

נעשה ונשמע

Na'aseh v'Nishmah

lit. we will do and we will understand

Try it

The Jewish approach includes learning by doing, which leads to understanding.

When the Israelites received the Torah, they responded *na'aseh v'nishma* or 'we will do and we will understand.' We might expect the opposite order – first we understand an instruction, then we do it. This story teaches the opposite -- often often we can't understand something until we do it.

Judaism is a system of mitzvot, prescribed actions – visit the sick, light Shabbat candles, etc. The mitzvot are not statements of belief, but rather actions.

One of the great heroes of the Exodus story is a man named Nachshon. Standing at the Sea of Reeds, facing the terrifying waters before them and the fast approaching Egyptian Chariots behind them, Nachshon knew something must be done. While many were frozen in fear or uncertainty, Nachshon stepped into the water and G!d then parted the sea.

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

1. Have you ever experienced the phenomenon of 'not understanding something until you did it'? When and where, and what did you learn by doing it?
2. When, in your estimation, is taking a risk important? When is it foolish?
3. If you could remind yourself of some insight or truth every day, what would it be? How might you use a ritual or habit to remind yourself of this?