

It doesn't work!

Posted by ploni.almoni@gmx.com - 05 Nov 2013 16:04

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Over the centuries we have learned interesting things about Hashem's world. We have learned that we have some ability to understand and affect the world. But this has come at the price of understanding our own limitations.

One example of this limitation is the concept of measurement error: when I measure something I never get the value I am really seeking, I get that mixed with some error. If I am aware of this problem I can compensate for it. I can make the same measurement many times and get a smaller error.

It's fascinating that experiment has to follow very strict rules, or it doesn't work. It's not easy to get used to this. There is a general belief today that we control our environment, that we know pretty much everything there is to know, and it's baseless.

The reality is that in society today we make choices that leave a lot to be desired. We make a call on how to teach our children, how to tax people, monetary policy, regulations etc. And very little of this is based on verified benefit. The reality is that we really don't know what we are doing, we don't actually go back and check the consequences of what we did, or when we do we draw the wrong conclusions.

The problem here is not that we are doomed to failure, but that we don't know how to think. In the lab people may know how to think in order to draw correct conclusions and be effective, but the lab is a pretty simple kind of setting.

It's scary how long it took people to learn the rules for doing good experiments. After all, the past was filled with great minds. If you think about that you realize just how bad our situation is. We can spend a long time thinking that there is no remedy for our limitations, even when there is.

I spent many years feeding my addiction. All the while I suspected that I couldn't stop. Then I decided that there is no way to beat it, and the only hope is to compensate for it somehow. These days I see it differently: every time I acted out, it's because I chose to do that, I know that rationally. The question is why I chose it. The answer is that my choices are only as valid as

what I see, and what I see is broken. I make my feelings with what I think deep inside. Once I learned and accepted this simple idea, it was a matter of learning the rules for seeing clearly inside my own mind.

I think I liked it better before, when I thought I was doomed but my mind was essentially sound. If I felt anxious it meant I really was in danger. If I felt guilty it meant I really did something wrong. If I felt a burning desire it meant I really needed the thing I was seeking. Today when I feel or think something I know I have to mindfully inspect it to see if it's a justified feeling. And with the right feelings you get the right behavior.

To me this is why the Torah says that the serpent was so cunning. The point of eating the tree of knowledge of good and evil, of intellect, was to be like G-d. But it doesn't really make me like G-d because it doesn't work!

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Re: It doesn't work!  
Posted by MBJ - 05 Nov 2013 18:23

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If I can respectfully ask (because I don't totally disagree with you) if our thinking is wrong, because we don't think right, then what makes you confident that with your new approach you are thinking correctly, and not just falling into a different mind trap of your own making?

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Re: It doesn't work!  
Posted by ploni.almoni@gmx.com - 05 Nov 2013 19:49

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The short answer is that you never know for certain. For example, people used to believe that Newton's law of gravity was correct. Now we know that it's not as correct as Einstein's theory of gravity. And it's easy to see that Einstein's theory is not entirely correct either, because it fails to describe the rotational motion of galaxies. Until you discover a reason why your theory doesn't work, you can use it.

There are certain "traits" of a good theory though. For example, a good theory gives new results, it doesn't just describe things that already exist. It's like a gift that keeps on giving.

Another trait of a good theory is that it's economical. It does not rely on unnecessary concepts.

There are some theories that you just know they are wrong, they call them phenomenological theories. They are basically a hack to describe a phenomenon until a better theory comes along, and this is known at the outset. A phenomenological theory is like a band-aid. For example Plank's description of black body radiation was like that. There was no underlying reason why it should work the way it did, and it bolted on to the current theory the idea that for some reason radiation has to be quantized. Today we know why radiation is quantized and when it's not. Radiation is quantized when it's constrained in a limited space, like an atom, a cavity, or an optical fiber. We don't have to bolt that on, it just "falls out."

Another good trait of a theory is that unifies, it simplifies, your current knowledge, it does not add new primitive concepts.

To me the idea that the failure to do what is in my best interest is the result of a faulty das is the most economical way I can describe my problems. This is a promising trait. The results of relying on this theory are very good, also, and they are tested by thousands of people every day. Mindfulness consistently gives good results in people's lives, when they use it. It's true for engineering, manufacturing, stock trading, yiddishkeit, and increasingly also mental health. I have also tried other popular methods of recovery, and I find mindfulness to be the most decisive and rapid.

And when I learn Torah I don't need to justify why it's okay to use my recovery method, it's already in the Torah. We are told that if we are mindful we can change. The question is: how come it doesn't work? My current approach gives an answer, and the answer enables me to stay clean, be nice to my wife, enjoy my kids, and grow in Torah and mitzvos as well.

If you are interested in this from a scientific standpoint I would watch "the character of physical law part 7".

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Re: It doesn't work!  
Posted by MBJ - 06 Nov 2013 01:36

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That you for the point to the Feynman Lecture series I am very excited.

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