

WHO IS RICH?

Rabbi Elliot Skiddell
Congregation Beth Emeth

Ten years ago, Tamir Goodman was a high school basketball phenomenon. Playing for the Talmudical Academy of Baltimore, the *kipah* [yarmulke] wearing teen was tearing up the court, averaging 30 points a game and leading his team to victory over many better known high school teams. He was profiled on the CBS program ‘60 Minutes’, wooed by college basketball powerhouses like the University of Maryland and touted as a possible future NBA prospect! In the end, Tamir Goodman did not join the ranks of the NBA’s multi-millionaires. Instead, he served in the Israeli army and today the married father of two plays for the Haifa Heat of the Israel Basketball League. Does he think about all the money he could have made playing in the NBA? In a recent interview he quoted a passage in “*The Ethics of Our Ancestors*” [4:1], a section of the Talmud, “[Rabbi] Ben Zoma says, Who is rich? One who appreciates what he has...”

I have heard it said that happiness is the art of taking pleasure in what we have while unhappiness is caused by focusing on what we *don't* have. Ever since the collapse of the stock market and the various ponzi schemes in which so much money was lost by so many, we, as a society, have been focusing on what we don't have instead of on what we do have. We are rich beyond compare when we have the love of family and friends and we are blessed with unimaginable wealth when we find a home in a community that strengthens and nurtures our spiritual needs. Echoing the words that Tamir Goodman quoted, the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said, “He who is contented is rich” and Benjamin Franklin said, “Who is rich? He that rejoices in his portion.” I doubt that either Lao Tzu or Ben Franklin knew the saying of Ben Zoma in *The Ethics of Our Ancestors*, but the wisdom of the teaching that all three of these great thinkers bequeathed to us is clear: contentment with what we have is one of the cornerstones of happiness. If we shift our focus away from the money we don't have anymore and focus instead on the wealth that we do have in our relationships and in our communities, we will be happier, we will be strengthened and we will be better able to weather the current crisis. At Congregation Beth Emeth we have been discussing and exploring issues of the value of money and our community values. Please join us for the next two discussions in the series “Torah and Money” on Wednesday evenings May 13 and May 20, at 7:30. There is no charge, just an openness to learn and a willingness to share your ideas.

Congratulations to Marilyn Dukoff, winner of a Mini-Cooper Car in our recent raffle. Have a question for Rabbi Skiddell or an issue you would like to have discussed? Please be in touch at rabbi@rcbe.org

Friday Evening Services at Congregation Beth Emeth, located at 36 Franklin Ave. in Hewlett, begin at 8:00 PM. Saturday morning services at 9:30 AM

For more information call 374-9220, come by the synagogue office or go to our updated website: www.rcbe.org