Reconciliation and Responsibility
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The Mishnah teaches: "For sins committed by one human being against another, the Day of Atonement does not atone until the one who acted wrongly has appeased the person he wronged" (Yoma 8:9).

In other words, the High Holidays cannot heal the wounds we inflict on other people until we do our best to make peace with each other.

Reconciliation is not something you can do by yourself, and it's not something you can do by text message. Oftentimes, an initial outreach can open the door to conversation, but in Judaism, true *t'shuvah* has to happen face-to-face.

The challenge, of course, is that human relationships are rarely black and white.

In sports, one team wins and the other one loses. But in life, especially in matters of the heart, it's not a zero-sum game. When we have conflict with someone, both sides have usually contributed to it in some way.

That's what makes forgiveness so hard. Convinced that the other person is more at fault, we wait for them to make the first move.

A spiritual practice that, in my experience, can help cut through this stalemate is called the Doctrine of 100 Percent Responsibility. It teaches that we are each 100 percent responsible for our *own* behavior—no more, and no less.

If I spoke harshly, that is mine to own. If I withdrew or criticized them unfairly, that belongs to me, regardless of what the other person did. This doesn't excuse their actions; it just prevents me from justifying my wrongs by pointing to theirs.

Taking 100 percent responsibility opens the door to genuine *t'shuvah*. It compels us to step forward, face-to-face, and begin the work of repair.

But how do we do this when emotions run so deep? Here are three principles that can guide us:

First, acknowledge the good in the other person.

Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav taught that there is good in everyone, because every human being is created in the image of God.

In conflict, we forget this. We focus on the wound and lose sight of the blessings that the person has brought into our life.

A step toward reconciliation is to name their goodness—not only to ourselves but, more importantly, to *them*: "You have been a loyal friend." "You have been a caring parent."

Saying it honestly softens the ground for healing.

Second, confess the wrongs *we've* done.

Maimonides says that confession is the essence of repentance.

It's not enough to admit our mistakes to ourselves or even to God; we have to confess them to the person we hurt. That means being specific: "I'm sorry for dismissing your feelings." "I'm sorry for being absent when you needed me."

Naming our transgressions aloud makes them real—and makes our apology sincere.

Third, do it unconditionally.

We cannot demand or even expect forgiveness in return. The other person may *never* say "thank you" or "I forgive you." They may *never* apologize back.

But that's not in our control. What *is* in our control—indeed, the *only* thing we can control—is taking responsibility for our actions and doing the right thing.

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As we head into Rosh Hashanah, we should remember the opening words of this week's parashah: "You stand here today, all of you, before Adonai your God." (*Deut*. 29:9)

This is a wake-up call: what we do during these coming High Holidays matters. It's an opportunity to do real repair and make our lives and the lives of others a little better—and God is watching to see if we take it.

Forgiveness is not about erasing the past; it's about paving the way to a different future. In Judaism, the primary goal of *t'shuvah* is to mend a broken relationship so we can move forward together.

By acknowledging the good, confessing our wrongs, and taking 100 percent responsibility for our own actions—face-to-face and without conditions—we create the possibility of reconciliation, wholeness, and renewal.