B’TZELEM ELOHIM
(all people are made)
in the divine image

Value the Humanity in Each Person

The Jewish approach requires us to protect the life of every person, and ensure dignity and justice for all people.
On One Foot: B’Tzelem Elohim

IMPORTANT TEXTS

And God said: "Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." And God created Adam in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.
— Breishit (Genesis) 1:26-27

Rabbi Akiva would say: "Beloved is humanity for we were made in the image of God. And doubly beloved are we for God made it known to us that we are made in his image."
— Mishnah Avot 3:14

“We are holy people – and all of us are holy – and our worth to others is ultimately going to derive from how we act.” — Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

The Implications

We will look at B’Tzelem Elohim in the context of:

- The Elephant in the Room: Talking About God 54
- Live Like a Boss 55
- Service: It’s Divine! 59
- Bring Everyone to the Table 62
- Who Do You See in the Mirror?: Self Worth and Body Image 64
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The Elephant in the Room: Talking About God

This Activity is Great For

- Spirituality
  - Alternative Service
- Learning
  - Group Learning
- Coffee Dates

I. Beginning the Conversation

When talking about the concept of Tzelem Elohim, some students may not be able to get past the God language. Use this as an opportunity to meet with the student one on one and start to unpack some of his or her uncomfortable feelings around talking about God.

Below are some suggested questions to get the conversation started. You may want to jump right in and start talking with the student, or have the student quietly reflect on these questions and write down some answers before you start your discussion. Feel free to use only one of these questions, or a selection that you like best.

Note: These questions are broad and inclusive enough that they transcend the setting. Keep these questions in mind when “the God questions” comes up in conversation with a student.

- What thoughts and emotions are coming up for you when talking about God?
- How often do you get the chance to talk about God?
- Is there a way of talking about God that feels more comfortable to you?
- Do you ever talk to God?
- How did you think about God in your childhood? How do you think about God now? Were there any times in your life that impacted your ideas or relationship with God?
- A wise religious person once said: “The God you don’t believe in, I don’t believe in either.” What are some of the ways that people talk about God that make you uncomfortable? List them.
- Can you redefine how you think about God to exclude those elements?
- If talking in God terms still doesn’t work for you, how might you reformulate the concept of “created in the image of God” in terms that will work for you?
**Big Idea**

Knowing that we are created in the image of God can empower us to live up to our highest ideals.

**I. Beginning the Conversation**

Ask students:

- Have you ever heard it said that we are all created in God’s image?
- What does that phrase mean to you?

**II. A Deeper Dive**

**A. The Creation of Humankind**

The Torah relates the creation of the world in Breishit (Genesis) Chapter 1. On the 6th day of Creation, God creates human beings and the Torah tells us that Adam is created in the image of God.

*Breishit (Genesis) 1:26-27*

26 And God said: ‘Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.’

27 And God created Adam in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

- Give students some modeling clay and ask them to shape the clay to represent what it might mean to be created “in the image of God.”
- Go around and have students explain what they have created, how it relates to their understanding of God, and what it means to be created in God’s image.
What do you think it means to be created in someone’s image? Does being created in someone’s image mean that you are the same as they are? Think about other “images” that you experience in your daily life. How does an “image” relate to the original?

If you could choose someone whose image you would want to be in, who would it be?

Why do you think the Torah tells us that Adam (and by extension his descendants — all people) were created in the image of God?

Does the phrase B’Tzelem Elohim “in the image of God” speak to you? Why or why not? If not, are there ways that you might reformulate the phrase that would speak to you?

Why do you think Rabbi Akiva thinks it is so remarkable that the Torah tells us we are created in the image of God?

Do you think it is possible to be created in the image of God and yet not know it?

Do you agree with Rabbi Akiva that being told that we were created in God’s image is a reflection of love?

Have you ever had someone believe in you and highlight your potential? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
C. B’Tzelem Elohim In My Life: Natan Sharansky

In the following excerpt, Natan Sharansky talks about his struggle to understand what it means to be created in the image of God. He found that his fear that he would violate the image of God inside of him gave the freedom and strength to resist the KGB (the state military police force in Soviet Russia).

Natan Sharansky is one of the most famous former Soviet refusniks and an Israeli politician, author and human rights activist. Sharansky was born and raised in the Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union, and became associated with the Soviet human rights movement, and one of the foremost dissidents and spokesmen for the Soviet Jewry movement. He was arrested in 1977, and convicted of treason and spying on behalf of the United States, and was sentenced to thirteen years imprisonment in a Siberian forced labor camp. For the first 16 months of his sentence he was held in Moscow’s Lefortovo prison, frequently in solitary confinement and in a special “torture cell,” before being transferred to a notorious prison camp in the Siberian gulag.

Years after his release, Sharansky stressed the need he maintained throughout his imprisonment to remain emotionally independent. He attributed his survival of the lengthy incarceration and the brutal conditions to his resistance to any sort of emotional surrender. Hence Sharansky’s expression of the paradox that while an ordinary Russian, he was in fact a slave to the system; but that once he discovered his Jewish roots and was restricted for his allegiance to them, he was in reality a free man. Sharansky’s memoirs of his years as a prisoner of Zion are described in his book Fear No Evil (paraphrased from: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

Sharansky talks about how the concept of B’Tzelem Elohim/“in the image of God” gave him strength and resolve during his imprisonment.

A few days before my arrest, an American tourist gave me a small book of Psalms from my wife, along with a letter she had written. In it Avital explained that she had carried the Psalms with her all year, during her travels around the world to fight for my freedom and for the freedom of Soviet Jewry. Now, she wrote, I feel that you should have it so I am sending it to you. Back then, my Hebrew was in no way adequate to read that book. After I was arrested, the book, along with all my other belongings, was confiscated. Then I began to think about the Psalms and about the note from Avital. The book soon took on an almost mythical meaning for me. I started to fight to have it returned, a battle that continued for three years.

I finally received the book along with the news that my father had passed away. I tried to read it, but I still understood little. I had to work my way through it slowly, page by page, comparing different lines, trying to recognize patterns and connect words to each other. The first lines I understood were those of Psalm 23: “Although I walk through the valley of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.”
I noticed that in the Psalms, the word fear kept appearing. On the one hand, fear was something to be overcome, such as not fearing evil. But as yirat hashem, or the fear of God, it had a positive connotation. It took me time to understand what this fear of God meant. My understanding was at first very vague and uncertain. But at some moment it occurred to me, seeing it many times, that this fear was connected not simply to God the Creator but to the image of God in which man was created. Mankind was created to be worthy of that image and to be true to it. This required me to go forward in an honest and direct way, without compromising principles. This fear, the fear of not being worthy of the divine image, not the fear of death, was what I was most afraid of in my interrogations with the KGB. I was afraid to lose the world of inner freedom I had found, to fail to stay true to my inner self, to no longer conduct myself in a way that was worthy of the divine image.

**Service: It’s Divine!**

This Activity is Great For

Social Justice
- Challah for Hunger
- Service Projects

Coffee Dates

Big Idea

We can follow in the ways of God by engaging in acts of service and kindness.

I. Beginning the Conversation

If you are at a service project, go around the room and ask participants to say 1-3 words (only!) that explain why they are here today. If at a coffee date: 1-3 words on why you engage in service.

Ask participants: Would you be surprised if the answer I would give you today about why I am here is “Be like God”? The Talmud tells us that if we want to be like God, we need to engage in acts of kindness and service.

II. A Deeper Dive

Read this source from Babylonian Talmud Sotah 14a together with a learning partner (chavruta) and then discuss the following questions:

And Rabbi Chama the son of Rabbi Chanina said, “What is the meaning of the verse, ‘After Hashem, your God, shall you walk (Deuteronomy 13:5)?’ Is it possible for a person to walk after the divine presence? For isn’t it already stated, ‘For Hashem your God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24)?’

Rather, to follow the character traits of God. “Just as He clothes the naked, as it is written, ‘And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife cloaks of leather, and he clothed them (Genesis 3:21);’ so too you shall clothe the naked. The Holy One, Blessed be He, visited the sick, as it is written, ‘And he appeared in Ailonei Mamrei [while Avram was in pain] (Genesis 18:1);’ so too you shall visit the sick. The Holy One, Blessed be He, comforted mourners, as it is written, ‘And it was, after the death of Abraham, and God blessed his son Isaac (Genesis 25:11);’ so too you shall comfort mourners. The Holy One, Blessed be He, buried the dead, as it is written, ‘And he buried him in the valley (Deuteronomy 34:6);’ so too, you shall bury the dead.” (Translation adapted from Sefaria, www.sefaria.org)

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B’Tzelem Elohim

TALK IT OUT

- According to this text, when are we considered to be acting in the image of God?
- Is this the image of God that you are accustomed to seeing?
- What do you think is the connection between kindness and Godliness?
- How does helping others help us achieve our potential?
- Consider this quote attributed to Australian Aboriginal activist Lila Watson. “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us walk together.”
- Do you approach service as an act of pity toward others? An act of personal fulfillment? How do you relate to Watson’s statement?

OFF THE PAGE AND INTO LIFE

Answer these reflective questions in writing, privately:

1. How do you currently think about your service activities?

2. How would your life be different if you viewed service as helping you access being created “B’Tzelem Elohim” in the image of God?

3. What piece of advice would you give yourself the next time you engage in service to another?
Follow-up

Challenge students to respond to one need/ engage in one act of service once a day for a week. Come back after a week and discuss:

- Which of the acts of service from this past week felt most satisfying to you?
- Did any of your acts of service feel more difficult than others?
- Reflecting on your week of service — why do you think the rabbis of the *Talmud* saw acts of service as Godly? Did you ever get that feeling when you were engaged in service?
- What other acts of service will you commit to over the course of the next week?

**Additional Resources:**
Watch this YouTube video of Rabbi David Aaron speaking about the connection between self-worth and service. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGdjYNIs5zs
Bring Everyone to the Table: Seeing Others as Created in God’s Image

This Activity is Great For

I. Beginning the Conversation

Ask students: When you look at others, what do you see? Their appearance? Their new sweater? OR Ask students to turn to each other and really look at each other — for an uncomfortably long time (30 seconds to one minute), and then tell each other what they see.

• What was it like for you to look at someone else in this way?
• What was it like for you to be looked at in this way?

Today we are going to talk about looking at others carefully, and what we can see if we look at them closely and carefully.

II. A Deeper Dive

A. Read the following story together:

There is an old Hasidic story about Reb Nahman Kossover, a friend of the Ba’al Shem Tov. Reb Nahman believed that the proper way to remain close to God was to constantly contemplate the four-letter name Y-H-W-H, to see the letters of God’s name ever before him. He was a preacher, and when he looked out at his audience, he was able to see God’s name in every face. But then times changed; the preacher was forced to become a merchant in order to survive. In the marketplace, with the rapid pace of all the buying and selling, he found it harder to always concentrate on the name of God. So we are told that he hired a special assistant to follow him wherever he went. The person’s only job was to be a reminder. Whenever he looked at his assistant’s face, he would remember the name of God.

What do you think the person (almost surely a man) looked like? Given the values of traditional Jewish society, he was probably not especially beautiful. Might he have been exceptionally tortured? Was a it a tormented face that reminded

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• When are you able to see the image of God in others’ faces?

• When is it more difficult for you to see the image of God in other people?

• Who in your life would you, like the Hasid, choose to look at to remember that everyone is created in God’s image?

B. Look at the following images. Which images are easiest for you to perceive as being created in the image of God? Which are more difficult?

• Do you believe that the people in all these images were equally created in the image of God?

• If so, does this understanding that they are all created in the image of God obligate you:
  • socially?  
  • financially?  
  • politically?
Who Do You See in the Mirror?:
Self Worth and Body Image

This Activity is Great For

Spirituality • Rosh Chodesh
Learning • Group Learning
Identity & Relationships • Inclusion
• Art and Creative Play
Academic Calendar • Career Development

Big Idea
The Jewish view that we are created in the image of God can help us overcome contemporary ideas that locate people’s value in their appearance or financial situation.

I. Beginning the Conversation

Bring in an assortment of magazines — women’s fashion magazines, Sports Illustrated, People, etc. Have students look through them and ask: what is the ideal man/woman according to the media? (They will probably focus on: appearance, wealth, skin color, family situation, career.)

TALK IT OUT

• In what ways do these media and cultural images of the “ideal” affect you?

• Do you find yourself associating your self-worth with your appearance, intelligence, economic situation or grades in school?

• Do you know anyone who does not?

Ask: Did you know that even models can’t conform to the level of physical attractiveness in the media? If they haven’t seen the Dove Evolution of a Model video, show it to them: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hibyAJOSW8U

Ask students if they would like to rid themselves of these media and cultural images. Invite them to tear up the images that they believe are harmful to their self-image — have fun tearing the images to pieces!

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II. A Deeper Dive

A. The Creation of Humans

The Torah has a different understanding of what makes a person special. Read over the description of the creation of humankind. What was special about them?

**Breishit (Genesis) 1:26-27**

26 And God said: "Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

27 And God created Adam in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

B. Rabbi Joseph Telushkin on Self-Worth

This excerpt is paraphrased from Rabbi Telushkin’s talk at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXH-9FQWF4E. In it, he talks about the fallacy of associating your worth with how much money you have, and emphasizes the Jewish perspective that our self-worth comes from being created in the image of God.

*Note: This excerpt specifically focuses on equating self-worth with money. If students are focused on beauty, help them see the broader message of Rabbi Telushkin’s words: that our worth derives from being created in the image of God.*

My father Shlomo Telushkin a’h (of blessed memory) worked in the 1930s for Rabbi Meir Berlin who headed the Religious Zionists, Mizrachi. Berlin learned English as an adult, and many times when someone learns a language as a second language they have a hard time learning the idioms.

... So Rabbi Berlin was puzzled by an idiom that he heard Americans use, and it eventually came to infuriate him. And that was the expression “so and so is worth”. When he heard it said of a certain man, and this was during the Depression when people were far poorer, “So and so is worth $300,000” he didn’t think much of the man, so he said “Yes, that’s what he is worth and not one penny more.”

The real question of worth though is: what are we worth to the people around us? What is our value as a human being? If we continue to associate worth only with money, we are setting ourselves up for misery. If you hear somebody say I am worth $10 million, what happens to that person when his investments collapse, and he’s then worth 2 million dollars, and then if he loses everything, what is he worth — nothing?
Our value is ultimately derived from the fact that we are created in God’s image. We are holy people — and all of us are holy — and our worth to others is ultimately going to derive from how we act.

- Does this text speak to you? Why or why not?
- How might Rabbi Telushkin’s father have responded to the messages in the magazine images you cut out?

C. Reflect and Craft

*Students will engage in a reflection activity and collage-making to reflect on what makes them created in God’s image.*

Tell students: We have seen that our self-worth comes from being created in God’s image. When you think about yourself, what do you think are your special virtues — those parts of you that can be thought of as the parts of you that are in God’s image? Write them down — no one else will see this.

Now go back to the magazines and choose words or images that reflect the real you and how you are created in the image of God. Cut out the words and images, and paste them onto this sheet of paper to illustrate the image of God inside you, and what truly makes you special.

- Are they talents?
- Ways of connecting?
- Ways of giving to others?

**TALK IT OUT**

- How can you remember this “real you” created in the image of God, when you are confronted by images and expectations that measure your worth in false and destructive ways?
If everyone is created in the image of God, then we have the responsibility to make sure that everyone — even if they are differently abled — has equal opportunity to participate, and feel accepted, at Hillel and campus events.

Use these questions to reflect upon inclusion, and to make sure that your Hillel events embrace the concept of B’Tzelem Elohim and include everyone with dignity.

• What kinds of disabilities are you most comfortable dealing with? What kinds of disabilities are harder for you to deal with? Who can you talk to about becoming more comfortable with these issues?

• Think about the Hillel events that you have run so far this year. Were there students with disabilities at these events? Can you check in with them to find out what their experience at the event was like, and what suggestions they have for you? If there were no students with overt disabilities there, what can you do to find out why they did not attend?

• What are 3 actions that you can take immediately at campus events and interactions to include others with dignity?

Here are some ideas for inclusion:

• When advertising Hillel events, always include a contact name and number for questions about accessibility.

• Create a student working group on disability to advise you.

• Proactively make sure that all students are included in conversation and activities at student meals and events.

• If you are serving a student with a disability, and you don’t know what he or she needs, ask! You will both be happy you did.
Textsheets for Students

On the next pages, you’ll find just the texts mentioned in each of the sections of this curriculum, without the facilitator’s guide. Use these sheets if you would like to make copies of the texts for students, while keeping the facilitator’s notes just for you!
Textsheets for Students

Live Like a Boss

Breishit (Genesis) 1:26-27

26 And God said: “Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

27 And God created Adam in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

Mishnah Avot 3:14:

Rabbi Akiva would say: Beloved is humanity for we were made in the image of God. And doubly beloved are we for God made it known to us that we are made in his image, as it states (Breishit 9): “In God’s image God created humankind.” (Translation adapted from JustAction, www.justaction.org)

Natan Sharansky

In the following excerpt, Natan Sharansky talks about his struggle to understand what it means to be created in the image of God. He found that his fear that he would violate the image of God inside of him gave the freedom and strength to resist the KGB (the state military police force in Soviet Russia).

Natan Sharansky is one of the most famous former Soviet refusniks and an Israeli politician, author and human rights activist. Sharansky was born and raised in the Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union, and became associated with the Soviet human rights movement, and one of the foremost dissidents and spokesmen for the Soviet Jewry movement. He was arrested in 1977, and convicted of treason and spying on behalf of the United States, and was sentenced to thirteen years imprisonment in a Siberian forced labor camp. For the first 16 months of his sentence he was held in Moscow’s Lefortovo prison, frequently in solitary confinement and in a special “torture cell,” before being transferred to a notorious prison camp in the Siberian gulag.

Years after his release, Sharansky stressed the need he maintained throughout his imprisonment to remain emotionally independent. He attributed his survival of the lengthy incarceration and the brutal conditions to his resistance to any sort of emotional surrender. Hence Sharansky’s expression of the paradox that while an ordinary Russian, he was in fact a slave to the system; but that once he discovered his Jewish roots and was restricted for his allegiance to them, he was in reality a free man. Sharansky’s memoirs of his years as a prisoner of Zion are described in his book Fear No Evil (paraphrased from: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

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Natan Sharansky (continued)

In the following excerpt, Sharansky talks about how the concept of tzelem Elohim/“in the image of God” gave him strength and resolve during his imprisonment.

A few days before my arrest, an American tourist gave me a small book of Psalms from my wife, along with a letter she had written. In it Avital explained that she had carried the Psalms with her all year, during her travels around the world to fight for my freedom and for the freedom of Soviet Jewry. Now, she wrote, I feel that you should have it so I am sending it to you. Back then, my Hebrew was in no way adequate to read that book. After I was arrested, the book, along with all my other belongings, was confiscated. Then I began to think about the Psalms and about the note from Avital. The book soon took on an almost mythical meaning for me. I started to fight to have it returned, a battle that continued for three years.

I finally received the book along with the news that my father had passed away. I tried to read it, but I still understood little. I had to work my way through it slowly, page by page, comparing different lines, trying to recognize patterns and connect words to each other. The first lines I understood were those of Psalm 23: “Although I walk through the valley of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.”

I noticed that in the Psalms, the word fear kept appearing. On the one hand, fear was something to be overcome, such as not fearing evil. But as yirat hashem, or the fear of God, it had a positive connotation. It took me time to understand what this fear of God meant. My understanding was at first very vague and uncertain. But at some moment it occurred to me, seeing it many times, that this fear was connected not simply to God the Creator but to the image of God in which man was created. Mankind was created to be worthy of that image and to be true to it. This required me to go forward in an honest and direct way, without compromising principles. This fear, the fear of not being worthy of the divine image, not the fear of death, was what I was most afraid of in my interrogations with the KGB. I was afraid to lose the world of inner freedom I had found, to fail to stay true to my inner self, to no longer conduct myself in a way that was worthy of the divine image.

Read this source from Babylonian *Talmud Sotah 14a* together with a learning partner (chavruta) and then discuss the following questions:

And Rabbi Chama the son of Rabbi Chanina said, “What is the meaning of the verse, ‘After Hashem, your God, shall you walk (Deuteronomy 13:5)?’ Is it possible for a person to walk after the divine presence? For isn’t it already stated, ‘For Hashem your God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24)?’

Rather, to follow the character traits of God.

‘Just as He clothes the naked, as it is written, ‘And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife cloaks of leather, and he clothed them (Genesis 3:21);’ so too you shall clothe the naked. The Holy One, Blessed be He, visited the sick, as it is written, ‘And he appeared in Ailonei Mamrei [while Avram was in pain] (Genesis 18:1);’ so too you shall visit the sick. The Holy One, Blessed be He, comforted mourners, as it is written, ‘And it was, after the death of Abraham, and God blessed his son Isaac (Genesis 25:11);’ so too you shall comfort mourners. The Holy One, Blessed be He, buried the dead, as it is written, ‘And he buried him in the valley (Deuteronomy 34:6);’ so too, you shall bury the dead.’”

(Translation adapted from Sefaria, www.sefaria.org)
Bring Everyone to the Table: 
Seeing Others As Created in God’s Image

There is an old Hasidic story about Reb Nahman Kossover, a friend of the Ba’al Shem Tov. Reb Nahman believed that the proper way to remain close to God was to constantly contemplate the four-letter name Y-H-W-H, to see the letters of God’s name ever before him. He was a preacher, and when he looked out at his audience, he was able to see God’s name in every face. But then times changed; the preacher was forced to become a merchant in order to survive. In the marketplace, with the rapid pace of all the buying and selling, he found it harder to always concentrate on the name of God. So we are told that he hired a special assistant to follow him wherever he went. The person’s only job was to be a reminder. Whenever he looked at his assistant’s face, he would remember the name of God.

What do you think the person (almost surely a man) looked like? Given the values of traditional Jewish society, he was probably not especially beautiful. Might he have been exceptionally tortured? Was a it a tormented face that reminded the rabbi of God? Or was it something less dramatic, what in Yiddish might be called eydelkeyt, a combination of gentleness, warmth, and nobility? We’ll never know, of course. Maybe it was just an ordinary human face, another person made in God’s image. But he was there to serve as a reminder, and that was quite enough.


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Breishit (Genesis) 1:26-27

וּוַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, נַעֲשֶׂה אדָם בְּצַלְמֵנָנוּ, כְּדֹתֵנוּ: זִירָדוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם, וּבְעֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּבְבַקּוֹתְנוּ לְעֵיל הַאָרֶץ, וּבְכַל הַרְמֶשׂ עַל הָאָרֶץ. כִּי זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים.

26 And God said: ‘Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.’

27 And God created Adam in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

Paraphrased from Rabbi Telushkin’s talk on Self Worth at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXH-9FQWF4E:

My father Shlomo Telushkin a”h (of blessed memory) worked in the 1930s for Rabbi Meir Berlin who headed the Religious Zionists, Mizrachi. Berlin learned English as an adult, and many times when someone learns a language as a second language they have a hard time learning the idioms.

... So Rabbi Berlin was puzzled by an idiom that he heard Americans use, and it eventually came to infuriate him. And that was the expression “so and so is worth”. When he heard it said of a certain man, and this was during the Depression when people were far poorer, “So and so is worth $300,000” he didn’t think much of the man, so he said “Yes, that’s what he is worth and not one penny more.”

The real question of worth though is: what are we worth to the people around us? What is our value as a human being? if we continue to associate worth only with money, we are setting ourselves up for misery. If you hear somebody say I am worth $10 million, what happens to that person when his investments collapse, and he’s then worth 2 million dollars, and then if he loses everything, what is he worth — nothing?

Our value is ultimately derived from the fact that we are created in God’s image. We are holy people — and all of us are holy — and our worth to others is ultimately going to derive from how we act.