

Study Guide 8: What Humiliating Others Does to Us

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.

8

WHAT HUMILIATING OTHERS DOES TO US

- “The Talmud declares that one who publicly humiliates another forfeits a place in the World-to-Come...Fortunately, given that most of us have been guilty of this offense at least once, other sources teach that eternal punishment is exacted only from those who routinely engage in such behavior.” See page 276 #2. Why is public humiliation considered such a heinous crime?
- When Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah was dying, his students asked for one final teaching and his response was “Every one of you go and be very careful of the dignity of others.” See page 278 #7. What are the consequences of following this advice?
- Rabbenu Bachya taught, “It would be better for a person not to have been born at all than to experience these seven things: the death of his children in his lifetime, economic dependence upon others, an unnatural death, forgetting his learning, suffering,

slavery, and publicly shaming his fellow man.” We may find it amazing that publicly shaming someone is included on this list but it is even more remarkable that it says this rather than “being publicly shamed.” See page 279 #9. Why is it worse to shame than to be shamed?

- “If you admonish someone for a wrong she has committed, never do so in the presence of others.” Read what the Chaffetz Chayyim has to say about this on page 281 #3 and consider the implications.
- Children are more vulnerable to all attacks, including humiliation, yet it is not unusual to see and hear parents scolding their children in public. Read page 285 #13 and explore why criticizing in front of others is both wrong and counter-productive.
- “If you have humiliated someone, your first obligation is to beg for forgiveness. Since begging is humiliating in itself, this inflicts on you a little of what your victim experienced.” Read page 292 #25 and #26 and discuss this.

© 2006, Bell Tower Books.
A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS
ISBN: 1-4000-4835-4, \$29.95
available wherever books are sold March 2006