IRREPLACEABLE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The most cogent lesson from this week's parsha is that there are no indispensable human beings in this world. Human beings are not replaceable and no two are alike, but they are not indispensable. One generation leaves and the next one arrives but somehow the world continues to exist.

There was no greater leader or prophet than Moshe. He cannot be replaced per se. But the world generally and the Jewish people particularly are able to exist and accomplish even after his demise and absence. Moshe, the rabbis of the Talmud tell us, was the sun while Yehoshua, his beloved disciple and successor, was only the moon. But the moon was sufficient to conquer and settle the Land of Israel for the Jewish people and to prevent any form of idolatry to compromise the faith of Israel.

I think that the symbolism of the great miracle of Yehoshua in "stopping" the sun and moon at the time of his battle with the Canaanites in the Valley of Ayalon, indicates this lesson of non-indispensability. Moshe and Yehoshua, the sun and the moon, can be "stopped" - they can disappear and no longer be active, but eventually the battle must be fought, in any case, by the people of Israel.

No reliance on the sun and the moon is justified. The bitter lesson of life in all of its enormity is that every generation, every person, has to fight the battle of life and spirit and triumph even if we are not the equal of the generations that preceded us and even if our leadership pales in comparison to the type of leadership that went before us in Jewish life.

Jewish life after the death of Moshe must have been terribly different from the time of his life. A leader and prophet like Moshe occurred only once in human history. But a new generation arose that did not know Moshe personally. Had Moshe survived to lead this new generation there would have been the clear and present danger that Moshe, who was now treated as a great but still human being, would be treated as a god.

Leaders are matched to their times and generations. They are never to be viewed in the abstract or absolute. The generation of Moshe perished in the desert of Sinai. That great generation of our ancestors that stood at Sinai and received and accepted the Torah never came to the Land of Israel. And if they never arrived in Israel then Moshe also could not arrive. The leader and the generation that he leads are permanently intertwined.

That is the essence of the story in the Talmud about Choni Hamaagel who after waking from a

seventy year sleep asked for his death since his generation and peer group no longer lived. No one is indispensable and every generation passes from the scene. The leader of one generation, no matter how great and wise he is, is not necessarily the proper head of the next generation. And that is the lesson that Moshe himself comes to realize and understand in today's parsha.

This is implicit in God's statement, so to speak, not to discuss the matter of entering the Land of Israel with Him further. The secrets and mysteries of human social existence remain hidden from human view and understanding.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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