

Study Guide 5: Who Needs to Repent and When?

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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WHO NEEDS TO REPENT AND WHEN?

- On page 150 #1, Rabbi Telushkin writes, “An old adage teaches, ‘Great men have great flaws.’ But ordinary people do also; the flaws are just more visible in great people. We all commit acts for which we need to repent.” He suggests that we reflect on some improper behavior in which we are currently engaged and offers a checklist in case we draw a blank. How often do we stop to think about this?
- As noted on page 152 #4, in Ezekiel 33:11 we read, “As I live, says God, it is not my desire that the wicked shall die, but that the wicked shall turn from his evil ways and live.” As described on pages 152 and 153, there is always hope of *teshuvah*, no matter how deeply we have transgressed. Examine this great blessing that is always available to us.
- On page 155 we find the words of Rabbi Eliezer: “Repent one day before your death.” How would our lives change if we followed his advice?

- On pages 156-171 #1- #28, Rabbi Telushkin explains the three steps of repentance: acknowledge the wrong you have committed; do what you can to undo the damage you have inflicted, and ask for forgiveness; resolve not to sin in this way again, and carry out your commitment. What is our experience of following his advice?
- On page 171 #29, Rabbi Telushkin writes of the importance of repentance when death is approaching. Have we been present at a friend or relative's bedside and encouraged them to unburden themselves before they leave this life?

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