

**“Siri - Show me a picture of God”
Anu Amekha**

The mahzor is filled with creative ideas/ suggestions about how to imagine God. And I think we should take this an invitation to get creative in our own imagination. I’ll tell you why by way of a story.

Recently, my son got a hold of my iphone and was asking Siri all sorts of questions. They think Siri has the answers to everything and I try to remind them, that Siri has the answers to lots of things, but not the most important things. I looked up from whatever I was doing when I heard him pose the question, “Siri - show me a picture of God.”

What made him ask? The theological curiosity of a four-year-old! And why was I so upset when this painting from 1515 by Cima de Conegliano appeared on the screen?



***God the Father* (represented by an old patriarch with white hair) by [Cima da Conegliano](#), c. 1515**

I shouldn’t have gotten too concerned. After all, he’s only 4 and this was in a series of “Siri show me a picture of” questions that included - a JetBlue airplane taking off, Spongebob, and rainbow toilet (which

magically, the Internet has a picture of a rainbow toilet). But I was panicked when he came over to me, showed me the picture, and said, “Abba, this is what God looks like.”

Now, what I should have said was, “What makes you think that’s what God looks like?” (He probably would have answered, “because Siri told me so.”) What I did say was: “No, that’s not what God looks like!”

As with all theological questions, the questions are better than the answers. His question is the same as Moses’ who pleads with God in Exodus 34 – “ הראיני נא את כבודך – show me Your glory.” I want to see your face. I want to know you. Moses, the only prophet in history who knew God, “face to face” is curious about what God actually looks like.

Our tradition treats God’s appearance and essence as a mystery. God cannot be seen or known fully. God, in the mahzor, is compared to hundreds of different images - a rock, a shepherd, a lover, a fountain, a potter, an artist, the silence after the storm, and yes, a father, and a king too. God is like all of these things and God is none of these things. Perhaps by describing God in such diverse enigmatic terms, the tradition is also giving us permission to be a range of our possible selves. If God is infinitely multitudinous, complex, and contradictory, then we, who are created in God’s image, are also diverse, enigmatic, complex, containing multitudes - both one from another and within each of us.

“You can’t be what you can’t see.” This is a common phrase used about the underrepresentation of women and minorities in media and in visible positions of leadership. Young girls look to media and subtly internalize the range of things they can become. In one year, the number of girls enrolled in archery programs spiked. It’s no coincidence that “Hunger Games” and “Brave” - both movies with

strong female leads who are archers - had come out that same year. You can't be what you can't see.

And if this picture is what you think God is, then what does it mean for the godliness of young children who won't grow up to look like this? My hair won't ever look like that? Does that mean that I'm any less created in God's image than the men with long flowing hair in the room? I hope not.

This experience inspired me to write a letter to the Apple company to see if they'd join me in correcting my son's and other's misperceptions about what God looks like. Can I share it with you? Here it goes:

Dear Mr. Cook:

I'm a big fan of your products and have been a happy customer for many years now.

I understand that you have preprogrammed responses to some commonly asked questions that show Siri to be wise, witty, and funny.

For example, if you ask Siri

"What is the best phone?"

She will answer you:

"The one you are holding."

If you ask Siri, "will you marry me?"

She will tell you

"My End User Agreement does not cover marriage. My apologies."

I have a few suggestions for the coders who work at your company, should someone ask (as my 4 year old did recently), “Siri, show me a picture of God.”

Perhaps Siri could paraphrase Exodus 33:20

כי לא יראני האדם וחי

She could say, I’m sorry I can’t do that, “because a person cannot see [God] and live.”

Or maybe you prefer the conundrum in God’s response to Moses in Exodus 3:14 when God says:

אהיה אשר אהיה

But then you might run into a translation problem. I can advise you if you want to go this route.

Everet Fox translates it: I will be there howsoever I will be there (whatever that means)

The Stone Chumash says: “I shall be as I shall be”

King James famously renders it “I am that I am”

JPS recognizes that any translation wouldn’t capture the complexity and mystery of the phrase in Hebrew and so they simply transliterate it writing ehyeh asher ehyeh in english letters

I’m partial to Robert Alter’s translation “I will be who I will be.”

Or maybe you could instruct Siri to tell us, look into the eyes of the closest human next to you. There you’ll find God, in the face of another. Just like Jacob said when he reunited with his brother Esau in Genesis 33:

For to see your face is like seeing the face of God.

In my humble opinion, any of those options would be preferable to the picture of Cima da Conegliano as beautiful as it may be. And it would go a lot farther in the theological education of my very impressionable son.

Thank you for your consideration.

**With Blessings,
Rabbi Ari Lucas**

Post Script

I brought this picture home today in preparation for synagogue and my son found it. And he asked, "Abba is that God?" And I thought, "Oh no! I'm making it worse." But I had gotten better at how I should respond. I said to him, "You know what? This is what someone a long time ago thought God looked like. Isn't it beautiful? What do you think God looks like?" And thank God, he has great teachers here at the CAI ECC because he said, "God is inside of me." And I said, "I think that's right."