

TABLE TALKS

BALANCE OF POWER • ISSUE #8

PARSHAT ואתחנן - SHABBAT NACHAMU

5780/ 2020



This week's antitrust hearings were held to determine if the companies' outsize power and influence

דברים י"ז:ט

וּבֹאֲתָ אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם וְאֶל־הַשֹּׁפֵט אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַּיָּמִים הֵהֱם וְדִרְשָׁתָּ וְהִגִּידוּ לְךָ אֶת דְּבַר הַמִּשְׁפָּט:

DEVARIM 17:9

And appear before the priests, levites and the judge in charge at the time, and present your problem. When they have announced to you the verdict in the case,

דברים י"ז:ט"ו-ט"ז

שׁוּם תִּשִּׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ מִקֵּרֵב אַחֶיךָ... לֹא־יִרְבֶּה־לּוֹ סוּסִים וְלֹא־יָשִׁיב אֶת־הָעָם מִצְרַיִמָּה לְמַעַן הִרְבּוֹת סוּס וַיְהוֶה אָמַר לָכֶם לֹא תִסְפּוּן לָשׁוּב בַּדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה עוֹד:

DEVARIM 17:15-16

You shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by the LORD your God...Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the LORD has warned you, "You must not go back that way again."

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Why are disputes brought before the Kohen, Levi and a judge?
2. Why is it necessary for God to be involved in the choice of a Jewish king?
3. Why does the Torah mention that the king may not have "many horses"?

דברים י"ז:י"ח

וְהָיָה כִּשְׂבָתוֹ עַל כֶּסֶּא מַמְלָכְתּוֹ וְלָתֵב לוֹ אֶת־מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל־סֵפֶר מִלְפָּנָי
הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:

DEVARIM 17:18

When he (the king) is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of the Torah written for him on a scroll by the priests and levites.

מסכת סנהדרין כ"א עמוד ב

מתני' לא ירבה לו סוסים אלא כדי מרכבתו וכסף וזהב לא ירבה לו מאד אלא כדי ליתן אספניא וכותב לו ס"ת לשמו יוצא למלחמה מוציאה עמה נכנס הוא מכניסה עמו יושב בדין היא עמו מיסב היא כנגדו שנאמר (דברים יז, יט) והיתה עמו וקרא בו כל ימי חייו:

TALMUD MASECHET SANHEDRIN 21B

MISHNA: The king "shall not accumulate many horses for himself" (Deuteronomy 17:16), but only enough for his chariot in war and in peace. "Neither shall he greatly accumulate silver and gold for himself" (Deuteronomy 17:17), but only enough to provide his soldiers' sustenance [aspanya]. And the king writes himself a Torah scroll for his sake, as stipulated in Deuteronomy 17:18. When he goes out to war, he brings it out with him. When he comes in from war, he brings it in with him. When he sits in judgment, it is with him. When he reclines to eat, it is opposite him, as it is stated: "And it shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life" (Deuteronomy 17:19).

"what emerges from the [biblical] texts is not democracy throughout the political system, but a distinct notion of power-sharing at its highest levels. Neither Scripture nor early rabbinic writings express any sympathy whatsoever for a system of government in which a single body or group possesses a monopoly of political authority."

- Stuart Cohen, The Three Crowns

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Why is such emphasis placed on the king having his own Torah with him at all times?
2. In the Mishna's explanation of all the verses in Devarim, what is the common theme?
3. In Biblical times, there were spiritual leaders (priests/levites), judges, the high court, the prophet and the king. Each is responsible for a specific area, why do you think this was the structure created for the Jewish community?