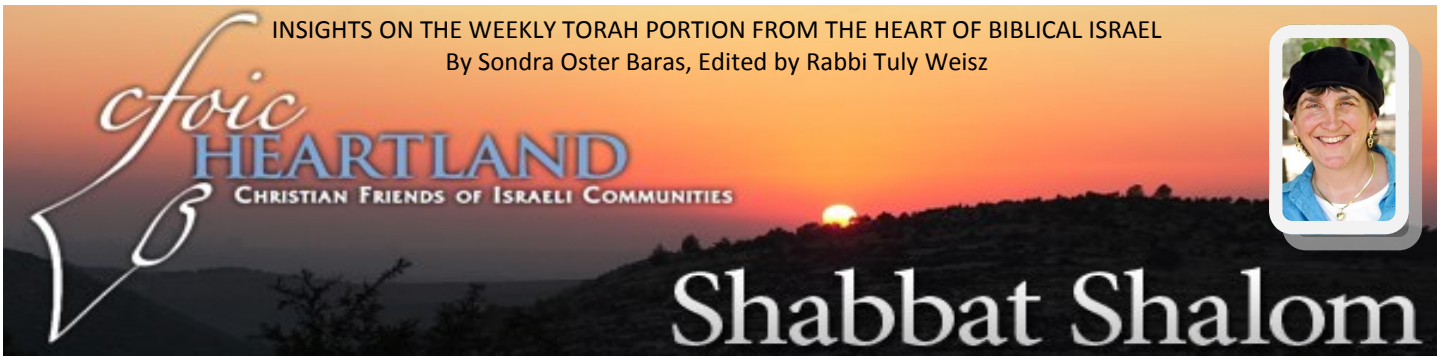

Pikudei

Exodus 38:21 – 40:38

God understands our need to feel His presence among us. And, like Moses who is reluctant to enter the Tabernacle, when we hesitate, God beckons to us.

The closing chapters of the Book of Exodus complete the section that deals with the construction of the Tabernacle. The last verses are particularly interesting.

> *Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.* (Exodus 40:34-35)

Twice, Scripture tells us that the glory of God has filled the Tabernacle, which, in essence is what the Tabernacle was for. When God first instructed Moses on this issue, He said: *"And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst"* (Exodus 25:8). Clearly, in having His glory fill the Tabernacle, He is dwelling among His people.

But it is this filling of the Tabernacle that prevents Moses from entering. This would seem to contradict another statement that God makes earlier regarding the purpose of the Tabernacle*: "There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel."* (Exodus 25:22). If, indeed, the Tabernacle is meant for Moses to meet God and to receive His instructions there for the Children of Israel, how is it that Moses is unable to enter the Tabernacle?

There are commentaries who position Moses at the entrance of the Tabernacle or, at least, at the entrance of the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle, and that this is where God speaks to Moses. Since the word "tabernacle" refers interchangeably to the entire complex and to the inner-most sanctum, this commentary is reasonable.

The Midrash, however, provides a different perspective. Moses is a righteous man and has done exactly what God has asked him to do. God asked him to build a tabernacle and he did so, as quickly as possible. And when the Tabernacle was completed, he stood outside, in awe of God's presence, hesitant to enter the Tent of Meeting. The Midrash then quotes God as saying to Himself: *"it is not right for Moses who constructed the Tabernacle to remain outside while I am inside. I will call to him to enter."* Therefore, the Bible continues: *"The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying"* (Leviticus 1:1).

The Midrash weaves together the end of Exodus with the beginning of Leviticus into one cohesive story. In so doing, it portrays God as a gracious host, who recognizes Moses' important role in constructing a house for Him. And it portrays Moses as the humble and righteous servant of God who, despite having completed the building of the Tabernacle and knowing its purpose as a meeting place between God and himself, hesitates to enter the sanctuary because of his awe of God's presence. It is God, therefore, who calls to Moses and beckons to him to enter.

The essence of the Tabernacle, then, is God's calling out to man, creating an environment in which man can come close to God. The place is created, not out of man's need, or his initiative, but out of God's understanding of our need to feel His presence among us. And, like Moses, when we hesitate to enter, He beckons to us.