

# ERRORS

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The fundamental issue raised in this week's parsha is how could so many wise and ostensibly pious leaders of Israel make such a fundamental error in vision and judgment and thereby condemn them and their constituents to death and ignominy? All of the commentators to Torah from the Talmud and Midrash forward in history have attempted to unravel this mystery for us.

Various theories, each one correct in its own view, have been advanced to deal with this difficult issue. Yet, as is the case so many times in trying to analyze human behavior and thought, after all of the answers are considered and accepted, the question still remains to trouble us. And that in itself is perhaps one of the main lessons of this sad narrative of the Torah.

Human beings are prone to error, even great and noble human beings. Man proposes but only God disposes. Rashi, based on Midrash, comments that even Moshe misunderstood the situation and sent the leaders of the tribes to spy out the land even though the Lord had never specifically told him to do so and left the final decision to do so to his judgment.

Life is usually not so much a comedy of errors as it is a tragedy of errors. And many times in history we can easily note that great people are also prone to make great errors of judgment and policy. So was it in First Temple times with the kings of Judah and Israel and so was it certainly in Second Temple times even with the descendants of the righteous Hasmoneans. And the story of our people in exile is strewn with erroneous messianism and bad policy decisions. Such is life and human folly.

We cannot live without leadership and direction, opinion and advice. But we should always be aware that human beings by definition are not omniscient and all knowing. The gift of prophecy no longer resides with our community. Because of this, caution is always advisable in matters of trust of others. The Psalmist cautions us not to trust the great, generous, noble and mighty blindly for they too are only mortal and subject to the decay of dust.

Another important lesson that appears here in the parsha is that the majority opinion is not always the correct one. Calev and Yehoshua dissented from their colleagues. The Jewish people disregarded their words and followed the overwhelming majority verdict regarding the Land of Israel.

The strength of the survival of the Jewish people throughout the ages has been its ability to dissent from majority opinions and ruling cultures. Cultures change and opinions shift with time and circumstances. But Godly truth never wavers and changes. Democracy may represent the will of the

majority. But even democracy is never infallibly right on major crucial issues.

The Torah serves as a brake against the tyranny of the majority. It provides a standard by which events and opinions can be judged and measured. Calev and Yehoshua will survive and lead the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. The other nobles and leaders, the wise men and naysayers, the majority and the politically correct will fade away and die in the desert.

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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)