



What is the Difference Between Magic and Spiritual Healing from the Torah?

What are the Jewish Approaches to the Occult Practices in the World?

Nowadays there is an increased interest in the occult. People often ask me about all kinds of spiritual healing/energy medicine, Tarot cards, Ouija boards, seances and all the other enticing occult techniques. One such recurring question is whether the system of Reiki is kosher? Baruch Hashem, I was never trained in any of these practices, as I came to the Torah way of life at a young age. Yet, the Torah sages had to be knowledgeable in sorcery and witchcraft in order to know how to refute them and categorize the various methods as either *kishuf* (magic), *nichush* (divination), *darchei Emori* (the ways of the Emorites i.e. superstitions) etc. Therefore, I take this opportunity to do a little research on the popular Japanese spiritual healing method called Reiki, so that next time someone asks me about it, I won't need to refrain from giving an educated answer. It seems to me that in the Jewish world, there are basically three general approaches to anything mystical that does not derive directly from Torah sources:

1. The *litvish chareidi* (non-Chassidic, black hat) view is to condemn anything mystical even though it may have Torah sources. According to this view, anything which cannot be proven scientifically, including any kind of spiritual healing, is condemned as being dangerous. An example of this approach can be found in [Rabbi Yair Hoffman's review of Alternative Medicine in Halacha](#).
2. The Jewish Renewal approach, that embraces all the popular New-Age Healing ways including astrology, psychics, the presence of spiritual energy in physical objects, tree worship, gemstones, shamanism magic and more. Incidentally, the leadership of Jewish Renewal often advocates sexual conduct that deviates from Jewish law. See for example, [Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute](#).
3. Those who work on filtering occult practices in our times through the lens of the Torah. They recognize through Kabbalistic knowledge, that science is just beginning to catch up with the deep hidden wisdom of the Torah, and that any true alternative mystical approach out there in our modern world, can trace its roots back to our very own Torah sources.

I personally believe that engaging in the third approach is part of the *geulah* (redemption) process, elevating the fallen sparks dispersed in the world and returning them to their source. In order to engage in this vital but perilous endeavor, we must be well versed in Torah, including both the revealed and concealed parts. In addition, an openness to explore other traditions is necessary, as long as we continuously engage in the Torah and our Torah knowledge supersedes our explorations of other traditions.

Is Reiki Kosher?

It is not the scope of this article to exhaust all the various spiritualisms popular in our time. Since I practice spiritual healing from the Torah, I'm often asked about Reiki, so I would like to explore this modality of healing further. Reiki was invented in the early 1920's by the Japanese Dr. Mikao Usui, while practicing Buddhist meditation. It is a spiritual healing method, using the laying on of

hands to channel the energy in the surrounding environment to the person in need of healing. To strengthen the channeled energy, the practitioner mentally focuses on ancient Japanese symbols. There are four Japanese mantras and symbols taught in the system of Reiki. The mantras are believed to be 'words carrying spirit.' "In ancient times, not only did the Japanese believe that the gods or kami were in every object and natural element, but in words too" (Bronwen and Frans Stiene, *The Japanese Art of Reiki: A Practical Guide to Self-Healing*). When I read this, no further research was necessary. There is no question that pronouncing mantras, whose origin is in idol worship, transgresses the Second Commandment of the Torah. Reciting these mantras containing names of idolatry is forbidden according to all halachic authorities ([Kollel Choshen Mishpat](#)). However, some practice a modern form of Reiki, without mantras or any prior beliefs. In the controversy of whether this type of reiki is permitted. The Amshinover Rebbe, R' K. S. Gross, Dayan Krauss are lenient, whereas other rabbinical authorities prohibit any kind of Reiki (*Sefer Ki Lo Nachash B'yakov, Kuntres "Al Tifnu,"* R' D. Morgenstern, R' Fanger shlit"a). Even without the idol worshipping element, in Reiki and other Eastern systems of energy healing, G-d is perceived as an impersonal energy force. The origin of Reiki is a composite of the Japanese words, *Rei* – 'spiritual knowledge' and *ki* – 'energy.' These systems believe that energy emanates and proceeds from G-d (or the universe) seen as one and the same. This pantheistic view goes against the Torah, as G-d cannot be confined to merely energy or to the universe: "The Holy One is called the place of the world, but the world is not His place" (*Tikunei Zohar* 81b). This explains why Rabbi Yitzchak Fanger, gave up his prosperous millionaire Reiki Center in Israel, to devote himself to bringing Jews back to Torah. This was after having consulted with Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, who told him that Reiki was based on *Avodah Zara*, and therefore forbidden.

Israel is Protected from Bilam's Manipulative Magic

Whatever healing we practice, we must always remember that Hashem is the source of everything, and all healing is ultimately in His hand alone. The Torah instructs us to be wholehearted and pure with Hashem (*Devarim* 18:13). This implies not to listen to cloud gazers, magicians and witches. We must not believe that their words have any power. Rather, we must make clear in our heart that everything is in the hand of the uppermost G-d (Ramban, *Bereishit* 17:1). Therefore, the Jewish people have no need for mantras or soothsayers, as we have a direct connection to Hashem. In his fear of Israel's power, Balak hired the well-known sorcerer Bilam to curse the Jewish people, through his connection with the dark powers. By employing impure sources, they attempted to manipulate reality into conforming to their evil schemes. Bilam tried to tune into the exact moment of G-d's anger for his own purposes. He knew that G-d became angry every morning when the kings of the world arise and worship the sun, as it states, "And in the morning Balak took Bilam and led him up to Bamot Ba'al, and from there he saw part of the people" (*Bamidbar* 22:41). Bilam thus timed his curses to coincide with the exact moment of G-d's anger (Ohr HaChaim, *Ibid*). What Bilam didn't know was that the powers guarding Israel are stronger than the forces he could conjure up, as it states:

סֹפֵר בַּמַּדְבָּר פָּרַק כַּג פְּסוּק כַּג כִּי לֹא נִחַשׁ בְּיַעֲקֹב וְלֹא קָסָם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כָּעֵת יֵאמָר לְיַעֲקֹב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מֶה פָּעַל אֵל:
 "For there is no divination (soothsaying) in Ya'acov and no sorcery Israel. At time it will be said to Ya'acov and Israel, 'What has G-d wrought?' (*Bamidbar* 23:23).

Through learning Torah and keeping mitzvot, the Jewish people are protected from both the soothsaying divination of Bilam and the magic of Balak. This protection pertains to all times. "At time it will be said to Ya'acov" – for the future "and Israel..." for the past. Soothsaying concerns the future, whereas sorcery refers to the past (Aderet Eliyahu, *Bamidbar* 23:23). Since Israel is cleaving to Hashem, we don't need soothsayers and magicians (Rabbeinu Bachaya *ibid*.)

Between Magic and Miracles

How do we go about filtering other traditions of spiritual healing through the lens of the Torah? The clue is to be found in a very puzzling Talmudic passage:

Abaye said: The laws of sorcerers are like those of Shabbat: certain actions are punished by stoning, some are exempt from punishment, yet forbidden, while others are entirely permitted. Thus: if one actually performs magic, he is stoned; if he merely creates an illusion, he is exempt, yet it is forbidden. What is entirely permitted? – Such as was performed by R. Chanina and R. Oshaia, who spent every Shabbat eve in studying the Laws of Creation, by means of which they created a third-grown calf and ate it (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 67b*).

If the Talmud states that someone who performs magic must be stoned to death, how come it was permitted for Rabbi Chanina to create a calf and eat it? Isn't that considered magic? Note that the Rabbis in the Talmud were studying Torah, specifically the laws of creation, through which they created the calf. Thus, the Rabbis created a calf by means of connecting certain the letters including those of Hashem's Name, through which the world was created. This is not considered witchcraft, since it's Hashem's deeds, by means of His holy name (*Iskei behilchot yetzira*). The difference between magic and G-d given miracles, are their source. It all depends on whose help is invoked in order to bring about healing. Why are sorcerers called מְכַשְׁפִּים/*mechashefim*? It is an acronym for: מְכַחֵשׂוּן פְּמִלְיָא שֶׁל מַעְלָה – 'Contradicts the heavenly entourage' (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 67b*). In the endeavor of the wicked to fulfill their hearts' desires, they always look for ways to get out of G-d's decrees. They are, therefore, involved in the powers of witchcraft and magic which is the opposite of תְּמִימוּת/*temimut* – 'pure innocence.' Judaism does not believe in the autonomy of evil. When G-d created the world, He created spiritual forces of purity and impurity, and forbade the latter (*Devarim 30:19*). Magic draws from the powers of impurity in the world, and as such, is forbidden. Miracles and practical kabbalah – which is only for great holy tzaddikim like the rabbis in the Talmud – draw from the forces of purity (*kedusha*) and are therefore permitted. Any system of healing be it Reiki, Pranic Healing or Crystal Healing etc. can never be kosher, as long as it draws upon extraneous names and forces rather than Hashem's life-giving light.

From Where does the Healing emanate? From the Side of Holiness or Unholiness?

The traditional explanation of the biblical phrase, "G-d has made one corresponding to the other" (*Kohelet 7:14*), is that G-d created the side of impurity corresponding to the side of holiness in order to ensure free choice. Many types of spiritual healing draw from the side of impurity, also called אַחְרָא אֲחֵרָא/*sitra achra* – 'the other side.' It is called so, to indicate that whatever receives its power from this side, still gets its power from Hashem, for G-d is the source of all. However, they get their power from the other side, meaning indirectly from G-d, so-to-speak from His backside, whereas the power of holiness emanates directly from G-d. It is important to note that even if the source of a certain healing system is from the *sitra achra*, it may still be effective, as Hashem empowered the side of unholiness, in order to make it more challenging to choose holiness. Those who choose to get their energy from impure sources, strengthen the illusion that impurity has independent power. By engaging in impure sources for spiritual healing, they conceal Hashem's oneness with husks of darkness, making it appear as if there exist independent powers other than Hashem in the world. In contrast, when the prophets or the tzaddikim perform a miracle or bring about healing, they do so with G-d's implicit help and/or permission. Likewise, in the kosher systems of spiritual healing such as EmunaHealing, we explicitly pray directly to Hashem and request His assistance in healing, to ensure that we draw our healing directly from Hashem's holiness.