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The way of sobriety

By Haaretz Editorial

Ariel Sharon leaves behind him a party in the process of creation, whose institutions have not yet been chosen and whose very existence is in doubt without his unifying leadership. Kadima brought together people whom some view as opportunists seeking a safe seat in the next Knesset and others view as heralds of the political big bang. Before Kadima was born, there did not seem to be any chance of establishing a strong center party that would gain control of the government and abolish the anachronistic division between right and left. But the departure of Knesset members from Likud and Labor in order to form a new party generated momentum for a radical reshuffling of the historic political system, whose importance should not be underestimated. The presence of Haim Ramon and Tzachi Hanegbi under the same political roof heralds a kind of awakening from outdated alliances and ideologies.

The joy with which Kadima was received by the public - as evidenced by the results of the polls, which predicted that it would win more than 40 seats - did not stem only from Sharon's charismatic and dependable leadership, but primarily from the political sobriety that he succeeded in instilling here. Over the last two years, the personal revolution that Sharon underwent has been shared by a large segment of the public. The settlement enterprise, which he led for years, has lost its prestige; the settlers have turned from trend-setters into a stubborn minority; and the evacuation of settlements suddenly seems feasible. The relief that the public felt after the evacuation of Gaza is what generated the momentum for Kadima's establishment. This healthy sentiment does not depend solely on Sharon's leadership.

Thus Kadima is not just Ariel Sharon, but the basis for establishing a moderate coalition. It is the party of national sobriety, which, together with Labor, Meretz, Shinui and the Arab parties, could continue dividing the land between Israelis and Palestinians and establish a border between them. The disengagement from Gaza established the precedent that even in the absence of a diplomatic process, it is still possible to advance toward this goal unilaterally.

The public will decide which party should lead this camp, but it must be hoped that the Likud, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, will remain out of the picture. There is no longer room for a ruling party that is responsive to the interests and dreams of the settlers and leads the country to the brink of destruction solely because of a desire to retain settlements that have no right to exist and whose presence in the heart of Palestinian areas generates friction, hatred and exploitation for

generations to come.

The coming days will reveal whether Kadima was just a passing political episode or a catalyst for a major and necessary political change. Granted, it was approved as an official party only two days ago, and it has no established political traditions to help it survive in the absence of its creator. But on the other hand, Kadima has a clear diplomatic message and a vital role to play in the stormy days to come. If it finds a way to elect a leadership and solidify the party even without Sharon, that will constitute proof that there is life in the trail Sharon blazed even after he himself is gone.
