Reflection on Shekinah for 18th May 2022 -prepared by Fiona

Opening words: This week, we are meeting in person. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us', we meditate at 7.30 pm on Wednesday in the prayer room of Wisdom Centre. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob and Hazel, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate, beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: Eternal God, through our meditation, may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence, may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, stability, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction:

Many have been inspired in the modern age by the image of Shekinah, emerging from the hidden depths of the Jewish psyche, changing as She is spoken, not only by the mystics, but by ordinary seekers longing for language for their own spiritual experience.

In this evening's meditation I am going to share with you a blog that I follow. Our reflection this week is attributed to Marg Mowczko from her recent article - *Shekinah: God's Immanent Presence*. Much like Wisdom, I have a fascination with Shekinah, a word not itself mentioned in the Bible but one which sounds exotic and spiritual. Marg writes that several Hebrew words used in relation to God are grammatically feminine. Ruach ("spirit"), chokmah ("wisdom"), and Shekinah ("dwelling, presence") are the three that are frequently mentioned in discussions on the feminine aspects of God. However, God is neither male or female, and the nouns ruach, chokmah, and Shekinah don't really tell us anything about God's gender. Yet God is described in the Bible with feminine and maternal imagery, as well as masculine and paternal imagery.

Shekinah Glory is thought by Jews to be a visible manifestation of God on earth, whose presence is portrayed through a natural occurrence. The word Shekinah is a Hebrew name meaning "dwelling" or "one who dwells." Shekinah Glory means "He caused to dwell," referring to the divine presence of God.

The word Shekinah is not in the Bible. It was first introduced by Jewish rabbis through literature in the period between the completion of the Old Testament and the onset of the New Testament.

The Shekinah as the "glory of the Lord" had dwelt in the tabernacle and then the temple (e.g., Exod 40:35; 2 Chron. 7:1). Christians believe that since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit dwells with God's people wherever they are, wherever they gather, and that God's people together constitute a new temple (Eph. 2:19-22; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5).

The etymology of "Shekinah" is from the Hebrew word shākan, which means"to reside or permanently stay." The rabbis used the term Shekinah to describe the following to the Jewish people:

- The presence of God amongst His people (Exodus 19:16-18; Exodus 40:34-38; I Kings 6:13)

- The glory of God dwelling in the Temple (2 Chronicles 7:1)
- How God dwells in the mountain (Psalm 68.16-18; Joel 3:17)

How is Shekinah Glory portrayed in the Bible? The divine presence of God on earth is depicted through the following:

- As a cloud (Exodus 24:16-18; Exodus 33:9; 1 Kings 8:10-13)

- As a pillar of smoke and fire (Exodus 13:21-22)

- As fire and a burning bush (Zechariah 2:5; Exodus 3:2)

Where is Shekinah Glory first mentioned in the Bible?

The first biblical account of Shekinah Glory is recorded in Exodus after the Israelites had left the shackles of slavery in Egypt. God appeared to them as a pillar of cloud and fire as they were camped at Etham. “By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” (Exodus 13:20-22)

Avoiding Anthropomorphism

In rabbinic texts, Shekinah is sometimes synonymous with the Holy Spirit. However, the word is employed as an indirect way to refer to God. It is used instead of the Hebrew word Elohim (“God”) and God’s name YHWH, and also instead of “face” and “presence” when used of the divine. This is especially the case in Bible verses where God is depicted as going somewhere or as doing something that humans might do. The rabbis wanted to avoid attributing human characteristics directly to God.[1]

Why does God not appear as a human in the Old Testament? When Moses pitched his tent outside of the Israelite camp in the wilderness to convene with God, the latter spoke to Moses face to face through a cloud as though speaking to a friend (Exodus 33:11).

However, when Moses asked to see God’s face, He denied Moses’ request, stating, “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). The glory of God was too great for human eyes to gaze upon and survive. Instead, God allowed Moses to stand in a cleft in a rock and see God’s back after He had passed by (Exodus 33:21-23).

What else does Shekinah Glory refer to? Not only is the holy manifestation of God portrayed through Shekinah Glory, it also entails the practice of honouring and praising God by exemplifying His glory.

“Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.” (1 Chronicles 16:24) “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)[2]

Examples of Shekinah Glory in the New Testament

The New Testament authors did not have the same concern about anthropomorphism. They tell us the astonishing story that God came in human form and did human things.

The divine presence of God is also found in the New Testament: “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”(Luke 2:9)

[1] https://margmowczko.com/shekinah-gods-immanent-presence/
[2] https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-is-the-meaning-of-shekinah-glory.html

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”(2 Corinthians 3:18)

2 Peter 1:17 recalls the Transfiguration of Jesus and seems to refer to the Shekinah as “the Majestic Glory”: “For he [Jesus] received honour and Shekinah from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Shekinah saying ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased!’” In the Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration, a bright cloud appears on a mountain and voice speaks (Matt. 17:5// Mark 9:7//Luke 9:34-35). Jesus is engulfed in, and receives, and is validated by the Shekinah.

The author of Hebrews more clearly indicates that God shares the Shekinah with Jesus, the Son.

The Son is the radiance of God’s Shekinah and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s Shekinah displayed in the face of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s Shekinah, are being transformed into his image from Shekinah to Shekinah, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

God’s Presence in the Future Age

In the second last chapter of the Bible, John describes a vision of the new heaven and the new earth, with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven. John then records the words of a voice which speaks from the throne.

In Revelation 21:10-11, the New Jerusalem is described as having God’s glory (Shekinah) and as being radiant as precious gems. This is because God’s presence, his dwelling, his Shekinah is there.

Look, God’s dwelling (skēnē) is with humanity, and he will dwell (skēnōsei) with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. Revelation 21:3-4

We are told that there is no need for a temple in the New Jerusalem because “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:22). Moreover, “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory (Shekinah) of God illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev. 21:23). In the last chapter of Revelation, John says, “Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). Maranatha!

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”(Revelation 21: 3)

In the New Testament, Jesus is the manifestation of Shekinah Glory. Jesus’ ministry is the ultimate encounter of Shekinah Glory that God has ever had with man on earth. “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.” (Colossians 2:9-10). Furthermore, Jesus was made to be both God and man in one person, in order to act as our High Priest, so that He could be the embodiment of the redemption of our sins.

“For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17)

Can we experience Shekinah Glory today?

Many Christians believe the separation of man from God was redeemed when Jesus paid the bond price for our sins with His blood on the Cross. I believe that even though Shekinah is not a biblical term it one among other descriptions and personifications used to describe God's divine and immanent presence on earth. it is connected with Jesus and the Holy Spirit and shares characteristics with Wisdom. Shekinah comes to life in the passages where Wisdom calls to humanity, perhaps Shekinah is an attribute of Wisdom to describe an indwelling. For believers, Shekinah is a wonderful comforting truth. God is with us.

Preparing for meditation

We will now enter a period of meditation, reflecting that we are both together in this room, joining with others meditating at home and participating in the silence at the heart of creation, connected to the mystery of all that is. Before beginning our meditation, you may wish to adjust your posture, you may wish to pay particular attention to the rhythm of your breath, taking a calming deep breath in through your nose, and a slow breath out, letting go fully. Then repeat this a few times. If you have a sacred word, you might notice its rhythm, perhaps noticing how your word is in time with the breath, or you may wish simply to focus on a candle or to follow the breath. We return to our meditation object or point of focus whenever we are aware of the mind wandering off, in a spirit of non-judgmental acceptance

We will meditate together for 25 minutes

After Meditation

Make for yourself a power spot
Bring you a spoon and a cooking pot
Bring air
Bring fire
Bring water
Bring earth
And you a new universe will birth…[3]

–Shekhinah Mountainwater in The Goddess Celebrates by Diane Stein

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…**Amen.**

Thank you for meditating with us; please join us again soon. Stay safe and well.



Our peaceful outdoor spaces promote wellbeing and are open to all, free of charge.

[3] https://goddesspriestess.com/2013/01/22/shekhinah-mountainwater/