



Event:

DEATH OF BILLIONAIRE HOWARD HUGHES

Date:

NISSAN 5, 5736
(APRIL 5, 1976)



The Rebbe spoke about him at the major Yud-Aleph Nissan farbrengen a few days after he died:

“The newspapers are all abuzz with this story. Someone even tried bothering me with this as well. A very wealthy man named Hughes passed away a few days ago. He was indeed quite wealthy; even by the United States’ standards.

“I asked the Yid who told me this story so excitedly, ‘What about this story moves you so much? You had nothing from the 2 billion dollars owned by Mr. Hughes!’

“But then I thought to myself: What lesson can we learn from this occurrence; specifically something connected with the month of Nissan—*Zman Cheiruseinu...*”

The bars of a prison are defined not by the material that makes them but by the meaning behind their existence. Someone in a self-imposed prison is actually a free man, armed with the knowledge that the only force imprisoning him is his own free will. And sometimes gold is more powerful than chains of iron clamped around a wrist.

Howard Hughes was an eccentric billionaire who made his money in the aviation and entertainment industry. Worth over \$6.24 billion in today’s dollars, he had nations doing business with him, purchasing military equipment and airplanes. And yet,

through it all, he was worried that someone was out to get him, poison him, kidnap him and to steal his money.

This paranoia only grew as he became more wealthy. As the years went on, a few plane accidents and head injuries led him to be in constant pain and on pain medication. His fear of other people grew and his neurosis got worse. At one point he moved into a theater for a year, living in the windowless screening room, eating chocolate and chicken.

When he died in 1976 he had been out of public sight for over 10 years, moving between hotels and resorts.

He purchased a hotel after living in it for a few months so the owners would not be able to evict him. In some of those hotels he wouldn’t even open his window drapes for years at a time. He weighed barely 90 pounds when he died, and the autopsy concluded that he had died from kidney failure, coming from dehydration, and malnutrition. Essentially he starved himself to death.

His paranoia prevented him from living like a normal human being. He feared for his life, for his money, didn’t trust his friendships, all because of a few dollars. A child can roam freely, but a billionaire? Not exactly.

A walk on the boardwalk? No. Eating at a restaurant? No. Relaxing with friends? Nope. What if they want to ask for half a million dollars for a project?

His billions of dollars granted him no freedom whatsoever; it made him the most miserable slave imaginable. The government listened to him, he owned everything from hotels to TV stations to airplane factories, and yet he couldn’t sleep at night.



On the other hand, there were people who lived in the concentration camps under the worst of conditions. But because they were connected to the “eternal”—to Torah and mitzvos—they felt themselves as free men.

Hashem did not create anything without purpose, to not have a use. If there is money, it must be used for good, not just sit in a bank. We tell Yidden, true, this non-Jew has 2 billion dollars but he is the slave of slaves. You might only have one million, nothing compared to his two billion, but you have the opportunity to use it for the good. Not drop it into a bank account, hire guards, crawl under a bed and begin trembling. Do good, bring the world closer to a *dira*

for Hashem, with the little money you have!

When a Yid decides that with the money Hashem gives him he will work to spread good, Hashem will send him another million, and when he uses it correctly, yet a third million. And he knows that with the wealth he can unlock many doors and open many listening ears; the purpose of his riches is to fulfill Hashem's shlichus.

Who is a free, truly liberated person? Not the wealthy individual in his own right, but someone who is not restrained by the *gashmiyus* of the world. This does not only include wealth; it includes addictions as well, for *taavos* do not shrink the more they are fed. The opposite is true¹, and one who has 100 wants 200, and

he who has 200 wants 400, until he is completely enslaved to his *taavos*.

It is entirely in the hands of the Yid. No matter how dark the *golus* that he finds himself in is, when he decides that he is preparing for the freedom of *Zman Cheiruseinu*² Hashem will intervene and his challenges will shrink until he is a completely free individual.

1. Sukkah daf 52b
2. This *sicha* was spoken right before Pesach 5736.



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TO READ THE ORIGINAL:

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