshas Bamidbar* (1, c): “Whoever claims, ‘I have nothing aside from Torah,’ also has no Torah. For a person’s passion and deep desire should be only for Hashem; and to cleave to Him, and not just to the Torah... This {level} reflects the quality of Aharon the Supernal *Kohen*.”

⁶⁸ *Yeshayahu* 61:6.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Yoma* 5b; *Pesachim* 114b, *Tosefos*, s.v. “*echad*.”