

# Who is God ?

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Moses encounters God, for the first time, it seems at the Burning Bush. And he is told that he will become the agent of their freedom, their leader. He resists the mission. Finally he gives in. But he asks God to give him some more information as to what or who God is. "Who shall I tell (the people) has sent me?" After all they feel they have been abandoned. On what basis would they possibly understand the Divine appearance after some 300 years?

God replies with the puzzling epigram "I am what I am." Which really sounds like a brush off. But the Hebrew "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh" is better translated "I will be what I will be." Even so, what does it mean?

The past has gone and cannot be retrieved. If one is to survive and succeed one MUST think of the future. The present might even be disastrous and painful. All one has to hope for is a better future. The role of God/religion is to help us cope, a framework to assist us drive onward. It helps if we can project to a better time ahead. And that was what the enslaved Israelites needed, all refugees, need to hear.

The idea of God being the future has a philosophical explanation. All material objects in the universe change. The only thing that cannot change is something non-material. God as philosophers understand the idea is indeed some thing unchangeable, non-material. For the idea of God to have any value it must be of something beyond the physical. That was what the Torah meant by saying "I will be." Unchangeable, unlike any other thing you have ever encountered. But of course you need to make the effort to make sense of it too.

Now I am sure that is far too philosophical and abstract a concept for an enslaved people living thousands of years ago to grasp or indeed for most human beings now to understand. But we can translate it into a very common expression we all use, "Trust me."

It is like the parent who moves away from a child while teaching him or her to walk or ride a bike. It is a tactic to help them learn to take their first independent steps. No matter how distant we may feel from the idea of God, we need to constantly remind ourselves that it is all around us, waiting for us to take the next step.