

## Study Guide 4: Giving Thanks

### 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.

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### GIVING THANKS

- The Hebrew for gratitude is *hakarat ha-tov*, “recognition of the good [another has done for you].” How often do we acknowledge all the blessings bestowed on us and take the trouble to thank people? Do we do this as frequently as we recite our litany of complaints?
- Read what Rabbi Telushkin has to say about both grateful and ungrateful people on pages 96-97 #1 and #2. Doesn't ungratefulness summon its own reward (or perhaps punishment)? Is gratitude indeed a prerequisite for happiness?
- If someone has helped us at some point in our lives, it is important not to let this fade from memory. Discuss the points Rabbi Telushkin raises on pages 97-100. Don't wait until you are dying to say thank you to those who have gone out of their way to be kind to you.

- On page 101 #6, Rabbi Telushkin stresses the importance of thanking our loved ones for all that they have done and continue to do for us. Sometimes we express gratitude to strangers but not those nearest and dearest to us. Explore the ways that we take what family and friends do for us for granted and what we can do to remedy this.
- On pages 101-102 #7 and #8, there are examples of famous people who have reciprocated the kindness shown to their family and friends, even though they themselves were not the beneficiaries. Is this something that has happened in our own lives?
- “Repay one person’s kindness by being kind to someone else.” See p. 104 #13. Consider that it is not always possible to thank someone for a good deed but random acts of kindness can spread goodwill throughout the world.

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