

***“And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they will know that I am the Eternal One their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Eternal One their God.”***

Exodus 29:45–46

### Making a Home for God

These two verses serve as the conclusion to several long chapters of detail concerning the construction of the *mishkan*, the portable tabernacle in the wilderness. I love them because they are so direct and simple. Here God declares openly what His whole project has been about. The *whole* project, from the beginning of the exodus, not just the tabernacle. Why did God take us out of Egypt? Because He wanted a home in this world, a place to live, and He felt that we could provide it.

Of course that sense of divine at-homeness was not just things to be measured in so-and-so many cubits, or in where to hang the dyed goatskins. It was about *us*, about the kind of people we were, the kind of community we could become. God senses that Israel is the right people (no, I didn't say the *only* right people . . . I have no way of knowing that!) to make God a home.

While the text seems clearly to be speaking of Israel as a collective and of God's desire to dwell among us, commentators as far back as Philo (20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.) and as recent as the Hasidic masters have also read it as referring to each individual. God wants to dwell *be-tokeh* or “inside” each and every one of us, if we will fashion a proper home for God within our hearts. These two readings are not in conflict, but complement and complete one another.

God has taken each of us out of our own private Egypt—whatever it is that enslaves us—and has set us free. Why? Not just for us to have fun, or to do whatever we like. God has set us free in order to become our God, to enter into that relationship of intimacy, love, loyalty, and trust with us. “Becoming” is, by definition, a never-ending process; each of us, throughout time, is called to allow that process to happen. Through us, in us, amid us and our community, God hopes to find a home in this world.

We are ever entrusted with this task of *mishkan*-building. Each generation, each community, every single person. Each of us has to do it in our own unique way, and yet we have to share that work with one another so that the one God, the single One who unites us all, can dwell both within us and among us.

Why does this verse speak so personally to me? Because I see my own freedom as such a precious and yet fragile gift. What to do with that freedom and how to respond to it are among the great questions that pursue me through life.

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