

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

P'KUDEI

The final words of Parashat P'kudei conclude the work of constructing the Mishkan. G-d's presence in the very intense form enters the holiest part of it:

The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting (within the Mishkan). The glory of G-d filled the Mishkan. Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested on it... and the glory of G-d filled the Mishkan (34:34-35).

Which a few p'sukim later, is followed by:

G-d called to Moshe. He spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting (Vayikra 1:1).

G-d appeared to Moshe for the first time when he was taking shelter with Yitro in Midyan, on the run from Par'o. G-d appeared to him in the 'bush that was burning, but not consumed' (3:2). He instructed Moshe to go to Par'o and plead with him to release the Israelites from slavery. In his reply to G-d, Moshe included a question: When the suffering Israelites in Egypt ask: 'What is His name?' (3:13), how should he respond? G-d replied that Moshe should reply with the words: G-d is EH'YEH ASHER EH'YEH (3:14).

There appear to be two ways of

translating EH'YEH ASHER EH'YEH.

One is in the future tense. G-d says: 'I will be what I will be.' Rashi explains that to mean that 'as I am with the Israelites in their troubles now, so I will be with them in all their troubles in the future.'

The other is in the present tense: 'I am that I am', which could be paraphrased as: 'I am, therefore I am.' For the future tense in Hebrew can cover the imperfect tense which means a continuation of the present: 'As I am now, so I am continuing to be.'

It might be argued that both translations are correct and that the expression of EH'YEH ASHER EH'YEH covers the two translations simultaneously - as elaborated below.

The Israelites fell from G-d's favour after the sin of the golden calf. After Moshe pled for G-d to continue to lead them and restore His presence, G-d said to Moshe: 'I will favour those I will favor, and show mercy to those I show mercy' (33:19).

G-d did not say who would be those favoured or be shown mercy. He spoke in the future. It seems that G-d meant that when things will happen in the future, you will see Me as having directed it all. You will understand only then my 'favouring those I show favour and having mercy on those I have mercy'. Thus EH'YEH ASHER

EH'YEH is in the future tense: 'I will be what I will be.' That is G-d's identity as far as humanity is concerned - when He is further away from them.

But when G-d is close to the people - as He was when they had put their wealth and greatest efforts in building a Mishkan to the precise details as He instructed, He appears in the present tense: 'I am that I am.' This is the climax of the parasha - the series of events involved in the building of the Mishkan removed the clarity of G-d's presence from the future tense to the present tense.

For as the people move to G-d, G-d comes to the people. And He was easily perceived and seen to be with them - exemplified by: 'The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting (within the Mishkan). The glory of G-d filled the Mishkan. Moshe could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud rested on it... and the glory of G-d filled Mishkan.' And that was peaked with 'G-d called to Moshe. He spoke to him...' And yet, as the Rashbam explains, even when He was very close, he nevertheless confined Himself within a small part of the Mishkan, within the Kodesh Kodashim, leaving the space in the rest of the Mishkan so that the Kohanim could continue to perform their duties.

G-d was in the present tense.

And this transition within EH'YEH ASHER EH'YEH - from the future tense to the present tense - is reflected in the following prayer in the Musaf service for the Festivals:

'Our Father, our King! Reveal the glory of your rule over us. Appear and be recognized as King over all people.'

