

# In the Image of God בצלם אלהים

## 1) Genesis 1:26-27

And God said, "Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness. They shall have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created humanity in God's image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female, God created them.<sup>1</sup>

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרַדּוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם  
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ  
עַל־הָאָרֶץ: כִּי וַיְבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים  
בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:  
--בראשית א: כו-כז

## Avot d'Rabbi Natan 1:15

Rabbi Elazar said, "May the honor of your fellow human being be as dear to you as your own, be slow to anger, and repent one day before your death."

רבי אלעזר אומר יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כשלך. אל תהי נוח  
לכעוס. שוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך:

"May the honor of your fellow human being be as dear to you as your own." How does one do this? This teaches that one should see the honor of one's fellow human being in the same way that one sees one's own honor; just as no one wants a bad reputation, so too should one not want to give another person a bad reputation.

יהי כבוד חברך חביב עליך כשלך כיצד מלמד שכשם שרואה את  
כבודו כך יהא אדם רואה את כבוד חברו וכשם שאין אדם רוצה  
שיצא שם רע על כבודו כך יהא אדם רוצה שלא להוציא שם רע  
על כבודו של חברו:  
--אבות דרבי נתן א: טו

- *What does it mean when we say that we are created in the image of God? What responsibilities does this place on us?*
- *Can you think of times in which you were not treated as a creation in the image of God? In which you failed to treat another person as a creation in the image of God? In which you failed to treat yourself as a creation in the image of God? How did this experience make you feel?*
- *When during the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict have people on both sides failed to treat the other as a creation b'tzelem Elohim? How have these failures to treat the other as creations in God's image contributed to the escalation of the conflict?*

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1. All Bible translations by the Jewish Publication Society. Some have been adapted for clarity and gender neutrality.

## 2) Ramban on Genesis 1:26

The statement of intent is unique to the creation of humans because of their stature, for the nature of the human is not like the nature of the animal and the beast that God created previously. The correct meaning of the expression "let us make" is that, as we already know, creation *ex nihilo* took place on the first day only, and after that, the creations came out of this foundation. When God gave the water the power to bring forth living creatures, we have the following statement about them: "Let the water bring forth living things." About the animals, we have the statement: "Let the earth bring forth animals." About the human, the text says, "Let us make." This means, "I and the land already mentioned will make humanity; the land will bring forth the body from its foundations as it did for the animals and beasts, as is evident in the statement, "And Adonai God created humanity with dust from the earth." Furthermore, I will give humanity breath from the divine mouth, as it says "And God blew into the human's nostrils the breath of life." The text says "in our image, after our likeness" because humanity resembles both of them. Its body is like the earth, from which it was created; and its spirit is like the divine. The repetition in the second verse, "In the image of God, God created them" teaches of the wondrous nature of humanity, which is more wondrous than all other creations.

- *What are the implications of arguing that we contain both a physical, earthy side and a Godly side?*
- *How does this concept affect the way we see ourselves and others? How might this concept inform the way in which we act toward the other?*

ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם - נתייחד בעשיית האדם מאמר בעבור גודל מעלתו, כי אין טבעו כטבע החיה והבהמה אשר ברא במאמר הקודם לו: והפשט הנכון במלת "נעשה" הוא, מפני שכבר הראית לדעת (בראשית א:א) כי האלהים ברא יש מאין ביום הראשון לבדו, ואחר כך מן היסודות ההם הנבראים יצר ועשה. וכאשר נתן במים כח השרוץ לשרוץ נפש חיה והיה המאמר בהם "ישרצו המים", והיה המאמר בבהמה "תוצא הארץ", אמר באדם "נעשה", כלומר אני והארץ הנזכרת נעשה אדם, שתוציא הארץ הגוף מיסודיה כאשר עשתה בבהמה ובחיה, כדכתיב וייצר ה' אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה (בראשית ב:ז), ויתן הוא יתברך הרוח מפי עליון, כדכתיב (שם) ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים: ואמר בצלמו כדמותנו - כי ידמה לשניהם, במתכונת גופו לארץ אשר לוקח ממנה, וידמה ברוח לעליונים, שאינה גוף ולא תמות. ואמר בכתוב השני בצלם אלהים ברא אותנו, לספר הפלא אשר נפלא בו משאר הנבראים. --רמב"ן על בראשית א: כו

### 3) Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5

For this reason, God created a single person: To teach you that whoever destroys a single soul, it is as though that person destroyed a complete world; and whoever preserves a single soul, it is as though that person preserved a complete world.<sup>2</sup>

[Adam was created alone] also for the sake of peace among people, so that no one can say to another "My father was greater than yours," and so that one cannot say that there are many rulers in heaven; also, to tell of the greatness of God, for if a person makes many coins from one mold, they all look alike, but God fashioned every person in the stamp of the first, and yet not one of them resembles another; therefore every single person is obliged to say: "The world was created for my sake..."

לְפִיכָּהּ נִבְרָא אָדָם יְחִידִי, לְלַמְדָּהּ, שֶׁכֹּל הַמְּאַבֵּד נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כְּאִלוֹ אֵבֶד עוֹלָם מְלֵא. וְכֹל הַמְּקַיֵּם נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מַעֲלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כְּאִלוֹ קַיֵּם עוֹלָם מְלֵא. וּמִפְּנֵי שְׁלוֹם הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמֶר אָדָם לַחֲבֵרוֹ אֲבֵא גָדוֹל מֵאַבְיָהּ. וְשֶׁלֹּא יְהוּ מִיָּנִין אוֹמְרִים, הֲרֵבָה רְשׁוּיּוֹת בְּשָׂמַיִם. וְלִהְיִיד גְּדֻלָּתוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁאֵדָם טוֹבֵעַ כַּמָּה מִטְּבָעוֹת בְּחוֹתָם אֶחָד וְכֵן דּוֹמִין זֶה לָזֶה, וּמְלֻךְ מְלֻכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא טָבַע כָּל אָדָם בְּחוֹתָמוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרֵאשׁוֹן וְאִין אֶחָד מֵהֶן דּוֹמֵה לַחֲבֵרוֹ. לְפִיכָּהּ כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד חַיֵּב לוֹמֵר, בְּשִׁבְלִי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם.  
--משנה סנהדרין ד: ה

- *What does this mishnah tell us about the ways we should see ourselves and others?*
- *What implications does this text have for the current conflict between Israelis and Palestinians? How, according to this text, should we view the suffering of the other? The death of the other?*

*This text is from the Rabbis for Human Rights  
Yamim Noraim Rabbinic Resource Packet*

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2. Some versions have "a single soul of Israel."