

## Contentment with One's Lot: *Samayach B'Chelko*

### TRANSLATION

The word *samayach* comes from the root *Sin-Mem-Chet* and means happiness, joy or contentment. The word *chelko* is based on the root *Chet-Lamed-Kuf* and means portion, lot, or piece. The phrase *samayach b'chelko* means contentment with one's lot or portion.

### TEXT

“Ben Zoma said: Who is rich? Those who are happy with their portion.”

(Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 32a also found in *Pirkei Avot* 4:1)

### COMMENTARY

Being content with one's portion is an age-old Jewish concern. In the book of Proverbs, we read, “A joyful heart makes a cheerful face; A sad heart makes a despondent mood. All the days of a poor person are wretched, but contentment is a feast without end.” (Proverbs 15:13 and 15)

To be truly joyful with one's lot in life is wise advice. It is a wonderful way to live, but how easy is it to adopt this attitude? How many of us are truly satisfied with our portion? How do we recognize our own good fortune? All around us the world advertises the goods and services we all seem to “need.” Our world is characterized by material acquisition, and to paraphrase a popular game show “who ‘wouldn't’ want to be a millionaire?”

This obsession with our “needs” is not just a contemporary concern. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, an eleventh-century Spanish poet-philosopher taught: “Who seeks more than he needs, hinders himself from enjoying what he has. Seek what you need and give up what you need not. For in giving up what you don't need, you'll learn what you really do need” (*Mivhar Hapeninim* 155,161 as found in *The Jewish Moral Virtues*, Borowitz and Schwartz, p.164).

This is the challenge, balancing what we need and what we want in order to become *samayach b'chelko* - satisfied with our portion.

Several commentators have suggested a variety of reasons why one should be *samayach b'chelko* - satisfied with one's portion. Reuven Bulka has written, “Whatever bounty and good one is given in life should be greatly appreciated. Unlike affliction, which one lives with by almost ignoring it and transcending it, that which one has been granted which seems to be beneficial should be accepted in joy (*As A Tree By The Waters* p. 256).

As it relates to acquisition of Torah, *Midrash Samuel* states, "...one must be happy that one can be involved in the study of God's word."

Our personal attitudes affect how we study and what we acquire through our studies. According to *Machzor Vitry*, if a person spends time worrying and brooding over one's portion of this world's pleasures (i.e. material possessions) one cannot concentrate on learning.

The *Ruach Chaim* explains that one's lot means one's ability to learn and comprehend. A person should not be dissatisfied if he or she cannot live up to one's ambitions or the standards of others with greater ability, one should do one's best and constantly review until the learning is mastered. In the end the individual will succeed and even excel (*The Pirkei Avos Treasury* p. 418).

Samson Raphael Hirsch taught that just as we should be satisfied with our portion of earthly goods, so too should we rejoice in the measure of intellectual talent we have been granted. For one should derive satisfaction from the knowledge that one has faithfully used one's abilities for the advancement of one's skills and learning, for God evaluates the achievements of each of us solely in terms of the extent to which one has made good use of one's intellectual abilities (*Chapters of the Fathers*, p. 107).

Simply put we are to be *samayach b'chelko* - satisfied with our portion from the effort we expend in life whether it is in acquisition of material possessions or acquisition of skills and knowledge not the number of possessions we have or the level of learning we achieve. It is in the doing not the acquiring that satisfaction and happiness are to come.

## TO TALK ABOUT

1. What do you treasure as your portion in life? Why? What satisfies you in your life and why?
2. Consider and discuss: if one is content with one's lot in life, does one risk becoming complacent or resigned to one's life situation? What about personal drive and ambition?

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