



*This is a transcript of a video recorded for High Holidays of 2020/5781, part of a rich collection of resources available at: <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/highholidays2020>.*

### ***Resmaa and Rambam: Help Us Return***

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*Shalom*, everybody. My name is Koach Baruch Frazier, and today I'd like to talk about two ways that we can return to our best selves now and through the entire year.

Now, one thing I've learned about living in a world propped up and fueled by white supremacy, is that our work to dismantle it has always been and continues to be multifaceted. And just as there is an important external-facing work, there is internal-facing work that is equally important and often unexplored and incomplete.

And, of course, this makes sense, the internal work is usually not done in public and it requires us to do the harder, reflective task that takes more time and energy than can be distilled into 140 characters online.

Yet, I believe this is part of the duty that we proclaim when we chant Assata Shakur's words. When we say we have nothing to lose but our chains, we're not just talking about the physical chains that have shackled our ancestors and the chains that shackle our siblings right now in the prison industrial complex. I believe we are also talking about the psychological and emotional chains that keep us distant from each other, and make it hard for us to be and stay in community and solidarity with those who also want to dismantle white supremacy.

And in moments of great tension, conflict and stress, many folks ask, "What can I do to make a difference?" And oftentimes, it's actually unclear where the best places are to put our energy. So, I would implore you to take the time and create the space to do this revolutionary service of the heart, mind and body. For this, too, is movement work.

And I'm really excited to loop you in to a conversation that I've been having with two healers, Resmaa and Rambam. You see, in order to hold the allness, the complexity, the beauty and diversity of our people on this road to liberation, we have to be in right relationship with ourselves and each other. And I believe that Resmaa and Rambam can help us return to our best selves through *teshuvah* and through building resilience in the face of trauma.

So, together, let's explore the ways that Maimonides, one of the great Sephardic sages of the Middle Ages, lays out his formula for being in right relationship with one another as we also explore the ways that Resmaa Menakem, a present-day Black American sage, lays out his formula for being in right relationship with ourselves as we move through clean pain to a more settled body and a more settled mind.

So, in the Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah, chapter two, we find the Rambam explaining to us what exactly *teshuvah* is when it comes to our relationship with other humans. He begins by saying that *teshuvah* is only actualized or completed when a person who confronts the same situation in which they have caused harm previously chooses differently this time. They choose to no longer create harm. But to be sure, we can only make it to that moment when we have taken concrete steps.

So, let's explore these steps now using a modified interpretation of the steps from my dear friend and classmate, Faryn Borella.

The first step is to realize for yourself that actual harm has been committed or inflicted. Now, some people will skip this part, thinking that it is unnecessary and they jump right to the apology. However, if you never recognize that harm has actually taken place, how can you and how will you interrupt it the next time?

The second step is renunciation. And this is where you acknowledge that the behavior is wrong without qualification and without dismissal or denial. You see, this is an important part of the process, and it can help us get clearer on how and why the behavior was harmful.

The third step is recitation, and this involves a public confession of the first two steps, recognition and renunciation, into to a community of accountability in which one takes ownership of their harmful behavior and publicly proclaims their resolve to change their behavior. They do this witnessed by peers or outside parties who can hold them to account.

The fourth step is reparations. Now, this is where the individuals who have been harmed are compensated for the damage that has been done. And while this compensation can take many forms, restitution ought to be made.

The fifth step is reconciliation, and this is an ongoing process of accountability between the individual harmed and the individual who committed the harm, as well as the larger community, to which all the parties are accountable.

And the last step is resolution. This is the moment I referred to earlier. When the person who committed harm is confronted with the possibility of recommitting that same harm and choose a different path. This is that point where they have returned to their best self.

Let's take a breath.

For now that we've had a peek into the returning to our best selves through right relationship with one another, We're going to follow the path of clean pain with Resmaa. In his book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, chapter one, Resmaa says that, "Healing involves discomfort, but so does refusing to heal. And, over time, refusing to heal is always more painful." He goes on to say there are two kinds of pain, clean pain and dirty pain.

Now, clean pain is the pain that mends and can build your capacity for growth. It's the pain you feel when you know what you need to say, and you need to do when you really, really don't want to say or do it, and you do it anyway, responding from the best part of yourself.

On the other hand, dirty pain is the pain of avoidance, blame, or denial. When you respond from the most wounded parts of yourself. And in chapter 12, he advises that recognizing, accepting and moving through clean pain often means facing what you don't want to face, what you have been reflexively avoiding or fleeing. And by walking into this pain, experiencing it fully and moving through it, you can metabolize it and put an end to it. And in the process, you also grow. You create more room in your nervous system for flow and coherence and build your capacity for further growth.

Clean pain is about in choosing integrity over fear. It's about letting go of what is familiar but harmful, and finding the best parts of yourself, making a leap with no guarantee of safety or praise. And Resmaa makes it clear that this healing does not happen in our heads, it happens in our bodies. And it is more likely to happen in a body that can stay settled in the midst of conflict and uncertainty.

Now, to be sure, the alternative path is avoidance, blame and denial. Within white supremacy culture, there are some ways in which dirty pain frequently show up in the form of flight, fight and freezing. Sometimes they look like talking, but not listening, taking over all the energy in the room, denying other people's lived experience, jumping to statistics and theory and philosophy and concepts and generalities. Sometimes it looks like reductionism and objectification, false counter-narratives and avoidance, defensiveness, denial, blaming and accusations and even violence. To counteract this dirty pain, we're going to explore the anchors that Resmaa gives us to move through clean pain.

The first anchor is to soothe yourself, to quiet your mind, to calm your heart and to settle your body. Now, this is the part where you quiet your mouth. You don't say anything, no matter how much you want to say, you just breathe. You put down anything that you're holding and you find the internal resource that your body experiences as safe, soothing or pleasurable. You slow things down.

I want to share with you a few practices that I've learned from the community healing network that have helped me to settle my body during conflict and stress.

So this first one, which I'm calling the butterfly, is where you cross your arms on your chest or your legs and you gently tap. Now, I will often rock with this tapping. Sometimes it feels like I'm in the arms of my parents, held with love.

Another practice is called lotion. And this is where you imagine that you've got that lotion that you love and you rub it on your body. You take it from the top of your shoulder down, or on your legs from your thigh down, rubbing that lotion all the way down.

Now Resmaa also recommends that you can sing aloud. You can chant. You can rub your belly. You can hum, or you can slowly rock. All of these are ways to settle your body and to slow things down.

The second anchor is to simply notice the sensations, the vibrations and emotions in your body. Just notice. Don't react. Notice what's happening in your body, how your body's feeling, touching your clothes. Notice how your body is positioned. Are you laying down? Are you standing up? Are you sitting? What are the sensations you feel? Can you feel the air moving across your body? Do you notice the temperature in the room? Is your body trembling? Do you feel relaxed? Are you tense? What is your body feeling? What is your body experiencing? And as your emotions arise, notice them, too. Are you scared? Are you angry? Are you frustrated? Are you relieved? Are you happy? Are you content? What are you feeling? And while you're noticing your feelings, you don't need to judge them. You just need to notice them.

With the third anchor, we accept the discomfort and we notice when it changes. Despite the urge to push it away or squash the discomfort, don't do it. Don't try to run away from it. Don't try to strategize it. Just be with the discomfort. Notice the speed and focus and quality of your thoughts and how they change. Don't go back to the past. Don't go to the future. Stay in the present with your body. And remember that the discomfort you are feeling is not a sign of your body or you being defective. It actually means that you're trying to protect yourself and accepting, experiencing and moving through the discomfort is the foundation of healing.

The fourth anchor implores you to stay present and in your body as you move through the unfolding experience with all its ambiguity and uncertainty. And from this place, you can respond from the best parts of yourself. And as you continue to use the first three anchors, slowly move into the heat, peril and possibility of the conflict or the stress or the anxiety or the discomfort and disagreement. Feel your way, moment by moment. Don't try to know what will happen next, because you can't know what's going to happen next. And if someone asks you, the only honest response is, "I don't know." Act from your deepest integrity, from the best parts of yourself. And as things unfold, you'll sense what these parts are.

And the last anchor has you safely discharge any energy that remains. This is an important step, but it is often overlooked. After you have been in the heat of a conflict or stress, the energy actually remains in your body. For your physical and emotional well-being, this energy should be discharged as soon as you reasonably can. And you can do this by exercising, dancing, playing sports, doing physical labor. I do it by drumming. But whatever you do, allow your body to guide you moment to moment. Let your body do what it needs to do unless that something is harmful. And remember that the point of this anchor is to discharge energy, not to integrate it. So, carefully choose the activity that will disperse the energy from your body as opposed to relaxing or integrating it.

These anchors towards clean pain, and the steps towards *teshuvah* are here to guide us to return to our best selves, so that when there is conflict and disagreement, pandemic and



uprising, we have the tools that are necessary to love and support one another and to be in solidarity with each other.

As we sing our way out with a mashup using a song by Rickie Byars and a verse from Eikha, may we turn and return to the God spark within us and each other, renewed and sustained through our breath and our practice as we move closer and closer to the day when liberation, which is our birthright, is finally actualized:

Return to me, return to me  
With every breath  
Return  
End and begin with me  
With every breathe, return  
*Hashivenu Havaya*  
*Eilekha venashuvah*  
*Hadeish yameinu*  
*Kekedem*  
Return to me, return to me  
With every breathe  
Return  
End and begin with me  
With every breath  
Return  
I will dwell among you