



# Wisdom and Folly -

## Yirat Adonai Reishit Da'at

יְרֵאת יְהוָה יְהִי רֵאשִׁית דַּעַת תְּכַמֶּה וּמוֹסֵר אֲוִילִים בְּזוֹ:

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge:  
but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)*



**IN WESTERN CULTURE** there is an optimistic tendency to assume that the more knowledge someone has, the better. Such an assumption is based on the ideal of technology, which seeks to control the environment for the supposed good of mankind. The wise man, according to the Greeks, is the worldly man of knowledge and power.

In Hebrew thinking, such a humanistic viewpoint is insufficient, since the fear of the LORD – *yirat Adonai* – is the starting point for knowledge. *Yirat Adonai* is the reverential awe at the glory of God’s Presence, the first principle for all sound reasoning about the universe (and all that is in it). Without this underlying principle, even the most sophisticated human reasoning will be based on nothing more than the “*yada yada*” (from *yada*’, the Hebrew verb “to know”) of a fool.

There are different types of fools described in the Bible, each of which exhibits a lack moral character and discipline (*musar*). Here are some of the most common terms:

### Types of Fools:

פְּתִי / פְּתִים

First, there is “the simple one” (*peti*), described as someone who is immature, easily seduced, and (seemingly) *unaware* that sinful actions have consequences (Psalm 19:7, Prov 1:22, 14:15).

כְּסִיל / כְּסִילִים

Next, there is “the dullard” (*kesil*), described as someone who is obstinately opinionated and *slow* to realize that sinful actions have consequences (Prov 1:33, 13:19, 19:29, etc.).

אֲוִיל / אֲוִילִים

Third, there is “the fool” proper (*evil*), described as someone who insolently mocks at sin and *doesn’t care* that sin has consequences (Prov 14:9, 1:22).



נָבָל / נְבָלִים

Then there's "the boor" (*naval*), a shameless and profane person who is a practical atheist (Psalm 14:1).

לֵיזִים / לֵיזִים

Finally (and worst of all), there is "the scorner" (*leitz*), a person who cynically and bitterly mocks (*yalitz*) everything in the world (Prov 21:24, 22:10). The end of the scorner is destruction (Prov 9:7, Isa 29:20).

The Western ideal of the knowledge is ultimately *foolish*, since it repudiates the very idea of the "fear of the LORD," and scorns the idea that moral discipline is important to understanding reality (just check your public school system for details). If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, then the lack of such results in vanity, ignorance, depravity and stupidity.

As followers of Jesus in a society darkened by such vain imaginations, we are called to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:15-16).

*May God help us walk so wisely today.*

**Transliteration:**

בָּזוּ	עֲוִילִים	וּמוֹסָר	חֹכְמָה	דַּ'אֵת	רֵישִׁית	יְהוָה	יִרְאֵת
(2)   (1)	(3)   (2)   (1)	(3)   (2)   (1)	(2)   (1)	(2)   (1)	(2)   (1)	(1)	(2)   (1)
ba-zu	e-vi-lim	u'mu-sar	chokh-mah	da'at	rei-shit	Adonai	yir-at
despise	fools	and discipline	wisdom	knowledge	beginning of	The fear of the LORD	

*Yirat Adonai reishit da'at, chokhmah u'musar 'evilim bazu.*