

Course Details

In *Crime and Consequence*, we learn to discover and recover the humanity within criminals, we question practices that seem unethical and unfair, and we explore ways to prevent crime from ever taking place.

Crime and Consequence is for people who care deeply about humanity, are enraged at injustice, are fascinated by difficult-to-solve real-life scenarios, and are committed to seeing a system that is just and fair to all.

Lesson Details

Lesson 1 -2 Lock and Key: What's the Point of Prison?

A quick glance at the statistics suggests an uncomfortable truth: modern-day societies imprison people at a rate unparalleled, and indeed unimaginable, in past times. Why is this so? Why do we lock people up, and what do we hope to achieve by doing so? Does the purpose of prison always outweigh the cons of conviction? This lesson considers and contrasts secular and Talmudic theories of criminal justice, before suggesting how to ensure a more just justice system.

Lesson 3-4 Judge, Jewry, and Execution: Judaism and the Death Penalty

Some crimes are irreversible. Everyone makes mistakes. Taken together, these two propositions suggest both the imperative and impediment for the death penalty and point to its central paradox. Can man have the authority to sentence another man to death? How should we respond to the most serious crimes?

Lesson 5-6 Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: Standards of Evidence in the Talmud

Justice may be blind, but judges and juries must be clear-sighted. This lesson explores the concept of evidentiary standards as it arises in several overlapping areas of Talmudic and secular law: How can we assess the truth of testimony? Does every criminal confession pass muster, or are some inadmissible? When can informants be considered credible?

Lesson 7-8 Clean Slate: How Do Criminals Make Amends?

What is the ultimate aim of the criminal justice system? If society seeks restitution for crimes and rehabilitation for criminals, it needs a better plan. It must consider what rehabilitation looks like, for which offenders and offenses it is applicable, and how to ensure sentencing contributes to this end. This class examines the extensive, systematic program of repentance laid out in the Talmud and considers what insights this process holds for the above questions and present-day criminal rehabilitation. Finally, we look at sentencing programs that incorporate some of these elements in their pursuit of real rehabilitative justice.

Lesson 9-10 Moving Forward: Reacceptance and the Criminal Background Check

All of your deeds are recorded in a book: so declares the Rosh Hashanah liturgy, and so it is within the contemporary criminal justice system. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Americans are released from prison and seek to rejoin society, but many are stymied by the public availability of their criminal records. Is it possible to find a balance between the needs of society, prospective employers, and ex-offenders? After surveying the contemporary situation, this class looks for answers in the paradigms of Jewish law.

Lesson 11-12 An Ounce of Prevention: Addressing Crime Before It Happens

The best way to improve the criminal justice system is by keeping people out of it. But before any attempt to prevent crime can be made, its causes and preconditions must be better understood. Judaism has long recognized the role of societal factors in the commission of crime: poverty and unemployment are significant, as are education, values, and personal character. This final lesson discusses the roots of criminality, several specific preventative policy proposals, and the various concerns associated with them.