



Rabbi Yitzchak Sapochkinsky, rabbi of Chabad of Westlake Village, CA, and director of the Chai Teen and Youth Center, enjoying the *brachah* he was given—to be able to help a fellow Jew, Jonathan Diamand, perform the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*, which protects all Jews everywhere.

Between Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, we learn *Pirkei Avos*, one chapter every Shabbos afternoon after *Minchah*. We begin with the words, “*Kol Yisroel yesh lahem chelek P’olam haba,*” to remind us that ALL Jews are holy, ALL Jews have a *chelek Eloka mima’al mamash* inside of them. Showing love and respect to our fellow Jews is necessary to hasten the coming of Moshiach, may it be now! We thank Rabbi Yitzchak Sapochkinsky for sharing his thoughts and experiences with us. -Ed.

INHERITING DOVID'S MONEY

Rabbi Yitzchak Sapochkinsky

MY FRIEND WHO IS A THERAPIST once told me that he had a client who was an internationally acclaimed artist. Even before virtual appointments became fashionable, this artist was too busy to come to the office and insisted on facetimeing their weekly sessions.

“I’d listen and offer advice while he’d mindlessly stroll the outdoor grounds of his sprawling mansion overlooking the ocean. The fame he relished and the income he earned were astounding and were reflected in his exceedingly lavish lifestyle.

“One day I shared with him a thought from *Pirkei Avos*. ‘*Who is wealthy? He who is happy with his lot.*’ The gentleman froze in his tracks and peered directly into the phone’s camera. ‘What did

you say?’ he asked, stunned by the profundity of what I had just said.

“I explained what every *cheder* child knows—the importance of being grateful for what we have, instead of focusing on what we’re missing. As I watched him slowly absorb the wisdom of this teaching, I was thankful for the richness and genuineness of the Torah’s teachings that irradiate our daily lives.”

The *Gemara* (*Brachos* 7b) states that no one thanked Hashem until Leah named her fourth son Yehuda. “*Hapaam odeh es Hashem*, this time I will thank Hashem.” This declaration was so significant that the name Yehudi (Jew) is derived from Yehuda, because being grateful is essential to the life of a Jew. So much so that we begin every morning with the words *Modeh Ani* (thankful am I) as opposed to *Ani Modeh* (I am thankful) because the first words out

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of our mouth should be “thanks” and not “I,” even if it is not grammatically sound.

But what about the Avos who brought sacrifices to express their thanks to Hashem? As did Noach, after surviving the great flood? Why aren't their expressions of appreciation deemed as noteworthy as Leah's? And why did Leah wait until her fourth son to finally express gratitude to Hashem?

The Tiferes Shmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Berenbaum, 1920-2008) explains that throughout her life, Leah pined for Yaacov's attention, yearning to feel like a cherished wife. The names she chose for her three elder sons bespeak her ongoing sorrow and loneliness. With each birth she hoped that—*maybe, just maybe, now, finally*— I will have earned my husband's love and interest. (There are certainly many ways to understand this story and I am only presenting one.)

As prophetesses, the Matriarchs and their counterparts, Bilha and Zilpah, knew that Yaacov was destined to have 12 sons. They concluded that each of the four wives would give birth to three sons. When Leah's fourth son, Yehuda, was born, she sensed a paradigm shift in her way of thinking. *“Perhaps, I am not destined to be Yaacov's mainstay akeres habayis after all. Perhaps my role is to be a mother to our children. That's why Hashem blessed me with a fourth son, exceeding my allotment.”*

So, she named this son Yehuda. This wasn't merely an expression of thanks and appreciation for something that took place. This was an acceptance of moving forward with Hashem's plan, even if it seemed at odds with her wishes. If she wasn't going to attain the wife status she craved, she would lovingly and willingly become the best mother any child could hope for.

Meanwhile, in the next tent over, Rochel wept over her childlessness. Despite being showered with endless spousal love, she desperately *davened* for a child. Her painful cries, in the simple textual reading, were met with Yaacov's indifference as he gently reminded her that he's not G-d and that this is her issue, and not his.

When her prayers were finally answered, she named her son Yosef, pleading with Hashem to give her another son, *“Yosef Hashem li ben achair.”* Tragically, when her second child Binyamin was born, Rochel passed away in childbirth, depriving her of raising her children and experiencing motherhood fully.

And then, says the Tiferes Shmuel, a very strange thing happens. Leah is interred in Me'oras Hamachpailah, next to her husband, Yaacov. The marital closeness that eluded her all her life is suddenly realized, albeit posthumously. And Rochel, buried alone in Beis Lechem, without any family members nearby, is crowned for eternity with the eminent title of Mama Rochel.

Der Aibishter blaibt nisht kain baal choiv, we are told. Hashem pays His debts and fulfills our desires, even if it doesn't happen the way we anticipated. Kever Rochel is visited daily by hundreds of Yidden pouring out their hearts to Hashem and asking Mama Rochel to intercede on their behalf. And Leah's longing is no more; she's next to her husband for eternity.

So, where does that leave us? Striving to accept—and learning to be thankful for—what we have, for the hand we were dealt. For the *brachos* that Hashem has bestowed upon us, even if they don't match our limited purview.

If only it were that easy.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, AN ELDERLY congregant—we'll call him Dovid—confided that he'd named me the beneficiary of his life insurance policy for \$2,000. Since he had very little, I was humbled by his benevolence. But my gratitude was short-lived when he made the mistake of also telling me that he was leaving the same amount to another member of the community whom we'll call Avraham.

I'm embarrassed to admit that I was a little put off. After all, in my mind, I was doing so much for Dovid, whereas Avraham barely saw him, let alone cared for him. My sense of justice concluded that I was worthy of receiving the full four thousand dollars. Alright, I'll settle for 3K, and Avraham can get 1K. I'm not that greedy!

Several months later my father visited

California and had a conversation with my elderly friend.

"Do you know," my father told me later, "that Dovid said you're in his will for \$35,000?"

"Can't be," I responded. "He told me \$2,000."

My father corrected me and assured me that he had heard right. I was elated, to say the least! Wow, \$35,000! My mind began racing with ideas! And then, as if to assure me that he'd heard correctly, my father added: "Yeah, he said you're in his policy for \$35,000 and so is Avraham."

My excitement evaporated faster than a deflated balloon. The fact that I had just learned that my share had increased substantially was marred by my inability to *fargin* another person's good fortune. I was the embodiment of selfishness, greed, intolerance, and a few other adjectives I'd rather not admit to.

Fortunately, the Heavenly Accountant takes everything into consideration. We each get what we need, what we deserve, but it's up to us to learn to *accept* and *appreciate*. So important is our state of mind, that the letters of the word *machshavah* (thought), when rearranged, spell *b'simchah* (in happiness). When we think correctly, that is, we thank Hashem for the blessings He has bestowed upon us—even if they don't meet the list of needs we came up with—we will be happier, healthier, and more wholesome.

P.S. Dovid lived for many more years. When he passed away, his life insurance policy provided only the funds to cover his funeral and related expenses. But he enriched me with a wealth of beautiful memories and a timeless lesson from *Pirkei Avos: Who is wealthy? He who is happy with his lot.* ❁

Message to all readers from Eliezer Raksin

ABOUT THE BOOK YOU JUST RECEIVED WITH YOUR N'SHEI CHABAD NEWSLETTER

It is now 25 years since my father's passing, and I am about to turn 70. In honor of both occasions, I was inspired to collect all my articles that were published in the N'shei Chabad Newsletter (which we all know is read by men as well!) and publish them in a book.

My goal? To show you that any man or boy can do mitvza tefillin! Even in his spare time. Especially if his wife or mother encourages and supports it!

(At my age, today, I would never do the things I did 25 years ago. I would never pester people the way I did. I would just move on to the next customer.)

Honestly, I am tired. I just want Moshiach to come already. That's the only way I'll get a

break, and a good night's sleep. I won't have to wake up every morning at four a.m. to run put on tefillin with people before work. I will be able to sleep in until seven in the morning.

So please accept my gift to you, readers of the N'shei Chabad Newsletter, and get all the boys and men in your life to do mitvza tefillin with chayus!

After you read my book, *Once Upon a Driver*, please give it to someone else who might be inspired by it, or donate it to a library or Chabad House. You may order more copies on Amazon.

Thank you,
Eliezer (Lazer) Raksin
Afula, Israel

