Sacred Slogans

“Tzelem Elokim / Imago Dei / Image of God”

I. Introduction

1a. Genesis 1:26-27
Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

1b. Genesis 5:1
This is the account of man. When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God.

1c. Genesis 9:6
Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

II. Who has Tzelem Elokim?

A. Everyone

2. Genesis Rabba 8:11
R. Tifdai said in R. Aha’s name: The celestial beings were created in the image and likeness [of God] and do not procreate, while the terrestrial creatures [dumb animals] procreate but were not created in [His] image and likeness. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: Behold, I will create him [man] in [My] image and likeness, [so that he will partake] of the [character of the] celestial beings, while he will procreate, [after the nature] of the terrestrial beings. R. Tifdai said in R. Aha’s name: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: If I create him of the celestial elements he will live [forever] and not die, and if I create him of the terrestrial elements, he will die and not live [in a future life]. Therefore I will create him of the upper and of the lower elements: if he sins he will die; while if he does not sin, he will live.
B. Everyone except Adam and Eve

3. Genesis Rabba 22:1
In the past, Adam was created from the ground, and Eve from Adam; but henceforth it shall be, “In our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26): neither man without woman nor woman without man, nor both of them without the Shechinah.

C. Only Adam and Two Generations

4. Genesis Rabba 23:6
Abba Cohen Bardela was asked: ‘[Why does Scripture enumerate] Adam, Seth, Enosh, and then become silent? Hitherto they were created in the likeness and image [of God], he replied, but from then onward Centaurs were created. Four things changed in the days of Enosh: The mountains became [barren] rocks, the dead began to feel [the worms], men’s faces became ape-like, and they became vulnerable to demons.

D. Only Adam Exclusively

5. B. Bava Batra 58a
R. Bana’ah used to mark out caves [where there were dead bodies]. When he came to the cave of Abraham, he found Eliezer the servant of Abraham standing at the entrance. He said to him: What is Abraham doing? He replied: He is sleeping in the arms of Sarah, and she is looking fondly at his head. He said: Go and tell him that Bana’ah is standing at the entrance. Said Abraham to him: Let him enter; it is well known that there is no passion in this world. So he went in, surveyed the cave, and came out again. When he came to the cave of Adam, a voice came forth from heaven saying Thou hast beholden the likeness of my likeness, my likeness itself thou mayest not behold.

6. Deut. Rabba 11:3
And this is the blessing: this bears out what scripture says, “Many daughters have done valiantly, but thou surpass them all” (Prov. 31:29). What is the meaning of, ‘but thou surpass them all’? This refers to Moses who was far superior to all. How? Adam said to Moses: “I am greater than you because I have been created in the image of God.” Whence this? For it is said, and God created man in his own image (Gen. 1:27). Moses replied to him: ‘I am far superior to you, for the honour which was given to you has been taken away from you, as it is said, but man (adam) abideth not in honour (Ps. 49:13); but as for me, the radiant countenance which God gave me still remains with me.’ Whence? For it is said, his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated (Deut. 34:7).
E. Are Gentiles Included in “Adam” / Men?

7. B. Bava Metizia 114b
R. Simeon b. Yohai said: The graves of Gentiles do not defile, for it is written, And ye my flock, the flock of my pastures, are men (Ex. 34:31); only ye are designated ‘men’ and not gentiles.

III. Tzemel Elokim in Practice

A. Executing Murderers

8. Genesis 9:6
Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

R. Akiva says: Whoever sheds blood nullifies the image [of God] as it says, “whoever sheds blood, by man shall his blood be shed.”

10. Mekhilton D.R. Yishmael Yitro 8
Why does [the Torah] say, “Thou shalt not murder” (Ex. 20:13) for it says “whoever sheds human blood” (Gen 9:6)? We have heard the punishment [for murder], but we have not heard the warning/prohibition. Therefore we learn, “thou shalt not murder.”

B. Mourning

11. B. Moed Katan 15a-b
A mourner is obligated to overturn his bed, as Bar Kappara taught: “[God says], “I have set the likeness of mine image on them and through their sins have I upset it; let your beds be overturned on account thereof.” What about one ‘separated’ [under a ban] and a leper overturning couches? Let this stand [adjourned].

C. Personal Hygiene

12. Leviticus Rabba 34:3
Another exposition of the text: “If thy brother be waxen poor. It bears on what is written in scripture: the merciful man doeth good to his own soul” (Prov. 11:17). This applies to Hillel the Elder who once, when he concluded his studies with his disciples, walked along with them. His disciples asked him: “Master, where are you bound?” He answered them: “To perform a commandment.” They asked, “What is this commandment? He said to them: “To wash in the bath-house.” Said they: “Is this a commandment? “Yes,” he replied: “if the statues of kings, which are erected in theatres and circuses, are scoured and washed by the man who is appointed to look after them, and who thereby obtains his maintenance through

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them—and more, he is exalted in the company of the great of the kingdom—how much more I, who have been created in the image and likeness; as it is written, for in the image of God made He man” (Gen 9:6)?

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<th>D. Idolatry</th>
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| **13a. Exodus 20:20**  
Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. |

| 13b. Ezekiel 1:10  
Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. |

| 13c. B. Avoda Zara 42b  
Ye shall not make with Me — i.e., ye shall not make according to the likeness of My attendants who serve before Me in the heights |

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<th>E. Wicked People</th>
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| **14. B. Megillah 28a**  
Rabbi asked R. Joshua b. Korha: In virtue of what have you reached such a good old age? He said to him: Do you begrudge me my life? Said Rabbi to him: This is [a point of] Torah, and it is important for me to learn. He replied: Never in my life have I gazed at the countenance of a wicked man; for so R. Johanan said: It is forbidden to a man to gaze at the countenance of a wicked man, as it says, Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee nor see thee. R. Eleazar said: His eyes become dim, as it says, And it came to pass that when Isaac was old that his eyes were dim, so that he could not see; because he used to gaze at the wicked Esau. |
F. Interpersonal Relationships

15a. M. Avot 3:14
[R. Akiva] would say: Beloved is man, since he is created in the image [of God]. A deeper love - it is revealed to him that he is created in the image, as it says (Genesis 9:6): “for in God’s image He made man.”

15b. Sifra Kedoshim 2:12 / Y. Nedarim 9:4 41c
“Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 19:18) – R. Akiva says this is a great principle in the Torah. Ben Azzai says “This is the account of man...” this is an even greater principle

15c. Genesis Rabbah 24
Ben Azzai says “This is the account of man” is a great principle in the Torah. R. Akiva says “Love thy neighbor as thyself” is an even greater principle (in the Albeck edition), so that one should not say since I was embarrassed I will embarrass my friend. R. Tanchuma says if you did so, know to whom you have embarrassed, someone made in the likeness of God

G. Procreation

16. B. Yevamot 63b
It was taught: R. Eliezer stated, He who does not engage in propagation of the race is as though he sheds blood; for it is said, Whoso sheddeth man’s blood by man shall his blood be shed, and this is immediately followed by the text, And you, be ye fruitful and multiply. R. Jacob said: As though he has diminished the Divine Image; since it is said, For in the image of God made he man, and this is immediately followed by, And you, be ye fruitful etc. Ben ‘Azzai said: As though he sheds blood and diminishes the Divine Image; since it is said, And you, be ye fruitful and multiply.

They said to Ben ‘Azzai: Some preach well and act well, others act well but do not preach well. You, however, preach well but do not act well! [Ben Azzai never married] Ben ‘Azzai replied: But what shall I do, seeing that my soul is in love with the Torah; the world can be carried on by others.

17. T. Yevamot 8:5 (8:7 in Lieberman edition)
Ben Azzai says: Whoever does not engage in procreation has shed blood and nullifies the image [of God], as it says, “because in the image of God he made man” and it is written “be fruitful and multiply.”