

## Lesson 3: How Do We Restore Justice Once It Is Lost?

### *Introduction:*

Opening Scripture: Nehemiah 1:4-7 – "When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses."<sup>1</sup>

**Objective:** This lesson will hopefully provide some important practical steps for restoring justice in a nation, focusing on biblical examples and the role we can play as individuals, members of a synagogue, and as a society.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all scriptures from the New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. (1995). The Lockman Foundation.

## **Main Points:**

### **I. Repentance and Recognition of Injustice**

- A. Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:13, 14 – “If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”
- B. Explanation: Restoration begins with recognizing where justice has been lost and repenting for our role in it. Both personal and national repentance are crucial.
- C. Biblical Example: Nehemiah acknowledged the sins of Israel and sought God’s forgiveness before initiating reforms (Nehemiah 1:4-7).
- D. Application to Us:
  - 1. As individuals: We must examine our own lives for areas where we may have contributed to injustice, whether through action or inaction, and seek God’s forgiveness.
  - 2. As a synagogue: We can hold special services of repentance and prayer, asking God to restore justice in our land and for our role in that process.
  - 3. As a society: National repentance is key to restoring justice. We should encourage our leaders to recognize wrongdoing and seek ways to correct it.

### **II. Reforming Leadership and Institutions**

- A. Scriptures:

1. Exodus 18:21, 22 – "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.
2. Acts 6:03 - "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task."

B. Explanation: Justice cannot be restored without reforming the systems and institutions that perpetuate injustice. This requires placing righteous leaders in positions of authority.

C. Biblical Example: King Josiah reformed the nation of Judah by instituting righteous practices, tearing down idols and restoring proper worship when the Torah Scroll(s) were found in the Temple. (2 Kings 22).

D. Application to Us:

1. As individuals: We can advocate for and support leaders who uphold justice and righteousness.
2. As a synagogue: We can educate ourselves on local and national issues, promoting leaders and policies that align with biblical principles.
3. As a society: Systemic reforms are necessary to ensure justice for all. This may involve addressing corruption, inequality, and unjust laws.

### **III. 3. Restorative Justice and Forgiveness**

- A. Scripture: Luke 19:8 – “Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.””
- B. Explanation: True justice involves restoring what was broken, not just punishing wrongdoers. Restorative justice seeks to heal relationships and make amends.
- C. Biblical Example: Zacchaeus made restitution as part of his repentance, restoring what he had taken and going beyond what was required.
- D. Application to Us:
  - 1. As individuals: We should seek to make amends for any wrongs we have committed and be part of the process of reconciliation.  
  
It is not enough to simply say we are sorry for our actions. Especially if we repeat those actions again and again.
  - 2. As a synagogue: Our congregation can support restorative justice initiatives, such as prison ministries, community reconciliation programs, and efforts to help victims of injustice.
  - 3. As a society: Promote restorative justice programs that focus on healing and reconciliation, rather than just punishment.

### **IV. The Role of Prayer and Spiritual Awakening**

- A. Scripture: Psalm 85:10 – “Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”

B. Explanation: Lasting justice can only come from God. Prayer is essential in seeking His guidance and intervention to restore justice in a broken system.

C. Biblical Example: Nehemiah prayed and fasted before taking any action to restore Jerusalem. His dependence on God ensured the success of his mission.

D. Application to Us:

1. As individuals: We must pray for our leaders and for wisdom in our efforts to restore justice.
2. As a synagogue: Regular prayer meetings focused on justice and national repentance should be a key part of our community life.
3. As a society: Encourage national days of prayer, public repentance, and seeking God's intervention in restoring justice.

## **V. Some Examples from Real Life of Restoring Justice in the Courts**

A. Vermont

1. Statewide reform towards restorative justice.
  - a. Community Justice Centers were established in various towns and cities across the state.
    - i. One aspect of these centers was restorative circles.
    - ii. Another aspect was victim-offender mediation
  - b. One of the requirements of this program is to make amends to the victims directly.
2. One example I found tells of a woman whose home was burglarized by a young man.

- a. She was initially affected a lot as she felt her space of safety had been violated. This caused her significant fear and anger with regard to the young offender.
- b. With this new law focusing on restorative justice, a mediated meeting was set up between the two.
  - i. The woman was able to relay to the young man how his actions caused her to feel violated, fearful, and angry.
  - ii. The young man was able to relay to the woman he had robbed of the life events which led him to making a bad decision and the remorse he felt for causing her ill and harm.
  - iii. The young man agreed to take the opportunity given him to work toward financial restitution.
  - iv. This brought some “closure” to the woman and gave the young man the opportunity to make positive changes in his life.

#### B. San Francisco, CA - Neighborhood Courts Program

- 1. Created to address low-level crimes using solutions based in communities
- 2. Community panels hear these low-level offences rather than taking them through a traditional court.
- 3. The affects of the crime on the victims are addressed through repayment of financial damages to the victims, apologies by the offender to the victim(s), and apologies by the offender to the victim(s), and sometimes community service.

4. This allows the offenders to be held accountable for their actions while the victims' needs are addressed as well.
5. It helps alleviate some of the long-term damage suffered by both when using the harsher legal remedies of the past.

***Conclusion:***

- **Call to Action:** As individuals, members of our synagogue, and citizens of society, we each have a role to play in restoring justice. Begin with personal repentance, advocate for righteous leaders, and work for restorative justice in your community.
- **Prayer:** Pray for God's mercy on our nation, for the restoration of justice, and for the courage to act justly in our personal lives and society.