



# Shabbat Shalom

## Shoftim

### *Deuteronomy 16:18 – 21:9*

*Our political leaders would do well to follow the guidelines for the kings of Israel, to ensure their righteousness and the absence of corruption in their kingdom.*

In this week's Torah portion, we read about the restrictions placed on a king of Israel.

Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, *'You shall never return that way again.'* *And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this Torah\*... that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment...* (Deuteronomy 17:16-20)

These verses set forth guidelines to be followed by the kings of Israel, to ensure their righteousness and the absence of corruption in their kingdoms. Although, we no longer have kings, our political leaders would do well to follow these rules.

1. The prohibition against owning many horses is linked with the prohibition against returning to Egypt. Key here is the idea that God redeemed His people from Egypt – a king of Israel must make sure never to take steps that would lead his people to be enslaved once again.

2. The prohibition against many wives is more a political rather than a sexual issue. In ancient times, kings took many wives as a way of cementing relationships with neighboring kingdoms, as a sort of peace treaty. However, the danger is that these wives will lead the king astray, that the foreign cultures these women bring with them into the kingdom will influence the king away from God's word and the Jewish way. Today this can easily translate into a word of caution against unhealthy relationships with neighboring nations.

3. The prohibition against too much silver and gold is designed to prevent corruption. If a king does not own too much, he cannot be swayed by money and financial power.

4. And finally, the king is commanded to write his own copy of the Torah and to keep it at his side, to read it and study it and follow the commandments. A king, or any political leader, must be a God-fearing man and he must avoid arrogance at all costs. If he seeks God's counsel in political decisions, he will ultimately do the right thing.

If the leadership of the world followed these four principles, the world would be a far better place.

\* The translation uses the word "law" but the Hebrew word "Torah" is far more expressive of the actual import of this Scripture, for the King is commanded to actually write his own Torah scroll.