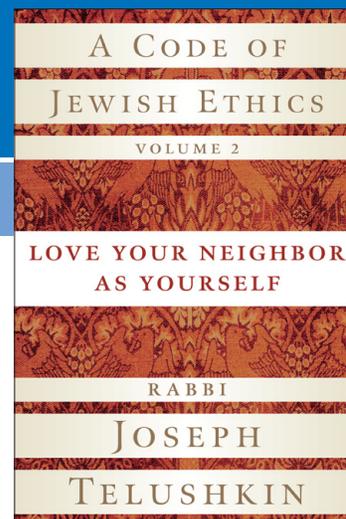


A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS

Volume Two, Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

STUDY GUIDE



GETTING STARTED

Reading Rabbi Telushkin's *A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself* 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: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself* 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: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself* to help you focus your discussion. You may decide to move through these questions one by one, or 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 offtrack, 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 his or 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: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

- “In the Torah, the commandment to love is immediately preceded by prohibitions against taking revenge and bearing a grudge....To love our neighbor as ourselves means to act toward others as we would like them to act toward us. If we want those we have provoked to let go of vengeful feelings, then we must act the same way when others hurt us” (see p. 9, no. 4). Have we been able to relinquish our resentment toward those we believe have harmed us and, if so, how has this affected our relationship with them? Also, how important was it that we let someone know how he or she hurt us or were we able to fully forgive without discussing what happened?
- Who is our neighbor? On p. 11, no. 7 Rabbi Telushkin draws attention to the fact that the word refers to someone we know and not humanity in general. This is why Jewish legal texts focus on actions more than on emotions. This commandment is practical, not theoretical. Read the summary of Maimonides' teaching about this and also the footnote about *Peanuts* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. In what ways has caring for others changed the way we feel about ourselves?
- On p. 12, Danny Siegel writes about what it means to fulfill Maimonides' words, “Whatever I do not wish for myself or for my friends, I should not wish for that person.” Siegel suggests that we try to make sure this comes true by acting to prevent misfortune from overtaking others. What can we do to make this a reality?
- On p. 14, Rabbi Telushkin takes this a step further by quoting Professor Steven Harvey in relation to treating others as

though we cared about them, even if we don't actually feel love toward them. In other words, as Hamlet says: "Assume a virtue if you have it not." Do you think that this a good idea?

- On p. 20, no. 12, Rabbi Telushkin writes that in the last hundred years we have "witnessed extraordinary advances in medicine, science, and technology, but there has been no comparable worldwide advance in ethical behavior." Read this paragraph and also the excerpt from Amos Oz's *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. What could each of us do to improve this situation?
- "Try to act in a way that will lead the other person back to good behavior." On p. 21, no. 13 (including the story in italics below), Rabbi Telushkin shows how resourceful we can be in helping others to redeem themselves. How can we do this in our own lives?

FULFILLING THE COMMANDMENT

- Do we feel love for others and therefore do a great deal for them, or do we do things for others (the way parents do for their children) and does our love grow as a result of this? See the first paragraph on p. 25, which suggests that "although we assume that what motivates us [to do things for others] is love, we don't always realize that the giving itself intensifies, and sometimes even creates, the love." In the italicized passage about Mussar teachings below this paragraph there is also much food for thought and discussion.
- On p. 26, no. 2, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin points out: "In every encounter with other people, you have an opportunity to either fulfill or violate this commandment." What does this mean in practical terms, and what can we do to remember it more often?
- One way to ensure that we fulfill the commandment is given on p. 33, no. 12, where it is suggested that we should always pray for others before we pray for ourselves. Explore how this can motivate us to make what we pray for happen.
- Read no. 14 on p. 37 and the Martin Buber story that follows. Here, Rabbi Telushkin points out that our neighbor (or anyone we know) also has a responsibility to let us know if they are in need. We can't read other people's minds, so if they need something, they should speak up about it. The same thing applies to us. We must give others the chance to help us. Do we do this and, if not, why not?
- On p. 39, Rabbi Abraham Twerski draws our attention to the fact that if we cannot bring ourselves to accept help from others, we can't truly give it either. Rabbi Telushkin adds that "when we refuse help, we limit someone else's ability to observe the commandment to love your neighbor."
- On p. 41, commenting on an observation by Professor Reuven Kimelman, Rabbi Telushkin points out that it is not enough for a man to feel that he treats his wife in what he considers a loving manner; the question is, does he give her what she needs to feel that he loves her? Of course, this applies equally to how a wife treats her husband. In other words, the criterion of whether we have fulfilled "Love your

neighbor" is if the other person feels that we love them as much as we love ourselves. What are the implications of this in our daily lives?

- We don't always remember to guard our tongues, especially when it comes to things we have heard and seen as guests in other people's homes. Rabbi Telushkin writes on p. 57 no. 3: "If you think that the comments you make about your host or hostess are rarely unkind, then ask yourself if you would be willing to make the same remarks directly to them." Explore this.

CARING FOR THE SICK

- We may not realize how much a visit lifts the spirits of someone confined to bed, particularly when that person is hospitalized in a city not their own. Have you been in such a situation, either as a patient or a visitor?
- If we discover that there is someone in the hospital who has no visitors (this often happens with elderly people), make an effort not only to visit the person but also to speak to the physician and nurses and ask about the patient's condition. See the italic passage on p. 65. The Sadviner Rav understood that this makes the patient feel cherished, and it also alerts the medical staff to the fact that there is someone who cares. Are there other ways in which we can look out for the welfare of those in the hospital who no longer have friends or family who can visit?
- The seventeenth-century work *Shnei Luchot Ha-Berit* teaches that we should care for a patient with our body, our soul, and our money, and Dr. Isaac Herschkopf suggests that we should also use our minds. See p. 68 for ways in which we can do these things, and discuss these and any others you can think of.
- When someone is ill, the whole family is stressed. See p. 69 for suggestions about how we can help to alleviate this. What is your experience of caring for others in this way?
- Rabbi Eliezer ben Isaac of Worms noted that sick people often study their visitors' faces and, if they look shocked or disheartened, the patient may lose hope (see p. 78, no. 17). Unless you can be cheerful, it is better not to visit. Read also p. 85, no. 8 for what Norman Cousins recommends about the power of laughter. What have you observed in situations like these?

FINAL KINDNESS

- "From the moment of death, the body should not be left unattended, and a *shomer* is called in to stay with the deceased until the funeral" (see p. 95). After 9/11, students from Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women recited psalms in four-hour shifts, and Yeshiva's president, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, commented: "The idea that you can have companionship even in death is a very consoling thought, whether you are Jewish or not" (see p. 96). Do you agree?
- Traditionally, Jews are buried in a *kittel*, a simple white gar-

ment. As Rabbi Jack Riemer notes on p. 110, there are many lessons to be learned from this. For instance, on Yom Kippur, if all men wear a *kittel*, one cannot distinguish between rich and poor. Also, it reminds each wearer that he and everyone else is mortal. “If he is going to make peace with those with whom he has feuded, he had better do so now.” Can we think of other lessons that can be drawn from having members of the congregation wearing the same simple garment in the synagogue?

- On pp. 112 and 113, Rabbi Telushkin writes “Many Jews are surprised to learn that the Kaddish contains no allusion to death but proclaims the greatness of God...Presumably, the Kaddish was chosen as the memorial prayer for the dead because the greatest testament to the deceased is that he or she has left behind descendants who intend to lead lives committed to Judaism.” What else might recitation of the Kaddish signify?

COMFORTING MOURNERS

- “What one should not do immediately after the death is to offer consolation... At such a time, the mourner is not yet ready for this” (see p. 116). Why is this so?
- In a footnote on p. 123, Rabbi Telushkin describes how a friend of his is always careful to conclude conversations with his parents with loving words. Mourners often experience guilt over hurtful things they said the last time they saw the deceased. Since we do not know when death will come, we need to be careful about leaving animosity hanging in the air. What more can we say about this?
- As is pointed out on p. 125, once death has occurred, repentance can never be complete, so it behooves us to act while our family and friends are still alive and, if we have treated someone badly, take steps to remedy the situation now. Has the thought that someone with whom you’ve had a falling out might die before you’ve reconciled ever occurred to you, and what might you do about it?
- *The Ethics of the Fathers* says: “It is not within our ability to understand the prosperity [or peace] of the wicked or the sufferings of the righteous.” It is almost always inappropriate to try and explain why the deceased or the mourner has suffered. As explained on p. 126, no. 17, such knowledge is not granted to human beings. What options are open to us if a mourner asks the reason for this suffering? See also the top paragraph on p. 131 where Rabbi Abraham Twerski counsels us not to minimize the importance of just being there and sharing someone’s pain.
- “As important as it is to visit mourners during the first week, it is equally vital to stay in touch afterward.” This may be the time when our support is truly needed. What can we do to be supportive in the months after the funeral?

PRACTICING KINDNESS

- As Rabbi Telushkin points out, “We generally think of kindness as a positive attribute, but not as something that can be regulated and even legislated. But in the Jewish tradition, *gemilut chesed*, acts of kindness are regarded as something in which all people must engage, whether they feel motivated to do so or not.” On p. 138, he lays out the three ways the Rabbis considered kindness to be better than the giving of charity. He also quotes Anne Frank: “How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment before making the world better...No one has ever become poor from giving.” Ponder and discuss the implications of integrating this into our lives.
- On p. 139, no. 3 is the prophet Hosea’s statement: “For it is kindness that I desire and not sacrifice,” i.e. kindness to others is more important to God than ritual observance. This, Rabbi Telushkin observes, has been hard for many Jews to absorb. Do you think this statement is true and, if so, why?
- The importance of kindness is deepened on p. 140 no. 5, where Abraham Axelrod explains Reb Aryeh Levine’s philosophy of life and commitment to goodness: “As he saw it, life’s main purpose is to help others. If a few days went by and he found no opportunity to help someone..., he began to wonder if he was perhaps superfluous in the world, and the Almighty had no further use for him on earth.” Explore this idea.

GIVING ADVICE

- The traditional approach to the tricky business of whether and how to give advice was summed up by Rabbi Moshe Chayyim Luzatto in *Mesillat Yesharim*: “The duty of the upright person is to give whatever counsel he would adopt for himself if he were similarly placed.” Read pp. 147-48, no. 2. Are there times, however, when following this suggestion might cause us to give wrong advice (see the footnote on p. 148). Do you agree with this approach or not?
- Rabbi Telushkin brings up another important point on p. 149, no. 3: “Make sure you are knowledgeable about matters on which you offer advice.” Read what he has to say and explore the ramifications of giving bad advice.
- However, there are times when it is our duty to offer bad advice, particularly when “we have good reason to believe that the person soliciting our advice will use our counsel to help him or her do something destructive” (see p. 152, no. 7). Have we ever been in this situation and, if so, what happened?
- Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav said: “One of the things I am very firm about is not giving advice in the form of orders.” Read pp. 153-54 to learn more about the approach of Reb Nachman and other rabbis. Are people more likely to follow advice if you “offer” it and then leave them free to take it or leave it?

TZEDAKA

- In no. 1 on p. 156, Maimonides is quoted as saying “It is our duty to be more careful in the performance of charity than in the performance of any other positive commandment” and Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky said, “I used to think that my passport to the Garden of Eden was my magnum opus, *Achiezer*. Now I think my passport will be my ledger where I record my charity accounts.” What is it about giving charity that caused them to make such extraordinary statements?
- “Because in Judaism God is seen as the One Who gives people wealth and Who commands them to give a part of that wealth to the poor, refusing to give charity is regarded as a form of stealing” (see p. 160, no. 8). Have you ever looked at it in this way?
- On p. 163, paragraph 1, there is a strong statement: “Human suffering does not call for judgment; it calls for action.” Read what is said on pp. 162-163, no. 12. Isn’t this a better and more practical approach than trying to figure out why people are afflicted? In Judaism, as Rabbi Telushkin writes, “equating suffering with divine will is immoral.”
- Many people give less generously to charity than they should because they are afraid of diminishing their assets, but the *Shulchan Arukh* reassures us that, “No person will become poor because of giving charity.” (see p. 165-166, no. 16) where poverty and wealth are defined not only in terms of money but also energy and health. Explore these two statements.
- As Rabbi Telushkin points out on p. 170, no. 22, we may lose all our money and possessions, but we will always own our good deeds. “Therefore, paradoxically, the only money we possess forever is the money we give away.” Discuss this novel way of viewing *tzedaka*.
- Jewish law understands the commandment to give a poor person “sufficient for his needs” to mean that we should try to provide precisely what that person lacks (p. 171, no. 3). Read the four stories on the following pages and recall instances of this kind of giving in your own life.
- On p. 173, no. 4 Rabbi Telushkin explains that we must take into account a person’s emotional, as well as physical, needs. In the following stories, he shows what this may mean and reminds us that we can’t group all poor people into one undifferentiated category. You may find some of this unexpected. What is your response to these examples?
- Most of us wait until there is a crisis before taking action, but Rabbis David Hartman and Tzvi Marx recommend that donors engage in “preventive *tzedaka*” (see p. 177, no. 8). We should offer assistance to those who have fallen on hard times so that they can avoid complete economic collapse. What are the advantages of this?
- Starting on p. 187, Rabbi Telushkin elucidates Maimonides’ eight levels of charitable giving. Do you agree with Maimonides’ highest level or do you think anonymous giving is better? Examine the implications of each of these levels.
- On p. 216, there is a description of giving money to anyone going on a long trip, to be dispensed as charity upon arrival.

“While this custom originally involved only giving money to Jewish travelers, spreading the word to non-Jews (both by telling them about it and giving them funds to disperse) would be a contribution of Jewish ethical practices to the world.” Is this a custom that we practice, and how has it affected those to whom we have given the money and ourselves?

- Even though the handling of money on Shabbat and most Jewish holidays is prohibited, the *Shulchan Arukh* notes that “it is good to give charity before praying” (see p. 218, no. 4). Do you agree with Rabbi Telushkin’s summing up of this: “Before beseeching God for mercy, we should show it ourselves”?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JEWS AND NON-JEWS

- In addition to commanding us to love God and our neighbor, the Torah also instructs us: “The stranger who resides with you shall be as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself.” (see pp. 267-268, nos. 6 and 7). More than a hundred years ago the philosopher Hermann Cohen wrote, “The stranger was to be protected, although he was not a member of one’s family, clan, religion, community, or people, simply because he was a human being. In the stranger, therefore, man discovered the idea of humanity.” What progress have we made toward making this a reality?
- The Talmud teaches that “the whole of the Torah is for promoting peace” and encourages Jews to avoid dishonest behavior toward Gentiles and to take care of them when they are in need of assistance” (see p. 271, no. 12). How does the concept of promoting peace in the world in this way influence, for example, our charitable giving, and our commitment to causes that have no immediate implications for Jews?
- It is our responsibility to try to influence our families and the citizens of the place where we live to stop sinning (see p. 293, no. 18). Elie Wiesel has repeatedly used his moral authority to try to stop the persecution of many groups. What have we done to emulate him?

THE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

- “In addition to biblical laws, several events depicted in the Torah underscore how important a person’s treatment of animals is in assessing his character.” (see p. 305, no. 14). Read this passage and discuss.
- Rabbi Aryeh Carmell writes that “it seems doubtful...whether the Torah would sanction “factory farming” and Rabbi Telushkin comments that it seems morally compelling for consumers to purchase only chickens and eggs produced in free-range conditions. Otherwise, we are “accomplices in the mistreatment of chickens who, like us, are creatures created by God.” (see pp. 324-325, no. 36) for more on this and explore.

THE LAWS OF SELF-DEFENSE

- Judaism takes a strong stand on not killing an innocent person even if your life is being threatened by someone else. As Rava said in the fourth century, “What reason do you see for assuming that your blood is redder than his?” Discuss the passage about this on p. 352, no. 7 and Rabbi Telushkin’s comment below.
- The question arises: Who bears the responsibility for what is often described as “collateral damage,” i.e. the deaths of innocent people caught up in a conflict. On p. 355 Alan Dershowitz uses an example from American law to apportion blame for what happened during Israel’s 2006 assault on Hezbollah. Do you agree with his viewpoint?
- In another comparison between U.S. and Jewish law, Rabbi Telushkin points out on pp. 355-356, no. 1 that in the United States bystanders are not required to do anything to help others while the Bible teaches, “Do not stand idly by while your brother’s blood is shed.” Jewish law, however, does not oblige us to sacrifice our lives for someone else. Read also p. 366, no. 14 and consider this.
- On p. 362, no. 9, another difference between American and Jewish law is raised: Under Jewish law, anyone who has information that can be helpful to someone on trial is obliged to testify, whether or not he has been subpoenaed. Do we think that American law should require this, too?
- On p. 363, no. 11, Rabbi Telushkin draws a further conclusion from the law not to stand idly by while your brother’s blood is shed. He believes that people should arrange to have their organs donated after their death to those in need. Consider this idea in view of the fact that one person’s organs can go to save the lives of more than one recipient.

WHEN LIFE BECOMES INTOLERABLE

- Since Judaism teaches that every human life has immeasurable value, does it assume that a life of intense suffering should always be preserved? On p. 380, Rabbi Telushkin tells the story of a mass suicide of four hundred young Jewish men and women being shipped to Roman brothels in the first century. Read this passage and also the following one about the death of Saul on the battlefield and discuss the implications.
- If imminent death is certain, is it permitted to pray for it to happen soon so that the suffering will be over? You can read differing views on this on p. 385. Which do you agree with?

THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

- One answer to the perennial question of whether the ends justify the means was provided by Rabbi Ya’akov Yitzchak of Pzhysha when he was asked why in Deuteronomy it is written, “Justice, justice you shall pursue” (see p. 403, no. 2). The rebbe answered that the repetition is meant to convey that both the ends and the means must be just. Have you

ever considered this when you have a strong desire to achieve a certain, and in your mind, righteous end?

- The one positive demand that Jewish law makes of non-Jewish societies is that they observe the Seven Laws of the Sons of Noah. (see p. 405, no. 4 and footnote). How can this be achieved?
- On p. 408, Dr. Isaac Herschkopf describes how, when conducting marital therapy, he always reminds himself that his client is neither the wife nor the husband, but the marriage itself. He goes on to say, “Similarly, the judge must continually remind himself that his client is neither party, but justice itself.” This also applies to our dealings with other people. What is our experience of this?
- It is interesting to note that Leviticus stresses that a judge should neither “favor the poor nor show deference to the rich” (see p. 413, no. 10). Rabbi Telushkin writes that the many Jewish laws commanding the compassionate treatment of the poor are applicable outside, but not inside, the courtroom. Have you ever given this any thought?
- On p. 415, no. 12, there is a description of the law of false witness, which ordains that a false witness receive the same punishment the person he or she testified against if he or she had been found guilty. Rabbi Telushkin says that he knows of no legal system that enforces such a law, but he believes it to be fair. Do you agree?
- Rabbi Irwin Kula suggests that the rabbinic preference for compromise rather than judgment stems from the fact that there is almost always at least a partial truth on each side. Read what he and others have to say about aspects of this on pp. 426 and 427 and discuss.

TOLERANCE

- Jewish law champions each person’s right to think differently. As Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk pointed out (see p. 434, no. 3), if everyone thought alike, they would hide their valuables in the same place and this would be a boon to thieves. Read also the italicized paragraph on the importance of not trying to make each of your children fit into the same mold. Examine all the implications of these two ideas.
- The Talmud teaches that intellectual growth depends on exposing oneself to a variety of viewpoints (see p. 436, no. 7) and, as Rabbi Telushkin points out, this includes “views with which we disagree. Otherwise, we will end up with a one-sided and incomplete understanding of a subject, or the world.” Explore how this may lead to tolerance.
- On p. 436, no. 8, Rabbi Telushkin writes that on many of life’s most important issues, there is no one truth. This is something that most people overlook, but it is vital for us to remember it. Discuss how this can make all the difference in acknowledging that other people’s opinions may be right—in addition to our own.