

## A Daily Bread

**Date:** 24 Elul 5782 (September 18, 2025)

**Torah Portion:** Nitzavim

**Topic:** Exponential Growth

We learn that the Written Torah encapsulates divine wisdom in a highly concentrated and, at times, opaque form. This mirrors the intense, compact spark of *kedushah* (holiness) it embodies. Because of its condensed nature, the Written Torah can be difficult to access on its own. To fully unlock its meaning, one must engage the heart and mind through the interpretive power of the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah serves as a clarifying force, fanning the initial spark into a radiant flame—a deep and passionate love for Hashem (God).

The Midrash presents a discussion between a wise man and a fool regarding the feasibility of mastering the entire Torah. The wise man insists it is achievable, while the fool maintains that it is not. The Midrash notes the oddity of this debate, since the question appears to be quantitative: how much time is needed, versus how much time is available? A simple calculation should suffice.

Yet, the Midrash shifts focus to a parable that highlights a deeper issue—the story of a loaf of bread suspended beyond reach. Here, both the wise and the foolish agree that the loaf cannot be accessed by hand alone. The key difference lies in approach: the wise man devises a solution, employing tools such as a ladder or stick to reach it, whereas the fool simply gives up. This reflects a broader truth about acquiring Torah knowledge—it is not about innate ability alone, but about one's willingness to seek out and employ the necessary means to grow.

This brings us to an essential insight about the learning process: the more one learns, the more efficient and expansive the learning becomes. Suppose a person devotes ten years to Torah study. One might assume they would make equal progress each year—advancing one-tenth of the way annually. In reality, however, the beginning stages are slow and difficult, with little to show in terms of progress. But if the learner persists with diligence, the pace gradually accelerates. Over time, their ability to comprehend even the most complex ideas increases exponentially. What once took months to understand may later be grasped in a matter of moments.

The fool fails to recognize this dynamic. He evaluates the challenge based on his present limitations and concludes that completing the Torah is impossible. In a sense, he is correct—as *he is now*, the task is beyond him. What he does not grasp is that through the very act of learning, his intellectual capacity will expand. Each new verse or concept becomes a rung on the ladder, lifting him closer to the once-unreachable “loaf” of Torah wisdom.

The Talmud (Berachos 40a) presents a similar contrast between physical and spiritual principles. In the material world, an empty vessel can be filled, while a full vessel cannot. But in the spiritual realm, the reverse is true: a “full” vessel—that is, a mind already enriched with Torah knowledge—becomes increasingly capable of receiving more. An “empty” vessel, however—a mind devoid of Torah—struggles to absorb anything at all.

This concept is echoed in Exodus 15:26: “*If you will listen, you will listen to the voice of Hashem, your God.*” The Talmud interprets the repeated phrase “listen, you will listen” to mean that initial effort to learn enables future learning. If one listens now, they will be able to continue listening and understanding. But if one fails to begin, they may later find themselves incapable of comprehension entirely.

The Midrash concludes with a profound reflection: “*[The Torah] is not hidden, but if you think it is hidden, it is hidden from you, because you are not engaged in its study.*” This statement implies two possible realities. The Torah is either accessible or inaccessible, depending entirely on one’s commitment to study. For those who persevere in their learning, the Torah gradually draws nearer, becoming part of both heart and speech. But for those who disengage, it remains distant—figuratively “in heaven” or “across the sea.”

Ultimately, we learn that Hashem plays an active role in the acquisition of Torah knowledge. Mastery of Torah is not achieved through human effort alone. While we are obligated to invest in its study, true understanding is granted as a divine gift—a gift of immeasurable worth and infinite depth. Shalom.