

Communicating The Divinity of Yeshua to Our Jewish People
“Between A Rock and A Hard Place”
by Rabbi David Rosenberg

Borough Park Symposium 2010

A great diversity of our Jewish people want to know and understand the mystery of God and the divinity of Yeshua. But...Messianic Judaism is often stuck in the middle of a dilemma, living in the unique Jewish space that I call: **“between a rock and a hard place.”**

The Rock is the historical Christian world in all the diversity of their theological views in opposition to the The Hard Place, which is our Jewish world with a very different set of theological views. Both communities claim the exclusive position as the people of God. Our Messianic Jewish community lives precariously between the Rock and the Hard Place. In response to J’han Moskowitz paper on Post modernism, you can also refer to this as the the “soft” hard Rock and the “somewhat” hard place. Nevertheless, since we are intimately related to both worlds, we find ourselves in many ways struggling between, a little bit uncomfortable, and completely crushed. The issue of Yeshua’s Divinity is one of the more uncomfortable compartments in this environment between *“a rock and a hard place.”* Resolving our difficulties with one side of this equation only causes greater difficulty with the other side. This leaves us with the daunting task of solving both sides of the equation. Anything less will simply continue the pain.

OUR GOAL:

We must reframe our Messianic faith to make it clearly biblical and relevant in both Jewish space and with the rest of the Body of Messiah. Although the task may seem impossible, God answers us with the same words He spoke to Abraham our Father. *“Is anything too hard for Adonai?”* (Gen.18:14, CJB). The Borough Park Symposium has taken on this impossible task by compelling our Messianic community to gather together in the spirit of Isaiah 1:18, *“Come now let us reason together!”*

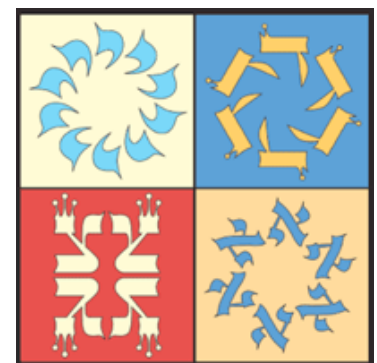
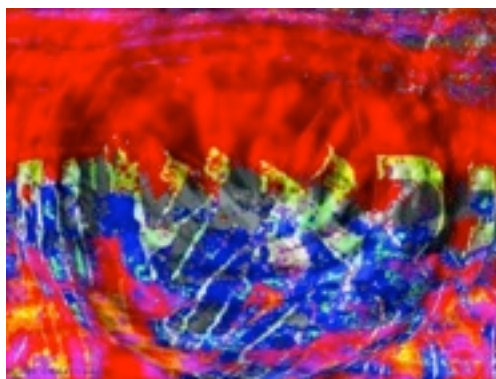
As I look over the papers being presented it is clear that we are all deeply impacted by our personal interactions. For Mitch Glaser it’s a Lebuitcher Rabbi in the 70’s at Brooklyn college, for Jhan Moskowitz, a conversation on a plane to Israel. Many years ago, my brother Jan and I had a conversation with a Rabbi in, of all places, Borough Park. Our youngest brother attended an Orthodox synagogue there and challenged us to talk with his Rabbi so he could help us make T’shuvah. After some time the Rabbi became a bit agitated with our faith in Yeshua and our desire to live an observant Jewish life. When he asked why we were wearing *kippot* and not *tzi tzis*, we both replied in unison, *“your right, we should be*

wearing them!” Jan quickly asked the Rabbi, why he had no blue techelet in his tzi tzis? He closed his eyes and put up his hands and said, “wait, wait, wait,” he paused for a moment and said, “*you really aren’t required to wear them.*” As he danced on his own contradiction, He said, “*You’re dangerous, because you are trying to build a bridge that should never be built!*” He was afraid that if we built such a bridge, people would be able to walk across from both sides, to actually communicate with one another, and that made him very uncomfortable. “*you wanna convert, convert! But, you can’t be both!*”

The documents of this symposium are passionate papers written with the singular hope of solving “*the impossible dream*” of bridging the theological gap between our Jewish and Christian worlds. Our messianic Jewish community has been given the impossible task of building a bridge that no one wanted. When John Roebling set out to build the Brooklyn bridge they said “*it couldn’t be done.*” To accomplish this he had to find a way to anchor both towers on the solid bedrock found under the layers of mud below the East River. He had to invent the cables to make it work. Unfortunately he also discovered “*the benz,*” but these are the risks of living between a rock and a hard place.

Trude Weiss-Rosmarin (author of *Judaism & Christianity: The Differences*) said, “*The chief fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity is that the former is committed to pure and uncompromising monotheism and the latter subscribes to the belief in the Trinitarian nature of the Divine being.*”

So, a gulf exists between Jewish and Christian ideas about the mystery of God, Messiah and His Divinity. But, why is the gap so large and how did it get that way? Below are examples of (observant) Jewish art which are intrinsically tied to the Hebrew language and the Hebrew alphabet creatively used to avoid the transgressing of making a “graven Image.”



How Christian images in art shaped Jewish perceptions: “Not a true monotheism.”

The discussion and dispute over the Divinity of Yeshua has a long history! Below, a depiction of the Trinity by Domenico Beccafumi (left), and an earlier effort at the Borough Park Symposium, called *the Disputation over the Trinity* by del Sarto (Church fathers working out their differences).



- Holy Trinity,
- St. Jerome, and two Saints,
- The ANDREA del Castagno

Nearly 18 centuries of wrong images made Yeshua *appear* to be one of *three Gods* - a radical departure from the ancient Jewish perceptions of the Invisible G-d of Israel. Somehow, the history of Christian art and the doctrine of the trinity put us in the uncomfortable position of explaining the divinity of Yeshua to our Jewish people as “an old man, a young man, (a baby), and a bird.

Below, a painting called the *Tricephalus* (three fused heads, painted by an unknown netherlandish artist). As if a three headed G-d isn't a problem, we then have to explain why "the old man," "the young man," and "the bird" are crowning the virgin Mary as if she is some how joining the Godhead?



Is it any wonder that our Jewish people ask such questions?

- "Does G-d have an image?"
- "G-d is invisible and no one has seen Him!"
- "Jews don't believe in the Trinity, we believe in **one G-d, not three!**"
- "Jews don't believe in a divine Messiah"
- "If you claim that Messiah is G-d, then you are guilty of making G-d into Man! You are an idol worshipper"

**We need to Dispell Jewish and Christian myth about God's Image
The Dichotomy of the invisible God verses the visible God.**

Jewish and Christian perceptions about Gods image developed over the centuries widening the gap of perception between Judaism and Christianity between the visible and invisible God. These mythical views about God developed into competing positions. The Jewish world defined itself as the people who worship the invisible God while the Christian world countered with the visible god in the person of Jesus Christ. As Daniel Nessim discussed it in his paper, he said, "2000 years of dogmatic formulation which lack a Jewish sensitivity and reading of the scriptures, and theological tradition seen as hostile and other, have made communication of the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in the Body of Yeshua nigh on impossible to communicate. Nevertheless as Jewish believers in Yeshua we have never shrugged from the impossible." Together, we can "dream the impossible dream" of building a bridge in the bedrock of God's revealed word, and with God's help, clearly communicate the biblical truths that have transformed all our lives.

*I am agreement with both Daniel Nessim, Richard Harvey and the many fine papers presented at this symposium, that our answers to this dichotomy must be based in the Tenach and the Brit Hadashah. I will limit my discussion to presenting what I believe to be **forensic evidence that God has an image.***

*I have, like many of you, argued and discussed the issue again and again to only walk away frustrated. In recent years I began to use power point presentations in my sermons and soon realized that the right picture can indeed be worth a thousand words. The issue of the **invisible God** verses **the visible God** was the big, frustrating “**either, or**” of our apologetic process. So, I set out to explain the big “**both, and**” apologetic, to show how God is both visible and invisible at the same time.*

**Important Biblical Terms about God & His Image
God is “One” (Echad) as evidenced in the Shema**

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

Hear oh Israel the Lord our God the Lord is on (echad)

Important Biblical Terms about God & His Image in the Tenach & New Covenant

1) The Image of God

Gen. 1:27 “So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.” (CJB)

2Cor. 4:4 “They do not come to trust because the god of the ‘olam hazeh has blinded their minds, in order to prevent them from seeing the light shining from the Good News about the glory of the Messiah, who is the image of God.” (CJB)

James 3:9 “With it we bless ADONAI, the Father & with it we curse people, who were made in the image of God.” (CJB)

2) The Image of God & The Invisible God

Colosians 1:15 CJB, “He is the visible image of the invisible God. He is supreme over all creation,”

Colossians 2:9 “For in him, bodily, lives the fullness of all that God is.”

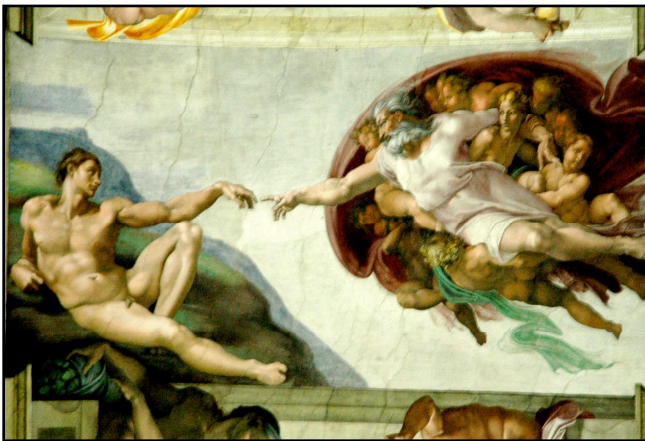
Colossians 2:15 “He is the visible image of the invisible God. He is supreme over all creation, 16 because in connection with him were created all things — in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, lordships, rulers or authorities — they have all been created through him and for him. 17 He existed before all things, and he holds everything together.

**Being made in his image and likeness, makes us like Him:
We are the Forensic evidence that God has an image!**

Like God, we are one part visible and two parts invisible. My body is the visible image of the otherwise invisible David. As a Rabbi I have been present many times when some one was passing away. When my mother passed away I volunteered to “watch the body” as we waited for the funeral home to come for her body. Although I watched for over an hour it was clear that the mom I knew had left the room the moment she died. But, I didn’t see her leave the room, but she left. The human spirit is invisible and so is the human soul. We are two parts invisible and one part visible. God the Father is invisible and so is the Holy Spirit. So, if Colosians is correct that **“in him dwells the fullness of the God head bodily”** then we may gain some new understanding about this profound statement concerning the visible image of Messiah and the invisible image of the Father; **“Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it will be enough for us.” 9 Yeshua replied to him, “Have I been with you so long without your knowing me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” (John 14:8)**

Of course, the New Covenant scriptures are easy. But the strength of our argument is best made in Genesis 1:27. Here we are able to examine the context of “Let us” language as God speaks within the Godhead. Despite the Jewish commentaries that insist on this as a reference to angels, we can prove otherwise by a simple examining a few related passages in the Torah.

1. “Let us” language in Genesis 1:27 “Let us make mankind in our image and likeness.”



Who is speaking to whom?

Does God the Father have an image?

Are angels actually present in the story?

2. “Let us” language in Genesis 11:5-9, The Tower of Babel

Who came down?

Are angels in the story?

Who is speaking to whom?



3. Is “Let us” Language in the text? Genesis 18: Three visitors to Abrams tent



Gen. 18:17 ADONAI said, “Should I hide from Avraham what I am about to do, 18 inasmuch as Avraham is sure to become a great and strong nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by him? 19 For I have made myself known to him, so that he will give orders to his children and to his household after him to keep the way of ADONAI and to do what is right and just, so that ADONAI may bring about for Avraham what he has promised him.”

- Is Adonai speaking in the first person? *Yes!*
- Are Angels present? *Yes!*
- Who is He speaking about? *Avram!*
- Who is he speaking too? *The Two Angels!*

So, we find a rule:

- In the presence of mankind and angels, God speaks in the first person. “I am Adonai”
- When God is alone - He speaks within Himself using: “Let Us” language!

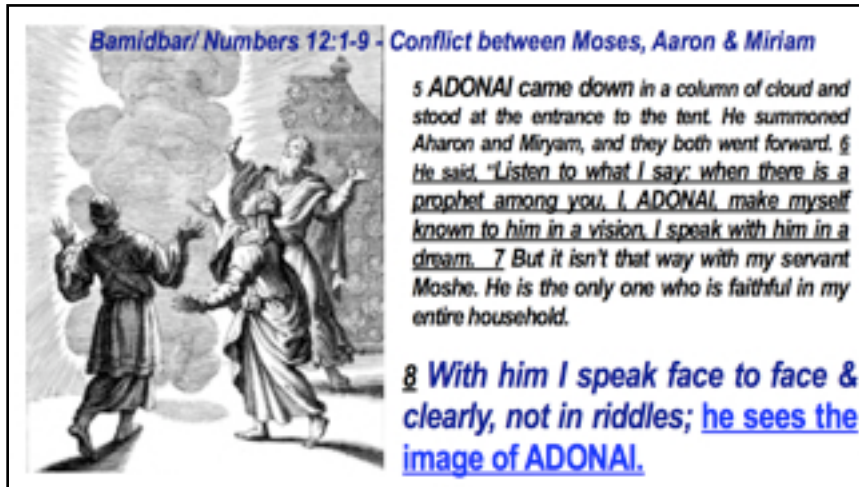
4. Is “let us” language present in the text? Genesis 28:13 Jacobs Ladder



- There are many angels ascending and descending “Jacob’s Ladder.”
- Man (Jacob) is present in the passage.
- Adonai is present in the text .

In the presnce of mankind and angels, God speaks in the first person. “I am Adonai”

5. God's opinion about His Image. Language about God's Image in Numbers 12:5-9



For some it is a bit uncomfortable to say that no one will ever see the Father. When I recently taught this material in another Messianic Synagogue some attenders expressed a disappointment over their expectations about finally seeing the father in eternity. Phillip had similar expectations! I believe this shows how deeply many of us have been affected by powerful images and perceptions from the Christian world and numerous expressions of the Trinity. But our responsibility is to make the message clear for our people. Based on a thorough study of the Tenach that is far more comprehensive than this paper, I believe we can reconcile the invisible God that is embraced by so many of our Jewish people by showing them that He is both visible and invisible. In addition, there is so much more we can say about the intentional purpose of God in making mankind in His image and likeness. But how we communicate these truths can be dangerous.

This is the nature of living between a Rock and a Hard place, when we seek to communicate in Jewish space within Jewish concepts we get crushed by the Christian world and in seeking to please the Christian world by giving ascent to "improbable" and incompatible trinitarian imagery we then become crushed in the Hard place of Jewish space **while all of Jewish space is watching!**

I believe we as the messianic community have a mutual mandate to bring a vision for reframing Jewish space and Jewish theology while at the same time challenging the Christian World to reframe both their identity and theology within Jewish space as well.

Conclusion

Without us the Rock and the Hard Place will continue as two ships passing in the night. occasionally they will collide bringing much damage to both. For a season we have to endure the uncomfortable and precarious place of living between a Rock and a Hard Place until we are fully embraced by both.

The tricephalus, the old man, the baby and the bird, along with the triplet images of god must fall by the way side as other false images and weak metaphores. Just like water, steam, and ice, or, the egg shell, the egg white and the yoke. They are unacceptable in Jewish space and theology. and despite whatever good biblical thinking was established at Nicea and Chalecedon their creedal formulas end up looking crippled in the context of the history of Christian art that claims to represent them. Long before any Jewish person seeks to investigate the beliefs of these famous councils they will have been exposed to countless formulations of the Trinity that most famous paintings in the world represent.

Our Modern Messianic movement must be willing to occupy this dangerous space for the sake of our Jewish People and the Body of Messiah. It is a bridge that only we can build with God's help! Many will still say, *"it can't be done."* But, *"this is our quest"* to find a way to communicate the good news to our Jewish world. The Messianic Jewish community is the only bedrock on which the historic towers of Jewish and Christian faith can stand together!

"Remaining always ready to give a reasoned answer to anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you - yet with humility and fear"