

בצלם אלוקים

b'Tzelem Elokim

lit. in the divine image

Value the Humanity in Each Person

The Jewish approach requires us to take action
to protect the life of, and ensure justice for, all people.

Humans were created singly to teach that whoever destroys a single soul, it is as if they destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves one soul, it as if they saved an entire world. This should foster peace among people, so that no one can say, "My ancestor is better than yours." if a person stamps out many coins with one mold, they are all alike. But when G!d forms each person in the image of the first person, each one is unique. - Mishna Sanhedrin (The Mishna is a collection of Jewish oral traditions, compiled in the 3rd century CE)

The sea splits. The people of Israel walk through with huge walls of water looming on either side. Pharaoh's army chases after them into the split sea. After the Israelites find safety on the other side of the sea, the walls come crashing down, brutally drowning and destroying the Egyptians in Pharaoh's army. Up in heaven, the angels want to cheer and sing in celebration. G!d is not pleased and says "My handiwork [the Egyptian army] is drowning in the sea; and you would sing before me?!" (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 39b) In other words, their loss is not something to celebrate, since those are G!d's children, too.

Questions for Conversation and Reflection

1. What might it mean to be 'created in the divine image'?
2. What might the implications be if all people are created in the divine image?
3. What kind of reminders do we need to remember that all people are valuable and deserve basic human dignity and rights?
4. Who in our times are most vulnerable to not be given basic human dignity and rights?