

THE Value OF Life

Textbook pages 18–27

Core Concept

Judaism teaches us to value and respect others and ourselves because every person is created in God's image.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- ☀ Explain why all human life has equal value.
- ☀ Articulate what being created in God's image means by providing examples of godly actions human beings can take.
- ☀ Differentiate between self-esteem and selfishness.
- ☀ Take actions that show respect for themselves and for others.

Chapter Overview

This chapter teaches the Torah concept that all humans—Jew and non-Jew alike—are created in the image of God. To be made in God's image is to have the capacity to behave in godly ways; for example, by performing acts of kindness and being compassionate and loyal.

Key Vocabulary

B'tzelem Elohim Created in God's image



Getting Started: Unpacking the Text

(pages 18–19)

Ask students how they might feel if they learned that someone wanted to be their friend but had never told them so. Have students explain their responses. (*Possible answers: disappointed because I might have been friendlier toward the person, glad because I would have felt embarrassed, sad because I might have gotten to know the person better*)

Invite a student to read *Pirkei Avot* 3:14 on page 18.

Explain that in this chapter, they will learn about what it means to be created in God's image. Invite students to guess what this means and how knowing it might make them feel special. (*Possible answers: Something about us is like God and knowing it makes me proud; we have a close relationship with God and knowing it makes me feel responsible.*) Welcome all speculation; do not judge any answers. After reading the section “In the Image of God” on pages 20 and 22, you may want to return to this quote and discuss it again with your students.

Have students read the story on page 19. Ask why having the two notes might be helpful. (*reminds them to keep a balanced view; cheers them when they are sad and brings them back to reality when they are getting a bit full of themselves*) Present the students with several situations and ask them which of the two notes they would reach for in those situations and why. Sample situations might include: trying out for a sports team, going to class the first day in a new school, and writing an acceptance speech after winning a school election. Encourage respectful discussion and note that different students may make different choices.

Explain to the students that in this chapter they will learn about the value of all human life—their lives and the lives of others.



Artist's Corner: Pirkei Avot 3:14 (page 18)

Distribute a sheet of drawing or construction paper and colored pencils or crayons to each student. Ask students to fold the paper in half so that they have two square, or close to square, shapes. Explore the concept of “a special love” by having students draw a heart on the left side of the paper. Inside the heart, ask students to list the people with whom they share a special love. (*parents, friends, siblings*) Outside the heart, have students list ways that special love is made known to them. (*The person gives hugs and kisses; the person is especially giving or helpful.*) God’s special love for humanity is made known through the Torah’s teaching that we are created in God’s image, a very special honor.

Now invite students to draw a Torah scroll on the right side of the page. Inside the scroll have them write “I was made in the image of God.” Tell students that in this chapter, they will learn about the actions they can take to make it known that they were made in God’s image. Have students write their names on their papers, collect the papers, and redistribute them when you complete the chapter. At that point, invite students to list around the scroll the actions they can take. (*Examples: speak honestly and respectfully, help those in need, show compassion to others.*) You may want to display the papers on a bulletin board under the heading “In God’s Image.”

In the Image of God (pages 20 and 22)

Ask students: How can all of us be made in God’s image? (*Being made in God’s image means we have the ability to behave in godly ways. Just as God clothed Adam and Eve, we can clothe others. Just as God visited Abraham when he was recovering [from his circumcision], we can comfort people who are ill.*) We act in godly ways when we use our abilities to add goodness to the world.



Photo Op (page 22)

Ask students to describe how Lydie Egosi’s body and soul might have worked together to create her tapestry of Noah’s ark. (*Her soul inspired her to turn the Bible story into a beautiful piece of art; her brain, eyes, and hands helped her make the art.*) Ask students for examples of when their own bodies and souls work together. (*Possible answers: praying, visiting someone who is ill, collecting food for the local pantry*) How does this make them feel? (*accomplished, proud, happy*)

Value Yourself (page 22)

After reading the story of Hillel, invite student volunteers one at a time to stand on one leg and teach everything they know about Torah to the class; for example, Bible stories and *mitzvot* they know. Presumably your students will not be able to remain on one leg while teaching all they know, and even those who do stay standing won’t know all of the Torah.

After each student who wants a chance has had one, ask students if they think the man in the story acted respectfully toward Hillel. (*No: The man was rude because*

he challenged Hillel to do the impossible.) In answering the man’s question as he did, Hillel followed his own teaching—“What is hateful to you do not do to any person”—demonstrating self-respect and respect for the man.



Teaching Enrichment: Value Yourself (pages 22–24)

Conduct a thought-provoking conversation that challenges the Torah commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Say: It’s easy to love people who are nice, but what about people who are not kind or trustworthy? Ask students for examples of types of people whom they would have difficulty loving. (*school bullies, terrorists, thieves*) Ask whether it’s realistic with regard to such people to follow the Torah’s commandment to love your neighbor.

Point out that loving your neighbors can also mean keeping them safe from harming themselves or others. We can imprison criminals and provide medical attention for the criminally insane. You may want to invite the rabbi to participate in this discussion.

Value Yourself (pages 22–24)

Ask students to read the paragraphs about self-esteem on pages 23 and 24.

Encourage them to consider how they might respond to the scenario of the friend who needed help in Spanish, described on page 24. Select three volunteers to participate in a role-playing activity. One student will be the friend needing help, another the one being asked for help, and the third will role-play the parent of the friend being asked for help. Solicit questions from the class for the actors to answer.

(Possible questions: Will you help your friend? How will you persuade your friend to help? Can the parent change the bedtime? Can the parent offer suggestions such as meeting the friend early before school?)

Bible Bio (page 23) **and Extraordinary Acts** (page 24)

Invite students to find similarities between the actions of Bityah and Henrietta Szold. (*Both helped others; both valued the lives of others; both were compassionate.*) Did they solve all their community’s problems? (*No. Bityah could not save all the Israelite boys, but she did save one, Moses, who in turn saved the entire people of Israel. Henrietta Szold could not save all the people in Palestine, but she did save thousands.*)

Help students understand through the example of these women that although none of us can completely solve a major problem such as world poverty or hunger, we can do our part to improve the situation. Ask students to think of ways they can help their community. (*Examples: donate clothes to a shelter, distribute children’s books to hospitals, recycle cans and newspapers*)

Learn It & Live It (page 27)

Have students work independently to develop their own list of “Ten Commandments of Loving Yourself.” Then divide class into small groups and have students negotiate

a final list of ten commandments based on their individual responses. Invite each group to share their list with the class and to explain why they think the commandments can help people treat themselves with love and respect.



Family in Action

Students have learned that one aspect of valuing life requires that we take good care of ourselves. Invite students to work with their families to assess and improve the safety of their homes. For example, a family may discover that they need drawer locks for young children, fire extinguishers, or an emergency evacuation plan.

Alternatively, you may invite students to develop a family contract in which each member of the family commits to developing a new habit that can improve his or her health and the other family members promise to provide support. For example, one person might commit to exercising three times a week and the other family members to helping that person make the time to do so.

You may want to begin the next class by asking students to share how they and their families have put Jewish wisdom into action by increasing the safety of their homes or the health of their bodies.

