

Shayla: What is the Shekinah?

Meforshim:

¹The word “Shekinah”² does not expressly appear in the Scriptures. When discussing the cloud that appeared in the tabernacle, indicating the presence of God, the Jewish rabbis would call it “the presence of G-d”. “Shekinah” comes from the verb “shakan”³ which means “to dwell or settle down”.⁴ So the etymology of “the dwelling or presence of God” is the grammatically feminine Hebrew word *Sh'ch'eenah*, or as we mispronounce it, Shekinah.



Another name for the Shekinah that many rabbis used was the "The Daughter of the Voice," or “God's Voice” (Heb. *Bat Kol*).

Therefore, because the term is consistently presented in the feminine, I will be using the feminine pronouns “she” or “her” rather than “it” to refer to the Shekinah. The reason for the personification will become clear shortly.

The Shekinah first appeared as our people left Egypt’s bondage and headed toward the Red Sea.

- **Exodus 13:20-22 HCSB** They set out from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. (21) The LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to lead them on their way during the day and in a pillar of fire to give them light at night, so that they could travel day or night. (22) The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people.

There seems to be evidence of teamwork between the cloud and the Angel of God.

- **Exodus 14:19-20 HCSB** Then the Angel of God, who was going in front of the Israelite forces, moved and went behind them. The pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and stood behind them. (20) It came between the Egyptian and Israelite forces. The cloud was there *in* the darkness, yet it lit up the night. So, neither group came near the other all night long.

The verse doesn’t say that the cloud IS the Angel of God; but instead, refers to them separately. First, the Angel of God⁵ moved to protect us, and then came the Shekinah.

The Shekinah was not an Israelite delusion, a form of self-imposed hallucination. The Egyptians, who were polytheists and the enemies of our people, saw her too and indicated a belief that there was a direct correlation between the menacing cloud and Yahweh.⁶

By the way, the pronoun “he” does not appear in the original text of verse 25 as it does in verses 4, 6, 7, and 8 of the same chapter. The English pronoun was added for “clarification” by the HCSB’s translators. I believe a better rendering would thus be “The Lord looked down on...threw into confusion...and caused the wheels...”

We next see the Shekinah indicating Yah’s presence on Mount Sinai (aka Mount Horeb), and bringing the good news of God’s mitzvot.⁷

¹ Source: http://www.geocities.com/glory_ark/tabernacleatsunset.jpg

² alternative transliterations Shekhinah, Shechinah, Shekina, Shechina, Schechinah, שכניה

³ Strong’s #7931

⁴ Genesis 9:27 “dwell in”; 14:13 “was at”; Psalm 37:3 “dwell in”; Jeremiah 33:16 “will dwell”

⁵ A theophany of the Son; aka Christophany; for further treatment see Theophany; or Angel of the Lord; or the sermon God Makes and Keeps Promises

⁶ Exodus 14:24-25

⁷ Exodus 24:15-18

As an interesting side note, the Shekinah did not appear until the people sanctified themselves to the Lord by being sprinkled by blood. Also, here too, we see a clear distinction between the Angel of the Lord, clearly identified as God yet existing in physical, visible form⁸ and the Shekinah that appeared five verses later.⁹ It is also important to remember that every time a Christophany appeared, the form was human and male.

Hashem used the Shekinah as a way of indicating His presence had arrived at the tent of meeting that was outside the camp; to let Moses and the people know He wanted to talk to them.¹⁰



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¹¹When we first built the tabernacle, the Shekinah descended, demonstrating both Yahweh's pleasure with our effort and His appropriation and sanctification of what was essentially nothing more than a big tent.¹²

By the way, even the word "tabernacle" is a variant of the word "shakan". In Hebrew, it is the word "mishkan". You can see its derivation in:

- [Psalms 132:4-5 HCSB](#) I will not allow my eyes to sleep or my eyelids to slumber (5) until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."

"Mishkan" can be referenced as Strong's #4908

and we can determine that it is also a feminine word in:

- [Psalms 46:4-5 HCSB](#) *There is a river--its streams delight the city of God, the holy dwelling place of the Most High. (5) God is within her; she will not be toppled. God will help her when the morning dawns.*

The Shekinah not only indicated Yahweh's presence among His people, but she also provided daily direction.¹³

"The Presence" in the New Covenant

Using the *middot* "binyan av" – analogy by common theme or concept – we find the following:

1. As we were led through the wilderness by the Shekinah, so Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.¹⁴
2. As the Shekinah arrived in order to indicate God's willingness to teach and counsel us, so the Spirit.¹⁵
3. As the Shekinah descended in the form of fire, so the Spirit.¹⁶ I believe this should also give us some insight into Moses' run in with a certain famous bush.¹⁷ The text says that the Angel of the Lord appeared "in" a flame, not "as" a flame.



⁸ Exodus 24:9-11

⁹ Exodus 24:15-16

¹⁰ Exodus 33:9-11

¹¹ Source: www.inspiredbooks.com/.../image002.jpg

¹² Exodus 40:34-35; Leviticus 16:16

¹³ Exodus 40:36-38; Numbers 9:17-23

¹⁴ Psalm 78:14 cp Luke 4:1, 14

¹⁵ John 14:16; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 13:2

¹⁶ Acts 2:3

4. As the Shekinah illuminated our way through the desert nights, so the Spirit illuminates us.¹⁸
5. As the Shekinah is interchangeable with Yahweh, so the The Ruach' ha Kodesh is Divine.¹⁹
6. As the Shekinah was instrumental in the bringing of God's mitzvot, so the Spirit was critical to the development of the Scriptures.²⁰
7. As the Shekinah assured us of God's presence in the camp, so the Holy Spirit is God living in and among those who believe.²¹
8. As the Shekinah protected us and ensured our delivery from Egypt, so the Holy Spirit is our seal, our divine assurance of God's deliverance from the world, the flesh and the devil.²² The Spirit will surely lead us to our Promised Land.
9. As the Shekinah did not come to dwell in the tabernacle until the people sanctified themselves to the Lord and were baptized in sacrificial blood,²³ so the Holy Spirit does not inhabit our earthly tabernacle²⁴ until we commit ourselves to the Lord and are baptized in the sacrificial blood of the Lamb.
10. As the Shekinah came directly upon the heels of the Angel of the Lord, so the Holy Spirit came immediately after and at the bidding of the Lord Jesus.²⁵
11. As the Shekinah was the glory of God, so the Spirit was the glory that was given to us by the Messiah.²⁶
12. As the Shekinah sanctified the tent and allowed the presence of God to dwell in our midst in spite of our sins, so the Holy Spirit sanctifies us and inhabits us in spite of our sins.²⁷
13. As the Shekinah struck down those impertinent rebels who dared follow Korah but were too cowardly to publicly admit it, so the Holy Spirit struck down Ananias and Saphira for their impertinent lies.²⁸
14. As the Shekinah struck down those who stubbornly insisted on their sin using a plague, so the Spirit will afflict the recalcitrant with sickness and death.²⁹
15. As the Shekinah filled Solomon's temple, so the Spirit uses our bodies as temples.³⁰

Using the *middot* "gezera shava" – analogy by common term or similarity in phrase - we find the following grammatical similarities:

1. *Shekinah*, Aramaic for the presence of God, being based on "shakan" is grammatically feminine³¹
2. *Ruach'*, Hebrew for Spirit, is feminine³²
3. *Parousia*, Greek for presence or advent of God, is used in virtually the same way as the Shekinah and is also feminine.³³ In the Greek world of the first century

¹⁷ Exodus 3:2; pic source: http://wordincarnate.files.wordpress.com/2008/12/burning_bush.jpg

¹⁸ Exodus 13:21; Matthew 25:3-4 (where the oil represents the Spirit's presence and the light represents the Spirit's empowerment); 1 John 2:20, 27

¹⁹ Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 2:10; Hebrews 9:14

²⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21

²¹ Matthew 18:19-20

²² Exodus 14:20; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13

²³ Exodus 24:7-8

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:1

²⁵ Exodus 14:19; Exodus 24:9-10, 15-16; John 14:16; 16:7

²⁶ Exodus 24:15-17 cp John 17:22; 2 Corinthians 3:7-8, 17-18

²⁷ Leviticus 16:16; Romans 5:8-9; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 John 1:8-10

²⁸ Numbers 16:19, 35 cp Acts 5:3-5, 9-10

²⁹ Numbers 16:41-49 cp 1 Corinthians 11:28-30

³⁰ 1 Kings 8:10-13; 2 Chronicles 5:13, 14; 7:1-3 cp 1 Corinthians 6:19

³¹ Strong's #7931

³² Strong's #7306

church, the word indicated a) a state visit; or b) the presence or appearance of a deity during worship, e.g. by divine fire.

4. *Pneuma*, the Greek word for spirit, is a neuter noun.³⁴ So the Hebrew authors of the New Covenant, when they translated the feminine *ruach'* into Greek, were limited in expressing Hebrew feminine *Ruach' ha Kodesh* into the Greek Holy Spirit by the constraints of the language.

The reader may object, "But Jesus was clearly alluding to the Holy Spirit when discussing the 'Spirit of Truth' and the personal pronouns in that verse are all masculine!" This is true in English. However, the personal pronoun "ekeinos"³⁵ is general and not gender specific. We must consider the possibility that the translators' modern gender bias may have influenced their selection of pronouns.

Conclusion

There are therefore no grammatical hindrances to positively identifying the Shekinah as the *Ruach' ha Kodesh*.

This matter is *shikul ha da'at*, a matter of some controversy, and should not be allowed to become a cause of dissension.

³³ Strong's #3952 from the pres. part. of Strong's #3918

³⁴ Strong's #4151

³⁵ Strong's #1563