

Study Guide 1: God as the Basis for Morality
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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BEARING A GRUDGE

- As Rabbi Telushkin points out on page 314, #1 and #2, hatred and untamed anger cause more suffering than any other human emotion and violate Judaism's most fundamental principles. He reminds us of what Hillel said (see "The Heart of Judaism", study guide 2). "Yet this is exactly what hate-filled people do: treat others in a way that they would hate to be treated." It all starts on a personal level but soon escalates to group action. How does this happen?
- On pages 314 and 315 #3, Rabbi Telushkin examines the concept of "groundless hatred" and points out that few people are willing to acknowledge that their hatred is without basis, or even exaggerated. On page 320 #3, he draws attention to the fact that "our hatred often becomes disproportionate to the provocation and needs to be reined in." Is this so in our own lives?
- "Hatred commonly causes people to hate those they believe to be their enemies more than love the people closest to them."

See page 315 #4. This may be hard to believe but reflect on it and see whether this has ever been your experience.

- On page 319 #2 we read, “The fact that we regard someone as our enemy does not mean that he deserves to starve, and if one feeds him, he might no longer be our enemy.” Such humanitarian acts are not uncommon, even on the battlefield, but why is it that we so rarely take the next step and relinquish the hatred we have been harboring toward our enemy?
- Rabbi Telushkin quotes a recovering alcoholic as saying, “Carrying resentments is like letting someone whom you don’t like live inside your head rent-free.” Read pages 323-24 #12 and examine how this has played out in our own lives.

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