

How shepherds destroyed the sheep god (Bo)

A civilization is destroyed only when its gods are destroyed. -E. M. Cioran

Ancient Egyptians never liked the Jews. Already from the days of Joseph, as honored as he was and despite the fact that he saved their civilization, they wouldn't even sit with him at the same table (school lunches were probably not much fun for Joseph's kids). The reason mentioned back in Genesis was because the children of Israel were shepherds.

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the *Kli Yakar* (1550-1619), on Exodus 12:2, explains that the ram, an adult male sheep, was a prime Egyptian god. As such, the Egyptians felt it unseemly that other humans should rule over their gods, by being shepherds, by controlling their holy rams, together with the other sheep. The sheep were holy animals for the Egyptians, not to be tended by people. Hence their intense dislike and anti-social behavior towards Jews, who made a living as shepherds.

The *Kli Yakar* finds astrological interest in the exact timing of the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt. Nissan, the Hebrew month of the Exodus, and the month that we commemorate Passover, astrologically, was also the month of the Ram (Aries).

In the middle of the month, when the moon is ascendant and the sheep-god is supposedly at the height of its power, God commands the Children of Israel to publicly and *en mass* slaughter young male sheep (and goats). One of the purposes, it seems, was to demonstrate the lack of power of this so-called sheep "god" of the Egyptian astrologers completely and unequivocally, and the ultimate power and supremacy of the Jewish version of God. The ostensibly powerful Egyptian sheep god was unable to protect itself from oppressed Jewish slaves. The Jewish Pascual sacrifice in Egypt destroyed their "gods" and the entire false theology around it, including their astrological beliefs.

So, may we not take astrology or horoscopes seriously, and realize the uselessness of false gods.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the memory of Beverly Marks z"l.