

## Chapter 8 – Learning Guide

### I-In-Class Discussion Questions

1-1-The statement from *Pirkei Avot* with which the chapter begins reads as follows. “Let the honor of your fellow man be as precious to you as your own. (Avot: Chapter 2, Mishna 10) How does the author of the chapter interpret this *mishnah*? How is it connected to Josh’s story? How else can this statement be interpreted?

2-Do you agree with the author’s view that Yitzchak Rabin’s assassination is an example of “moral decay?” What is moral decay?

3-“Even after entering his guilty plea, Rabbi Frankel seemed unapologetic. In a New York Times interview, Rabbi Frankel continued to insist publicly that ‘the ends justify the means.’” Do you believe that there are circumstances where the ends to justify the means? Is the case of Rabbi Frankel one of these situations?

4-What is the antidote to moral decay according to the author of this chapter?

5-What is Nathan’s secret? Should Nathan have revealed this secret to his boss before he was hired? Why do you suppose Nathan revealed his secret to Josh?

6-Does Josh believe that Nathan is doing a good job or not?

7-“After some serious soul-searching, Josh realized that a God fearing Jew *doesn’t lie and bring harm to others.*” Do you agree with Josh about this?

8-Why does the author of this chapter believe that sometimes respect may not be enough? Do you agree or disagree? Do you think that Josh should have done more for Nathan in this situation?

9-In discussing his dilemma, Josh never talks about his own attitude towards homosexuality. Why not?

10-The very last sentence of the previous chapter states, “They did this not to live a detached and emotionless life, but to live a deeper, richer, and more purposeful life, a life of integrity and connectedness.” Integrity and connectedness are sometimes seen as opposite characteristics. Sometimes, more integrity means less connectedness, and more connectedness means less integrity. Do you think that this insight applies to Josh’s dilemma? In other words, is Josh trading away “integrity” to increase “connectedness”? Or, vice versa?

### II-Essay Questions

1-Why do you suppose Yigal Amir assassinated Yitzchak Rabin? Do you believe that political assassination can ever be justified from an ethical point of view?

2-The thesis of this chapter is that respect is an antidote to moral decay. Do you agree or disagree with this thesis? Write a short essay explaining your view.

3-“You can’t always look to an authority figure for ethical guidance.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Write a short essay explaining your view.

### **III-Connections**

A-Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir is Research Director at the Business Ethics Center of Jerusalem. He recently wrote as follows:

There are indeed profound paradoxes in the seemingly straightforward ideals of toleration and freedom. These ideals raise perplexing questions: Should I be tolerant even of intolerance? Should I support freedom even for tyranny?

A commitment to tolerance means an acknowledgment that no single person can encompass the totality of truth. Reality is so vast, so complex, that a myriad of distinct individual viewpoints are necessary in order to enable us to begin to comprehend it. The Talmud prescribes a special blessing on seeing 600,000 people at once, blessing God Who comprehends the "wisdom of secrets." The Talmud's explanation for this blessing is that "Just as each person's face is different, so are each person's beliefs different." Only when we have thousands upon thousands of people together do we begin together to approach an understanding of the world's inner being. This variation among human beings is not only acceptable -- it elicits a unique blessing.

Yet this doesn't mean that all beliefs are valid! The Sages of the Talmud certainly acknowledge that some beliefs are completely false and dangerous. They identified a few fundamental ideas as being so contrary to the very foundation of Jewish belief that they stated that those who hold them endanger their place in the World to Come.

When probing the limits of toleration, we must ask ourselves: Is this opposing view an additional, alternative piece of the puzzle of existence? Is it one more facet of the "wisdom of secrets"? Or does this view attack the foundation of existence?

This unique approach allows us to remain passionate in our own beliefs, while remaining tolerant of many other points of view because we recognize some essential insight or lesson they convey.

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(Source:[http://www.aish.com/societyWork/work/The\\_Jewish\\_Ethicist\\_Discriminating\\_Against\\_Discrimination.asp](http://www.aish.com/societyWork/work/The_Jewish_Ethicist_Discriminating_Against_Discrimination.asp))

Question: Do you believe that this viewpoint is consistent or inconsistent with Josh's decision?

B-Consider the following statement:

Job discrimination, for any reason, is un-American, unfair, and unwise. Our nation's economic success depends on having the most qualified, dedicated, and competent people as part of the workforce, regardless of sexual orientation. Too many gay and lesbian Americans still face job discrimination because of their perceived or actual sexual orientation. This should not be allowed to happen in our modern society.

Workplace discrimination affects hundreds of thousands of gay and lesbian Americans. This issue goes to the core of what it means to live in a free society. Freedom depends on people having the opportunity to pursue any career they wish. Any person's progress in the workplace should depend solely on his or her skills and ability, not their sexual orientation. There has been important progress in recent years to make the workplace friendlier for gay and lesbian Americans. The Human Rights Campaign reports that among the Fortune 500, 328 companies (65%) have non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation. Even Wal-Mart, which defines conservative old-fashioned American values, now offers protection for its gay and lesbian employees. (Source: <http://www.logcabin.org/logcabin/workplace.html>)

Question: Why do you think attitudes towards gays in the workplace is changing so dramatically? Is this a Jewish issue?

#### **IV-Personal Journal**

1-What would you have done in Josh's situation?

2-What is your attitude toward homosexuality?

3-What is your attitude toward homosexuals? Is there a real difference between this question and the previous question?

#### **V-Group Project**

Your group should develop a one or two paragraph statement on discrimination in the workplace.

#### **VI-Vignette**

##### **Do the Ends Justify the Means?**

In the summer of 1999, Mrs. Vivian Silvervault's attorney contacted the Director of the

Autumnville Jewish Nursing Home, Jill Smart, to discuss a gift proposal in the amount of \$3 million.

The Autumnville Jewish Nursing Home is considered a state of the art facility located in an upscale suburb of New York City. The Nursing Home serves both Jewish and non-Jewish clients. The current ratio is approximately 50-50.

The attorney explained to Ms. Smart that all donated funds must be used for a Medical Ethics Center to be located on the grounds of the nursing home. The Medical Ethics Center which would include a Medical Ethics Officer, would serve a dual function. First, according to Mrs. Silvervault's instructions, it would serve as a location where the nursing home's medical and nursing staff could obtain help in answering the increasing number of ethics related questions. In addition, the Center would also educate the broader Jewish community about the importance of this topic. The attorney explained that the proposal was extremely important to Mrs. Silvervault for personal reasons regarding her own mother's medical care at the time of her death.

Ms. Smart had been trying to interest Mrs. Silvervault, the sole heir to the Silvervault Department Store fortune, to commit to a major donation for some time. Ms. Smart was extremely interested in the proposal, in spite of the fact that she was personally opposed to the specific idea of a Medical Ethics Center. Ms. Smart strongly believed that the proposed Medical Ethics Center would turn out to be more of a nuisance than a practical resource for her medical and nursing staff. From her experience and discussions with doctors and nurses, she had concluded that they would view a Medical Ethics Officer as an intruder rather than as a valuable contributor in providing health care to the Nursing Home's residents.

In spite of her reservations, Jill Smart decided to bring the proposal before the Autumnville Jewish Nursing Home's Board of Directors. In fact, Ms. Smart argued vigorously to the Board about the need to highlight an ethical perspective in the delivery of healthcare services, basing her argument on her belief that nursing homes and other medical facilities must view residents and patients as human beings and not just inputs into a production process. Ms. Smart was able to convince the board about the importance of this proposal in spite of heated opposition from a number of medical doctors and an attorney who serve on the Board.

One year later, Ms. Smart decided not to rehire the Medical Ethics Officer for a second year. As she explained to the Board, "This was an experiment that failed. Our staff resisted advice from the Medical Ethics Officer and viewed his suggestions as unrealistic, at best." In addition, Ms. Smart noted "It is now clear that the educational aspect of this project really goes beyond the mission of this institution. We will keep the new medical ethics library, that's important, but we just can't afford the Medical Ethics Officer." The cost savings in eliminating this position were substantial. With these funds Ms. Smart hired two new full time nurses to work the ever growing Alzheimer Unit.

