

# Being Divine

**What does it mean to be created in the image of G-d? What makes humans special, different than the rest of creation? What gives humans their essence?**

**In this source sheet, we will explore a number of possible Jewish answers to this question.**

**By being able to recognize the divine within us, we will be able to show gratitude for it.**



Multiple times in the verses of Genesis that describe the creation of the world, human beings are described as being created in the Divine Image:

**Genesis 1:26-27**

**בראשית א, כו-כז**

“And G-d said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” And G-d created man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them.”

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-לֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיִּבְרָא אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱ-לֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

**Genesis 5:1**

**בראשית ה, א**

“This is the record of Adam’s line. When G-d created man, He made him in the likeness of G-d.”

זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדוֹת אָדָם בְּיוֹם בָּרָא אֱ-לֹהִים אָדָם בְּדְמוּת אֱ-לֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ:

**Genesis 9:6**

**בראשית ט, ו**

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, By man shall his blood be shed; For in His image did G-d make man.”

שֹׁפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפֹּךְ כִּי בְצֶלֶם אֱ-לֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם:



**Jewish thinkers throughout the ages tried to understand what exactly the essence of a Divine Image is. What is it referring to?**

**We will share four classical interpretations:**

### 1. Control

Rabbi Saadia Gaon, on his interpretation of the verse “in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26) defines the Divine Image as control or dominance. This domination is clearly stated in the verses that follow: “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” (v 28). According to this interpretation, G-d created the world and controls it — and gave humans some of this control — to be able to dominate nature and use it for human needs.

- *When have you felt grateful for having control and the ability to “make things happen”?*
- *What responsibility does that carry for you?*

According to the Midrash, along with this control comes responsibility, and the sages taught that at the same time, the following warning was given:

“When the Blessed Holy One created the first human, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: ‘Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And all that I have created, it was for you that I created it. Pay attention that you do not corrupt and destroy My world: if you corrupt it, there is no one to repair it after you.’ ”

(Kohelet Rabbah, Parasha 7:13)

### 2. Creativity

A different interpretation acknowledges the dominance that humans were given over nature, but holds that this dominance is meant for one goal: to create and make. In this version, the Divine Image is the human ability to create. Unlike G-d who can create something from nothing, humans can create something new from something existing. This is the divine gift of creativity.

“...the term ‘image of G-d’ in the first account refers to man’s inner charismatic endowment as a creative being. Man’s likeness to G-d expresses itself in man’s striving and ability to become a creator. Adam the first who was fashioned in the image of G-d, was blessed with great drive for creative activity and immeasurable resources for the realization of this goal.”

(Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, p. 12)

- *What are your G-d-given gifts of creativity for which you are grateful?*
- *In what realms of your life do you implement creative solutions, create new things, and influence the world around you?*



### 3. Knowledge

According to Maimonides, the Divine in humans is actually their intellect and the ability to think, perceive, attain knowledge, and think abstractly.

“The soul of all flesh is the form which G-d gave unto him, and the high intelligence which is found in the soul of man is the form of the man who is perfectly intelligent. Concerning this form it is said in the Torah: ‘Let us make man in our form after our image’ (Gen. 1.26), as if saying that he should possess a form which knows and attains the Intelligences which have no body... but it is concerning the Intelligence which is the form of the soul.”

(Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Foundations of the Torah, 4:8)

- *What gifts of knowledge and perception can you identify in yourself and in others, for which you are grateful?*

### 4. Free Will

Our final interpretation posits that the Divine Image is actually the ability to have choice and free will. This is described clearly by Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk:

“Let us make man in our image: The image of G-d is free will, without any natural external inclination, only from free will and intellect. G-d's knowledge does not impinge on free will, because his knowledge stems not (in the same way as the) knowledge of man which comes from his senses, rather it is He alone who perceives, as is explained in the Rambam. Behold it is not in our ability to understand how this works...

- *When have you implemented your ability for free will?*
- *Can you imagine a world in which you did not have freedom of choice?*

Rather, this we know: Free will is a condensation of G-dliness, because G-d provides place for his creations to do as they choose, and removed from their actions, the decree and the decision on an individual level... The Torah speaks in the way that people speak; let us leave a place for man's personal choice, that he won't be forced in any of his actions, and in the obligation of his thoughts, to be free to do good or evil as he desires. He will be able to do things against his more natural state, and against those things which are straight in the eyes of G-d...”

(Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, Meshech Chochma, Bereshit, 7)

- *What choices are you grateful for?*



*Finally, consider each of the four interpretations.*

- *Which one feels most divine to you?*

- *How do you express your gratitude for it?*