

Judaism and Evolutionary Astrology: Insights from a Jewish Astrologer

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Abstract: *While the Torah instructs Jews not to practice soothsaying or divination, the Talmud includes several discussions about the power of astrology with many Rabbis even arguing that the use of astrology is both permitted and meaningful. Add to this discrepancy the numerous astrological mosaics on the floors of ancient synagogues, as well as certain Kabbalistic practices, and it becomes clear why there is confusion within the Jewish community. This article examines Jewish perspectives on evolutionary astrology throughout Jewish history and its link to current mystical applications.*

Keywords: Jewish Mysticism, Kabbalah, Judaism, Evolutionary Astrology, Talmud, Torah

Astrology and Jewish History

JEWES ARE INSTRUCTED IN Torah, “You shall not practice divination or soothsaying” (Lev. 19:26), and then later, “When you enter the land that *HaShem* your G-d is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of the nations. Let no one be found among you who ... is an augur, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one casts spells....For anyone who does these things is abhorrent to *HaShem*” (Deut. 18:9–12). Jewish readers today repeatedly find references that seem to dismiss astrology and hold a sense of disdain for those who seek prophecy from the stars. However, many ancient synagogues contain mosaic floors that depict astrological signs and charts. Alan Avery-Peck discusses this at length in *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* (reprinted online in My Jewish Learning):

“The recurrence of the zodiac in synagogue after synagogue suggests its importance as more than a decorative or ornamental device. Rather, as the Talmudic sources make clear and as the continued appearance of the zodiac in later European Jewish art shows, the use of the zodiac in the synagogue of the rabbinic period was consonant with its symbolic



importance, an importance that extended from non-Jewish into Jewish metaphysics.”¹

These images suggest that Jewish theology was strongly influenced by the Hellenistic perception of the cosmic order of the universe and that conflicting belief and practices existed within the Jewish community.

By the time of the rabbinic period (100–600 CE), views on astrology clearly shifted. There are links between each Hebrew month and astrological sign. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (200–250 CE) discussed in Talmud the connection between character traits and the day of the week a person was born (Shabbat 156a). Rabbi Hanina in the same tractate takes this approach a step further and discussed how character traits are guided by the planet that influenced a person’s birth (Shabbat 156a). The discussion states that one born under the constellation of the sun will achieve eminence, and one born under Venus will become wealthy and immoral. One born under Mercury will be wise and have a retentive memory. One born under the moon will suffer evil. One born under Saturn will suffer frustration; one born under Jupiter will be righteous; and one born under Mars will become either a surgeon or a slaughterer. And of course, each of these planets is connected to an astrological sign. It is interesting to note that each Hebrew month is associated with one astrologic sign, which is different than the Gregorian calendar in which the signs overlap different months. This alignment suggests that the astrological signs are more closely connected to moon calendars, such as the Jewish calendar, than sun-based ones.

Other commentaries in this tractate of Talmud state that “upon entry into the month of Adar one should become increasingly joyous.” There are also suggestions that “a Jew should avoid litigation with gentiles in the month of Av, because his *mazal* [Hebrew for stars] is bad; and he should move the court case to the month of Adar, when his *mazal* is good (Talmud, Taanit 29a–b). Jewish astronomers and teachers, such as Samuel of Nehardea, discussed the effect that Mars had on healing practices (Talmud, Shabbat 129b). In Ecclesiastes Rabbah we read that King Solomon had expertise as an astrologer. Astromancy, at the time, was viewed as a science (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.167), but not one that could accurately predict the future. In fact, there were still warnings against using divination that would usurp the power of *HaShem*.

¹ Alan J. Avery-Peck, “Astrology in the Ancient Synagogue,” My Jewish Learning, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/astrology-in-the-ancient-synagogue/>.

The Argument for Astrology

Recent research from a Pew Research Center poll demonstrates that roughly 30% of Americans believe in the power of astrology.¹² It seems that people are searching for comfort and guidance in uncertain times, something that many people cannot derive from rigid theologies. For some, astrology provides a sense of “why” to a tumultuous life and offers suggestions about how to deal with life’s challenges. Astrology and other mystical practices is thought to fill the gap between theology and science, suggesting to the mystic that these are artificial boundaries, anyway. For them, a literal reading of *Breshet* states that *HaShem* created the sun, moon, planets, and stars and then placed them in the sky. The implication is that celestial rotation and placement was divinely planned, not random. If Jews follow the mystic’s line of reasoning, they can connect the time of their birth (also governed by *HaShem*) to the planets and constellations that are the foundation of an astrological chart. Thus, the movement of the planets is thought to influence people’s life, guiding them on their spiritual, psychological, and emotional journey.

For Jewish astrologers, these mystical practices are a pathway back to a belief in something mystical and spiritual, something bigger than daily ego-focus living. Much like meditation, astrology is one pathway that leads people back to a spiritual existence. Rather than rejecting ancient ideas and metaphysical practices as out of alignment with religion, theologians might do better to understand the human need for comfort and reassurances that cannot be found purely in dogma. For some Jews, a focus on behavior, on action, and on orthopraxy allows for them to embrace mystical practices as a way to enrich their Jewish identity and spiritual journey.

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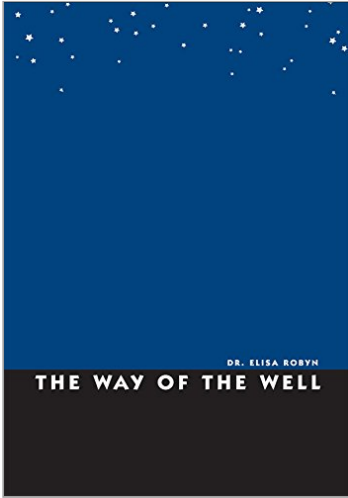
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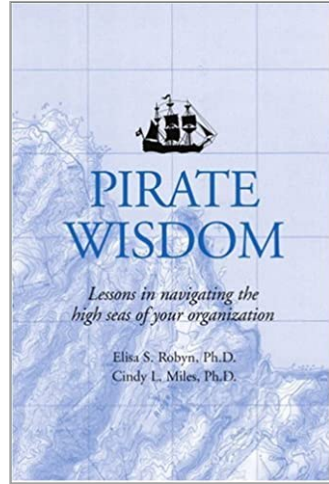
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elisa Robyn has a PhD in Educational Psychology and two Master's degrees, one in Geology and one in Jewish Mysticism. In addition, she is also a trained astrologer and has studied with both Shamans and Kabbalists. She has recently transitioned from a 20-year career as an Academic Dean and now has her own [consulting practice](#) and is the radio host of the Dr. Elisa Show on KUHS Radio Denver.

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