

## Judaism, Human Dignity, Human Rights – notes for talk for BFRHR AGM 2020

Let's begin at the beginning. Specifically in the first chapter of Genesis, in the second version of the creation story) with the creation of human beings (source 1)

Here we are told that humanity is created in the divine image, created equal (male/female), and created in order to steward/rule the world and all that lives on it.

This is the proof text par excellence that requires us, as a positive commandment, to respect all human beings BECAUSE they are made in the image of God.

For many generations, the power of this scriptural commandment, meant that the equality of human value is seen as based on the monogenesis of humanity and its resonance with the image of God (whatever that may mean). While the verse itself contains much ambiguity (what does tzelem Elohim mean?) the connection that humanity was created equal and has absolute and unchangeable value has long been assumed to be unquestionable.

As long as scripture was seen as authoritative, the idea that human value, dignity and ethical behaviour originates in God was the bedrock of understanding of the value of human beings.

There are a number of ambiguities in the text, let alone the observed reality that while Genesis may teach monogenesis – that we all derive from the same ancestor and are in the image of God – human actions have never followed this dictum very seriously.

And what do we mean by the image of God? (tzelem is associated with physicality, making the idea of dignity etc to do with how the body is treated (live or dead), the body being a physical manifestation of God in some way. This leads us down a rabbit hole of thinking – is God corporeal – Judaism rejects this but bible is ambiguous – lots of examples from Abraham seeing the three men onwards /Ezekiel's vision/ Moses at the cleft of the rock seeing God's kavod in the retreating back of God)

*Source 2 pirkei avot 3:14*

*Source 3 psalm 8 (partic v 6)*

*Source 4 – theological basis*

So while this is a hugely important and bedrock proof text for us, there is a lot to unpack.

One of the first big questions is - Is human rights/dignity something bestowed by God or is it a societal construct? It is clear that while Bible understands the former, Judaism as it evolves allows for both.

When we look at Rabbinic Judaism – and the best text is the debate between Akiva and Ben Azzai in nedarim - there is clarity similar to that of bible (R Akiva/Ben Azzai) are clear – the toledot Adam is the greatest principle that equalises all human beings and gives us relationship because of our single descent from God.

*Source 5 (Akiva / ben Azzai)*

*Source 6 PdeRE –*

This has been eloquently expressed by Rene Cassin – from the Ten Commandments to the Rights of Man *source 7*

I would like us to move now to what we believe animates human rights. In the words of the equality and human rights commission, *source 8*  
And ??

### **Human Rights are the social conditions necessary for human dignity**

Many Jewish writers focus on the covenant relationship of obligation, that we are commanded and obliged to righteous behaviour, and that rights are not so much given as derived from the obligations we have to others.

***An expression of Jewish law's basic approach to man's obligations can already be found in the first book of the Bible, in which Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden and commanded "to tend it and to keep it." Man is first and foremost "commanded," obligated, given duties rather than rights. Under this basic approach of Jewish law, human rights are often formulated by way of negation, that is, by proscribing infringement of the various rights. Thus, for example, the Torah says "you shall not go around as a talebearer among your people" ([Lev. 19:17](#)) as an expression of the right to a good name; "you shall not rule over him with rigor" ([Lev. 25:43](#)) as an expression of man's dignity; "you shall not go into his house to fetch his pledge" ([Deut. 24:10](#)) as an expression of his liberty and right to privacy (see \*Imprisonment for Debt), and so on, with "you shall" implicit in "you shall not."... Together with this, there are cases in which man is required, as a positive commandment, to respect various***

rights. Thus, regarding the obligation to maintain human dignity and physical integrity: "therefore take good heed unto yourselves" (lit., "your souls," interpreted as "your lives"; [Deut 4:15](#)) and, regarding freedom of movement: "proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (Jewish virtual library)

*the traditional Jewish view on rights is derived from the biblical sense of the obligation of all humans to God as their creator, sovereign, and covenant partner. Fundamental to the Jewish conception is the principle that God is the creator and sovereign of the universe, all of which ultimately belongs to Him including all life within it. What emerges out of the biblical approach are a series of protections and limitations which can roughly be translated into rights and obligations. While humans have nothing other than what God grants or covenants with them, as God's possessions no human instrumentality, certainly no state, can legitimately interfere with their God-given rights, liberties, protections, or obligations. While there may not be natural rights, there are fundamental rights in the sense that all humans are bound by covenant with God, at least through the Noahide covenant (Obligations and Rights in the Jewish Political Tradition: Some Preliminary Observations*

*Daniel J. Elazar*

Source 9 david novak

Source 10 – 13 Isaiah/ Deuteronomy

Since the authority of scripture has declined and most people do not now view human rights to be vested either in imago dei/btselem Elohim or in the covenant relationship with God, it may be best to reframe the discussion a little. Given that there are often competing rights, and that our tradition infers rights from responsibilities rather than gifting them to us unadorned, I find it helpful to use the lens that :

*Human Rights are the social conditions necessary for human dignity. Our goal is human dignity, achieved through the medium of rights and obligations.*

When we examine the notion of honour/ respect and giving dignity, our texts yield rich results and with much less room for ambiguity.

As Susannah Heschel writes (*source 14*) *kavod – dignity* begins as an attribute of God but is not only shared with God, it is bestowed on us. Dignity as an idea permeates Jewish thought from the earliest texts to the most modern.

The Talmud tells us (*source 15*) *Berachot 19b* that ensuring dignity takes precedence even over Torah prohibitions (though that is later challenged to rabbinic traditions in later texts)

Source 15a rambam

*Pirkei Avot 2:10 (source 16) and 4:1 (source 17) chosen here to give a flavour of how this ethical book of mishnah views dignity and honour. Chagiga source 18*

Dignity in Rabbinic Thought is classified both as *kvod ha b'riyot* and *kvod ha'adam* - The respect for and dignity of Creation, and that of human beings. Whereas we tend to speak of human rights in modern parlance, the traditional texts widen the idea of honour and dignity to include not just the social construct that is modern understanding of human rights, but also the natural world/ the animal world/ both the living and the dead.

*Source 19*

*Source 20*

This goes right up till modern time

*Source 21 Menachem alon*

While I think that the reframing of the discourse of human rights into the language of human dignity is a useful one, something with which maybe we can empathise more as we see the humanity of the other, and which draws the sting of the other half of the balance – namely the responsibility and obligation of those who claim their rights – the idea of dignity – both *kvod ha b'riyot* and *kvod ha adam* is complex and in Jewish texts not always aligned with modern western thinking.

Doron Shultziner reminds us that there are

*three distinct features of a Jewish conception of human dignity [that] can be identified in contrast to core characteristics of a liberal conception of human dignity. First, the original source of human dignity is not intrinsic to the human being but extrinsic, namely in God. Second, it is argued that the "dignity of the people" has precedence over personal autonomy and liberty, which are core liberal pillars. The third characteristic pertains to the potential conflict between personal autonomy and liberty, and God's commandments. ( In a Jewish perception of Human dignity.)*

As Jews, we can proudly assert that much of what has become understood as fundamental human rights / the unassailable dignity of all human beings is sourced in the Hebrew bible and in later Rabbinic evolutions.

We are driven by the imperatives so eloquently spoken by our prophets *source 22 malachi – have we not all one father – why do we break faith*

As inheritors of enlightenment thought, we struggle with competing rights, with the possibility to waive rights (something we cannot realistically do with our obligations), with the richness of liberal thought – and with the knowledge that once the authority of scriptural texts which sourced our humanity in God had been eroded, there was left a lacuna for other framings of the value (or not) of humanity. The historian Colin Kidd argues that the decline of scriptural authority \*17<sup>th</sup> c ) “opened up an ideological space for the uninhibited articulation of racialist sentiments”. The rejection of monogenesis led to the possibilities of a hierarchy of races – and to supremacist ideology.

We need to follow our rabbinic exemplars, to stress the importance of human dignity and to fight for the conditions that ensure that all people and peoples are able to achieve it. If Human Rights and Human Dignity are not rooted in a literal tzelem Elohim, are not bestowed by God upon creation, then it is up to us to ensure that we not only keep the ideas alive and active but that we co-create them in our world.

In the words of Susanna Heschel

*Source 23*

Judaism and Human Rights  
Source Sheet by Sylvia Rothschild

**Genesis 1:27-28**

בראשית א': כ"ז-כ"ח

And God created humankind in the divine image, creating it in the image of God – creating them male and female. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ  
בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה  
בָּרָא אֹתָם: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר  
לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ  
וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ וּרְדוּ בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וּבְכָל-חַיָּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

This passage becomes the proof text in which we are required, as a positive commandment, to respect human dignity and physical and mental health

**Pirkei Avot 3:14**

משנה אבות ג': י"ד

He (Akiva) used to say: Beloved is humankind for they were created in the image [of God]. Especially beloved are they for it was made known to them that they had been created in the image [of God], as it is said: “for in the divine image, God made humankind” (Gen 9:6

הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, חֲבִיב אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא  
בְּצֶלֶם. חֲבִיבָה יִתְרָה נוֹדַעַת לוֹ שֶׁנִּבְרָא  
בְּצֶלֶם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית ט) כִּי בְּצֶלֶם  
אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם.

**Psalms 8**

תהילים ח'

(1) For the leader; on the gittith. A psalm of David. (2) O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name throughout the earth, You who have covered the heavens with Your splendour! (3) From the mouths of infants and sucklings You have founded strength on account of Your foes, to put an end to enemy and avenger. When I behold Your

(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל-הַגִּתִּית מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:  
(ב) יְהוָה אֱדֹלֵינוּ מִה־אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ בְּכָל-  
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּגְּהַ הַיּוֹדֶךָ עַל-הַשָּׁמַיִם: (ג)  
מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים | וַיִּנְקִיִם יִסְדֹּתָ עֵז לְמַעַן  
צוֹרְרֶיךָ לְהַשְׁבִּית אוֹיְבֵי וּמִתְנַקֵּם: (ד)  
כִּי-אֲרָאָה שְׁמִיךָ מַעֲשֵׂי אֲצַבְעֹתֶיךָ יָרַח  
אֶכְוָכִיִּים אֲשֶׁר פּוֹנְנֹתָה: (ה) מִה־אֲנֹשׁ  
כִּי-תִזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבִן-אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ: (ו)

heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, what is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him, that You have made him little less than divine, and adorned him with glory and majesty; You have made him master over Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet, sheep and oxen, all of them, and wild beasts, too; the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas. O Eternal, our God, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!

וּתְחַסְרֶהוּ מֵעַט מֵאַלְהִים וְכְבוֹד וְהָדָר  
 תַּעֲטֶרְהוּ: (ז) תִּמְשִׁילֶהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדָיךָ כֹּל  
 שְׁפֹתָה תַחֲתֶרְגְּלֵיו: (ח) צִנְהָ וְאַלְפִים  
 כָּלֵם וְגַם בְּהֵמוֹת שָׂדֵי: (ט) צִפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם  
 וְדָגֵי הַיָּם עֹבְרֵי אֲרָצוֹת יָמַיִם: (י) יִהְיֶה  
 אֲדוֹנֵינוּ מְה־אֲדִיר שְׁמוֹ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:

Theological basis for justifying the dignity of all humans

- a) God created humans in the divine image (Gen 1:26)
- b) Out of this stems the inviolability of human dignity
- c) This applies to all people and is the basis for the equality of all people
- d) Since all humans have the same dignity, it follows that the same rights and responsibilities apply to all people.

Love your neighbour as yourself: R. Akiba states, "this is a great principle of the Torah". Ben Azzai states: "This is the book of the descendants of Adam" (Genesis 5:1): This is even a greater principle. (Sifra, on Sefer Va-Yikra (ad loc.) see also TJ Nedarim 9:4)

*Ben Azzai comes to teach that the ground of Jewish interpersonal ethics is not merely a social contract between disparate individuals but is rooted in the fact that every human being was created in the image of God. Hence, the end of Genesis 5:1 is the crucial key. That is the point of the Torah stating "This is the book of the descendants of Adam". It is precisely the fatherhood of God that is the ground of our duty to embrace the brotherhood of man. Hence, even if one has broken the social contract and harmed someone else, one dare not retaliate. Every human being is created in the image of God, and no one may ever forget it (David Horwitz)*

“God formed Adam out of dust from all over the world: yellow clay, white sand, black loam, and red soil. Therefore, no one can declare to any people that they

do not belong here since this soil is not their home.” (Pirkei dRabbi Eliezer, Tannaitic)

"... if any relationship between the universal Declaration and more generally the place of the rights of man in the modern world on the one hand, and the Decalogue as the first formulation of man's basic duties on the other hand does exist, this relation is not a formal one. Nevertheless, its reality is evident and must be traced back to the earliest periods of ancient history, when man, standing erect, mastering fire, and enjoying the benefits of written language, became aware of his innate dignity.

The expression: "God created Man in his own Image" characterizes both that *prise de conscience* (awareness) and the religious form which it adopted initially. Secularization followed. The dignity of man has been reaffirmed by philosophers, sociologists, and statesmen regardless of religious beliefs, and has been detached from religious credos or cults. What is incontestable is the permanence of the idea through the centuries and despite the most profound divergences of interpretation of the doctrine. " **From the Ten Commandments to the Rights of Man** by Rene Cassin

What are human rights?

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death.

They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life.

They can never be taken away, although they can sometimes be restricted – for example if a person breaks the law, or in the interests of national security.

These basic rights are based on shared values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights/what-are-human-rights>

[Human rights are the social conditions necessary for human dignity.](#)

“It would seem that the Jewish political tradition has no place for the modern notions of rights. When the question has been raised, some Jewish scholars have pointed out that rights are a foreign import into Jewish legal and political discourse. One of the chief arguments made along these lines is that in Judaism there are duties and anything that could be termed rights is strictly derivative from these duties ....Proof of this is that there are a number of ready-made terms for duty, most obviously *hovah* a debt, but there is no real term for a “right”. The closest term that comes to mind for the concept of right is *zechut*, (hence the

modern phrase zechuyot enoshiyot) but in its original rabbinic setting, a zechut is a privilege that is an entitlement. It is not what a person “holds” as much as it is what a person has been granted – and by implication, what can be revoked. The same is true of the term “reshut” (permission) which could be defined as that which has not yet been legislated....nevertheless the term that does correspond to rights is a “cry” “tsa’aqah” in the language of scripture (see Job 19:7), or a claim “ta’anah” in the language of the Rabbis.(Mishnah Ketubot 13:4) (David Novak in introduction to "Covenantal Rights, a Study in Jewish Political Theory)

**Isaiah 42:6-8**

(6) I the Eternal in My grace, have summoned you, And I have grasped you by the hand. I created you, and appointed you A covenant people, a light of nations— Opening eyes deprived of light, Rescuing prisoners from confinement, From the dungeon those who sit in darkness. I am the Eternal, that is My name; I will not yield My glory to another, Nor My renown to idols.

ישעיהו מ"ב:ו'-ח'

(ו) אָנִי יְהוָה קְרָאתִיךָ בְצַדִּיק וְאַתְּמוֹק  
 בְּיָדֶיךָ וְאַצְרָרְךָ וְאַתְּמַנְנֶנּוּ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוֹר  
 גּוֹיִם: (ז) לְפָקֶחַ עֵינַיִם עֲוֹרוֹת לְהוֹצִיא  
 מִמִּסְגָּר אֲסִיר מִבַּיִת כְּלֹא לְשָׁבִי חֲשׂוֹד:  
 (ח) אָנִי יְהוָה הוּא שְׁמִי וְכְבוֹדִי לֹא חָרַר  
 לְאֲתָתָן וְתַהֲלֹתַי לְפָסִילִים:

**Isaiah 58:6-8**

No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, And to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin. Then shall your light burst through like the dawn And your healing spring up quickly; Your Vindicator shall march before you, The Presence of the Eternal shall be your rear guard.

ישעיהו נ"ח:ו'-ח'

(ו) הֲלוֹא זֶה צֹמֵם אֲבֹתְרָהוּ פִתְחֵם  
 חֲרָצְבוֹת לְשַׁע הַתֵּר אֲגַדְוֹת מוֹטֵה וְשִׁלַּח  
 רְצוּצִים חֲפָשִׁים וְכָל־מוֹטֵה תִּנְתְּקוּ: (ז)  
 הֲלוֹא פָרַס לָרֵעַב לַחֲמֶה וְעַנְיִים מְרוֹדִים  
 תָּבִיא בַּיִת כִּי־תִרְאֶה עָרֶם וְכִסִּיתוּ  
 וּמִבְשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם: (ח) אֵז וּבִקְעַע  
 כִּשְׁחָר אוֹרְךָ וְאַרְכָּתֶךָ מִהֲרָה תִצְמַח  
 וְהִלָּךְ לְפָנֶיךָ צְדָקָה כְּבוֹד יְהוָה יֵאֲסָפֶךָ:

**Deuteronomy 10:17-19**

For the Eternal your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the

דברים י':י"ז-י"ט

(יז) כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהֵי

great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favour and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing.— You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

הַאֱלֹהִים וְאֲדֹנֵי הָאֲדֹגִים הָאֵל הַגָּדֹל  
הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִשָּׂא פְנִים וְלֹא  
יִקַּח שֹׁחַד: (יח) עֹשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט יְתוֹם  
וְאֶלְמָנָה וְאֹהֵב גֵּר לְתַת לוֹ לֶחֶם וְשִׂמְלָה:  
(יט) וְאָהַבְתֶּם אֶת־הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הֵייתֶם  
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

**Deuteronomy 16:18-20**

You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Eternal your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Eternal your God is giving you.

דברים ט"ז:י"ח-כ'

(יח) שֹׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֶּן־לָהֶם בְּכָל־  
שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה אֲלֵיךָ נָתַן לָךְ  
לְשִׁבְטֶיךָ וְשֹׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעָם מִשְׁפָּט־צְדָק:  
(יט) לֹא־תִטֶּה מִשְׁפָּט לֹא תִכִּיר פָּנִים  
וְלֹא־תִקַּח שֹׁחַד כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יַעֲוֹר עֵינַי  
חֹכְמִים וְיִסְלַף דְּבַר־י צְדִיקִים: (כ) צְדָק  
צְדָק תִּרְדֹּף לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה וְיִרְשַׁת אֶת־  
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהִנֶּה אֲלֵיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: (ס)

God's creation of human beings in the 'image of God (*Tzelem Elohim*)' appears three times in the Bible (Genesis I :26-28; 5: 1-3; 9:6), although the term *Tzelem* appears even more often in a negative context, referring to idolatry. The biblical word '*kavod*,' which can be translated as dignity, honour, or glory, stems from a common Semitic root meaning 'heavy' - similar to the Latin "gravitas"....The concept of dignity is initially introduced in the Bible as an attribute of God. Moses asks God to see his '*kavod*', and God responds by agreeing to show Moses his back (Exodus 16:7). ....While the term *kavod* appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible, applied both to humans and to God, the Bible gives no precise definition over what constitutes the dignity of either. *Kavod* as 'dignity' is not simply an attribute shared with God, but an attribute bestowed upon the human being by God, according to Psalm 8:6: 'You have crowned him (man) with glory and honour (*kavod v 'hadar*).' Although not always explicitly evoked, human dignity hovers over biblical thought, including the prophetic injunctions against injustice and economic exploitation, and also the Levitical proscriptions regarding incest. In all of these cases, it is the physical body that' is viewed as

most vulnerable to violations of dignity.

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A Rabbinic prohibition is always and everywhere superseded for the sake of human dignity. And even though we are explicitly enjoined in the Torah not to depart from the Sages' teachings either to the right or to the left, this negative precept itself is set aside in the interests of human dignity. [translation by Rabbis for Human Rights] Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kilayim 10:29

דבר שאיסורו מדבריהם הרי הוא נדחה מפני כבוד הבריות בכל מקום, ואע"פ שכתוב בתורה לא תסור מן הדבר הרי לאו זה נדחה מפני כבוד הבריות.

### Berakhot 19b:9

The Gemara cites an additional proof from a *baraita*: **Come and hear: Great is human dignity, as it overrides a prohibition in the Torah.**

ברכות י"ט ב:ט'

תא שמע: גדול כבוד הבריות שדוחה [את] לא תעשה שבתורה.

### Pirkei Avot 2:10

(10) They [each] said three things: Rabbi Eliezer said: Let the honour of your friend be as dear to you as your own; And be not easily provoked to anger;

משנה אבות ב':י'

(י) הם אמרו שלשה דברים. רבי אליעזר אומר, יהי כבוד חבריך קביב עליך כשליך, ואל תהי נוח לכעס. ושוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך.

### Pirkei Avot 4:1

(1) Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from every man, as it is said: "From all who taught me have I gained understanding" (Psalms 119:99). Who is mighty?

משנה אבות ד':א'

(א) בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר (תהלים קיט) מכל מלמדי השכלתי כי עדותיך שיחה לי.

He who subdues his [evil] inclination, as it is said: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city” (Proverbs 16:3). Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot, as it is said: “You shall enjoy the fruit of your labours, you shall be happy and you shall prosper” (Psalms 128:2) “You shall be happy” in this world, “and you shall prosper” in the world to come. Who is he that is honoured? He who honours his fellow human beings as it is said: “For I honour those that honour Me, but those who spurn Me shall be dishonoured” (I Samuel 2:30).

איזהו גבור, הכובש את יצרו, שנאמר (משלי טז) טוב ארך אפים מגבור ומשל ברוחו מלכד עיר. איזהו עשיר, השמח בקלקו, שנאמר (תהלים קכח) גיע כפיה כי תאכל אשריה וטוב לה. אשריה, בעולם הזה. וטוב לה, לעולם הבא. איזהו מכבד, המכבד את הבריות, שנאמר (שמואל א ב) כי מכבדי אכבד ובני יקליו:

**Mishnah Chagigah 2:1**

...And whoever takes no thought for the honour of his creator, it would have been better had he not come into the world.

משנה חגיגה ב' א'

(... וְכַל שֶׁלֹא חָס עַל כְּבוֹד קוֹנוֹ, רָאוּי לוֹ שֶׁלֹא בָּא לְעוֹלָם:

**Btselem Elohim:** Human Dignity Derives from Divine Origins of Human Being  
 Traditional Jewish literature employs the term *kvod ha-briot* (the dignity of created beings), alluding to the Creator as the source of human dignity and grounding the requirement to protect human dignity in the divine origins of the human being. From its foundations, our tradition grants consummate value to the human being, as in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis: ‘*Na’aseh adam b’tsalmenu,*’ ‘Let us make the human being in Our image’ (Gen. 1:26).  
 Both biblically and post-biblically, the word *kavod* itself harbours multiple meanings. In some contexts, the tradition demands special *kavod* for designated groups of people: the king; scholars and the elderly; one’s parents (*kibud av v’em*) and community (*kvod ha-tzibbur*).  
 The term *kvod ha-briot*—on the other hand—signals a form of unqualified, universal respect for human beings as such, intrinsic to their existence as human beings, whether old or young, sick or healthy, *tzaddik* (righteous person) or *rasha* (criminal), independent of social status, identity, or context.  
 Halakhic sources concur that *kvod ha-briot* is one of the overarching values of

Jewish tradition;

"The meaning of **kvod ha-adam** [human dignity] is to not degrade and debase the image of God in the human being. ... The halakhah adopts more strictness in relation to the sort of harm in which there is degradation and debasement of the divine image – for example, conducting a strip search in which someone's clothing is removed publicly. Furthermore, [Jewish tradition] finds that it is preferable not to humiliate or degrade someone publicly even if they have transgressed a rabbinic prohibition and it is well known publicly, and some say even if he has transgressed a Biblical prohibition. [From Rabbis for Human Rights website [www.rhr-na.org/files/Human%20Dignity%20Weintraub\\_0.pdf](http://www.rhr-na.org/files/Human%20Dignity%20Weintraub_0.pdf)]

**Menachem Alon, Israeli Supreme Court Justice**

[In Judaism] we often use the phrase 'human dignity' (*kavod ha-adam*) and 'respect for creations' (*kavod ha-beriyot*) interchangeably because they are one and the same. 'Respect for mankind' is in fact respect for all created beings as we were all created in the image of God.

מנחם אלון  
...לעתים קרובות, במקום הביטוי "כבוד האדם" בא הביטוי "כבוד הבריות". והלא דבר אחד הוא. "כבוד הבריות" פירושו כבודם של הנבראים, של כל הנברא בצלם אלוקים

**Malachi 2:10**

(10) Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we break faith with one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?

מלאכי ב':י'  
(י) הָלוֹא אָב אֶחָד לְכֻלָּנוּ הָלוֹא אֵל אֶחָד בָּרָאָנוּ מִדּוֹעַ נִבְּגַד אִישׁ בְּאֶחָיו לְחַלֵּל בְּרִית אֲבֹתֵינוּ:

("Rabbinic Judaism uses the expression, '*kavod ha-adam*'; dignity (or honour) of the person, when speaking of the dignity of individuals, usually Jews, and applies the broader term, '*kavod ha-briot*', dignity of created beings, to all human beings in the collective, including Gentiles and some- times animals as well.....Within classical rabbinic texts, the inherent dignity of all human beings is occasionally affirmed, while at the same time recognizing that dignity requires affirmation, particularly in cases when dignity might not be automatically conveyed. That is, dignity is both an essential, intrinsic aspect of being human, while at the same time it is created through appropriate behaviour

and societal acknowledgment. Dignity may be inviolable, but it is also dependent upon recognition and action by others to be brought into existence. The intrinsic dignity of human beings is established by the fundamental conviction that humans were not only created by God, but were created to bring honor to God. The earliest stratum of rabbinic literature the Mishnah, states: 'All that God created in His world He created exclusively for His *kavod* (honour or glory)' (M Avot 6:11). Indeed, God's love of humanity is exemplified in the creation of human beings as images of God, according to a statement in the Mishnah (M Avot 3:14). Moreover, the dignity of others should be considered as important as one's own: 'Let the honour of your fellow human being be as precious to you as your own' (M Avot 2:10).....**Jewish law and tradition recognize that dignity is conveyed (or not) and is thus dependent upon human will and human actions. Actions that convey dignity are essential requirements of Jewish law, which recognizes that dignity is received from acts performed by other people, and also that the act of conveying dignity to another person also brings dignity to the one who is conveying it. In that sense, dignity is not fixed, but depends upon actions and recognition; it is created through performance''**

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