

JCI CURRICULUM: UNIT 1: CHAPTER 2 – B'TZELEM ELOHIM LESSON 1: IN WHAT IMAGE

LESSON 1: IN WHAT IMAGE? (45-50 mins)

Goals:

For students to:

- understand the concept of *Tzelem Elohim*.
- appreciate that the concept of *Tzelem Elohim* is not trite, but actually quite radical
- grapple with the practical implications of this teaching.

Materials:

- chalk/poster board
- markers
- text handouts

Procedure:

Framing Exercise (10-15 minutes)

- Explain to the class that we can learn a lot about a person or a group of people by listening to the story they tell about how they began.
- Ask the students to summarize the story of how the United States was founded. What can we learn about the values of Americans by that story? Possible answers:
 - We value freedom (don't want to be ruled by the British).
 - We are a nation of immigrants (people came from elsewhere).
 - Taxation without representation is tyranny.
 - Centrality of ideas – esp. as written in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
- Write/uncover the following sentence. Ask a student to read it aloud.

Genesis 1:26

בראשית פרק א

כּו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ

And God said, "Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness.

- Ask the class: What do you think it means to be made in the image of God? What does it say about the Jewish people that this is our founding story about the creation of the world?
- One answer to this question might be that we are in the image of God in that we emulate certain characteristics of God.

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Framing the text study (3-5 minutes)

- Ask the class: Think about the characteristics that people understand to be aspects of God. When we say that people are created in the image of God, which characteristics are we talking about? Which are we not talking about?
- Draw a line down the middle of the board and list answers.
 - On one side, you may have answers like, “create, love, get angry, think.”
 - On the other side, you may have answers like, “work miracles, all-powerful, all-knowing”

Text study (20 minutes)

Divide students into *chevrutot*. Pass out the Text Sheet (Sota 14a).

Class discussion (10 minutes)

Have the students share some of their answers to the discussion questions. Focus on the last question: “If you were to really take the idea of *b'tzelem elohim* seriously, how would it change you life?” If you built a society based on that concept, what might be some differences between that society and our own?

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Appendix:

TEXT:

תלמוד בבלי- מסכת סוטה פרק א
 רבי חמא ברבי חנינא מאי דכתיב אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה והלא
 כבר נאמר כי ה' אלהיך אש אוכלה הוא אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה מה הוא מלביש ערומים
 ויעש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם אף אתה הלבש ערומים הקב"ה ביקר דכתיב
 חולים דכתיב וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא אף אתה בקר חולים הקב"ה ניחם אבלים דכתיב ויהי אחרי
 מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו אף אתה נחם אבלים הקב"ה קבר מתים דכתיב ויקבר אותו
 בגיא אף אתה קבור מתים:

Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, said: What does the Torah mean when it says: "You shall walk in the ways of the Lord." (Deuteronomy, 13:5) Can a person really walk in the shadow of the Divine Presence? Rather, it means that you should imitate the ways of God. Just as God clothed the naked (as it says: "And God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them," Genesis, 3:21), so you shall clothe the naked. Just as God visited the sick ("And God appeared before Abraham [after his circumcision]), so you should visit the sick; just as God buried the dead (as it says: "And God buried Moses in the valley") so you should bury the dead; and just as God comforts the grieving (as it say: after the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son), so you too comfort the grieving.

Babylonian Talmud, Sota 14a

WHAT THE TEXT MEANS:

- How does this text understand the practical implications of being made in the image of God?
- What do the actions that God performs have in common with each other, if anything?
- What might the rabbis have been trying to say by choosing these examples of God's actions to emulate and not others (God's miracles, for example)?

WHAT THE TEXT MEANS TO ME:

- How might this fact or belief or vision, and the knowledge of this fact or belief or vision, affect what we do and how we act?
- If you were to really take the idea of *b'tzelem elohim* seriously, how would it change your life? How might this sensibility or awareness shape your sense of self or your behavior?