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Steps Toward Accountability



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Taking accountability when we have caused harm is a part of ensuring gender justice.

In their [book on community accountability](#), Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan write¹:

“There is no way to “hold people accountable.” People can only “take accountability.” Accountability is a continuous, active, and voluntary process of being responsible to yourself and those around you for your choices and the consequences of your choices. Unlike punishment, it is something that we do rather than something that is done to us.”

Though the steps to taking accountability are clear, they are not simple and must be conducted in earnest. This means that one’s remorse and efforts to change must be genuine rather than stem from wanting to regain what they may have lost personally or professionally after they caused harm. While harm around safety, respect, and equity occurs between individuals, it often also involves the people in communities, organizations, and institutions. We have, therefore, put together the following steps to assist those who want to repair the harm they have caused. We have also included questions about accountability for communities and their members to consider.

The steps and questions draw from the Jewish concept of *teshuvah*, repentance or return, which is an ongoing process. They also draw from resources in the areas of community accountability² and [restorative justice](#). Restorative justice is about meeting the needs of those harmed, those who have harmed, and those in the community through restorative practices. It is only one framework and may not always be appropriate.

In [The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Sexual Abuse](#), the authors² draw from the work of [Howard Zehr](#) and ask the following questions³ that frame a restorative justice orientation and are part of the initial considerations to a restorative justice process:

1. Who has been hurt?
2. What do they need?
3. Whose obligations is it to meet those needs?
4. What are the root causes?
5. How do we engage relevant stakeholders in addressing these needs and obligations?
6. What needs to be done to make things as right as possible, including addressing root causes?

We invite you to think through these steps and questions for individuals and organizations as we work towards building a movement of gender justice in Jewish spaces through an intersectional lens.

Steps for someone who has caused harm

Considerations for communities and their members

Maimonides⁴ outlines the steps to teshuva:

- Recognize the harmful behavior and actions you took
- Regret and feel remorse over your actions
- Stop the harmful behavior and distance yourself from it
- Undertake the work necessary to transform yourself and to change
- Verbally confess the harm you caused and be specific about your actions
- Make amends or restitution
- Apologize and ask for forgiveness from those you have harmed
- Resolve to do better. Make different choices.

- What, and on whom, has the impact of the harmful behavior been?
- What is our communal obligation in both the harm that was caused and in responding to its aftermath?
- To whom is the community responsible?
- How can the community balance what may feel like competing responsibilities, such as being in relationship with those who were harmed and those who harmed, in safe ways?
- How can the community support those who have been harmed and acknowledge their pain? What do those who have been harmed need? What do restoration, transformation, and justice look like for them?
- What if we cannot meet the needs of those who have been harmed?
- How can community be recreated in safe ways for those who have harmed? What do they need? When is the right time for doing so?



¹ Kaba, Mariame, and Shira Hassan. 2019. *Fumbling Towards Repair. A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators*. Project NIA/Just Practice. (This passage appears on page 78.)

² Oudshoorn, Judah, Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, and Michelle Jaccett. 2015. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Sexual Abuse. Hope Through Trauma*. New York, NY: Good Books.

³ Ibid. These questions appear on page 25.

⁴ Maimonides, Moses. 1470. *Mishneh Torah*.