

## A Daily Bread

**Date:** 18 Elul 5782 (September 11, 2025)

**Torah Portion:** Ki Tavo

**Topic:** Called to the Torah

In Deuteronomy 28:1–2, it says: “If you carefully listen to the voice of YHWH your God and follow all His commandments that I give you today, then YHWH your God will raise you above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and reach you—if you listen to His voice.”

A similar idea appears in Proverbs 8:34: “Blessed is the person who listens to Me, who comes quickly to My doors each day, and guards the entrances of My house.”

The Shem MiShmuel explains a Midrash using a metaphor. He begins with this idea: The human soul has two main "entranceways"—one to the **mind**, where knowledge of Torah is received, and one to the **heart**, where emotional connection to God (Hashem) is formed. These entranceways can be "closed," like doors that block anything holy from entering.

According to Shem MiShmuel:

- The **door to the mind** is closed by **arrogance**. A person who thinks too highly of their own ideas may reject or ignore the Torah's wisdom.
- The **door to the heart** is closed by **excessive desire for material pleasures**. This kind of craving often comes from a sense of personal inadequacy—a feeling that one is not capable of reaching spiritual greatness, so they settle for lower goals.

Even though arrogance and low self-esteem are opposites, the Midrash refers to both as "doors" (דלתות). Interestingly, the Hebrew root *dal* (דל) can mean both "raised up" and "brought low," depending on context. For instance:

- In Isaiah 38:14, it means being **lifted up**. דָּלוּ עֵינַי לְמָרוֹם (*dal-lu ei-nai la-ma-rom*) “My eyes were “raised” high.” It is used in the sense of loftiness.
- Whereas, in Psalm 116:6, it means being **brought down**. דָּלֵתִי, וְלִי יְהוֹשִׁיעַ (*dal-lo-ti, ve-li ye-ho-shi-a*) “I was brought low, but He saved me,” it is used in the sense of lowliness.

Using this insight, Shem MiShmuel interprets the verse in Proverbs about waiting at God's doors. He says it refers to someone who feels spiritually blocked—whose heart and mind are shut. This person might feel that studying Torah or praying is pointless in such a state. But the verse teaches otherwise: Even if you don't feel inspired or fully understand what you're learning, you should still keep going.

The Talmud (Shabbat 63a) supports this: “A person should first study by repetition, even without full understanding, and only afterward seek the deeper meaning.”

This means that even if your heart is closed, you should still engage in holy activities. Over time, the holy words will build up around your heart. Then, when the “door” eventually opens, all that holiness will flow in and have its intended effect.

But you don't have to just wait. If you feel blocked but want to grow spiritually, you can take steps to open those doors—**one at a time**.

- **Start with the mind:** The main obstacle here is arrogance. To open this door, you need to recognize your limits, respect the Torah and its scholars, and be willing to submit your own ideas to their wisdom. Only then will your mind become open to true understanding.
- **Then move to the heart:** Once the mind is open, you can begin to deal with the desires and distractions that block your heart. This involves remembering your soul's worth, raising your personal standards, and pushing yourself to reach for spiritual heights through heartfelt prayer.

After opening both doors—your mind for learning and your heart for prayer—you must stay alert. Keep working to ensure these openings remain clear, and continue growing in these two key areas of spiritual life. Shalom.