

EIGHT CHAPTERS □ CHAPTER 5:2

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

We're then offered a marvelous piece of advice. "Don't let your goal be to simply enjoy yourself" when you eat, drink, and do other such things, "and thus choose only appetizing foods, drinks, and the like." Instead, "strive for what's edifying" -- that is, to aim for what will ennoble us, hone our inner being, and bring us closer to our ultimate goal of comprehending G-d, rather than what will merely tickle our senses.

If what we're partaking of "happens to be gratifying, too, then so be it" Rambam adds; since there's nothing inherently wrong with that. But the other side of the coin is that if that same thing "happens *not* to be gratifying, then so be (that)" too, and we're to partake of it with aplomb with the idea that what matters most is that it will enable us to better ourselves.

There's an instance or two in which we'd be encouraged to choose something just because it was tasty, though: for medical reasons -- if we'd somehow lost our appetite and would need to eat something distinctively good in order to get it back; or if we'd grown depressed and would need to "ward it off by listening to poems and music, by strolling in gardens and among alluring structures, or by sitting before attractive works of art and the like".

The same goes for accruing wealth, by the way (which isn't at all wrong as long as we do it with halachic and legal guidelines). We may certainly do it, but only "to acquire edifying things, to maintain our well-being, and to extend our life long enough to comprehend G-d and know as much about Him as we can."

In the end, though, our "goal in all that should be our physical (and emotional) well-being" rather than the experience itself, so that we might achieve our ultimate goal with full vigor.

(Rambam ends here with an interesting bit of advice which still holds true today. "In point of fact," he adds, "the practice of medicine has a lot to do with virtues, knowing G-d, and comprehending what true bliss is", and it thus allows one to pursue a life of virtue and intelligence, he says from personal experience, having been a physician himself.)

Text Copyright © 2006 by [Rabbi Yaakov Feldman](#) and [Torah.org](#)