

Why the Torah works

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There is a gemara in Bava Metzia that talks about the following case: you encounter your friend and your enemy with their donkeys. Your friend's donkey is loaded, and he is unloading it (thus relieving the pain of the animal.) Your enemy's donkey is unloaded, and he is loading it. Who do you help first? The gemara says that you help your enemy first, "in order to coerce your yetzer."

There is a halacha that you don't allow a workman to work on your property on Shabbos even though it's his choice to work there on Shabbos or not, you are not benefiting by his working on Shabbos, so he is not working for you. But it gives a certain undesirable impression. This halacha applies even if you are the only person who will witness this. Similarly, we are not allowed to walk into certain non-kosher places, because it gives a certain impression. This applies even if no Jews can see us.

You can see from here two interesting cases of how the Torah works. Actions penetrate the heart, they teach us something. The heart is blocked. The foreskin is a symbol of the "foreskin around the heart," the blockage on the heart. The heart represents the part of the mind that desires things. If Hashem told us "don't desire this, desire that!" it will not help. But if Hashem gives us an action to perform, then it gets through.

How does this work? It relies on our das. We have the ability to draw conclusions from what we know. We can never get rid of this das, we are stuck with it. People are so attached to their ability to think for themselves that they will die in order to keep it. We want our das more than we want anything else. It takes death to actually take it away.

This is where actions come in. An action is an event that I can assess. Look, I am loading my enemy's donkey, maybe he is not that bad after all. I see my worker working on my property on Shabbos, maybe Shabbos is not so holy after all, chas v'shalom.

The interesting thing is that this applies to all our observations. We learn something from everything we do. For example, if your wife is whining about something and you offer help, it makes her whine more, because from your helping her she concludes that she is really in need of help. And more importantly, the Torah is full of actions for us to take and to avoid. All those actions penetrate the heart and teach us something. Perhaps when we refrain from doing melacha on Shabbos we learn that really Hashem runs the world, since we are definitely not running it at the moment. When we engage in learning gemara, we figure out a sugya, but we

also conclude that Hashem's chochma is amazing, and we are drawn to it. It goes on and on. Truly interesting are the mitzvos whose effects are completely hidden from us.

Chazal say that there are three thousand reasons for every mitzvah. In other words, the complete and true effects of the mitzvos are not knowable by us ahead of time. Only by keeping the mitzvos can we actually gain that understanding, and even then it is usually incomplete.

There is a concept that there are two forms of the Torah, one for use on earth and one for use in Shamaym. Perhaps the latter form contains statements such as "desire this, don't desire that" which are appropriate for beings whose das always works properly. At the end of days Hashem will take away our heart of stone and will give us a heart of flesh. He will tell us what to desire and what not to desire and we will believe Him, like a child does with his parents.

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