Danya Ruttenberg, *On Repentence and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World*, Beacon Press

1. People hurt one another. Sometimes the harm is unintentional, even born of goodwill and the desire to help. Sometimes it's the result of ignorance or lack of information. Sometimes it happens because of cowardice. Sometimes it reflects a self-protective impulse—a desire to preserve one's own self-image or concern about organizational public relations. Sometimes a long process of dehumanization makes atrocities possible. But whatever the cause, people manage to inflict damage in a myriad of ways, from hurt feelings to lost livelihood, the infliction of trauma, the perpetration of hate against a vulnerable demographic, or the loss of life. Sometimes harm can be repaired. Sometimes it can't. Regardless, in a moral universe, there is work to be done whenever harm is inflicted.

2. Moses Maimonides was a twelfth-century philosopher and scholar of Jewish law. He offers a powerful, game-changing path to healing and repair, which can be useful for everyone, regardless of background or belief system….
According to Maimonides, a person doesn't just get to mess up, mumble, "Sorry," and get on with it. They're not entitled to forgiveness if they haven't done the work of repair. (And they're not necessarily entitled to forgiveness even if they have.) Another human being's suffering is not magically erased because the person who caused it says that they didn't mean to do it. This is true in our personal lives, and it's also true of politicians caught saying racist things, celebrities named as sexual abusers, human resources departments that cover up employee complaints, and governments perpetrating harm against individuals or groups. Fixing damage involves taking specific steps; there's a process. We can't ever undo what happened, but we can transform the situation and ourselves. But you can't cut corners.

3. For the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud, and for our guide Maimonides, forgiveness is much less important than the repair work that the person who caused harm is obligated to do. The Hebrew word that is often translated as "repentance" is tshuvah, which literally means "returning." In Modern Hebrew, a tshuvah is an answer to a question—you've gotten back to someone—but it also means "returning" in the sense of "I'll also need a return ticket for this bus ride." In a spiritual context, tshuvah is about coming back to where we are supposed to be, returning to the person we know we're capable of being—coming home, in humility and with intentionality, to behave as the person we'd like to believe we are.

4. Addressing harm is possible only when we bravely face the gap between the story we tell about ourselves—the one in which we're the hero, fighting the good fight, doing our best, behaving responsibly and appropriately in every context—and the reality of our actions. We need to summon the courage to cross the bridge over that cognitively dissonant gulf and face who we are, who we have been—even if it threatens our story of ourselves. It's the only way we can even begin to undertake any possible repair of the harm we've done and become the kind of person who might do better next time. (And that, in my opinion, is what's truly heroic.)…
But sometimes—often, I'd suggest—understanding the full weight of our behavior doesn't happen until we have to face the harm we've caused directly.

5. Many times, when people are told that they have caused harm, a defensive, self-protective impulse kicks in. We often deny either our actions or their impact, particularly if we have caused great harm—or if we believe that doing a harmful thing is the same thing as being a bad person….
Real repentance, real transformation requires real vulnerability, real risk….
[Repentence] an act of concern. And facing the harm that I caused is an act of profound optimism. It is a choice to grow, to learn, to become someone who is more open and empathetic.

6. The work of repentance is, in many ways, the work of looking outside ourselves, looking with an empathetic eye at what we have done, letting it matter to us, and trying earnestly to figure out how we can both meaningfully address it and ensure that it never happens again. This is, in some ways, an act of tenderness, of extending ourselves to care for others, of giving ourselves the time and attention we deserve to grow, of investing in our own learning and capacity to heal. Because repentance is, I believe, in part, a kind of self-care. When we do the work, we give attention to our own broken places, our own reactionary impulses, our own careless ignorance. And it's a way of saying, "Hey, self, you need some attention. Let's give you some help becoming the kind of person you want to be."

7. [T]he practice of calling in closely mirrors much of the Jewish literature on rebuke, perhaps because it too presumes that all those involved have the shared bonds of a caring community. Maimonides uses Leviticus 19:17–18 as his source text: "You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kin but incur no guilt because of them. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countryfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself." Implied in the verses and suggested even more strongly in the Talmud, and then the Mishneh Torah, is the notion that the reason it's important to rebuke another person is for the victim's own emotional and mental well-being. "If one

person commits a sin against another person," Maimonides says, "the one sinned against should not remain in silent hate against the sinner."

8. Public rebuke can encourage others to speak out against oppression and can help harmdoers to see that bystanders are willing to take action. It is also true that an often useful principle—that "rebuke should happen in private"—can be weaponized to silence criticism or the naming of injustice. And let us not forget that disagreement is different from rebuke—someone expressing, in public, an idea that differs from yours is not the same thing as telling you that you have done something wrong. Our public discourse might be healthier if we were clearer on these distinctions and used them with more intentionality. In any case, there is a time and a place for public rebuke.