

# Bones and Broomsticks

## Sorcery in the Torah – Part I\*

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( המאמר נערך ע"י חברי המכון הרב יעקב שי' גרשון והרב אברהם שי' בערגשטיין.



## Introduction

The subject of sorcery and other occult practices is a most delicate and complicated subject to explore – for a host of reasons. Firstly, there is fierce debate within Rabbinic circles as to whether sorcery and witchcraft engender genuine or merely imaginary effects altogether.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, even if there were some truth to sorcery, it is questionable whether it remains a viable art in modern times. Above all, the subject raises formidable theological challenges to reconcile the existence of forces that appear to contravene the omnipotence of *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*.

Complicating the issue further, is the fact that Jews have historically been targeted by diabolical stereotypes related to witchcraft and sorcery and other occult practices as a pretext for massacres and expulsions. And yet, there is no denying that traditional Jewish sources refer to practices that recognize the reality of the occult. In some instances, activities associated with practical Kabbalah are suggested for protective or medicinal purposes. Indeed, entire works have been written by great Sages over the centuries documenting these practices.<sup>2</sup>

What follows is a modest attempt to collate and clarify the traditional Torah perspective on how these arts operate and why they are outlawed by the Torah.

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## Source of Prohibition

A series of verses in the Torah (Devarim 18:10-13) forbids the practice of occult arts that were prevalent amongst the non-Jewish nations in Biblical times (translation courtesy of the Kehot Chumash):

(10) Specifically, **there must not be among you anyone who passes his son or daughter through fire**—this being the central feature of the cult of Molech, **anyone** who consults any of the following: a **stick-diviner** (קוסם קסמים), a **diviner of auspicious times, an illusionist** (מעונן), a **diviner who interprets omens** (מנחש), a **divining sorcerer** (מכשף),

(1) ראה הנתבאר באריכות במאמר 'אסטרוולוגיה בהתורה' (מכון שמואל), ו"ש"נ. וראה גם הנסמן באסיא (פג-פד, ע' 220 ואילך. פה-פו, ע' 220 ואילך).

(2) ראה לדוגמא 'ספר הפעולות' להרח"ו (נודע גם בשם 'ספר קבלה מעשית', 'ספר הרפואות', 'רפואות וסגולות', נדפס לראשונה מעצם כתי"ק, תשע"ד), ועוד. וראה שו"ת וישב הים (ח"א, סי' יג), נעתק לקמן (הערה 200).

