

Study Guide 10: The Temptation of lashon hara  
A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS: VOLUME I, YOU SHALL  
BE HOLY  
Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

*Getting Started*

Reading Rabbi Telushkin's A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS will challenge you to consider how and why you live an ethical life; discussing what you've read with others will allow you to share these profound considerations.

Conversations about ethics will necessarily get personal as each participant shares examples from his or her life. An open, respectful environment will ensure that you have a lively discussion. Referring back to A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS as much as possible – bringing your discussion from the personal back to the rabbinic commentaries and contemporary stories in the book – will enrich your discussion experience.

We've provided a series of discussion questions on several key passages in A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS to help you focus your discussion. You may decide to move through these questions one by one, or you may decide to skip around a bit and tackle questions as they arise. The questions are here to provide a road map, to help you regain direction if your discussion veers off track, and to help you get where you're going: to a clearer, deeper, and more satisfying understanding of Rabbi Telushkin's remarkable book.

In addition to using the following questions to direct your conversation, we recommend that you begin your meeting by introducing yourself to the other members of your group. Why are you interested in Jewish ethical teachings? What do you hope to get out of your discussion? To be sure that each person gets what he or she wants, we suggest this simple exercise:

- Get yourself something big to write on so everyone can see—a poster-sized paper taped up on the wall, for instance, or a poster board propped up against a chair or table.
- Choose someone, maybe your hostess or discussion leader, to write down a word or phrase for each person's vital discussion issue, something basic to remind you of the big idea.

- Then go around the room and ask each person to contribute one *specific* aspect of the reading that he or she would like to discuss—a particular passage, a question left unanswered, a positive, negative, or neutral observation.
- Each time you notice you've discussed a new point from the list on your board, give the person who chose this topic a chance to expand on her question or observation.
- Ask one member to keep an eye on the clock and call time once you have only fifteen or twenty minutes remaining before the end of the meeting. The discussion-board secretary can then check off each of the topics that you've already hit upon and see if there are any big or burning issues still left unaddressed.

Best wishes for a stupendous discussion experience! Enjoy all the discoveries you will make about yourself, your faith, and your world as you read, study, and talk about A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS.

## 10

### THE TEMPTATION OF *LASHON HARA*

- “The fact that a statement or incident is true does not mean that others have the right to know about it.” See page 332 #1. Most people do not consider this before they open their mouths. Is this your experience?
- One form of malicious speech is passing along to someone the hurtful things that someone else has said. Even God refrained from doing this when speaking to Sarah. Read pages 333-334 #2 and #3 and explore ways to avoid making matters worse by “telling all.”
- It is almost impossible to make amends for *lashon hara*, as can be seen in the traditional story about the pillow related on page 337 #10. This is particularly true in these internet times. Check out page 350 #9. What are your thoughts on this?
- Rabbi Telushkin suggests on page 348 #4 that one day a month we guard our tongues from saying anything negative about or to

anyone and, on the other days, observe this abstinence for a two-hour period. What effect does this have on our behavior?

- Some people do their best to avoid gossiping about friends but enjoy discussing the reported failings of public figures. On page 353 #16, Rabbi Telushkin recommends avoiding this if we believe that the issue has no bearing on the person's ability to do their job. Do you agree?
- "Not only should we not speak *lashon hara*; we should also not listen to it." Read page 359 #27 and discuss the advice given there.

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