

## Study Guide 3: Judging Other People

### 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.

### 3

#### JUDGING OTHER PEOPLE

- Most of us rush to judgment but Leviticus 19:15 says, "In justice shall you judge your fellow man." Read what Rabbi Telushkin has to say about "the ignored commandment" on page 70 #1 and #2. Are we aware of how uninformed and unreasonable our opinion of other people's behavior often is? Why do we think this happens?
- As Rabbi Telushkin says on pages 70 #3, "One reason many of us have a higher regard for our own character than that of others is that we judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their acts, especially those acts we find annoying." Do we recognize this and can we recall occasions when it has happened?
- On p. 71, Rabbi Telushkin writes that "commenting on the difficult commandment to 'love your neighbor as yourself,' the Ba'al Shem Tov taught that just as we love ourselves despite our faults, so too should we love others despite their faults." He points out that we tend to justify our own actions but "loving our neighbor as ourselves means seeking out rationalizations and excuses for

others' behavior in the same way we do for our own." Are we willing to admit that we have one standard for ourselves and another for other people? Perhaps we should be tougher on ourselves and less tough on others? See also page 79 #13, where Albert Schweitzer is quoted as saying, "You don't have to be an angel in order to be a saint." On page 75 #7, Rabbi Telushkin suggests that for at least one day each month we try to see only good in all those we meet.

- On page 77 #11, Rabbi Telushkin suggests that when assessing someone, we should do so not "on the basis of one or two negative things" but on his behavior as a whole. Also, "if you hear about someone's misdeeds, take into account that her good deeds may be more significant. As Maimonides writes, 'There are some merits which outweigh many sins.'" Has it ever occurred to us to look at things from this point of view?
- On page 91 #13, Rabbi Telushkin writes, "When we don't know someone, or when something in the person's behavior has struck us as inappropriate, we should regard the person with caution, but should still treat him graciously." Read the story about Joshua in this paragraph and also the following page and discuss how we should treat people who behave badly.

© 2006, Bell Tower Books.

A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS

ISBN: 1-4000-4835-4, \$29.95

available wherever books are sold March 2006