

# TABLE TALKS

BALANCE OF POWER • ISSUE #8

PARSHAT - שABBAT NACHAMU

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

## דברים י"ז:ט

ובאת אל-הכהנים הלוים ואל-השפט אשר יהוה ביהם הִנֵּה ודרשׁת וְהִגִּידו לך את דבר המשפט:

### 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-ט"ז

שׁוּם תְּשִׁים עַל־יְרֵךְ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְתַּחֲרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּנוֹ מִקְרָב אֲחֵיכֶם ... רַק לְאִירְבָּהִילוּ סּוֹסִים וְלֹא־יִשְׁיב אֶת־תְּמָם מִצְרִימָה לְמַעַן כָּרְבּוֹת סּוֹס וְיְהוָה אָמַר לְכֶם לֹא תִּסְפּוּ לְשׁוּב בְּדֶרֶךְ הַזֹּה עַזְזָז:

### 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"?

וְהִנֵּה כִּשְׁבָתוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלָכָתוֹ וְכַתֵּב לֵו אֶת-מְשֻׁנָּה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל-סִפְר מַלְפִּנִּי 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.

**מִסְכַּת סְנַהְדְּרִין כ"א עַמּוֹד ב'**

מתני' לא ירבה לו סוסים אלא כדי מרכבותו וכסף זהב לא ירבה לו מאי אלא כדי ליתן אספניה וכותב לו ס"ת לשמו יוצא למלחמה מוציאה עמה נכנס הווא מכניסה עמו יושב בדיון היא עמו מישב 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?