



REFLECTIONS ON RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

THE MESSY MAGIC

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Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge and honor the victims, survivors, and those who have been harmed in Jewish spaces who have trusted us with their experiences and their needs.

We know this work is not easy and has taken a toll on you. But you have bravely done it anyway.

We would also like to applaud and amplify the work of institutional leaders and their teams who have attempted to take accountability for the harm they caused to those who trusted them or their institutions.

We have seen you struggle as you learned and persisted in the difficult work of restorative justice.

You have been and continue to be an inspiration for us.

We hope we have honored you in these pages by acknowledging everything you taught us. May we and others continue to learn from your courageous modeling.

May healing, restoration, and justice come to all who have been harmed in our Jewish spaces.

“Faith is not certainty; it is the courage to live with uncertainty. Faith does not mean seeing the world as you would like it to be; it means seeing the world exactly as it is, yet never giving up the hope that we can make it better by the way we live..”

– Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l, Letters to the Next Generation: Reflections for Yom Kippur

Executive Summary

This qualitative, auto-ethnographic report contains our reflections on our work educating and training on, and facilitating institutional restorative justice (RJ), accountability, and *teshuva* (Hebrew word for return or repentance) processes in Jewish spaces for the past six years. We have worked with Jewish victims, survivors, and others who have experienced various kinds of harm within Jewish organizations and institutions. We have also consulted for Jewish institutional leaders and others who want to bring survivors a modicum of restoration and healing by taking accountability for the harm they were made to endure. While this work can be magical, it is also messy. This duality and tension are reflected in the name [Ampersands Restorative Justice](#), under which we do our work.

We frame our reflections in the form of seven questions and answers. [Seven is a very significant number in Judaism](#), marking the days of creation and rest, the Jewish agricultural cycle, the Noahide laws, and more. More importantly, for this paper, [Rabbi Eliyahu Safran](#) notes that seven is the number of times a form of the word “*shuv*,” which means to turn or return, appears in the Torah portion that is read the Shabbat before Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year. At this time, repentance - *teshuva*, which contains the root word of *shuv* - is the theme. In fact, the Biblical source of *teshuva* is found in this Torah portion with the seven verses: “You shall then return to G-d your Lord, and will obey Him.” In the words of Rabbi Safran, “seven is completeness and wholesomeness,” and the significance of the word ‘turn or return’ appearing seven times is that “*teshuva* turns back to completion, to a state of wholeness and completeness.”

Our seven reflections offer answers to what restorative justice is and how it differs when it involves institutions rather than individual parties. They explain a particular dynamic in Jewish spaces that we believe impact harm and repair. They also outline the patterns and gaps we have observed in institutional RJ. These can explain how survivors continue to be harmed and where institutional and individual harm-doers may get stuck when implementing the steps of *teshuva* and accountability. Our reflections also explore what we have learned about when, where, and how to begin the difficult accountability work that is RJ, and outline the limitations and misunderstandings about institutional RJ. They discuss what the magic of RJ can look like and what we believe is unique in attempts to engage in RJ in Jewish spaces. Each reflection includes anecdotes, lessons learned, and relevant research.

We cannot ask others to stand in accountability without doing so ourselves. Therefore, our reflections also include where we have made mistakes and our attempts to correct course. We are grateful to SRE Network for their investment in our work and the opportunity to gather these reflections.

It is important to note that what is reported here is not reflective of any one case that we have worked on, but an aggregate of cases and situations that have come before us. We have done so to protect the confidentiality of those who have entrusted us with their hopes for, and

attempts at, accountability and repair. Any perceived reference to an individual client is purely coincidental. Specific references are only made when a process has been publicized or when we have received permission.

No report can contain everything we would like to say. And it is easy to read reports without the nuances contained in its words. If you have questions, comments, or concerns about what is written here, please reach out to us at info@ampersandsrj.org. We would be happy to discuss our work with you.

Introduction

Over the last six years, we have facilitated institutional restorative practices within 15 Jewish organizations with individuals, synagogues, denominational leaders, and various organizations. Each case has taught us something new. Alissa's previous and continuing work in RJ outside of Jewish spaces in cases between individuals has allowed us to compare individual and institutional RJ. Additionally, we have consulted for Christian communities and have noticed how the different faith groups approach restorative justice ("RJ"), survivors, harm-doers¹, and sexual harm. As two Jewish women of faith, our lived experiences as victim-survivors², coupled with our academic and advocacy backgrounds, provide a solid foundation for our restorative justice work in Jewish spaces. This foundation is integral to who we are and how we engage our RJ work.

We are both trained as criminologists who study sexual harm. Guila has primarily worked with victims and survivors, and Alissa has worked chiefly with those who have caused sexual harm. The respective lenses we each bring to our work help us approach it in a balanced way. While we come from different parts of the Jewish world where we were once deeply engaged, neither of us engages personally in our communities to the extent we once did due to the harms we have experienced. Neither of us has received the individual or institutional accountability we seek. Guila has been profoundly disappointed and further harmed by her efforts at pursuing accountability through the rabbis she turned to for help at first, and then through the criminal legal system.

Our collaboration in our survivor-centered, trauma informed approach to RJ is sacred, but a mix of miracles and challenges has left us questioning how we should practice RJ in the Jewish world. We are learning to live in the tension between those extremes, just as we continue to learn from survivors, institutions, and community members. This auto-ethnographic report centers seven important questions about RJ and includes some of the lessons we have learned, questions we continue to wonder about, and research and anecdotes that help us answer our questions.³ It is based on our lived expert experiences, our aggregated notes from all the projects we have worked on, and post-project and regular reflections on our work. We write this at a time when we are questioning what is possible given the gaps we continue to see.

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¹ Consistent with the values of restorative justice, we use the term harm-doer or person who caused harm instead of the term offender.

² We use these terms interchangeably and acknowledge that those who have been harmed may use other terms.

³ We wrote this report by aggregating clients and processes. Any perceived reference to an individual client is purely coincidental. Specific references are only made when a process was public or when we have received permission.

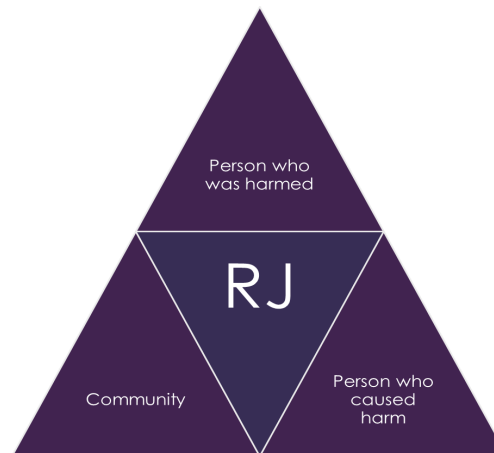
Our Reflections on Restorative Justice, Accountability, Repair, and Teshuva

1. What is restorative justice and how does it differ when it involves institutions?

Beginning her undergraduate degree at 29 after a career as a Jewish educator, Guila learned about RJ and its Indigenous roots in a course called Introduction to Criminal Law. Hearing about Indigenous processes that reflected the Jewish practice of teshuva, or repentance, was awe-inspiring. She wondered why Jewish communities or Jewish courts were not engaging in RJ to address communal and individual harm. RJ's values, she realized, were consistent with Jewish ones.

RJ is a human-centered approach to repairing and preventing harm.⁴ It involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in the process and its outcomes.⁵ It is a framework, a value set, and a way of life that we see as tied directly to Judaism. RJ is one possible pathway toward healing, restoration, and justice. It seeks to make all relevant stakeholders more whole in the process. Yet, it is not always possible nor even appropriate.

RJ is about repairing the harm caused by individuals and institutions. It allows those who have experienced harm to share their stories and to ask individuals and institutional leaders who harmed them to meet their needs. It enables individual and institutional harm-doers to take responsibility for the damage they caused and to make things as right as possible. It also brings together community members who enabled the harm, looked the other way, were harmed secondarily, or want to serve as support people and accountability partners to those involved in a process.



People often equate RJ with weakness, and prefer to punish people who cause harm. The suggested punishment in cases of sexual and gender-based harm frequently includes banishment from the community. In theory, this feels good. In practice, however, it does nothing

⁴ Ampersands Restorative Justice (2021).

⁵ Zehr, H. (2015). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. New York, NY: Good Books.

to deter future harmful behavior, nor do harm-doers get banished — they are simply displaced elsewhere and may continue to harm others.

Punitive approaches that name, shame, and isolate people are ineffective at changing behavior and preventing future harm.⁶ They are also antithetical to RJ.⁷ Research on restorative approaches consistently shows that they are effective at compelling harm-doers to take responsibility and accountability⁸ and reducing reoffending,⁹ even for crimes of severe violence and for those at high risk of reoffense.¹⁰ Importantly, RJ processes are effective and impactful for survivors of various forms of harm as well, including sexual harm, as measured by high satisfaction rates,¹¹ less fear of revictimization,¹² and reductions in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)¹³.

RJ emphasizes seeing the humanity and dignity of all involved because it considers crimes and harms as violations of people and relationships.¹⁴ Seeing each other's humanity proves challenging. When someone has been egregiously harmed, it can be hard to see their harm-doer in their full human dignity. When we first began talking about this critical value of RJ, Guila could not imagine asking a survivor to see the human dignity of the person who harmed or violated them. Alissa reflected that we have to be able to see one another's humanity if we want to stop harm from happening.

Similarly, those who have caused harm may have difficulty seeing the person they harmed in *their* full humanity. Had they been able to do so earlier, they may not have caused them harm. Together we thought about how we are all created *betzelem elohim*, in the image of G-d, and how this value is the rallying call for the push toward safety, respect, and equity in the Jewish world. However, this call sometimes neglects repair and survivors' desire for said repair.

⁶ Ackerman, A. (2018). The Importance of Connection. TEDx Long Beach.

⁷ We expand on the consequences to harm-doers in a later section.

⁸ Sherman, L. W., Strang, H., Angel, C., Woods, D., Barnes, G. C., Bennett, S. & Inkpen, N. (2005). Effects of face-to-face restorative justice on victims of crime in four randomized, controlled trials. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 1(3), 367-395.

⁹ Latimer, J., Dowden, C., & Muise, D. (2005). The effectiveness of restorative justice practices: A meta-analysis. *The Prison Journal*, 85(2), 127-144; Sherman, L. W., Strang, H., Mayo-Wilson, E., Woods, D. J., & Ariel, B. (2015). Are Restorative Justice Conferences Effective in Reducing Repeat Offending? Findings from a Campbell Systematic Review. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 31(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-014-9222-9>

¹⁰ Sherman, L.W., Strang, H., Barnes, G., Woods, D. J., Bennett, S., Inkpen, N., Newbury-Birch, D., Rossner, M., Angel, C., Mearns, M., & Slothower, M. (2015). Twelve experiments in restorative justice: the Jerry Lee program of randomized trials of restorative justice conferences. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 11(4), 501–540. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-015-9247-6>;

¹¹ Latimer, J., Dowden, C., & Muise, D. (2005)

¹² Sherman, L.W., Strang, H., Barnes, G., et al. (2015)

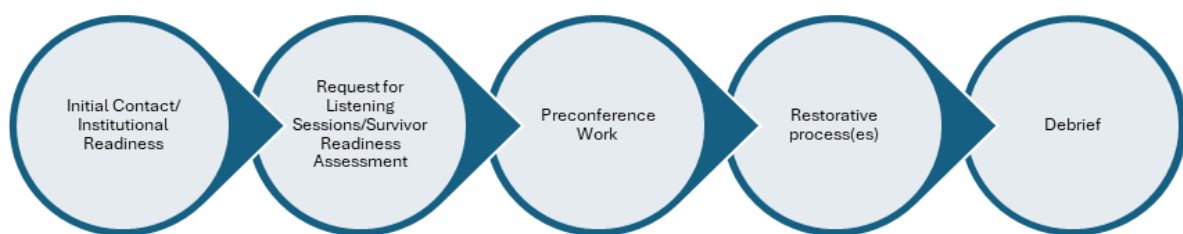
¹³ Angel, C. M., Sherman, L. W., Strang, H., Ariel, B., Bennett, S., Inkpen, N. & Richmond, T. S. (2014). Short-term effects of restorative justice conferences on post-traumatic stress symptoms among robbery and burglary victims: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 10(3), 291-307

¹⁴ Zehr, H. (2015).

Institutional leaders can create toxic environments conducive to harm. They may cause secondary victimization¹⁵ by not listening to or believing survivors who disclose harm. RJ can help institutional leaders see their role in causing harm and see those they harmed more clearly, especially when multiple survivors and institutional leaders are involved. Individual survivors have their own stories, needs, and reasons for participating in a process, and it is common for leaders to see survivors as a monolith.

Our RJ Process

We follow a five-phase institutional RJ process, though the phases are iterative and not linear. Each phase has multiple components, which may take place simultaneously as we work toward bringing survivors and institutions together for face-to-face or other processes.



An institutional leader usually makes initial contact to begin an RJ process. Before proceeding, we ensure that there are no current or pending criminal justice, civil, or ethics processes. We also assess the institution’s readiness by considering budget, motivation, capacity, and willingness to take accountability and address root causes of harm. We now strongly recommend including at least one survivor in planning and development from the outset.

Additionally and at the same time, we meet with survivors to gauge their desire to participate in RJ, understand their expectations, and assess for readiness. These initial conversations help us envision and create individualized pre-conference education materials to help all participants prepare for restorative processes that might occur. Pre-conference work can last between one to eighteen months before any face-to-face process takes place, ensuring the safety and well-being of all participants.

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¹⁵ The negative reaction of others to the victim, as well as the rejection and stigmatization that can follow (Taylor, S.E., Wood, J.V., & Lichtman, R.R. (1983). It Could Be Worse: Selective Evaluation as a Response to Victimization. *Journal of Social Issues* 39(2):19-40; Grubb, A. & Turner, E. (2012). Attribution of Blame in Rape Cases: A Review of the Impact of Rape Myth Acceptance, Gender Role Conformity and Substance Use on Victim Blaming. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17(5), 443-452.). It is also known as a “second wounding” or secondary trauma or injury. Ahrens, C.E. (2006). Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social Reactions on the Disclosure of Rape. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 38, 263-274; Loney-Howes, R. (2018). Shifting the Rape Script: ‘Coming Out’ Online as a Rape Victim. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 39(2):26-57.

2. What is “Living Room Syndrome” and how does it impact harm and repair?

Alissa walked up the concrete steps toward the glass facade of the local Reform synagogue that would be her Jewish home for four years. She noticed the placard next to the door frame. “The Living Room,” it read. This is the place where she both experienced and witnessed sexual misconduct. Some older men hugged her for too long or ogled at her. Some even tried to kiss her on the lips as she squirmed out of reach. She watched this happen to other women in this place, too. On multiple occasions, both in the Living Room and in the Chapel, she witnessed men grab women’s backsides without their consent. She reported the behavior only once, and it is not lost on her that the instance she reported did not occur in the Living Room. In that instance, a man she recognized but did not know entered the social hall, began a conversation, and reached over and grabbed her backside.

There has been a [lack of professional and personal boundaries in Jewish workplaces and communal spaces](#). The dynamics we describe above focus on one individual’s experience in a Reform synagogue, but reflect a larger phenomenon called “[Living Room Syndrome](#).”¹⁶ We have been struck by the number of victim-survivors who tell similar stories about harm in their synagogues, communities, and Jewish-led organizations. The Jewish community, writ large, (dys)functions like a big family. While our Jewish communities and spaces may be beautiful and warm, our “cultural familiarity with each other”¹⁷ leads us to interact as if we are in our living rooms. Instead of operating within a framework that includes workplace and other institutional norms, we can cause harm when we don’t have boundaries or act like we are among family.

Despite many instances of harm happening in both literal and figurative Jewish living rooms, only a few are disclosed. We cannot shake the stories of those who were harmed in actual living rooms by people they trusted. We have come to think of the living room syndrome and family dynamics in Jewish spaces like the [casting couch in Hollywood](#) - the spaces in which so many harm-doers took advantage of those they harmed and where others silently watched it happen.

Additionally, in our living rooms, we might not speak up when an uncle touches us inappropriately because we have been taught that it is *lashon hara*, or gossip, and bad form. Because we do not speak of harms that occur, those who cause harm can passively deny their misconduct. The denial leaves no room for accountability. As the man who grabbed Alissa articulated in a follow-up conversation, “I’ve been doing this to women for years. No one ever told me to stop. I didn’t know I was doing anything wrong.”

Rarely do we kick people out of the family, not even those who engage in sexual misconduct at the Passover Seder. However, when harm happens in the Jewish communal “living room,” there are often calls for the removal of the harm-doer from the community or organization. Some have gone so far as to shame people who remain connected to these harm-doers. While there are

¹⁶ <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/we-must-own-our-responsibility-as-women/>

¹⁷ Ibid

instances where removal from the community is necessary for creating safety, there are practical, humane ways to do so. We have seen these attempts through accountability committees and policies in some [Christian churches](#)¹⁸ that prioritize children and survivors, while also recognizing that harm-doers have needs too.¹⁹ Safety, accountability, and repair, when desired, can go together.

How can we keep the warmth of the Jewish living room *and* create safer and accountable places? Alissa wondered about that after her experience in the synagogue. Because of her expertise, she used RJ to engage the man who grabbed her in repair conversations. She also applied a Jewish lens to a restorative response by giving a synagogue-wide sermon on RJ and accountability.

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3. What patterns and gaps have we observed in institutional RJ processes in Jewish spaces that impact the steps of RJ and *teshuva*?

We met because Guila was studying how some survivors of sexual violence become anti-sexual violence advocates. Alissa participated in that study and casually mentioned her RJ work in her interview. Due to our many similarities, we kept in touch and advised each other in our respective work. While Alissa continued her RJ work outside of Jewish spaces, Guila began discussing RJ as a possibility in her presentations to Jewish organizations who often asked, “Justice for whom?” Guila noticed that they were forgetting about restoration and that survivors, at times, are the ones who prefer RJ options over others. As we continued talking, we began to observe patterns repeating themselves as stories of harm-doers in Jewish spaces became public because survivors bravely spoke out. Harm-doers generally did not take accountability. Survivors also shared how institutions equally harmed them. We recognized this as potential accountability and repair opportunities for institutions and their leaders and for survivors.

Our Jewish texts provide the steps for addressing the harm we have caused. Therefore, RJ principles should be familiar to Jewish individuals and institutional leaders looking to repair harm.

We can compare the steps from [Maimonides’ formula for the teshuva process](#)²⁰ to those in RJ.

¹⁸ See section F in the Recommendations section of this Zero Abuse Project report.

¹⁹ See for example Bass, S. (n.d.) *A Careful Grace: Accountability for Sex Offenders in the Church*. Available at <https://www.netgrace.org/resources/a-careful-grace>

²⁰ Benchimol, 2021. Steps Toward Accountability. [SRE Network](#) resources.

RJ Steps Vs. Maimonides' Formula for the *Teshuva* Process

RJ Steps	<i>Teshuva</i> Steps
▶ Specifically name the harm you caused.	▶ Recognize the harmful behavior and actions you took.
▶ Speak about your understanding of the impact of the harm.	▶ Regret and feel remorse over your actions.
▶ Explain the steps you are/will take to ensure you never behave this way again.	▶ Stop the harmful behavior and distance yourself from it.
▶ Answer questions asked of you by the person you harmed.	▶ Undertake the work necessary to transform yourself and change.
▶ Be prepared to meet specific asks or requests made by those you have harmed, including restitution.	▶ Verbally confess the harm you caused and be specific about your actions.
▶ Offer authentic amends.	▶ Make amends or restitution.
▶ Engage in active accountability work.	▶ Apologize and ask for forgiveness from those you have harmed. ▶ Resolve to do better. Make different choices.

These steps are iterative and similar, though there are significant differences. *Teshuva* is a personal, internal process that requires awareness and remorse. While RJ does not necessarily require remorse, it is inherent in taking accountability. RJ also does not require desisting from one's previous harmful behaviors, though that is also part of accountability. *Teshuva*, therefore, is more of an internal process of feeling, regretting, and enacting, while RJ is a process held by facilitators to get one to the place of *teshuvah*. When we are not activating the *teshuvah* process, RJ may help jumpstart it, with facilitators supporting us.

Both RJ and *teshuvah* involve making amends, including taking steps to change behavior. *Teshuvah* even goes as far as seeking forgiveness from the one you harmed. But neither RJ nor *teshuvah* is *about* forgiveness and reconciliation, and neither guarantees it.²¹ While forgiveness may come from an RJ encounter, it is not "a prerequisite to or a necessary outcome of" RJ

²¹ Zehr, 2015.

processes.²² Accountability is the obligation of the harm-doer to those they harmed while forgiveness is a survivor's personal decision. As Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg writes, "The work of repentance and the gift of receiving forgiveness are not the same. The work of repentance is demanded of every single one of us...even if some accounts can never be closed."²³ Even in Maimonides' formulation, one must take several accountability steps *before* asking for forgiveness. This means that accountability does not depend on forgiveness. How one asks for forgiveness matters - it is about creating space for what the survivor is or is not ready for.

When working in Jewish spaces, we have observed patterns and gaps that make it difficult for harm-doers, including institutions, to follow the steps of *teshuvah* and RJ, and for survivors to get the accountability and repair they seek.

Patterns and Gaps

Survivors

- Survivors and harm-doers co-exist in the same or adjacent Jewish communities and spaces. Community or organizational members frequently have relationships with both parties. These complex relationships become challenging to navigate when harm has occurred. Survivors often feel additional harm in these multiple relationships.
- Survivors may not want to have anything to do with the individuals who harmed them, nor do they have expectations of them. However, those who want to connect for closure or have their needs met may struggle to do so safely. Institutions are often hesitant to help survivors connect with primary harm-doers even when asked.²⁴
- The commission of harm in faith spaces has long-lasting impacts on harmed parties' spirituality or spiritual connection to their faith, faith group, and faith leaders. Spiritual abuse includes systematic coercion, control, and manipulation, especially through the use of religious texts to excuse or rationalize behavior.²⁵ It is incredibly damaging to those who experience it, exacerbating other impacts of harm.²⁶ The effect of spiritual abuse is poorly understood and underappreciated, leading individuals and institutions to cause further harm to survivors.

Individual Harm-doers

- From the survivors and institutions we have worked with, we have observed that primary harm-doers in Jewish spaces are not taking responsibility, as *teshuvah* and RJ demand. We have heard that harm-doers who would like to try and take accountability are not, or do not feel welcome to do so. They are, or believe they will continue to be, rejected in

²² Ibid.

²³ Danya Ruttenberg, 2022. *On Repentance and Repair*, p. 190.

²⁴ The person who initially and directly caused harm to another as opposed to secondary harm-doers who cause harm after the initial act and harm-doer.

²⁵ Oakley, L. & Humphreys, J. (2018). *Understanding Spiritual Abuse in Christian Communities*. Available at <https://thirtyoneeight.org/media/gbsj1haw/spiritualabusesummarydocument.pdf>

²⁶ Oakley, L., Kinmond, K., & Blundell, P. (2024). Responding well to Spiritual Abuse: practice implications for counselling and psychotherapy. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 52(2), 189–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2023.2283883>

Jewish spaces—especially those where they caused harm. However, institutions can often link the parties when the survivor desires an accountability and repair process. Institutions can also support harm-doers in their path toward accountability and be messengers about what RJ can accomplish.

- Denominations use ethics processes to investigate harm by colleagues. The focus in these processes is on maintaining professional, ethical, or religious standards rather than facilitating meaningful repair between the person who was harmed and the person who caused harm. This is a missed opportunity for accountability and repair.

Institutions

- Notably, there are serious harms that do not rise to the level of an ethics violation or are simply not included in ethics codes, leaving those who experience harm with little to no recourse. Institutions with ethics processes should consider how to address this gap. We applaud institutions who have broadened their repair efforts to go beyond sexual harm.
- Harm in Jewish settings brings added pain when leaders do not respond well to survivors or their disclosures. Institutional RJ may be possible when survivors and institutions are interested, but accountability should not depend on survivors' willingness to engage. Leaders should take steps to be accountable and make necessary changes, even if survivors do not want to engage with them in a process.
- Often, a harm-doer has caused harm in several interconnected parts of the larger Jewish institutional and communal ecosystem. The lack of coordination among Jewish institutions can frustrate survivors' quest for accountability and repair when leaders pass accountability down the line to a partner organization where harm also occurred.
- The gendered dynamics in repair efforts often leave women to clean up the messes of men who behaved inappropriately in their organization. Because repair processes are complicated, women working on accountability and repair may be blamed by survivors, the broader community, and male leaders with whom they work for how they clean up the mess. This causes harm to the women who are trying to take institutional accountability.

Community Members

- [Community members may not know how to respond in the aftermath of harm.](#)²⁷ They may feel anger for survivors, guilty if they were bystanders, unsure what to do with their relationships with harm-doers and institutions, and concerned for their community or space. A restorative approach recognizes that community members should not be deprived of repair processes because they have a stake in, and are impacted by, both harm and repair efforts.
- Jewish institutions don't always know how to use community members to help in accountability and repair processes. We have seen advocates and activists shunned by institutions and heralded by survivors, which sets up challenging dynamics. Community

²⁷ Ackerman and Benchimol (2018). Restorative Justice and *Teshuva* Following Sexual Misconduct. E-Jewish Philanthropy.

members should be included and can help by supporting survivors and being accountability partners to institutional leaders.

- Sometimes, community members advocating for survivors use tactics to push organizations to act in ways that feel threatening to organizational leaders. We understand why they take these approaches. However, these tactics may inflame already existing tensions. There is a delicate dance that RJ can teach community members about [calling in and calling out](#).²⁸

These are all areas of opportunity to more effectively and holistically apply the steps of *teshuva* and RJ. These opportunities consider the place and needs of everyone who should be coming together to work on accountability and repair. As the film [Spotlight](#) reminds us, “It takes a village to abuse (a child).” We believe it takes that same village and more to repair.

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4. What have we learned about where institutions and survivors want to begin accountability and repair work versus where they should begin?

Whenever we have been approached about a potential RJ process, whether by institutional leaders or survivors, the initial feeling is excitement by the parties about what they believe is possible. Quickly, however, it becomes clear that the excitement level differs from the reality of what restoration and accountability entail. We have found that survivors are apprehensive about confronting their harm-doers. Institutions, too, worry that engaging in RJ with no guarantee of restoration and justice will further harm survivors. Engaging in a process becomes even more daunting once we explain what RJ demands. Therefore, it is vital to clearly outline the what, when, and how of RJ at the outset of any process.

When to Begin?

RJ does not involve fact-finding like ethics, human resources, criminal legal system processes, and other investigations. RJ focuses on understanding who has experienced harm, what their needs are, and whose obligation it is to meet those needs.²⁹ RJ emphasizes the importance of truth-telling through storytelling rather than questioning a survivor's credibility. [The Reverend Dr. Danielle Tumminio Hansen](#) writes about narrative trust and a “hermeneutic of belief,” which is a “way of listening that starts with empathy and assumes belief.”³⁰ These are very different from fact-finding. In Jewish spaces, we have engaged in RJ processes after law firms have conducted formal investigations, after harm-doers have admitted causing harm, or when survivors have asked for processes.

²⁸ Bennet, J. (2019). What if Instead of Calling People Out, We Called Them In? *New York Times*. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/19/style/loretta-ross-smith-college-cancel-culture.html>

²⁹ Zehr, 2015.

³⁰ Tumminio Hansen, D. (2024). *Speaking of Rape: The Limits of Language in Sexual Violations*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

How to Begin?

The work of accountability begins with a clear understanding of the roles that people and institutions play in causing harm, how this impacts survivors, and the role that all parties can and will play in repair. However, we have learned that Jewish organizations are hesitant to recognize themselves as harm-doers and that they rarely see a place for primary harm-doers in the RJ process.³¹ This led us to focus on secondary victimization and [Dr. Jennifer Freyd's work on institutional betrayal](#)³² in our learning with institutional leaders. We also quickly realized that focusing only on institutional betrayal, one of the causes of secondary victimization, was discouraging when we were asking people to imagine possibilities. We, therefore, added a focus on institutional courage³³, which is the antidote to betrayal. Showing up to begin difficult RJ work is, in and of itself, a form of courage by survivors and institutional leaders.

Furthermore, to move ahead, all parties to an RJ process must trust that everyone is operating in good faith. This is understandably challenging for survivors who were harmed, but it is crucial for success. To address this, we can bring people together earlier for more minor conversations about what we may be able to achieve. For example, in one project, we conducted listening sessions with survivors about what they envision a small-scale conversation between them and institutional leaders might entail, laying the groundwork for a planning committee to build more significant community processes.

Where to Begin?

RJ processes can take many forms, from formal circle processes, one-on-one facilitated restorative conversations, facilitated shuttle processes, processes where we use surrogates,³⁴ and more. However, Jewish organizations sometimes have limited ideas about RJ. They may imagine a large circle process that may not suit everyone's needs. There are many other RJ options that may facilitate repair more effectively, especially among parties that already know each other. Therefore, where to begin depends on the people involved in the process, who they are, and what they need.

- **RJ Education**

We have seen organizations commit to RJ before they understand what it entails and demands, leaving them surprised about what we ask of them. Survivors, too, may want to engage in RJ with institutions to meet specific needs. However, meeting survivor

³¹ Some were even reluctant to have Alissa work with them because her research has been about offenders.

³² Freyd, J. (n.d.). Institutional Betrayal. Freyd Dynamics Lab, University of Oregon. Available at <https://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/institutionalbetrayal/>. Institutional betrayal includes “wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals (e.g. sexual assault) committed within the context of the institution.”

³³ “Institutional Courage is an institution’s commitment to seek the truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost.” - [Center for Institutional Courage](#)

³⁴ Ackerman, A. & Levenson, S. (2019). *Healing from Sexual Violence: The Case for Vicarious Restorative Justice*. Brandon, VT: Safer Society Press. Vicarious restorative justice processes utilize surrogates or proxies in place of direct harm-doers or survivors.

needs is just one part of RJ, and survivors may become disenchanted with the work and emotional toll that RJ takes. Therefore, we now begin with educating survivors, institutional leaders, and community members about RJ and its demands before engaging.

- **Take Responsibility for Impact of Harm**

Survivors want institutions to take responsibility for causing harm and to understand how that harm has altered their lives. The effects of harm can be long-lasting and far-reaching, affecting many parts of a survivor's life, which institutional leaders may not understand. Expanding survivors' and leaders' understanding of these effects can help everyone recognize why survivors hold institutions and their leaders responsible for their pain - because they are secondary harm-doers.³⁵

After we teach the basics about RJ, we now delve into learning curricula which explains the many impacts of harm on individuals, institutions, and communities. Understanding harms and impacts allows leaders to unpack where they enabled harm, consider how harm continues through interacting with or ignoring survivors, and understand the root causes of harm in their organization. When institutions do not see themselves as harm-doers and do not know that the harm they cause has an impact, they cannot take the accountability survivors are waiting for. We have seen the light bulb go off after months of learning when leaders finally understand why survivors are more upset at them than they are with the primary harm-doers.

Additionally, taking responsibility is deeply tied to living our Jewish values. We encourage institutional leaders to examine their values and those their organization espouses. We ask that they think about how institutional betrayal violates those values and how courage helps to honor them. We ask that they integrate their values into how they show up for RJ. This can feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable, especially for leaders who are used to turning cases of harm over to their lawyers. While institutions should protect themselves as a process unfolds, the legal approach can have the effect of obscuring leaders' humanity.

- **Meet Survivor Needs and Apologize**

The beginning of a process allows survivors to express their needs from the institution and harm-doers. It may be the first time survivors think about their needs, as rarely has anyone asked about them. Survivors' needs exist on a continuum, from taking actionable steps for the betterment of others to providing specific outcomes to individual survivors. Their needs often include consequences, recognition, dignity, voice, prevention, and connectedness.³⁶ Some seek acknowledgment, apology, accountability, restitution,

³⁵ The person or people who caused secondary victimization after an initial act of harm.

³⁶ McGlynn, C., & Westmarland, N. (2019). Kaleidoscopic Justice: Sexual Violence and Victim-Survivors' Perceptions of Justice. *Social & Legal Studies*, 28(2), 179–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663918761200>

rehabilitation, and prevention.³⁷ Survivors need others to believe them, to have the opportunity to tell and hear the truth, to feel empowered and vindicated, and to receive timely and appropriate information.

One of the most prominent needs we hear is the need for the institution to publicly acknowledge the harm they caused. An honest [apology](#)³⁸, informed by survivors' voices, can go a long way. Yet, organizations and institutions need to be bold in starting there. Perhaps they feel it is an admission of guilt, or they fear survivors will sue them, or are advised by lawyers not to apologize. However, engaging honestly in RJ with survivors is one way institutions can begin to correct course and show survivors that they are remorseful and want to do better.

Additionally, institutions will say they want to listen to survivors. Still, survivors seek action, such as the active steps organizations will take to follow through with accountability and meet their needs. They want institutions to change the structures that allowed harm to occur in the first place, including better training, staffing, or changes to policy and practice. Some survivors simply want to converse with institutional leaders, while others want to connect with others with similar experiences. Therefore, we teach institutions that they cannot just listen for the sake of listening. They have to *do something* with what they hear from survivors.

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5. What are the misunderstandings about and limitations of institutional RJ?

Every time we start a RJ process, we apply the lessons we learned in past cases. We also tailor the components of each process to address the specific issues and needs of all parties involved. This means that no two processes are alike. At times, the questions institutions and survivors ask us reveal the misunderstandings they have about RJ. These misunderstandings must be clarified early on.

Here are some things we have heard from institutions:

- “Can you train us to hold RJ processes with the survivors we hurt?”
- “We want to engage a survivor in RJ, but only if they don’t leave our organization where they were harmed.”
- “Why are survivors so angry at us when we were not even part of the organization at the time they were harmed?”
- “Why are survivors still upset after we apologized?”

Here are some things survivors have shared:

³⁷ Herman, J. (2023). *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

³⁸ Union for Reform Judaism. (2023). Making Amends: A Message for Yom Kippur 5784.

- *“If the institution would only do teshuva, I would be healed.”*
- *“Restorative justice failed me. I did not get what I asked for from the institution that harmed me.”*
- *“How can you say that the institution is trying? I don’t see it.”*

As we have already mentioned, RJ is not appropriate for every situation or person. Even when it is possible and the ‘magic’ of RJ happens, there are limitations, including ones we had not considered when we began our RJ practice. These limitations have made us rethink how we work with survivors and others. When participants do not understand these limitations at the outset, they will likely be dissatisfied with the process and their expectations will not be realistic.

- **Time:** RJ requires patient deliberation and time. It is not predictable because people's emotions and needs may change over time as a process progresses. These changes can impact the process. We must explain to participants that whatever process or processes we engage in will take longer than we estimate.
- **Representation:** We often must clarify who RJ facilitators work for or represent. We never charge survivors who have already paid in other ways for the harms they were made to endure. Survivors may want us to be their advocates, but survivor-centeredness is different from being a survivor’s advocate. Institutions that hire and pay us may think they control the process and its outcomes. Some institutions also believe we should help them look good in front of survivors and the wider Jewish world. We, therefore, explain to everyone that our role is to facilitate RJ processes rather than represent one party over the other. Our ‘client’ is the RJ process, accountability, and repair where possible.
- **Readiness:** Readiness is a crucial ingredient of RJ, as one of the goals is to avoid causing additional harm to anyone. Some people may not be ready for RJ. Survivors may be too traumatized to participate in safe ways. Institutional leaders may desire repair in theory but need more time to be ready in practice. Among leadership teams, too, there may be varying degrees of readiness among the individual leaders who are participating. These are not judgment calls; they are simply realities that are better faced early on. Just because a person or institution *wants* to be part of a process does not mean they automatically get to participate in one. If facilitators do not appropriately and repeatedly assess for readiness, or do not adequately resource or prepare people, they can cause additional harm. We have had to pause processes because our iterative readiness assessments revealed that someone was not ready. We keep the door open should they do what they need to become ready again.
- **Transparency:** Honesty is vital among all parties, including the facilitators. We will never lie or withhold information even when something is difficult to say. We need our clients to be honest too. Holding back essential pieces of information or history can seriously impede a process. Processes have failed and participants have been hurt when clients leave out critical information that, had we known earlier, would have changed how we designed a process or the recommendations we would have made.

- **Meeting Survivor Needs:** Meeting survivors' needs takes time, especially when done by an institution with boards, lawyers, and others at the helm. Survivors are often uncomfortable with the long time that it takes. Survivors' needs exist on a continuum, from taking actionable steps for the betterment of others to providing specific outcomes to individual survivors. A survivor's needs often determine the goals of a process, though RJ is more than a transactional process. There are several misunderstandings surrounding survivors' needs.
 - **Needs and Wants:** Survivors must differentiate between their needs and wants. "Needs are resources that life requires in order to sustain itself. Wants are our desires: things that we might like to have but aren't essential to our survival."³⁹ They should also have realistic expectations and a clear understanding about what institutions are willing to do. Institutions may raise survivors' hopes by engaging in RJ, but then fail to commit to meeting their needs.
 - **Financial Needs:** Some survivors have genuine financial needs, including reimbursement for therapy costs, lost wages, and retirement benefits. It is realistic for institutions to set aside compensation for therapy costs for survivors at the outset. We have found that Jewish institutions are unlikely to meet other financial needs, leaving some to wonder how large, successful institutions can deny survivors' financial remuneration while saying they will take accountability.
 - **Healing vs. Needs:** Survivors will be deeply disappointed if they believe their healing will come from an institution. Alissa wisely reminds them, "Do not rely on the institution that harmed you to heal you." RJ may be just one part of a very long healing process. Even after a process that successfully meets their needs, survivors may have other healing work to do independently.
- **Power and Agency:** Though RJ seeks to level the playing field, the process can exacerbate existing power differentials between survivors and organizational leaders. Survivors are often left feeling powerless and without a sense of agency when institutions fail to communicate effectively or involve them in the decision-making about the process.
 - **Communications:** Survivors see ineffective communication about RJ by an institution as a power play. Communications can be complicated when there are many survivors asking for accountability and repair. Organizational leaders must figure out their communications plan about their accountability and repair efforts early on, including clarifying what will be shared publicly and what will be shared only with participating survivors.

³⁹ Kaba and Hassan. 2019. Fumbling Towards Repair: A workbook for community accountability facilitators.

- **Decisions about Survivor Needs:** Survivors have expressed frustration, hurt, and sadness when they feel like they are being offered “crumbs” by institutions in an attempt to meet their needs. They feel like they are always giving up more, negotiating and conceding to institutions, in an attempt to get their needs met. Even when an institution decides it will meet survivor needs, survivors are often left waiting for answers, as they do not play a role in institutional conversations. The waiting game can heighten survivors' sense of powerlessness.
- **Responsibility:** Everyone involved in a process must take responsibility for how they behave towards others, no matter whether they are institutional leaders, community members, survivors, or facilitators. We have experienced harmful actions and words from both institutions and survivors. Similarly, others involved in a process have experienced the same. At times, because of their pain, people cannot see that they are also causing pain to others. We must contend with these dynamics which are crucial when we are working on the issues of accountability and repair.
- **Satisfaction:** For these reasons, RJ will not satisfy all participants. It cannot erase the past or alleviate the trauma. It cannot repair tarnished reputations, especially when accountability work is not shared publicly.

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6. What does ‘the magic of restorative justice’ look like in practice?

Alissa coined the name Ampersands Restorative Justice after years of working in silos. On the one hand, she worked directly with those who had caused sexual harm. On the other hand, her friend and colleague, Guila, was fighting for survivors' rights and dignity. What was missing was the bridge to each other. Alissa experienced the magic of connection and bridge-building by participating in vicarious RJ processes⁴⁰, where she witnessed what she thought was impossible - true accountability and feelings of restoration. Creating opportunities for that magic to occur requires deliberation, patience, and empathy. It requires us to live into the ampersand - the ability to hold tension and nuance and create connection. We see this idea in the concept of “[Eilu v'eilu](#),” which was the Heavenly response to the debates between the Houses of Shammai and Hillel. The response taught that both opinions were the word of G-d; that both have validity. Like the Ampersand, we have room for truths that are in tension with each other. This is at the core of RJ.

⁴⁰ Vicarious RJ progresses utilize surrogates as either survivors or those who have caused harm. These may be utilized for a variety of reasons. Survivors may not know the person who harmed them. The harm-doer may be deceased or otherwise unavailable, or the survivor may have no interest in meeting with the person who harmed them. Similarly, those who cause harm may want an accountability process, but are not allowed contact with the person they harmed or the facilitator may be unwilling to contact a survivor on behalf of a harm-doer. In these instances and others, vicarious processes can be helpful.

The magic of RJ is hard to put into words. It can be a tiny spark of hope or a monumental shift. Ultimately, it's about reconnecting with the humanity of others in seemingly impossible situations. We aim to facilitate this reconnection by helping people involved see themselves and others more completely. It is in these connections that the ampersands, the tensions that need to be held simultaneously, are revealed and honored.

We do our best to help survivors, advocates, and organizational leaders bridge the divide when they can see beyond their preconceived ideas about each other. Our success is evident when the parties involved change how they communicate with each other. For instance, a leader initially hesitant to meet with survivors later described it as "nothing short of a miracle."

Pre-Conference Magic

As facilitators, we have the vantage point of seeing each party to a process through their grappling, learning, and ultimate understanding. We can only bring survivors and leaders together after that learning has occurred. There are magical moments that happen in our pre-work where we educate and converse with survivors and leaders separately. Magic also occurs when organizational leaders meet the critical need for accountability because of the pre-conference learning, which can happen in several ways. It can come from survivors seeing themselves and their experiences reflected in [reports](#) about harm, [accountability, and repair](#)⁴¹ that we write after listening to them and to institutions.

In cases with multiple survivors, magic can also happen when we bring them together. Survivors have said that they found healing and empowerment through connections with others who have been harmed and understand their experiences. Some expressed not realizing how much they needed a peer-survivor space which helped them feel more connected.

Similarly, as organizational leaders learn with their team about the harms they have caused or enabled, they come to terms with what led them there. This learning impacts the organization as leaders understand how toxic cultures from the past may still affect their teams today. We have witnessed leaders shift from thinking about institutional policy to truly seeing the survivors before them because of this learning. However, survivors are not part of this organizational learning and miss out on this progress.

Additionally, some institutional leaders who participate in RJ may also be survivors. Sometimes, they come to understand the impact of their own experiences of harm through our learning. Survivors who participate in RJ may fail to see or appreciate this duality. Few leaders have shared their survivorship in a process with survivors, but it has been transformational when they have.

Magic in RJ Encounters

Few words can describe the magic that occurs when participants engage in dialogue with each other. Restorative encounters use ritual to create a safe space for difficult conversations

⁴¹ See our report linked here.

involving community members, survivors, and those responsible for harm.⁴² One kind of RJ encounter is a circle process, which begins with a discussion of shared values, followed by the survivor sharing their experience. The responsible parties then respond and take accountability, using what they have learned in pre-conference education, and the survivor presents their needs for repair. These encounters are extremely powerful and moving.

In RJ encounters, community members may be the support people for the survivors and/or an institution's accountability partners. They can include family, friends, board members, and members of partner organizations. Support people participating in processes have called their experience in RJ encounters “a gift,” “profound,” and “sacred.”

Magic can also come from public or private apologies that institutional leaders make where they name the harms caused on their watch and acknowledge the impacts. But even these moments of magic and accountability, while helping some survivors, does not go far enough for others.

Pain and Magic of Patience

Sometimes, survivors only expect to share their experience and its impacts, entering a process with no guarantees that organizations will meet their needs. In some instances, institutions have followed through with addressing multiple needs beyond simply listening. However, survivors have understandably grown impatient while waiting to hear whether their requests will be honored. Indeed, had we pushed institutions harder or earlier, instead of giving the leaders space to make thoughtful and deliberate decisions, survivors' requests might not have been honored. Patience is required for institutions to make difficult decisions. Still, the time it takes organizations to grasp the depths of impact and make decisions accordingly can be painful for survivors who are not included in those deliberations.

Magic and Spirit of Needs

RJ will never be able to meet all survivor needs. And it cannot force institutions to take accountability or to meet survivors' requests. The reality is that there are survivors' needs that institutions realistically cannot meet. In those instances, we ask leaders to consider whether they can meet the spirit of the request. This is another way that we aim to build bridges for connection and opportunities for participants to see each other's full humanity. In those moments, the impossible becomes possible, and miracles occur.

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⁴² Pranis, K. (2015). The Circle Keeper's Handbook. Available at <https://fromdiaperstodiamonds.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CIRCLE-KEEPER-HANDBOOK-REVIS-ED-PRANIS.pdf>

7. What seems unique regarding RJ in Jewish spaces, especially compared to other faith groups' repair efforts?

“Abuse is a cancer and Tylenol won’t cut it. So, while this work on restorative justice and accountability education and facilitation feels hard, it’s the organizational chemotherapy that we need.” - Pastor Phil EuBank, Menlo Church

We have observed particular markers that have made RJ in Jewish spaces challenging compared to our work in Christian communities. While we have only worked with two Christian churches and know that what we have seen there differs greatly from many other Christian spaces, the comparison to what we have seen in Jewish spaces is stark.

- **Types of Harm:** Sexual misconduct exists on a continuum from appropriate behavior to criminal acts. The types of sexual and other harms that Christian communities ask us to address are usually more serious, involving criminal acts of sexual abuse, which have also, at times, involved law enforcement. However, the more severe cases of sexual violence in Jewish spaces have yet to be acknowledged and addressed. While we know that these kinds of harm have also taken place in Jewish spaces, the majority of the cases that have come our way, with some exceptions, have not involved criminal conduct. It seems that, even when potentially criminal behavior has occurred in the Jewish world, people are reluctant to involve law enforcement. It is also often too late to do so because the statute of limitations has passed.
- **Language about Harm and Repair:** The language used by Christian faith leaders and others to talk about sexual abuse and the responsibility to address it reflects their Christian doctrine. For example, they describe sexual harm as a ‘sin’ and institutional accountability as part of ‘being a good Christian.’ However, it seems that Jewish leaders only use Jewish terminology regarding accountability and *teshuva*. Jewish values or texts are applied to repair but not to understanding harm and survivor experiences. This is a missed opportunity to understand that harm, too, has a spiritual dimension and is not divorced from our Jewish lives.
- **Understanding Survivor Experiences:** The Christian groups we have worked with prioritize survivors and talk about them in a more understanding way than Jewish groups do. We have noticed that Jewish institutions may fail to hear survivors’ voices, understand their pain, or see them fully when survivors are angry or persistent. They should understand that survivors are vulnerable and feel disadvantaged when coming up against institutions that are more powerful and wealthy than themselves. Institutional leaders who see trauma play out in survivors’ behaviors or words may blame survivors or misunderstand their emotions. This lack of understanding harms survivors and thwarts RJ processes.
- **Communications:** [Christian groups that have approached us want to be highly transparent](#) about their accountability and repair work, including posting about it online

and sharing it widely with those outside their immediate communities. Jewish organizations are much more private about their repair work and coming together with survivors. The desire and need for Jewish institutions to protect themselves from outside scrutiny is valid, but it means that no one learns from their [brave examples of accountability and repair](#).

In sum, we have work to do in our Jewish spaces around harm and repair. We must bravely recognize all instances of harm, not just the ones we are more comfortable addressing. We can lean into our Jewish values and texts to understand harm and repair. We can try to understand where survivors are coming from, especially when they have given us the opportunity to do better. Finally, we can share our efforts around accountability and repair, understanding that harm impacts entire communities, and inviting others to learn with and from us.

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Conclusion: Learning to be Nimble and Standing in Our Values

Moments of magic are possible. We have been fortunate to witness these moments and to turn to each other and say, “This is the work. This is holy work.” We have been moved beyond words by the courage survivors have shown and the trust they have put in us. We have been equally moved by institutional leaders who stand in their values and aim to do the right thing, even when it is tremendously challenging. But more recently, we have questioned what institutional accountability and repair can accomplish and whether it is enough for survivors.

One way for us to model accountability for others is to stand in it ourselves. The last six years have taught us many lessons. Most painful has been the crisis of faith, where we have wondered whether our work contributes to additional harm or enabled harm due to the limitations and gaps discussed in these pages. Because survivor-centeredness has always been our north star, we had to rethink whether and how we should practice RJ. We always believed that RJ was limited only by a lack of creativity or imagination. We were wrong. We have learned that people's lack of understanding and readiness to engage or follow through limits RJ. As you have read above, we have changed how we operate to correct this mistake. We made significant changes to our process by creating readiness checklists and iterative assessments tailored to institutional leaders and survivors. We also learned that the necessary criteria and possibilities in an institutional process differ from what is required in an individual one. Additionally, we have expanded our bank of curricular materials for survivors, institutions, and community members to deepen the RJ learning we provide.

We have also changed how we think about the boundaries of our work, both in terms of how we communicate the limits and boundaries of RJ and how we honor our own. It is common for institutional leaders and survivors to push those boundaries without realizing they are doing so. As survivors and professionals, part of our accountability work has been communicating our boundaries better and sticking to them. We can only help clients if our cups are full.

We have learned about the importance of cultural humility and awareness. We come from different parts of the Jewish world. What works in one Jewish space may not work in another. This is also true for our work outside of the Jewish world. Whether working in a Jewish space or not, we are clear that our clients are experts in their own lives and communities. When leaders or survivors bring us into a community, we must first listen and learn. There may come a time when we are not the right facilitators for a case. We will name this and help to locate the right people for the job. Furthermore, in a post-October 7th world, we are very clear with Christian institutions about our Jewish identities. Some seek us out specifically because we are people of faith who are not Christian.

We have also been rethinking what we ask survivors at the onset of a project. Typically, we begin with “What are your restorative, justice, and healing needs?” Simply asking these questions can make survivors more hopeful than they should be. If we are not clear about the

limits of RJ or an institution's desire and ability to meet survivor needs, these questions can cause harm.

Yet, despite our concerns, we have seen some very positive steps. Six years ago, only some people understood what RJ was, fewer ever heard about institutional RJ, and many had limited imaginations about what RJ could accomplish. Today, people are talking about RJ and recognizing that survivors who want accountability and repair deserve to be heard. They are inquiring about what RJ entails and how they can participate. Jewish and other [communities](#) continue to want to learn.

We have also seen significant shifts in how the Jewish community thinks about RJ. While most of our processes have been private and confidential, the public ones have had rippling effects across the United States and Canada, with survivors and community members interested in and eager to learn more about what we do and how they can get involved. Most importantly, survivors have been grateful for the processes we conducted even when those processes fell short of their expectations.

So much of what we know is anecdotal. There is no solid data on harms, impacts, survivor needs, or institutional willingness to repair in Jewish spaces.

What's Next?

As such, **in late 2024 we will launch a comprehensive online survey** that will capture the numbers and kinds of harms that have occurred across Jewish spaces and denominations to understand the nature and scope of sexual and gender-based harms, and institutional responses to those harms. We will also ask survivors about their restorative, justice, and healing needs so that this evidence can inform our practice and that of the Jewish world.

Even though we have made all these shifts, we are still left questioning. This may be due to burnout and compassion fatigue, but we believe it is also related to our desire to give more to survivors and to the people working in institutions who really try when working on repair and accountability. We are grateful to everyone who has struggled with us and who have welcomed us into their struggles. **We invite you to engage with us in continuing to think about how to better build a Jewish world that honestly grapples with the challenges and possibilities of accountability and repair.** We will continue to ask these difficult questions and look for answers.

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Author Biographies

Dr. Alissa R. Ackerman holds a PhD in Criminal Justice from The Graduate Center at The City University of New York. She is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at California State University, Fullerton. She is also the co-founder and owner of Ampersands Restorative Justice, where she is a trainer, consultant, and restorative justice practitioner. She is a “pracademic” and “survivor scholar” in that she incorporates her academic training, practitioner, and personal experiences with sexual violence in her work. Alissa writes extensively on topics related to sexual violence and offending, restorative practices, and sex crime policies in academic journals, books, and OpEds. She has published almost 40 peer-reviewed journal articles and 8 books. She co-authored *Healing from Sexual Violence: The Case for Vicarious Restorative Justice*, with Dr. Jill Levenson in 2019 and her most recent co-edited volume, *Survivor Criminology: A Radical Act of Hope*, was released in 2022. Alissa is an internationally sought after speaker and trainer, having given over fifty national and international talks, including a TEDx Talk in 2018. She is an internationally sought-after speaker, consultant, and trainer. Along with Casey Ballinger, MSW, Alissa is the co-recipient of the 2024 Gail Burns-Smith Award.

Dr. Guila Benchimol is a criminologist, consultant, educator and victim advocate who works with survivors, faith institutions, and leaders to prevent and address sexual violence and other abuses of power. She was one of the key advisors who guided the launch of the Safety Respect Equity (SRE) Network in 2018, where she continues to serve as the Senior Advisor on Research and Learning. Guila is also the Director of Faith-Based and Community Accountability at Ampersands Restorative Justice and the Ethics Case Consultant for the Va’ad Hakavod of the Rabbinical Assembly. Guila also sits on the board of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), and is a research associate at the Center for the Study of Social and Legal Responses to Violence where she has worked on domestic violence and homicide files. She holds a PhD in Sociological Criminology from the University of Guelph and is also a trained restorative and transformative justice facilitator. Her first 10+ year career as a Jewish educator informed her understanding of the need to address victimization of all kinds. Previously, Guila was the Director of Judaic Studies at Tiferes Bais Yaakov and the Managing Director of NCSY Canada. She lives in Toronto and was raised in its Spanish Moroccan Jewish community which was built by the families who fled Tangier.