

FORBIDDEN PASTURES II

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Avraham said to Lot, "Let us not have friction between me and you, and between my herdsmen and yours. We are brothers, after all." (Bereshith 13:8)

The previous essay discussed the problems inherent in working as a shepherd. It seems difficult to reconcile this with the fact that some of the greatest leaders of the Jewish people, including Moshe Rabbeinu and King Dovid, were shepherds before they assumed their leadership positions. Even more astonishing is that, as our Sages tell us, their background as shepherds actually enhanced their performance as leaders of the Jewish People. How could an occupation which has such a miserable reputation produce such outstanding individuals?

In fact it was because King Dovid and Moshe Rabbeinu were shepherds that they were chosen for their positions. As shepherds they had an opportunity to show that they were concerned about each and every individual, a characteristic which is a prerequisite for being a Jewish leader.⁽¹⁾ How can this be reconciled with the monetary debts that our Sages say a shepherd will almost inevitably incur?

Both Moshe Rabbeinu and King Dovid were meticulous about grazing their sheep only on uninhabited desert lands where none of the pasture area was privately owned. By doing so they were able to avoid the basic halachic pitfall of shepherding. This practice demonstrated their trait of absolute integrity, which is a fundamental necessity for someone in a leadership role. It was because of both the care that they showed to their flocks and the honesty they displayed while tending them that they eventually merited to become the leaders of the Jewish People.⁽²⁾

1. *Heard from Rav Shlomo Brevda*

2. Yalkut Shimoni, Shemoth 169