



## DIVREI MENACHEM

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# A 'God' in Sheep's Clothing

Not long ago, we read of Yaakov's sons tending their father's sheep. And when Yaakov later appeared before Pharaoh, he declared: "Your servants are shepherds." Indeed, in our Parsha, we note that the Hebrew slaves still owned cattle during their bondage! (Shemot 10:24-25)

Shepherds are prevalent in Tanach: Avraham, Yaakov, the twelve tribes, Moshe, David, and the prophet Amos, to name the most prominent. For the one who cares for lost sheep, for instance, is undoubtedly leadership material.

Moreover, in Perek Tehillim 23, Hashem is described as a shepherd leading His people to green pastures. So, we might ask, how of all the conceivable acts Bnei Yisrael were to perform before their release from bondage, they were commanded to tie sheep to their bedposts, slaughter the sheep, and sprinkle the blood on their doorposts.

The archeologist Yitzchak Meitliss offers an engaging explanation for the sacrifice of the sheep in Mitzrayim in the context of the pagan worship and competition between gods that was rife at that time.

Notably, the sheep – "Amon," "the king of

all gods' – was the highest-ranking in Egypt from no less than 2000 gods (!) depicted as animals. Future Egyptian kings would be named in his honor, such as Amnonchetap and Tut-Anach-Amon, the latter depicted as a human body with a ram's head.

Now, Pharaoh consistently avoided allowing Bnei Yisrael to sacrifice to *their* God. At one time (in a moment of despair), he suggested that the people do so in his land, to which Moshe responded that that would insult the local populace and be life-threatening to his people. Perhaps that was Pharaoh's intention!

But why not let the people sacrifice in the wilderness? – Because that would amount to a submission to the 'god of the wilderness,' Seth, the deity of his arch-enemy, the Hittites!

So, Hashem had in mind, as it were, to demonstrate His disdain of the contagious idol worship in Egypt and to show His power and dominion over all the so-called gods. Moreover, Bnei Yisrael were to publicly slaughter the elevated Egyptian idol as a symbol of *their* contempt of the Egyptian god and their (renewed) loyalty to Hashem, even after endless years of slavery in a heathen environment.

That kind of *Messirat Nefesh* must surely enlighten and inspire us to prepare ourselves, in our times, for a renewed meeting with Hashem at "Har Sinai." ■

Shabbat Shalom! Menachem Persoff