

# REPARATIONS

## SHABBAT

### *Collective Teshuva*



*In this unit students will explore Jewish texts and values in connection to reparations, understanding collective teshuva, and how we are all responsible for one another.*

# Reparations as Teshuva

**Grade(s):** K-12th

**Number of participants:** any

**Time needed:** 60-75 min



## Goal(s):

Students will understand the concepts and practical aspects of reparations in connection with the Jewish values of collective teshuva.

## Objectives:

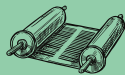
Students will:

- Explore stories of collective teshuva and Jewish texts on repairing harm
- Learn about the call for reparations in America.
- Analyze and create art rooted in the themes of repentance and repair.

## Elements of Learning



Visual Art



Jewish Text



Reflection



Performance Art



Jewish Values

## A Reconstructionist Lens

*in 2023, the Reconstructionist Movement passed a resolution in support of reparations, committing ourselves to reckoning with the foundational harms our societies are built upon. This resolution is based upon a Reconstructionist understanding of foundational Jewish texts, including the command to pursue justice, loving our neighbor as ourself, and making restitution. In this unit students will explore these themes in age appropriate ways, connecting our ancient wisdom to the call for reparations today.*

# SETTING UP



## Materials

- ☐ Appendix texts
- ☐ Art supplies
- ☐ Computer

## Set Up Suggestions

Students will need space to move around and create skits together.

You will need 4 stations set up with activity space, along with a place to make collaborative artwork.



## Important Note

The Jewish sources presented in this packet focus on various forms of monetary remuneration for harm caused as we are taught in the Torah and rabbinic literature. Many of these rules were originally focused on the damage or theft of property, not on the generational harm caused to descendants of enslaved people. In Jewish tradition we often extrapolate values from one example to teach us a larger moral lesson. In this case, if our tradition expects us to pay reparations for damage to property, how much more so are we expected to take responsibility and pay for harm done to human beings?

## Hebrew Wordbank

## אוצר מלים בעברית

Justice

צֶדֶק

Tzedek

Repentance

תְּשׁוּבָה

Teshuva

Feel free to add your own!



# SETTING UP



## Key Words



### **Teshuva**

Repentance, returning to our best selves.



### **Reparations**

Money or other tangible ways to repair harm done to an individual or towards a group of people.



### **Accountability**

Taking responsibility for our actions the impact those actions have had on others.



### **BIPOC**

An umbrella term that stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. (Pronounced “bye-pock”)



### **Racism**

Prejudice or discrimination towards a person or group of people based on their race.



### **Anti-Racism**

Actively opposing racism through education, activism and advocacy.



## *My Notes*

## Jewish Context

Jewish texts, including the Torah and Talmud, have many laws and guidelines about how to treat vulnerable people in our communities. We are called upon to actively pursue justice, to love our neighbor, and to make restitution when we have caused harm.

# Opening Activity



## All Together (10-15min.)

### Materials Needed:

- Copies of the Scenarios from the Appendix

### Directions:

Divide students into pairs or small groups.

For students who are reading, give each group one of the scenarios and ask them to read it, answer the questions, and then create a skit to act it out together. Ask students to consider if there are multiple ways they might respond in the scenario, and if so, to create multiple versions of their skit to show the different possibilities.

For students who are not reading, either pair a teacher/student who can read with them, OR, read all the scenarios together and then let each group pick which one they'd like to work on.

Invite students to share their skits with the class. After each, ask the group if anyone has additional ideas of how the characters in the story could have responded or acted.



*My Notes*

# A Taste of Torah



## Collective Repair (20-30 min.)

### Materials Needed:

- Copies of Appendix texts
- Computer

### Set Up

You will need 4 stations for this activity. Split students into 4 groups, or, if you have a small class, you can also stick together as one group.

### Directions

Write these words on the whiteboard and ask students to define them together.

- Teshuva: repentance, repair, returning; making amends for wrongs
- Collective / Communal: participating as a group, working together
- Reparations: money or payment made to a person or group who have been harmed
- Accountability: taking responsibility for harm we have caused

### Ask students:

- Why is teshuva important?
- When is it hardest to responsibility for our actions?
- How do we feel when someone has hurt us but won't apologize or fix the problem?
- If we hurt someone without realizing it, but they tell us how our actions caused harm, how could we respond to make things better?
- Is it enough to apologize? What else might we need to do to fix our mistakes?

Split students into groups and invite them to cycle through the stations with their group.

### Station 1: Collective Repair

At this station students will explore stories from the modern world of collective teshuva. Give them copies of the stories from the Appendix and ask them to read and answer the questions together.

## Collective Repair (cont.)

### Station 2: Reparations videos

#### K-4th Grade: “**R Is for Reparations | CBC Kids News**”

Watch this short video clip about a group of young Black Canadian students who co-wrote the book “R is for Reparations”. Ask them to discuss:

- What are reparations? Why are they important?
- How can people today help repair the harm that was done during slavery?
- Why is it important for young people to learn the difficult history of their countries?
- Do you think governments will want to pay reparations? Why or why not?

Video link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FZdmqM\\_SGw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FZdmqM_SGw)

#### 5-7th Grade: “**Cost Inheritance: Callie House & Reparations History**”

Have students watch the video and then discuss:

- Why did Black Americans start asking for reparations?
- How did the US Gov’t respond to this request? Why do you think the government put Callie House in jail? What do you think they should have done instead?
- Why do you think some white people don’t want to pay reparations? What could you say to explain why it’s a good idea?

Video link: <https://www.pbs.org/video/america-reframed-the-cost-of-inheritance-callie-house-reparations-history/>

#### 8-12th Grade: “**Cost of Inheritance: the Wealth Gap of Black Americans**”

Have students watch this short video and then discuss:

- What caused the wealth gap for Black Americans?
- What should be done to close the wealth gap?
- How can white people today repair harm done by previous generations? (Think expansively!)

Video link: <https://www.pbs.org/video/america-reframed-the-cost-of-inheritance-the-wealth-gap-of-black-americans/>

### Station 3: What Would You Do?

At this station students will explore Jewish texts connected to reparations and collective repair. Choose from the texts in the Appendix based on age and your particular setting.

Fold the pages with the texts in half so that students can read the questions first before reading the Torah’s answer.



## Collective Repair (cont.)

### Station 4: Modern reparations

**This station is recommended for middle schoolers and up.**

Several Jewish organizations have engaged in the work of reparations today. Choose from amongst the texts (based on age) in the Appendix and ask students to read together and share their ideas and reactions with one another.

## Let's Get Creative



### Collective Teshuva in Art (20-30 min.)

#### Materials Needed:

- Copies (digital or printed) of the Reparations artwork (Appendix)
- Art supplies

#### Set Up:

Students will need space to create their own Collective Teshuva artwork

#### Directions

As a full group, look at the two pieces of Reparations artwork. Ask students to reflect on what they see:

- What Hebrew or English words do you recognize? What words do you have questions about?
- What images do you see? (People, animals, nature, etc.)
- What messages do you find in this art? What do you think the artist wants us to learn from this piece?
- How do you feel when you see this piece? What questions do you have?
- How does this image teach us about collective teshuva?

Split students into pairs or small groups. Ask them to co-create their own piece of collective teshuva artwork. Using the texts you studying in the previous activity (Stations 3 or 4), ask students to use the text (literally or abstractly) to inspire their artwork. As they create, ask students to think about:

- What message do you want to share?
- What does collective teshuva look like?
- What colors, textures, images might help you illustrate your ideas?



Once each pair has completed their artwork, collage/attach all of the different pieces together to create one large class piece on collective teshuva.

Can this piece be displayed somewhere in your synagogue/school for Reparations Shabbat? How might it be used to inspire deeper community conversation about collective responsibility and reparations?

## Closing Reflection



### Moving Forward (5-10min.)

**Materials needed:**

- Artwork from previous activity

**Directions**

Invite students to share their artwork and ask the group to reflect on how the larger piece shares a message of collective teshuva.

Read this quote from Pirkei Avot and ask students to share their thoughts on what it means in connection to Reparations:

הוא הִיָּה אוֹמֵר, לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמֹּר, וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶּן חוֹרִין לְבַטֵּל מִמֶּנָּה.

*Rabbi Tarfon used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at free to neglect it.*

**As we close the activity, invite students to reflect and share:**

- One thing you learned today
- One thing you found challenging today
- One question you have about this material

### Evaluating Student Success:

- Did students engage by participating in activities, asking/answering questions?
- How did students respond to the material? Curious? Thoughtful? Uninterested?
- Did students understand the ideas of collective teshuva and reparations?
- How did students show kavod (respect) to one another?
- How did students respond to the challenge to think about difficult challenges, such as the legacy of slavery and how to engage in reparations work?

# Appendix

Below are some texts that you will need for this unit.

- Scenarios 1-4 (Opening Activity)
- Collective Teshuva Stories (Station 1)
- Torah Texts (Station 3)
- Reparations Writing (Station 4)
- Reparations Artwork

## Scenario 1

Your group of friends at school starts saying not nice things about another kid in school. You don't join in the teasing but you also don't tell your friends to stop. You find out later that the other kid heard about the mean things that your friends were saying and is upset and sad.

- *What would you do?*
- *If you didn't join in the teasing, is it your fault that the other kid is upset and sad, or not?*
- *What would you say to your friends?*
- *What would you say to the other kid?*
- *How could you help fix this situation?*

*As a group, create a skit of all the different ways you might act in this situation.*

## Scenario 2

A group of friends is at a park and some of them are getting too rowdy. The grownups say that if kids keep misbehaving everyone will have to go home. You try to get your friends to be more chill but in the end the grownups say its time to leave.

- *How would you feel?*
- *Is it fair that you have to leave even though you weren't the problem? What does "fair" mean to you?*
- *What would you say to the grownups?*
- *What would you say to your friends?*

*As a group, create a skit of all the different ways you might act in this situation.*

## Scenario 3

You and your friends are playing tag and three people all run into each other at once. One person is okay, one person has a skinned knee, and one person hit their head. Each friend thinks the other two are to blame, everyone is upset and mad at each other.

- *If you were there, how might you help your friends?*
- *If you were one of the three people who ran into each other, how would you feel? What would you say?*
- *If you thought the accident was your fault, would you take responsibility, why or why not?*
- *How could this group solve this situation so that everyone feels okay with each other?*

*As a group, create a skit of all the different ways you might act in this situation.*

## Scenario 4

Someone stole the class cookies! You ask around and figure out who did it, but they won't admit it to the teacher or the rest of the class. Now no one has cookies. The teacher says if someone takes responsibility then everyone can have cookies.

- *What would you do?*
- *Would you tell the teacher who took the cookies? Why or why not?*
- *Another kid, who did not take the cookies, says she took the cookies. You think she did it so that the teacher will give everyone cookies. Do you share the truth instead?*
- *Is the teacher's idea fair? What does "fair" mean to you?*
- *What do you think should happen?*

*As a group, create a skit of all the different ways you might act in this situation.*

## Collective Teshuva Stories

### **Germany Pays Holocaust Reparations**

In 1951 Germany began paying money to survivors and families of Holocaust victims. To this day some survivors still receive money from the German government. This was seen as an important step for Germany to make things right after the Holocaust. Some people said that Jewish people should not take these payments, that it was disrespectful to the victims to try to put a monetary value on their lives. Others said it was the right thing to do because Germany needed to pay back the Jewish people for the death and loss they caused.

*What do you think?*

*Should a country that killed or hurt a group of people pay money to their families or survivors? Why or Why not?*

### **Minnesota Returns Indigenous Land**

When North America was colonized, the government took land from Indigenous and Native nations living on the land. For centuries there have been efforts to return the land to the Indigenous nations. In 2022 the state of Minnesota returned 12,000 acres of land to the Ojibwe Nation, which will help them build their own futures on their ancestral land.

*What do you think?*

*If one group took land from another group, should they give it back? Why or Why not?*

*What other actions might the group that caused harm need to take to make things right?*



## Collective Teshuva Stories (part 2)

### **America Apologizes to Japanese Americans**

During World War II, the American government was worried that Japanese Americans who lived in America would side with Japan in the war and not America. The government forced Japanese Americans out of their homes and into internment (prison) camps. After the war, Japanese Americans worked for decades to convince the US government to apologize and repay them for the harm it had caused. In 1988 (more than 40 years later) the US government finally apologized and paid \$20,000 to each surviving formerly incarcerated Japanese American.

*What do you think?*

*How can a country make things right when they have hurt an entire group of people?*

*Is there / What is the proper amount of money to pay to someone in this situation? How would you make that determination?*

### **South Africa Faces Its Difficult History**

For many decades South Africa had a system set up called “apartheid” that said that white people were citizens but Black people were not. Black people were injured, killed and imprisoned; they did not have equal access to education, health care, or the justice system. After apartheid ended, the new government apologized for what had happened and arrested some of the people who had caused harm. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created, in which both victims and perpetrators were invited to give testimony. In some cases, perpetrators were granted amnesty in return for confessions. The government did pay some money to Black South Africans, but in much lower amounts than requested.

*What do you think?*

*How can a country that treated its own people so badly make things right?*

*Is agreeing to confess a fair exchange to avoid punishment?*

*How can a country heal from such a big divide?*

# The Israelites Leave Egypt

The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. While enslaved they were not paid for their work, so they would leaving Egypt without any money, livestock or possessions. This would make survival very hard in the wilderness on their way to their new home in Canaan.

- What do you think should happen?
- Should Egypt pay them for their labor?
- What would be a “fair” amount, considering how long they were enslaved? How would you calculate that amount?

*After you discuss these questions as a group, unfold the page to see what the Torah and Sages say.*

Fold here

## What Does the Torah Say?

### Exodus 12:36-37

The Israelites had done Moses' bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing. And had made the Egyptians friendly toward the people, and they let them have their request; thus they stripped the Egyptians

וּבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כְדִבְרֵי מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁאַלְוּ  
מִמִּצְרַיִם כֶּל־כֶּסֶף וְכָלִי זָהָב וְשִׁמְלֹת:  
וַיְהִי־הָאֵתָּה נָתַן אֶת־חֵן הָעַם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם  
וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּם וַיִּנָּצְלוּ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם

### Chizkuni on Exodus 11:2:4-3:2

“silver vessels and golden vessels.” It was no more than a fair exchange, seeing that the Israelites left behind their houses and their fields which no one compensated them for.

כִּלִּי כֶסֶף וְכָלִי זָהָב בַּמָּקוֹם שֶׁהֵנִיחוּ  
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתֵיהֶם וּשְׂדוֹתֵיהֶם וְכִלְיָהֶם  
שֶׁלֹא יָכֻלוּ לִשְׁאֹת עִמָּהֶם שֶׁהָיָה הֵיוּ  
לָהֶם לִישְׂרָאֵל נַחֲלוֹת בַּמִּצְרַיִם

### Ramban on Exodus 11:3:1

“And God made the Egyptians friendly towards them”. The Egyptians did not hate Israel because of the plagues. They felt affection towards Israel, and the Egyptians acknowledged, “we are the wicked ones, we have done violence, and you deserve God’s graciousness.”

וְטַעַם וַיִּתֵּן ה' אֶת חֵן הָעַם בְּעֵינֵי  
מִצְרַיִם שֶׁלֹא הָיוּ אֲנָשֵׁי מִצְרַיִם  
שׁוֹנְאִים אוֹתָם עַל הַמַּכּוֹת, אֲבָל  
מוֹסִיפִין בָּהֶם אֲהָבָה וְנוֹשָׁאִים חֵן  
בְּעֵינֵיהֶם, לֵאמֹר, אֲנַחְנוּ הַרְשָׁעִים  
גַּם עוֹשִׂים חֲמָס, וְרָאוּי הוּא שִׁיחֹנֶן  
אֶתְכֶם הָאֱלֹהִים.

- What does the Torah say?
- Do you think this was fair pay for the work Israel did while enslaved?
- What else, if anything, do you think Egypt should have done?

## Ancient Israel's Laws of Slavery

In the Torah, God gives Israel rules for how to treat enslaved people. In general, someone was enslaved because they owed debts they could not pay with money, and so they paid with their physical work.

- Imagine you are God or the leaders of Israel. What rules would you make about slavery?
- Knowing the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, why do you think they would enslave people too?

*After you discuss these questions as a group, unfold the page to see what the Torah and Sages say.*

Fold here

## What Does the Torah Say?

### Deuteronomy 15:12-15

If a fellow Hebrew, man or woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall set him free. When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: Give him cattle or sheep from the flock, grain from the threshing floor, and oil, with which the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I give you this commandment today.

כִּי־יִמְכַר לְךָ אֶתְחִיד הָעִבְרִי אִם הָעִבְרִיָּה  
וְעָבְדְךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים וּבִשְׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת תְּשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ  
חֲפָשִׁי מֵעִמָּךְ: (יג) וְכִי־תִשְׁלַחֲנּוּ חֲפָשִׁי מֵעִמָּךְ  
לֹא תִשְׁלַחֲנּוּ רֵיקָם: (יד) הָעֲבִיד תַּעֲנִיֵק לוֹ  
מִצֵּאֲנָךְ וּמִגֵּרְנֶךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְךָ ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִּתֵּן־לוֹ: (טו) וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ  
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּפְדֶּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־כֵּן אֶנְכִּי  
מְצַוְךָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם:

- In your own words, what does the Torah say?
- Why are there rules about how to treat a formerly enslaved person?
- Why do you think the Torah reminds us that Israel was enslaved in Egypt?

## Stolen Property (version 1)

The Torah and Talmud have many rules about what to do when someone steals something. Let's think about what is "fair" after someone has stolen something from another person.

- Think of an item you own that is easy to replace and does not have a lot of emotional value for you. (For example: plates in your kitchen, a couch, a phone charger, etc). If someone stole those items, what should they do to make up for stealing?
- Think of an item that you deeply love (a stuffed animal, a photo album, your favorite item of clothing, etc.) If someone stole that item, and could not replace it, what would be a fair way for them to make it up to you?

*After you discuss these questions as a group, unfold the page to see what the Torah and Sages say.*

Fold here

## What Does the Torah Say?

### Leviticus 5:21-24

When a person sins against the Lord by lying about a deposit or pledge, or through robbery, or by taking money from another, or by finding something lost and lying about it; if they swear falsely regarding any one of the various things that one may do and sin -- when one has sinned and, realizing their guilt, wants to return what they stole, or the deposit or the found object, or anything else about which they lied,

**they shall repay the original amount and add a fifth part to it. They shall pay it to its owner when they realizes their guilt.**

נֶפֶשׁ כִּי תִחָטָא וּמַעֲלָה מֵעַל בִּיהוָה  
וְכַחֵשׁ בַּעֲמִיתוֹ בְּפִקְדוֹן אוֹ בְּתִשּׁוּמַת יָד  
אוֹ בְּגִזְלָה אוֹ עֲשָׂק אֶת־עַמִּיתוֹ: וְהִיָּה  
כִּי־יִחָטָא וְאָשָׁם וְהָשִׁיב אֶת־הַגִּזְלָה אֲשֶׁר  
גָּזַל אוֹ אֶת־הָעֲשָׂק אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂק אוֹ  
אֶת־הַפִּקְדוֹן אֲשֶׁר הִפְקִיד אֹתוֹ אוֹ  
אֶת־הָאֲבֵדָה אֲשֶׁר מָצָא: אֹו מִכֹּל  
אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁבַּע עָלָיו לִשְׁקֹר וְשָׁלַם אֹתוֹ  
בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וְחִמְשָׁתָיו יֹסֵף עָלָיו לְאִשֶּׁר הָיָא  
לֹו יִתְּנֶנּוּ בְיוֹם אֲשַׁמְתּוֹ:

- In your own words, what does the Torah say?
- Why do you think the person who stole must pay back what they stole plus an extra 20%?
- What else do you think the person who stole should do to fix their mistake? Is your answer different if they stole or broke something on purpose or if they did it on accident? Why?
- What if, instead of stealing something, this person injured or hurt another person? What should they do then?

## Stolen Property (version 2)

The Torah and Talmud have many rules about what to do when someone steals something. Let's think about what is "fair" after someone has stolen something from another person.

- Imagine someone steals your art supplies and then creates art with it and sells it for a lot of money. Should they pay you back for the cost of the art supplies or the cost of the art they sold?
- Imagine you own a sheep and someone steals your sheep, sells the wool, and then returns the sheep. Should they also pay you back the money they got from selling the wool? Why or why not?
- Imagine you have an idea for an invention to help the world. Someone steals your idea, makes your invention and then sells it and makes a lot of money. What should they do to pay you back? Why?

*After you discuss these questions as a group, unfold the page to see what the Torah and Sages say.*

Fold here

### What Does the Torah Say?

#### Gittin 55a

Rabbi Yochanan ben Gudgeda said: if a beam was stolen and built into a building, the person from whom it was stolen should receive the amount of money that the beam is worth, but not the beam itself.

The Sages taught (Tosefta, Bava Kamma 10:5): if someone stole a beam and built it into a building, Beit Shammai says, they must destroy the entire building and return the beam to its owners. Beit Hillel says: the original owner should be paid the cost of the beam, but not given the beam itself.

ועל המריש הגזול  
שבנאו: תנו רבנן גזל  
מריש ובנאו בבירה  
ב"ש אומרים מקעקע  
כל הבירה כולה  
ומחזיר מריש לבעליו  
וב"ה אומרים אין לו  
אלא דמי מריש בלבד  
משום תקנת השבין:

In order to encourage repentance, the Sages chose the easier ruling and said the robber only had to pay back the value of the beam.

- In your own words, what does the Talmud say?
- Do you think the Talmud is fair to the person who was robbed? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with Beit Shammai or Beit Hillel? Why?
- Why does the easier ruling (Hillel) encourage repentance?

# Reparations Today

## **Movement for Black Lives: Reparations**

We demand reparations for past and continuing harms. The government, responsible corporations and other institutions that have profited off of the harm they have inflicted on Black people — from colonialism to slavery through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance — must repair the harm done. This includes:

- 1) Reparations for the systemic denial of access to high quality educational opportunities in the form of full and free access for all Black people (including undocumented and currently and formerly incarcerated people) to lifetime education including: free access and open admissions to public community colleges and universities, technical education (technology, trade and agricultural), educational support programs, retroactive forgiveness of student loans, and support for lifetime learning programs.
  - 2) Reparations for the continued divestment from, discrimination toward and exploitation of our communities in the form of a guaranteed minimum livable income for all Black people, with clearly articulated corporate regulations.
  - 3) Reparations for the wealth extracted from our communities through environmental racism, slavery, food apartheid, housing discrimination and racialized capitalism in the form of corporate and government reparations focused on healing ongoing physical and mental trauma, and ensuring our access and control of food sources, housing and land.
  - 4) Reparations for the cultural and educational exploitation, erasure, and extraction of our communities in the form of mandated public school curriculums that critically examine the political, economic, and social impacts of colonialism and slavery, and funding to support, build, preserve, and restore cultural assets and sacred sites to ensure the recognition and honoring of our collective struggles and triumphs.
  - 5) Legislation at the federal and state level that requires the United States to acknowledge the lasting impacts of slavery, establish and execute a plan to address those impacts. This includes the immediate passage of H.R.40, the “Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act” or subsequent versions which call for reparations remedies.
- (Source: <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/reparations/>)

## **Isabelle Wilkerson**

America is an old house. We can never declare the work over. Wind, flood, drought, and human upheavals batter a structure that is already fighting whatever flaws were left unattended in the original foundation. When you live in an old house, you may not want to go into the basement after a storm to see what the rains have wrought. Choose not to look, however, at your own peril...Whatever you are wishing away will gnaw at you until you gather the courage to face what you would rather not see...

Many people may rightly say, "I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves." And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right of wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.

*(Source: Caste by Isabelle Wilkerson)*

## **Rabbi Sharon Brous**

...I acknowledge the challenges, and I will not purport to know exactly what this should look like. But I believe that it reflects a profound lack of righteous imagination to argue that the practical difficulties should foreclose the commencement of this long overdue conversation. What we know is that injustice, unaddressed, does not disappear. It festers until it erupts.

*(Source: Rabbi Sharon Brous, 2017/ 5778 Rosh HaShana Sermon)*

- **According to these sources, what is reparations? What historic crimes are they attempting to repair? Why are they important?**
- **How might you respond to someone who says, "I was not at fault, this is not my responsibility"?**
- **How are reparations an act of collective teshuva? What else must be done to fix the harm done to Black people in America?**



## **Reconstructionist Resolution on Reparations (2023)**

*In 2023 the Reconstructionist Movement passed a Resolution on Reparations.*

*The Resolution acknowledges the historic realities that:*

- The United States was built on stolen land, and its wealth created through the kidnapping and enslavement of African people and their descendants.
- The tenants of white supremacy are built into the foundations of many American legal and social systems.
- Many Jews have benefited from white privilege in the United States, including, health, safety, property, education, employment, wealth-creation, and social and political participation.
- Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) have called for a national reckoning for the generations of white supremacy, collective trauma, and harm done to their communities, as well as creating social equity for future success.

*The Resolution provides a values based framing:*

- Healing must begin with confronting the truth of the crimes committed against BIPOC communities and individuals by the the United States.
- Jewish tradition urges us to pursue justice and to do teshuvah: taking responsibility for past wrongs and participating in the ongoing repair needed.

*The Resolution highlights these actions:*

- The Joint Tikkun Olam Commission will focus on creating anti-racism trainings and practices in order to build more inclusive communities. (2020)
- Reconstructing Judaism hired a Director of Racial Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (2021)
- The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association passed a “Resolution on Reparations for Slavery, Indigenous Genocide and Systemic Racism in North America/Turtle Island” (2021)
- Reconstructing Judaism’s Board of Governors outlined steps for addressing racial injustice and pursuing racial equity in their strategic plan (2021)
- The Jews of Color and Allies Advisory Group recommended eleven commitments to racial justice to the Board. (2021)

*The Resolution calls for continued action:*

- Collectively acknowledging harm down to BIPOC communities and how American prosperity was built on oppression and white supremacy, joining BIPOC led efforts to address the racial wealth gap and generational harm.
- Encouraging Reconstructionist congregations to engage in continual anti-racism learning, unpacking and unlearning white supremacy, and standing in solidarity with impacted groups.
- Supporting and advocating for legislation and policies that address the need for reparations
- Continued community assessment and accountability with the Movement



# Marjorie Attignol Salvodon

## “Hineni | הנני: Belonging, Memory, Action” (2022)

This piece was commissioned by Reconstructing Judaism  
as part of the Reparations work in 2022.

For more information and the artist's message:

<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/reparations/commissioned-artwork/>





Ayeola Omolara Kaplan

## “Reparations in Pursuit of Repairing the World” (2022)

This piece was commissioned by Reconstructing Judaism as part of the Reparations work in 2022.

For more information and the artist's message:

<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/reparations/commissioned-artwork/>