The American Dream...or Nightmare?

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**#1 Question: How would you define wealth?**

**#2 Question: How much money would make you happy?**

**#3**

**Pirkei Avos 4:1**

*Ben Zoma says:*

***Who is wise?*** *The one who learns from every person, as it says (Psalms 119:99), “From all my teachers I gained wisdom.”*

***Who is strong?*** *The one who controls his desires, as it says (Proverbs 16:32), “One who is slow to anger is better than a mighty warrior, and one who rules over his will is better than one who conquers a city.”*

***Who is rich?*** *The one who is happy with his portion, as it says (Psalms 128:2), “When you eat the fruits of your labor, you are fortunate, and it is good for you.” “You are fortunate” — in this world; “and it is good for you” — in the World to Come.*

***Who is honored?*** *The one who honors others, as it says (I Samuel 2:30), “For those who honor Me I will honor, and those who scorn Me will be degraded.”*

**Question: Why does Ben Zoma choose to deal specifically with these four attainments?**

**#4 Question: In his answers to the four questions, Ben Zoma is not going with the simple understanding.**

**What is he looking for?**

**Do you see a common thread in all four answers?**

**#5 Question: Why does Ben Zoma deviate from the simple understanding of wealth?**



**#6**

**Koheles Rabba 1:13**

*One who has one hundred desires two hundred.*

People have an inherent urge to expand and feel larger than they are at present. They want to own more, to grow beyond the current limitations and increase their holdings in this world. This being the case, Ben Zoma's advice to be happy with one's lot seems to contradict human nature.

It may sound like a lofty ideal - to be sure, it would be a wonderful trait to have - but since it goes against our grain, it doesn't seem possible to attain.

**Question:   Can you resolve this contradiction?**



**#7 Question: If you are supposed to be happy with what you have – is isn’t it the recipe for being complacent and not striving to achieve great things in life?**

**#8 Question: What is the “portion” that you are supposed to be happy with?**

**#9 Question: How do you apply the ideas you discussed today in your life?**