

Torah Portion: **Tetzaveh**
(Book of Exodus)

Whose loneliness is greater: God or Humankind? The final verses in chapter 29 of the Book of Exodus state: *I will abide among the Israelites, and I will be their God. And they shall know that I the Lord am their God, who brought them out from the land of Egypt that I might abide among them.*” (Exo. 29: 45-46).

Why did God participate in the freedom of the Israelites from Egypt? According to the above verses, so God might *abide among them*. Rabbi Brad Artson notes, “This remarkable verse presupposes that the purpose of God’s actions to liberate the Jews and to instruct them to build the *Mishkan* (sanctuary in the desert) was to meet a *divine* need—a need for companionship and for relationship.”

Abraham ibn Ezra, the 12th century bible scholar from Spain, questions the reason for even constructing this portable sanctuary when he writes, “the purpose of my (God) bringing them forth from the land of Egypt was only that I (God) might dwell in their midst.” Instead of building for Pharaoh, God rescues the Israelites so they could build for him! Maimonides seems to concur: “It would appear that the dwelling of the Divine glory in Israel was to fulfill a want below, but it is not so. It fulfilled a want above (God).”

Alternatively, can it be that the God of Israel suffers from existential loneliness resulting from the creation of a world susceptible to change, upheaval, and tragedy? God’s only hope for improving the world, restoring the dream of Creation, is a partnership with humankind. Thus, God has chosen to abide, through covenant, in the sanctuary of Israel in the hope this people will carry God’s message forward. As time passes, the covenant is expanded to include other peoples and nations in a partnership to realize a world of peace, love, prosperity, and fulfillment for all.

Rabbi Artson profoundly explains, “God’s passion and loneliness find expression and resolution only in the reciprocal love of human beings. . .It was God’s love that created the world. It is our love that sustains it and fills our lives and communities with meaning.”

The late Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel succinctly states: “God’s dream is not to be alone, but to have humankind as a partner in the drama of continuous creation.”

- Rabbi Howard Siegel