

# MOSES BOUND TO HIS GENERATION'S FATE

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The series of disasters that befell the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai, as recorded for us in the previous parshiot of the book of Bamidbar, reaches its climax in this week's parsha. Heaven decrees that neither Moshe nor Aharon or Miriam - the entire leadership team of the Jewish people - will be allowed to enter the Land of Israel.

The treatment of Moshe individually seems rather harsh to our limited human understanding of these matters, in light of his seemingly minor transgression of smiting the rock instead of speaking to it. Because of this problem, some of the commentators and scholars - Rambam and Abarbanel for example - claim that the punishment was for an accumulation of previous minor transgressions that culminated with Moshe's striking the rock - a straw that broke the camel's back type of scenario.

Most commentators however concentrate on attempting to explain the matter in light of the statement in the Torah itself, that Moshe's punishment was due to the sole incident of his striking the rock instead of following God's instruction to speak to it.

Be this matter as it is in all of its wondrous complexity and difficulty, the bottom line is that the Jewish people will not enjoy Moshe's presence and leadership when they embark on their task of nation building upon entering the Land of Israel. All of Jewish history, in fact all of world history, would have been different had Moshe led Israel into its promised land. But it was not to be.

I think that among the many lessons and nuances present in this Torah lesson there is one that bears great relevance to understanding the pattern of Jewish history itself. And that lesson is that a leader, no matter how great he is individually - even if he is Moshe who is able, so to speak, to relate to God directly and at will - is still only a product of his time and circumstances.

If Moshe's generation, the generation that left Egypt and stood at Sinai to receive the Torah is not going to enter the Land of Israel, then Moshe himself will also not enter it. The leader is bound to the fate and occurrences of his generation and times. A great leader of one time is not necessarily the great leader of another period.

The Talmud points this out in many different ways: "Yiftach is the great leader for his generation just as Shmuel was the great leader for his time." Individually speaking, the two may not be on the same

plane and level of spiritual greatness, but Shmuel is not the suited for leadership of Yiftach's generation just as Yiftach is not the right person to lead the generation of Shmuel.

Moshe is inextricably bound to his generation and cannot enter the Land of Israel. The rabbis also taught us: "The rule over the people of one time cannot impinge for even a hair's breadth over the rule over the people of the next generation." These ideas and axioms bound Moshe as well and they precluded him from entering the Land of Israel no matter his spiritual greatness and quality.

Shabat shalom,

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