



Where did Bilam Learn His Magic?

What's Wrong with Tarot Cards, Magic, Witchcraft and Wicca?

I've always gravitated towards the mystical and occult, and that's what draws me to the inner dimensions of Torah. Many years ago, on my first day in [Diaspora Yeshiva](#), I eavesdropped on the advanced class, where a mystical looking man with a long beard taught the secrets of *The Way of G-d*, by the 18th century kabbalist, Rav Moshe Luzatto. Before taking on Torah observance, I had been dabbling with astrology and palm reading. I later found that there are Torah sources for both in the *Zohar* and other Kabbalistic works, but they are not so accessible and easy to understand and apply. Although Judaism recognizes astrology as an ancient wisdom, through which we may gain insight into the strengths, weaknesses, or inborn character traits of a person, it may not be used for predicting the future as it states, "We do not consult astrological forecast or cast lots. HAGA – because it states, 'You shall be pure with Hashem your G-d' (*Devarim* 18:13). Even more so is it forbidden to consult magicians, soothsayers and witches" (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 179:1). However, we may take precautionary heed of an astrological prediction that we heard indirectly, because ultimately astrology is a system through which G-d expresses His will in the world. Thus, the *Shulchan Aruch* continues: "A person ought not to act against what he knows is the astrological influence, (*mazal*) because one must not rely on miracles" (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 179:2). Although it is generally forbidden to plan our time based on astrological forecasts, in some cases, the Torah does permit to engage in a particular enterprise at certain favorable times. Thus, it became customary to begin learning a new subject (tractate) on Rosh Chodesh and to schedule a wedding at full moon (*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 166:3). I once was at a Jewish retreat center which our group shared with another group. Lo and behold, when we returned from a hike, the other group had invaded our lounge and laid out a set of Tarot cards on the carpet. I had to use many prayers and EmunaHealing techniques to gain back the purity of the room needed for our group's Torah activities. What's wrong with Tarot cards? Aren't they used for inner spiritual work? Even if it may not be true that Tarot cards are the key to lost Egyptian magical wisdom and even though using them may be a fun way of gaining psychological insights, since Tarot cards are used for divination, they are forbidden by the Torah along with magic, witchcraft and wicca- all belonging to the "dark side." Perhaps, even taking the message of Chinese fortune cookies seriously is included in the following prohibition:

ספר ויקרא פרק יט פסוק כו... לֹא תִנְחָשׁוּ וְלֹא תַעֲוִנוּ:

"...You shall not act on the basis of omens (divination) or lucky hours (soothsaying)" (*Vayikra* 19:26).

Bilam – The Black Magic Sorcerer

Balak was fearful of the power of the Jewish people. Therefore, he enlisted the help of Bilam son of Be'or, a renowned sorcerer. The source of Bilam's magic came from tapping into powerful, impure energies by engaging in immoral acts with his donkey (*Zohar Balak* 206b). In Biblical times, kings often relied on prophets and magicians. This was an expression of the kings' desire to control reality. Such kings, Balak included, believed that in return for a reasonable sum, the magician could change reality to conform to their desires. Through the medium of seven altars, seven rams, enchantments and solitude (*Bamidbar* 23:2), Bilam himself strived, through magical means, to obtain such power by forcing it down from Heaven. One of the messages of *Parashat Balak* is that no one can force G-d's will. Even the greatest magician ever had to submit to Hashem and agree that only "What Hashem puts into my mouth that I must take care to say" (*Bamidbar* 23:12). The first step in the process of crushing Bilam was to disable his tools. Therefore, G-d made the donkey

ineffective and even counterproductive to Bilam's magical purposes. Both Balak and Bil'am needed to learn – each in his own way – that only G-d controls the world, and that the powers given to mortals are meant solely to serve G-d in the world.

From the Ancient Mountains of the East

When Hashem first consulted the angels, regarding whether to create humans, they were opposed to it, as it states, "What is mortal man, that You think of him, and the finest human being that You even consider him?" (*Tehillim* 8:5). After Hashem finally did create Adam, two angels Aza and Azael spoke up before Hashem: "Our original claim has been justified. Behold, the man that You made has sinned before You." Hashem then cast them down from their level of holiness. Once they descended, the evil inclination entered and overcame them. They chased after women and caused people to err. "They took wives for themselves from whomever they chose" (*Bereishit* 6:2). As a result of their arrogance and presumptuousness, they were removed and banished from their former holiness (*Zohar, Bereishit* 1:37a) Hashem bound the angels with metal chains in the mountains of darkness [קְדָמַי הַרְרֵי קֶדֶם/*Harerei Kedem* – 'Ancient Mountains of the East'], from where they would teach people the occult arts. It is from there that Bilam learned his black magic as it states, "Balak, king of Moav, has brought me from Aram, from the Ancient Mountains of the East, [telling me] to come curse Ya'acov and conjure divine wrath against Israel" (*Bamidbar* 23:7). Bilam further said about himself, "It is the word of one who hears G-d's sayings, who sees a vision of the Almighty" (*Bamidbar* 24:4); (*ibid.* 24:16). For he had heard G-d's secret sayings from Aza and Azael. This is why it states, "...hears G-d's sayings," rather than '...hears G-d's voice.' From Aza and Azael he learned how to divine the most auspicious times to perform his art.

Holiness Precludes Sorcery, Incantations, Consulting Oracle, and Necromancy

Rabbi Shimon said: How many times have I repeated, and no one pays attention! The Holy One does not allow His Presence to rest except in a place of holiness that is befitting. He therefore repeatedly warns,

ספר דברים פרק יח פסוק י לא ימצא בך מעביר בנו ובתו באש קסם קסמים מעוין ומנחש ומכשף:
 "There shall not be found among you anyone... who practices stick divination, divines auspicious times, divines by omens, practices witchcraft, uses incantations, consults mediums and oracles, or who attempts to communicate with the dead" (*Devarim* 18:10-11). "On the contrary, fortunate is the nation of Israel who has been made holy in order that He allow His Presence to dwell among them, as it is written, "G-d makes His Presence known in your camp... Let your camp therefore be holy" (*ibid.* 23:15) ([From Zohar III:207b, Parashat Balak, translated by Avraham Sutton](#)).

The Torah Prohibition Against Sorcery and Soothsaying

What is a soothsayer? (קֹדֵם) One who takes his stick in hand (as though he were consulting it), "Shall I go, or shall I not go?" So, does it state, "My people ask council of their stick, and their staff declared to them" (*Hoshea* 4:12). The מְעוֹיֵן (diviner) according to Rabbi Akiva are people who assign time – who say, "This time is auspicious to begin some work." The sages say it refers to those who hold your eyes under control (who delude by optical deception). A SORCERER (מְנַחֵשׁ) is one who draws prognostications from the fact that the bread fell from his mouth, or that a deer crossed his path, or that a stick fell from his hand (Rashi, *Devarim* 18:10). According to Rashi's definition of a soothsayer, it would seem that a pendulum would fall into that category. Yet, I learned from my spiritual healing teacher, Chana Luke, that Rav Mordechai Eliyahu permits the use of a pendulum, but only for the sake of healing. Nevertheless, in EmunaHealing we do not rely on exterior signs, in order to avoid any resemblance to sorcery and soothsaying. It is always preferable to open our intuition and get answers from within our body, according to the principle of, "I will build a *mishkan* (sanctuary) in my heart." This way we can reveal Hashem within ourselves – rather than relying on

an external sign like a pendulum, which is similar to fortune telling. In addition, when using external signs, impure, exterior forces can attach themselves. Even regarding internal signs, we may not use them constantly for every choice in life, for this would be like fortune telling. After warning us against magicians, cloud gazers and witches, the Torah guides us, "You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d" (*Devarim* 18:13). This teaches us that we must believe in our heart that Hashem alone has the power from beginning to end. Nothing else – neither cloud gazers, magicians, sorcerers or the constellations – have any power to affect reality in any way (Ramban, *Bereishit* 17:1). Spiritual people, who gravitate to the esoteric and mysterious may easily overstep the boundaries of what is permitted. Therefore, we are enjoined to accept our destinies wholeheartedly and not attempt to magically affect the Natural Order. The Torah emphasizes that worship of any entity other than G-d is idolatrous. There is no room whatsoever for belief in any force which competes, even in the slightest way, with the One and Absolute G-d. For further details regarding the prohibition of engaging in enchantments, magic or the use of omens see *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, Chapter 166.

Israel Will Gain the Highest Perception by Avoiding Divination

ספר במדבר פרק כג פסוק כג כי לא נחש ביעקב ולא קסם בישראל כעת יאמר ליעקב ולישראל מה פעל אל:
 "For there is no divination in Ya'acov and no soothsaying in Israel. In time it will be said to Ya'acov and Israel, 'What has G-d wrought'" (*Bamidbar* 23:23).

The Jewish people are worthy of blessing since there are no diviners or soothsayers among us. There will come another time like this, when Hashem's love for us will be revealed to all, for we will be seated before Him and learn Torah from His mouth. Our place will be closer to the Divine Presence than the ministering angels. The angels will ask us, "What has G-d wrought?" This is the meaning of what is stated, "Your eyes shall behold your Teacher" (*Yesha'yahu* 30:20). Another interpretation: The phrase **יאמר ליעקב** – "It shall be said to Ya'acov" is not in the future but in the present tense. This teaches us that we have no need for diviners, sorcerers or soothsayers. For any time it is necessary to tell Israel what G-d has wrought and what decrees He enacted on high, the decrees of the Omnipresent are transmitted to us through our prophets, or the Urim and Tumim will inform us (*Midrash Tanchuma Balak* 14; *Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* 20:20; Rashi, *Bamidbar* 23:23).

In conclusion, as long as we remain wholehearted with Hashem, without falling into the temptation of relying on questionable forecasts and fortunetelling etc., we are brought inside a partition so close to G-d that even the ministering angels cannot enter. Thus, Israel can receive revelations that even the angels do not know, since we are closer to G-d than the angels! (*Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim* 32a).