HOW TO GREET THE KING

- The Duke & Duchess of Cambridge are coming to Vancouver.
    - No I was not invited to have tea with them.
- But if I was, did you know that there is a special blessing in Judaism that you say when you meet the King or Queen?
    - I know they are not of such station yet, but even still – we have a blessing for kings!
    - Baruch attah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech HaOlam she natan m'kvodo l'basar v'dam
        - Blessed are you Adonai, Ruler of the Universe who has given of your glory to people of flesh and blood.
- We have an interesting and complicated relationship with kings in Judaism.
    - Going all the way back to Moses at Mt Sinai the Jewish nation had no kings.
        - At Mount Sinai G-d told Moses that if the Jews would follow in His ways, they would be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."
        - If they would serve the one true King, they would have no need for a mortal replacement.
            - Moses was a prophet and he passed the mantle of leadership to Joshua who was a Judge, and for much of early Jewish history that was who led us, Prophets and Judges.
    - In fact in the in the Book of Deuteronomy – which our parasha comes from this weekend God knows that the people will one day demand a King, because they will want to be like other nations.
        - So God through Moses lays down the guidelines for a Jewish monarch, limiting his materialistic pursuits and exhorting him to follow G-d and be humble.
        - Then it happens, in the year 880 BCE, after 400 years of being led by prophets and judges, the people approached the Prophet Samuel, clamoring for a king "like all the other nations."
        - After consulting with G-d (who expressed His disappointment in the peoples' lack of faith), Samuel reluctantly gave in to their pleas, but not without warning them of the pitfalls inherent in having an absolute monarch.
        - A short while later, when a young man from the tribe of Benjamin named Saul came to him for help locating his lost donkeys, Samuel anointed him as king over Israel.
            - Yes our first king was a guy looking for his donkey – talk about your lucky day.
                - "have you seen my donkey?" "No – but how would you like to be king?" Does it come with a donkey? OK"
            - After a brilliant start, Saul lost G-d's favor when he did not completely follow His command to wipe out all traces of Amalek, the mortal enemy of Israel. Shortly thereafter, G-d commanded Samuel to anoint a young shepherd named David king of Israel. Even though Saul continued to rule, he was no longer favored by G-d.

- Even if you missed that day in Hebrew school you can see where this is going.
    - It was Jewish Game of Thrones – and Winter was comin'
        - With it all the things that usually come with Monarchies and situations where one person has total and absolute power.
        - Aldus Huxley famously wrote, "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely."
    - Jewish Kings had their moments of brilliance and benevolence, Solomon the Wise comes to mind, but for the most part the Jewish people what they wanted to be ruled by a King like every other nation – and those reigns were like those of every other nation.
        - Favored the wealthy and the upper class
        - Fraught with conflict
        - Drunk on power
        - And the heir to the throne is not always, or even often as wise or discerning as those that came before them.
            - Heredity is not a predictor of much more than shoe size.

- And so what does all of this have to do with anything – beyond the aforementioned visit of Prince William and Princess Kate?
    - You may have noticed that there are having an election in the United States in a few weeks, the first debate is Monday night.
    - The same halachah – Jewish law that commands me to say a bracha should I be so fortunate to meet a king, also instructs me **NOT** to say that bracha over the President or Prime Minister. And the reason why is important.
        - We don't say the bracha for a King over a President or Prime Minister because they do not have absolute power:
            - Halachic authorities mention four criteria in order to be considered a king for this purpose:
                1. One must be the absolute ruler of his kingdom or country (Orchot Chaim in name of Sefer Ha-Eshkol, Hilchot Berachot #49, Shut Ha-Radvaz 1:296). The President of the United States does not have absolute authority. He must bend to the will of the Congress whether he likes it or not.
                2. The king must have the ability to administer capital punishment (Shut Chatam Sofer ibid.). The President does not possess this power. While he does have the power to grant life by issuing a pardon, he does not possess the power of death (Shut Be'er Moshe 2:9).
                3. The king must have royal clothing. The President of the United States wears a suit like everyone else. Though a royal pantsuit might be a different story.

(Shut Yehaveh Da'at 2:28 and Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot 2:139).

4. The king must have an entourage (see Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot ibid.). On this one you could say he meets the criteria.

- So if the President or the Prime Minister do not meet the criteria for the blessing of a king, what blessing do you say when you greet them?
    - You say the blessing – Thank you God for NOT making them a King.
    - You thank God that we have the autonomy and freedom to choose our leaders and to limit their power so that it is representative of the people.
    - And when we vote, either here in Canada or for those that are US citizens in a few weeks in the US we would be wise to remember the distinction between an elected leader and a King.
        - Who appreciates that they are not all powerful, they are not God's representative here on earth in basar v'dam in flesh and blood
        - And wiser still to not elect someone who cannot themselves tell the difference.

So should you happened to meet The Duke and Dutchess of Cambridge this weekend, while you could maybe get away with saying the bracha for the king and queen it might be best just to say to, "Oh My God its Will & Kate" and take a selfie. And thank God that we get to vote for our leaders – but then again that means we have to choose wisely. The responsibility is on us.