I Do Good Deeds, Therefore, I Am

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Virtue signaling is an affectation that has taken hold among many who profess to be virtuous. Living a truly virtuous life and actually doing good deeds appears to be optional. It seems that mindlessly shouting a prescribed slogan that often rhymes, on demand, at exceedingly high volume, is all that is required.

This conception of idle virtue is antithetical to our Jewish tradition, where what a person thinks in the abstract is not as important as what a person does in practice. Leading a virtuous life means more than just good thoughts; it requires performing good deeds, referred to in the Torah as the mitzvoth (commandments). Notwithstanding René Descartes'[1] famous dictum that I think, therefore, I am,[2] the Torah's view might better be expressed as, I have a soul and do good deeds, therefore, I am.

Interestingly, Blaise Pascal, another noted mathematician and acquaintance of Descartes, also disagreed with Descartes on this subject. Many just cite Pascal's statement[3] that the heart has it reasons, which reason cannot understand.[4] However, he went on to explain that it is the heart that experiences God and not a person's facility to reason. Perhaps, though, Pascal's figurative reference to the heart might be better understood as the soul. As the Bible[5] describes, God created Adam from a combination of earthly matter and spiritual essence.[6] As a result, he became a living being endowed with understanding.[7] It is the soul, which is the source of a person's identity as an individual.

Both Descartes and Pascal would have benefited from the landmark study done by Dr. Antonio Demassio.[8] He analyzed the role played by what is commonly referred to as the rational mind, which challenged the then prevailing view as to the way the mind functions, in his book aptly titled, *Descartes' Error*.[9]

Dr. Damassio reports on his work with a patient who suffered a freak accident that impaired the functionality of his amygdala. This part of the brain is viewed as the seat of our instinctual or emotional behavior, as opposed to the frontal cortex, which is viewed as the rational portion of the brain. Dr. Damassio's study suggests that decisions are actually made by the instinctual portion of the brain. The cortex then rationalizes those decisions.

Indeed, many successful decision-makers do rely on what is typically referred to as a gut feeling; but which may be better defined as instinct. They are also rather adept at rationalizing those gut feelings. Given Dr. Damasio's conclusions, we should be questioning whether our thoughts and decisions should necessarily be viewed as wholly rational. They may in fact just be flawed rationalizations of what our underlying instincts demand, which are not always wholesome or noble. Consider how this instinctual bias, insidiously cloaked in reflexive rationalizations, might yield self-serving decisions that may even be perceived to be altruistic, because of the deceptive functioning of the brain. Is it any wonder that the virtue-signaling crowd believe they are doing good by merely shouting a variety of slogans? Thus, the brain cannot be counted on to be wholly rational and, therefore, our implicit trust in our own rationality may be misplaced. What then can be done to remedy the problem?

The Torah offers a means of dealing with the matter. It begins with the realization that there is another aspect to the thinking process, which is embodied in our spiritual dimension, the soul. Indeed, Maimonides (Rambam) views the brain as an organ of the body, which is joined with the soul. The brain is then something akin to the central processing unit in a computer. The actual seat of character traits, knowledge, thought, and decision-making, is the soul. The soul's perception and expression in the physical world, though, is limited by the constraints of the body, including the mind. Rambam,[10] therefore, applies a holistic approach to dealing with a person's physical and mental, as well as, spiritual health, to assure the well-being and proper development of the person. Each of these essential components in the make-up of a person must be nourished in order to assure a good and productive life. How then to nourish the spiritual portion of the person and train the brain effectively to function in expressing the will of the soul? In this sense, the brain is a filter that can impair or distort the desires of the soul.

The performance of the mitzvoth is a means by which the soul trains the mind and body and habituates them to behave properly. By doing the mitzvoth, whole-heartedly and with joy, a person can achieve a higher level of consciousness and connection to the divine. This connection to the spiritual manifests itself in the good feelings that it engenders, which suffuse the mind and body. This blissful state is truly sustainable in that it is both long lasting and repeatable, by continuing to do good deeds.

It is noteworthy that some mitzvoth are classified as *hukkim*.[11] The term "*hok*" is derived from the word *hakikah*, something indelibly engraved in rock, like a picture.[12] It is suggested that, in

modern parlance, it might be termed imprinting, in the sense of creating neural pathways in the brain. It results from the habitual behavior associated with the performance of a *hok*.

In essence, as the Rambam[13] posits, the actions of the body affect the soul, and we can affect how we think by what we do. Consider how an athlete trains using repetitive routines (habitual behavior) to establish what is commonly referred to as muscle memory. The term is somewhat of a misnomer. Our muscles don't have memory. The process of reacting to outside stimulus is controlled by our brain or, as the Rambam terms it, the soul.

Following the Torah handbook of training and programming, neural pathways can be created (i.e., engraved or imprinted) in the brain. This is accomplished through the process of acting out Torah rituals and other observances of the commandments, which is a means of imprinting the brain. Because of the less-than-rational nature of *hukkim* ,[14] their performance is particularly well suited to bypassing the filter of the so-called rational mind. In essence, they reach right into the instinctual and emotional part of the brain and create virtuous responses that become second nature and are more consistent with the needs of the soul.

Establishing and reinforcing good patterns of behavior is an essential and fundamental part of this imprinting process. The effect of this kind of ritualized behavior and conditioning is to train and sublimate those instincts and emotions to higher purposes, nourishing our spiritual side, embodied in the soul. This, instead of reinforcing our baser instincts and desires traditionally associated with this part of the brain that are rationalized by the frontal cortex, as Dr. Damasio found.

The Torah-derived patterns of good behavior include, for example, praying in a *minyan*, at specified times, observing the details of the Sabbath and holidays, or following other observances. By habitually acting out these rituals or other observances like *hukkim* with heartfelt joy, we not only imprint our brains with neural pathways, we also create a positive feedback loop, enhanced by our brain chemistry, which reinforces the good feelings we experience when performing these sacred rituals.

In this light, consider the recent desire by many soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces to wear *tzizith* as they fight the evil that is Hamas. The *tzizit* offer no real tangible protection in combat, and as the Midrash Tanhuma[15] notes, like other such *hukkim*,[16] there is an illogical character to the mitzvah of wearing *tzizith*. Yet, soldiers are donning *tzizith* every day just like the body armor they customarily wear, and the comforting feeling they experience putting on *tzizith* is undeniable. *Tzizith* are designed to serve as a symbolic reminder of the importance of performing the 613 mitzvoth. The ritual of making the blessing and donning the *tzizith* every morning, as well as the feeling of having the garment as an added layer close to the body, as a tangible form of spiritual body armor, is most heartening.

Rabbeinu Bahya discusses the details of the *parah aduma* (red heifer) requirements,[17] another example of a *hok*. He notes that features of this ritual are not only devoid of logic—they appear to defy logic. Thus, the very same ashes of the

parah aduma purify the ritually impure and defile the ritually pure. Rabbeinu Bahya goes on to explain [18] that the term *hok* also means boundary or limit.[19] Establishing boundaries and limiting our behavior is an essential element in the kind of habitual behavior that can imprint our brains with a positive message. It is one of the fundamental benefits of performing the mitzvoth.

The Talmud[20] analyzes the nature of the soul. It does so, poetically, in parallel statements about the characteristics of the divine and the soul, as follows:

1. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, fills the entire world, so too the soul fills the entire body.

2. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, sees but is not seen, so too does the soul see, but is not seen.

3. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, sustains the entire world, so too the soul sustains the entire body.

4. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, is pure, so too is the soul pure.

5. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, resides in a chamber within a chamber, so too the soul resides in a chamber within a chamber.

Rav Bahya ibn Pakuda,[21] in his seminal work, the *Hovot haLevavot*,[22] describes the interplay between the body and soul, the constituent elements comprising a human being. Both are among the benefits God has bestowed on humankind. The body is visible, and the soul is invisible. Accordingly, Rav Pakuda asserts, a person has a duty to render to God visible and invisible service.

The visible outward service is the observance of the duties of the limbs. This includes praying, fasting, giving charity, learning the Torah and teaching it, making a Sukkah, waving a lulav on the festival of Sukkot, *tzitzith*, mezuzah. and similar precepts whose performance is completed by the physical limbs.

The invisible inward service consists of the fulfillment of the duties of the heart. This includes acknowledging the unity of God in our hearts, believing in God and God’s Torah, revering God and humbling ourselves before God, loving God, trusting in God, abstaining from what God hates,

devoting our actions to God's name, reflecting on the benefits God bestows on us and similar things, which are performed by the thoughts and sentiments of the heart, but are not associated with activities of the visible limbs of the body.

Rav Pakuda explains that the duties of the limbs cannot be performed properly unless they are accompanied by the will of the heart, longing of the soul to do them and desire of the heart to perform them. Cooperation between the body and soul is required for the complete service of God; no act can be complete without the agreement of the soul. Thus, the soul and the body must act in concert to perform the mitzvoth or the performance is not deemed whole and complete. Among other biblical sources, Rav Pakuda cites a verse in Deuteronomy[23] that one must love God with all of one's heart, soul, and might. Indeed, as the title of the *work Hovot haLevavot* (Duties of the Heart) indicates, Rav Pakuda is particularly focused on devotion of the heart, as a critical and integral component of performing the mitzvoth. He cites the discussion in the Talmud[24] about how when rain was needed, the barometer for measuring who would be most successful in entreating God was not the amount of Torah the person studied. Rather, the determining factor among the sages was who had the most heart. The Talmud explains, this is based on the verse in Samuel,[25] that God seeks the heart.

Rav Pakuda discusses the need for introspection and self-examination[26] as to a person's service of God (i.e., performance of the mitzvoth). He also speaks about the need for a person to train oneself to do so, with all one's might, diligence, and zealousness, until it becomes a habit. He goes on to explain that the primary purpose of the mitzvoth, which involve the body and the limbs, is to arouse a person's attention to the feelings that must have in the heart and the mind, in furtherance thereof. In essence, it is the doing of the mitzvoth with the proper intent that nourishes the soul. Engaging in the performance of the mitzvoth with all of a person's heart and mind and exerting oneself to the best of the one's ability results in God opening the gates of spiritual qualities. Said another way, it enables the soul to be nourished.

I believe the good feelings it engenders are a part of the self-reinforcing mechanism, designed to motivate a person to continue doing mitzvoth this way. Indeed, as the Mishnah in Avot[27] states, doing a mitzvah engenders doing another mitzvah.

Among the mitzvoth, is the obligation to love your neighbor like yourself.[28] Rav Pakuda presents this mitzvah in a most interesting way. He challenges a person to make a personal accounting regarding the person's joining with people for furthering the general welfare, such as plowing or harvesting, buying and selling, and other societal matters. These are endeavors in which people should help each other, because they should love doing for their neighbors that which they would love happen to themselves and eschew doing harm to others.

Rav Pakuda also asserts that the strengthening and rectification of the soul is through habituating it with morals and wisdom. It requires guiding it with words of wisdom, teaching it good traits and restraining from the bodily lusts. The strengthening and rectification of the body is achieved by providing it with various types of good, tasty food and drink, which are suitable to its nature, washing it with warm water, and supervising its benefits and needs constantly. However, he cautions that if a person's thoughts are limited only to the needs of the body and all attention is focused on this

object, then the person will neglect the improvement of the soul. Likewise, if a person's attention is only directed toward rectifying the soul, then will neglect much of the needs of the body. It takes a balance. The key is for the person both to provide the body with the food it needs to function and the soul with the wisdom and moral conduct it needs. It is a potent example of the soul and body connection. Rav Pakuda also notes the verse in Ecclesiastes,[29] which states that a person should not be overly righteous so as not to bring desolation on himself, or overly wicked or a fool so as not to suffer an untimely demise. He explains that should not separate from the world nor seek to conquer the world and indulge in base desires beyond that which is appropriate for the satisfaction of religious and worldly needs.

There is much contemporary discussion of the mind-body connection. The Jewish tradition approaches the substance of this matter from a somewhat different perspective. It recognizes that there is a soul and body connection. The mind, in this equation, is a part of the body apparatus. Thus, there is an obligation to keep not only the body, including the brain, in good health, but also the soul.

The Bible[30] obligates a person to guard both his body and soul. Keeping both in good health and functioning properly requires a proactive approach. They are also interdependent and, therefore, there must be a coordinated healthcare program. In this respect, it is similar to treatment regimens that recognize the mind-body connection. However, many of the issues ascribed to the mind are rightly placed with the soul.

The brain in this construct is another organ of the body, much like the processor, memory, and other hardware in a computer. The body is the machinery it controls in order to perform a variety of tasks. In this analogy, the soul is the programmer and software that makes the computer and, by extension, the machinery of the body it controls, function. Without the software to run it, the mind and body are but a lifeless machine. The connection between the two is intimate. Each is integral to the functioning of the other.

The Rambam explains[31] that the soul animates the person and controls what the person feels and contemplates. It governs:

1. Nutrition: The complex system in the body, which ingests food, digests it, processes into a form that can be assimilated, transported and stored within the body, so as to be available to provide the energy, when and where needed, to power the body and its functions. This includes maintenance, growth, and reproduction. It must also distinguish between what is useful to the body and what is not and then discards the waste.

2. Sensation: The complex system of the five senses of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch and the processing of that sensory input.

3. Imagination: The power to recall impressions of various incidents after they are no longer perceptible by the senses, associate and disassociate them from other memories and develop new ideas that are not just recreations of previous perceptions of the senses. It can imagine things that don't exist in reality.

4. Simulation: The power that attracts or repels a person from something else. It can inspire a person to seek, flee from, appreciate, or reject something. Anger, desire, fear, courage, cruelty, mercy, hate, love, and other emotional states are a part of the simulative power of the soul. It expresses itself in actions of the organs and limbs of body it controls, such as the motions of the hands, feet, and eyes, as well as, the internal processes of the organs, which fuel fear, courage, or other emotional states.

5. Conceptualization: The power to think and contemplate. It enables a person to acquire knowledge and distinguish between positive and negative activities. This includes both in the abstract realm of the spiritual and the applied realm of vocational activities, such as carpentry, agriculture, medicine, and seafaring. It also includes the power of discernment to enable a person to determine when one is suited to performing a particular activity or it is proper to do so.

The Rambam notes that soul craves knowledge. It is the faculty, which God endowed us with, in order to comprehend knowledge. It has the ability to understand metaphysical concepts and recognize God and the majesty of God's creations. The soul does not decompose upon death like the body. It is from God and it is eternal.[32]

If the soul has so much control over the body and, by extension our life, then where does the breakdown occur that enables a person to sin? Isn't this so counter to the soul's spiritual essence as to make it virtually impossible to happen? Yet as the Talmud[33] reports no person dies without sin. Why then do good people commit sins?

The Rambam answers this question.[34] The actual performance of the mitzvoth or rebellion against the dictates of the Torah is effectuated by the soul's sensory and simulative controls noted above. This is because they direct the actions of the body, which engages in virtuous or sinful actions. But the origin of these impulses lies elsewhere. It is in the conceptual facility of the soul that the problem begins. It can be as simple as belief in a defective idea instead of a true one. Often though, the problem is a much more subtle one. This is because a person has positive virtues and correspondingly negative ones. Intellectually, a person might make errors because of a lack complete and coherent knowledge, a misunderstanding, or a lack of clarity. In this sense, the concept of merely virtue signaling without concomitant good actions is a corrosive influence. Better to do good deeds and eschew the impotent signaling. What's the point of talking about virtue and not actually acting virtuous by doing good deeds? It's obnoxious and self-defeating.

The Rambam explains[35] that a healthy soul can be recognized by its good deeds and kind conduct. Illness of the soul is manifested by evil conduct, damaging actions, and reproachable deeds. The Rambam analogizes the symptoms of soul sickness to physical maladies. He notes that sometimes an ill person will suffer from confused senses. What is bitter might taste sweet and vice versa. Sometimes they might find unhealthy activities pleasurable and vice versa. They may even ingest harmful substances that a healthy person would shun. An unhealthy soul might similarly believe that wicked, undesirable, or unworthy actions are good and vice versa. He goes on to say that the wicked will seek motives that are in fact evil and yet because of their infirmity will characterize them as good. In essence, they seek pretexts to justify wrongful conduct and rationalize it.

It appears that the Rambam, in the twelfth century, is describing what today might be described as the symptoms of virtue signaling disorder syndrome. He even notes that those who suffer from this condition typically don't appreciate they have a problem and consider themselves healthy. The Rambam offers that left untreated, the illness of the soul just gets worse. Bad conduct doesn't satisfy the soul; it merely increases its appetite. A soul doctor is required to diagnose and heal the spiritual ailments, much like a medical doctor is required to diagnose and treat physical illness. However, because of the integration of the soul and body, a combination of remedies is required, in order to cure a problem.[36]

The soul constitutes the center of a person's consciousness, intellect, emotions, perception, and understanding. It is the soul that directs whether a person feels happy or sad or loves or hates something. The senses are also controlled by the soul. The soul is the source of a person's imaginative facility, contemplative ability, and appreciation of metaphysical ideas. The Rambam speaks of how soul health is dependent on our moral conduct and taking the middle path. Improving our moral qualities heals the soul. Both the body (including the mind) and the soul must be healthy. If the body is not healthy then the soul suffers, as well. It is not able properly to apprehend the knowledge of God while unwell.[37] In essence, medicine treats the body and Torah the soul. A person can actively treat the soul by doing what is right and proper. The Rambam describes[38] the golden mean, which provides equilibrium among all sorts of excesses dictated by our inborn character traits, including extremes of even the virtuous ones. The key though is treating both as a part of a coordinated treatment plan.

In describing the soul, the Rambam uses terminology that is reminiscent of a discussion of quantum and wave theory. The soul is said to have form but not substance, akin to electromagnetic energy. This is unlike the body, which has both form and substance. The soul is invisible. Yet, it has observable effects, which manifest themselves in the actions of the body.

The Torah provides a holistic approach to life that includes soul health to achieve enlightenment and nobility. The master training program, embodied in the Torah system of mitzvoth God beneficently bestowed upon us, includes *hukkim*. In this regard, it is important to appreciate the depth and full extent of what are considered the *hukkim*.

It is respectfully submitted that there are no real *mishpatim*, which could be expected to be enacted as a matter of course by those professing to be rational. Consider the vagaries of human nature

and the ability of some segment of the society to rationalize and glorify what others perceive as undoubtedly and absolutely abhorrent. For example, on October 7, 2023, Shabbat-Shemini Atzeret, evil Hamas invaded Israel, brutally murdered over 1,200 Israelis, Americans, Europeans, Nepalis, and others from dozens of countries. In addition, Hamas maimed many thousands more, committed sadistic and unspeakable atrocities, and kidnapped Israelis, Americans, and others, including women and children, who they viciously abused and are continuing to hold hostage. They also murderously fired more than 7,000 rockets and missiles targeting innocent civilians in Israel. Although condemned by many, the world has not universally denounced Hamas' evil conduct. Indeed, some even sought to rationalize this miscreant behavior, finding excuses and pretexts to justify the malign actions of Hamas. Alas, this is not the only example of atrocities that are ignored, including against Christians in Darfur and Muslim Uyghurs in China. So many can't see because their vision is obscured and moral clarity impeded by their debilitating, misplaced, and biased focus on virtue signaling ideologically driven messages.

It's all too reminiscent of the Midrash[39] that described God offering the Torah to other nations before granting it to the Jewish people. Each nation God offered the opportunity to receive the Torah first asked what was in it before they could accept it. When told it contained a prohibition against killing, one nation answered that murder was an essential part of their ethic. Others balked at the restrictions on adultery. Another nation refused it because it prohibited theft and that was an accepted part of their cultural tradition. The sum and substance is that what some may think are ordinary and rational rules are not so obvious to everyone. The answer, ultimately, of the people of Israel was we will do and listen. In essence, it's the doing part that's critical and this involves performing the entire program, not just the part we profess to understand. After all, burdened as we are with our rationalizing mind, who are we really to know?

The Beit haLevi[40] in analyzing the nature of *hukkim* concludes that we don't actually know the reason for any of the 613 commandments; it's really all just speculation.

All of the commandments are intertwined into one seamless whole, each dependent on the other, designed to yield refinement. Overdoing or underperforming any of the commandments is to be eschewed, because the entirety of the Torah is a divinely prescribed program to achieve this result. Missing a step or adding one will only serve to disrupt the finely tuned mechanism. Thus, even well-meaning attempts to ascribe reasons justifying the performance of some of the commandments, like the *mishpatim*, are fraught with danger. This is because trying to rationalize the performance of some of the commandments might lead to dismissing those, like the red heifer, which don't make rational sense. Hence, the emphasis in the Torah on the *hukkim* as the correct approach to the commandments.

It is suggested that the distinction between *hukkim* and *mishpatim* is not in the requirement of unquestioning performance, which effectively is applicable to both categories; but, rather, in the observable or hidden results of doing them. As Maimonides[41] notes, every commandment serves a useful purpose. In some cases, the usefulness is evident and in others not so much.

Thus, a good physical exercise routine and diet can have positive and measurable effects on our physical health. We can also see the wonderful and most beneficial effects following the *mishpatim* has

on how society functions. However, there are no observable conditions we can measure to determine the positive effect the red heifer protocol is having on our soul. Perhaps, that goes to the essence of the descriptive category of *mishpatim* as distinguished from *hukkim*. We can readily observe the visible difference fulfilling the *mishpatim* makes on relations among people. This should inspire us faithfully to follow the complete formula. After all, the overt parts can be seen to work in practice.

Establishing good patterns of behavior through good training helps assure when the real test occurs that we acquit ourselves well.

It is also important to think before acting, in order to fashion the appropriate response to a particular circumstance. An automatic, conditioned response is not always the answer. In life, it is sometimes difficult to recognize what is positive or negative in a particular situation.

The Torah contains all sorts of rules that are designed to control our behavior. If a person wishes to eat the eggs in a nest, the mother bird must first be sent away, before the person may collect the eggs.[42] When besieging a city, it is commanded not to cut down the fruit trees.[43] The Bible also commands that the mother animal not be slaughtered on the same day as its young.[44]

The Bible permits eating only certain species of animals, with certain defined characteristics [45] and only certain specified fowl,[46] provided they are first to ritually slaughter.[47] In addition, among other things, the suet must also first be removed,[48] as well as the blood,[49] and the meat cannot be eaten with milk.[50] As to sea life, only certain fish with specified characteristics[51] are permitted to be eaten, not any others. These are but a few head notes of the many volumes of halakhic materials containing extensive detailed rules and regulations governing food and its consumption.

We don’t know the particular reasons for each commandment. However, there is a pattern in terms of human behavior that they share in common; they serve to regulate it. Satisfaction is delayed and limited. A person is prohibited from just grabbing the limb of a live animal and chowing down on it.[52] This is a part of the balance prescribed by the Torah. It is an entire system in balance, which must be studied, mastered, and performed in order to function properly. Frankly, it is a life’s journey.

The treatment of the body and soul requires a coordinated approach. Modern medicine has developed expertise in dealing with the body and the mind. Notwithstanding the understanding that there is a mind-body connection, it has been slow to develop integrated treatment regimens that deal with both as an integrated whole. It is frankly deficient in recognizing there is also a soul and body (and mind) connection. It is viewed as a vestige of ancient wisdom that has been eclipsed by modern medical practice, aimed curing the physical manifestations of disease. Investigating and dealing with the spiritual component of the equation as a part of a holistic treatment of the person is often viewed as an anachronistic practice. Modern wisdom in the form of medical science is viewed as the optimum approach. Healing the soul is viewed either as a psychological problem, better left to mental health experts or as a matter of ancient wisdom, better left to the person's rabbi or other source of religious inspiration.

This is due in part to the feeling that healing of the soul is not a matter of science, but rather a matter of metaphysics. After all, the soul can't be seen. What can't be directly or even indirectly observed is viewed as being outside the purview of medical science. Its diagnosis and treatment is not covered in medical textbooks and is not a part of a doctor's traditional training. While the suffering endured by a soul may result in physical (including mental) manifestations, it is not a problem medical experts have been trained to handle. For an individual of faith, there is little choice but to seek separate medical treatment for the physical manifestations of illness from a medical professional and treatment for spiritual ailments from a spiritual expert. The concept of an integrated treatment plan that deals with both is foreign to Western medicine.

The Talmud[53] reports an exchange between the Roman emperor Antoninos[54] and Rabbi Yehudah haNasi on the subject of the body and the soul that provides a conceptual insight into this matter. Antoninus poses the issue of how the body and soul can ultimately be judged by the heavenly court. He avers that the body can argue it was the soul that sinned. Furthermore, it is not present at the time of heavenly judgment, because by then it is dead and buried. The soul can argue that it was the body that sinned. Rabbi Yehudah haNasi responds with a parable. He asks Antoninus to consider the case of two guards stationed to protect the fruits in an orchard. One of the guards is lame and the other is blind. Neither can steal the fruits of the orchard on their own. However, the guards, acting in concert, can together steal the fruit. The lame person said to the blind that he should place the lame one on his shoulders. Acting jointly, in this manner, the lame person was provided with mobility and the blind person with a means of sight, sufficient to reach and steal the fruit. In this manner, they managed to pick the fruit and each ate the bounty they illicitly obtained together. Sometime later, the owner of the field came by, noticed the fruits of the orchard were gone and asked the two guards what had happened. The lame man answered he had no legs and therefore, he could not be guilty of the theft. The blind person also pleaded he had no sight and could not have seen his way to steal the fruits. The owner placed the lame guard on the shoulders of the blind one and judged them as one. Rabbi Yehudah haNasi then responded to Antoninus' line of reasoning directly. He asserted that God casts the soul back into the body and judges them as one.

It is the body and soul, which together face the evil inclination and life. They should be treated as a whole. The good we do affects our soul and helps determine how we think. Virtue signaling serves no useful purpose. It is no substitute for actually doing good deeds, and it can lull us into falsely assuming otherwise.

In a very real sense, we are what we do, and that affects the way we think. We are also not just the sum total of what we think or what we feel. We are also what we can become. Our charge should be, I do good deeds, therefore, I am. May we be blessed to follow the Torah program in its entirety and become the best versions of ourselves.

Notes

[1] A seventeenth-century mathematician and philosopher. The statement is set forth in Part IV of Descartes' book, *Discours De La Méthode Pour Bien Conduire Sa Raison, Et Chercher La Verite' Dans Les Sciences* (Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences). It was reportedly originally published in French in 1637 and in Latin translation in 1644.

[2] In the original French, "*Je pense, donc je suis*" and in the Latin translation, "*Cogito ergo sum*."

[3] In his book, *Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autre sujets* (Thoughts on religion and on some other subjects), known as *Pascal's Pensées* in English, in Part 4, Numbers 277–278 (of the paperback edition published by Dutton in 1958). It was, reportedly, originally published in French in 1670.

[4] In the original French: "*Les Coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connait pas*."

[5] Genesis 2:7.

[6] *Ibid*. and Rashi's commentary thereon, which explains that God blowing into man's nostrils a breath of life as referring to the soul. This is based on the Midrash Rabbah 12:8, which describes how man was created from a combination of physical matter drawn from the physical world below and spiritual essence drawn from the spiritual world above. It states that the breath blown into man's nostrils was the soul. The result is to make peace between (harmonize) the physical and spiritual

realms.

[7] *Ibid*. and Ramban, Sforno, and Radak commentaries, thereon, among others.

[8] A neuroscientist and professor at USC.

[9] The full title is *Descartes' Error: Emotion Reason and the Human Brain*. It was originally published by Putnam (1994) and then by Penguin in paperback (2005).

[10] Maimonides, *Shemonah Perakim*.

[11] See Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' *Covenant & Conversation* (online at rabbisacks.org) *Hukkat* (5771) *Descartes' Error* (July 2, 2011).

[12] See Rabbeinu Bahya's commentary on Numbers 19:2.

[13] Maimonides, *Shemonah Perakim.*

[14] See Midrash Tanhuma, *Hukkat, Siman* 7. On the one hand it is prohibited to wear a mixture of wool and linen (Deuteronomy 22:11), and on the other hand, this combination is permitted for *tzizith*. It is illogical, yet God commanded us to observe this mitzvah as a *hok* (Leviticus 19:19).

[15] *Ibid*.

[16] Leviticus 19:19.

[17] Numbers 19:2.

[18] In his commentary on Numbers 19:2.

[19] He cites, for example, the usage of the term in Jeremiah 15:22.

[20] Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Berakhot*, at page 10a.

[21] An eleventh-century rabbi and philosopher who lived in Spain.

[22] In his Introduction to this work, which is also published in English translation under the title *Duties of the Heart*.

[23] Deuteronomy 6:5.

[24] Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin*, at page 106b.

[25] Samuel I, 16:7.

[26] As a part of his Eighth Treatise, Examining the Soul, in the *Hovot haLevavot*.

[27] 4:2.

[28] Leviticus 19:18.

[29] 7:16.

[30] See Deuteronomy 4:9 and the Ha'amek Davar commentary thereon. See also Deuteronomy 4:15 and Ha'amek Davar commentary thereon.

[31] *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 1.

[32] See also *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei haTorah* 4:8–9.

[33] Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Shabbat*, 55a, which reports that Rav Ammi made this statement.

[34] S*hemonah Perakim*, Chapter 2.

[35] *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 3.

[36] *Ibid*. The Rambam clearly states that the health and illness of the body is the domain of medical science. This is not a matter of faith healing.

[37] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Deot* 4:1.

[38] *Shemonah Perakim*, Chapter 4.

[39] Sifrei, Deuteronomy 343.

[40] Beit haLevi commentary, on *Parshat Ki Tisa*, by Rabbi Joseph Dov haLevi Soloveitchik, the first Brisker Rav.

[41] Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:26.

[42] Deuteronomy 22:6–7.

[43] Deuteronomy 20:19–20.

[44] Leviticus 22:28.

[45] Leviticus 11:3–8 and Deuteronomy 14:4–8.

[46] Leviticus 1:13–19 and Deuteronomy 14:11–18.

[47] Deuteronomy 12:21. See also Deuteronomy 14:21, as well as Numbers 11:22.

[48] Leviticus 7:23–25.

[49] Leviticus 7:26–27.

[50] Exodus 23:19; Exodus 34:26; and Deuteronomy 14:21.

[51] Leviticus 11:9–12 and Deuteronomy 14:9–10.

[52] See Genesis 9:4 and Rashi commentary thereon. See also Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin* , 59a.

[53] Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sanhedrin*, 91a–b.

[54] He is reputed to be Marcus Aurelious by some (see the Jewish Encyclopedia entry on Antoninus in the Talmud). He was the adopted son of Antonius the Pious and sported his name in his full title, Marcus Aurelious Antonious Augustus. He also fits the timeline, as a contemporary of Rabbi Yehudah haNasi. Interestingly he was a stoic as well.