

MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

Types of Magic and its Power

The Torah specifies nine types of magic and witchcraft:

Deuteronomy 18:10,11

לא ימצא בך מעביר בנו ובתו באש קסם קסמים מעונן ומנחש ומכשף... וחבר חבר ושואל אוב וידעוני ודורש אל המתים.

"There must not be found among you anyone that passes his child through the fire, or uses divination, a soothsayer, an enchanter, a witch, a charmer, a medium, a wizard or a necromancer."

Is the power of magic and witchcraft mentioned in the Torah real? If so, does it exist today?

Maimonides seems to consider it false:

Rambam, Hilchot Avoda Zara 11:16

ודברים האלו כולן דברי שקר וכזב הן והם שהטעו בהן עובדי כוכבים הקדמונים לגויי הארצות כדי שינהגו אחריהן, ואין ראוי לישראל שהם חכמים מחוכמים להמשך בהבלים אלו ולא להעלות על לב שיש תועלת בהן... המאמין בדברים האלו וכיוצא בהן ומחשב בלבו שהן אמת ודבר חכמה אבל התורה אסרתן, אינן אלא מן הסכלים ומחסרי הדעת... אבל בעלי החכמה ותמימי הדעת ידעו בראיות ברורות שכל אלו הדברים שאסרה תורה אינם דברי חכמה אלא תהו והבל שנמשכו בהן חסרי הדעת ונטשו כל דרכי האמת בגללן.

All of these matters are a lie and falsehood that ancient idol worshipers used to draw the non-Jews after their ways. It is not fitting for Jews, who are wise, to be led after these things nor to entertain the thought that there is any truth to them... One who believes in these matters and thinks that they are true and a matter of wisdom, but the Torah forbid them, is among the foolish and unintelligent... But wise people with a proper outlook will know with clear proofs that all of these things that the Torah prohibited are not of wisdom rather they are empty and unfounded, pursued by the unintelligent who have deserted the paths of truth on account of them.

Nevertheless, most classic commentators disagree with Rambam and rather attribute the power of magic and witchcraft to "the dark side of the force". In fact, some even suggest that Rambam himself may have changed his opinion after having learned Kabbalah toward the end of his life.

A noted commentator on the Rambam wrote of him: "Rambam knew [the secrets of Kabbalah] toward the end of his life. I testify that I saw [old, original documents in which he himself affirms, and which prove, that he engaged in the study of the Kabbalah...but] since the nature of these secret matters is esoteric, he didn't publish them but rather hid them" (Migdal Oz, Yesodei HaTorah 1:11).

Shalshet HaKabbalah 44a brings that R' Eliya Chaim saw in a letter that Rambam wrote to one of his disciples, "After I arrived in the Land of Israel, I found an elderly sage who enlightened my eyes to the ways of the Kabbalah, and if I had known before what I have learned now, many things that I wrote, I would not have written."

Magic Today

Do the forces of magic and witchcraft exist today?

Regarding a certain type of witchcraft (*terafim*, more below), Cardano, a non-Jewish wise man, asserts that it was nullified since the war between Julius Caesar and Pompey, about 100 years before the destruction of the Temple. Our sources teach that as long as the Jewish people merited prophecy through pure inspiration, idolaters were given it through sources of impurity, much as a monkey mimics a man. This is similar to what the wicked King Menashe said to Rav Ashi in a dream that if he were in Menashe's generation, he'd raise his robe to run as fast as he could to worship the idols (Sanhedrin 102b). This means that the forces of impurity are commensurate with the forces of purity. Once prophecy was cancelled after the destruction of the Temple, G-d took away the forces of impurity from the non-Jews, particularly where the Torah has taken root. Exceptions are Africa and particularly the Far East of which it is written, "Abraham sent away the sons of Hagar to the Far East with presents" (Gen. 25:6). Our sages taught that he revealed to them impure, unholy names (Sanhedrin 91a).

Before discussing the nine classical types of magic mentioned in the Torah, let's briefly explore *terafim* mentioned above, as well as another form of witchcraft that is also based on utilizing the force of demons.

Teraphim

"Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and [meanwhile] Rachel stole her father's *teraphim*" (Gen. 31:19).

Teraphim are figures and statues in which demons enter and speak through them. How? Pirkei d' Rebi Eliezer explains that it is performed by slaughtering a man, crushing the contents out of the head, preserving it in salts and spices, writing the name of a demon on a gold strip placed under the head, hanging it on a wall, lighting a candle in front of it, and prostrating before it until it speaks. For this reason Rachel stole her father's *terafim*, in order prevent Lavan from knowing that they left or where they went.

Nevertheless, the *teraphim* are often misleading: "For the *terafim* have spoken vanity" (Zecharia 10:2). Why is this? Even though demons are privy to knowledge through astrology, human freewill supersedes the stars and the information they portend may be changed. Also, G-d intentionally misleads the demons so that man shouldn't be too dependent on them.

Spells on the Bride and Groom (*Asirat Chatanim*)

This form of witchcraft uses demons to prevent a newly wed couple from consummating the marriage, or from having children. It is hinted at in the following verse:

"When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out to war, nor shall he be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year to make his wife happy. No man shall

take the lower or upper millstone as a pledge, for he takes a man's life for a pledge" (Deut. 24:5-6).

Targum Yonaton explains the verse as follows: A man shall not "lock up" a bride or a groom through magic spells, for he takes the life of the offspring that should have come from their union. This is based on his understanding that the first verse about pleasing his wife refers to marital relations. The second verse that prohibits "seizing" the lower and upper millstone euphemistically refers to preventing the couple from relations.

Yerushalmi (quoted in the Targum)

ולא תהוון אסורי חתנין וכלין ארום כל דעבד אלין כפר בחיי עלמא דאתי.

"Anyone who casts such a spell denies the world to come"

This is based on the following gemora:

Yevamot 63b

אמר רבי אסי אין בן דוד בא עד שיכלו כל הנשמות שבגוף.

Rabbi Asi said, the descendent of David (Mashiach) will not come until all the souls have been depleted from the 'Body'.

"The Body" refers to the World of Souls. Until it is emptied, Mashiach and the World to Come cannot occur. Preventing pregnancy then, delays Mashiach and the World to Come.

Sanhedrin 37a

דיני נפשות, דמו ודם זרעותיו תלויין בו עד סוף העולם. שכן מצינו בקין שהרג את אחיו שנאמר (בראשית ד) דמי אחיך צועקים. אינו אומר 'דם' אחיך אלא 'דמי' אחיך, דמו ודם זרעותיו.

Regarding the death penalty, his blood and the blood of all of his lost future offspring are dependant on him. [One who takes a life is responsible not only for the life of the person that he takes, but also for the lives of anyone who would have come from him for all generations.] As we find with Cain who killed his brother, [G-d said to Cain] 'the bloods (plural) of your brother are crying out from the earth' (Gen. 4:10). The verse doesn't say 'blood' but 'bloods', referring to his [Hevel's] blood and the blood of his potential offspring.

This spell is so horrible since it deprives life from all future generations. In addition, the Arizal says the one who casts the spell is liable for the seed that was wasted without the possibility of pregnancy.

Sefer Charedim (5:42) brings a true story of a man who "tied" a groom. He became very ill and just before he died, he said he saw the Angel of Death with sword in hand who told him that because of the spell, he brought death upon himself and lost his portion in the World to Come.

Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 7:13

רבי ליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבן גמליאל סלקון לרומי...עלון לחד אתר ואקבלון בחד. כד יתבון למיכל והוה כל תבשיל דהוה עליל קומיהון אי לא הוון מעלין ליה בחד קיטון לא הוה מייתו ליה קומיהון וחשין דילמא דאינון אכלין זבחי מתים. אמרין ליה מה עיסקך...אמר לון חד אבא גבר סב אית לי וגזר על נפשיה דלא נפק מן הדא קיטונא כלום עד דייחמי לחכמי ישראל...נפק לגבון אמרין ליה מה עיסקך אמר לון צלון על ברי דלא מוליד...[ר' יהושע] זרע ליה כיתנא על גבי טבלה איתחמי מרבץ ליה איתחמי דסלק איתחמי מיתלש בה. עד דאסק חדא איתא בקלעיתא דשערה אמר לה שרוי מה דעבדתין. אמרה ליה לא שרייה. אמר לה דלא כן אנא מפרסם לך. אמרה ליה לא יכלה דאינון מסלקין בימא וגזר רבי יהושע על שריא דימא ופלטון. וצלון עלוי וזכה למיקמה לרבי יודה בן בתירה.

R' Lazar, R' Yehoshua, and Raban Gamliel went to Rome...They came to a certain town and were accepted into a house. They noticed that all food that their host brought was first sent to a side room, and they suspected it was being offered to idol worship. They asked the host what he was doing...He replied, "My elderly father swore not to leave his room until Jewish Sages arrive...The father came out and they asked him why he's doing this. He told them, 'Pray for my son who has no children'...[R' Yehoshua] took flax seeds, planted them on the table, they grew, he uprooted the plant, and as he did so, he pulled up a woman by the braids of her hair. He told her to release the spell but she refused. He threatened to publicize her. She said she couldn't release the spell because she threw it into the sea. R' Yehoshua commanded the minister of the sea and it spit out the spell. They prayed for the man and he eventually fathered R' Yehuda ben Bateira.

The Nine Types of Magic and Witchcraft in the Torah

Deuteronomy 18:10,11

לא ימצא בך מעביר בנו ובתו באש קסם קסמים מעונן ומנחש ומכשף...וחבר חבר ושואל אוב וידעוני ודורש אל המתים.

"There must not be found among you anyone that passes his child through the fire, or uses divination, a soothsayer, an enchanter, a witch, a charmer, a medium, a wizard or a necromancer.

1. Passing Children Through Fire (*Ma'avir*)

"And they have built the high places of Tofet which is in the valley of Ben-hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire" (Yirmiyahu 7:31).

"They have also built the high places of the Ba'al to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to the Ba'al" (Ibid 19:5).

Rashi (Deut. 18:10) explains that two fires would be lit and the child would be passed in between. However, according to Ramban (Lev. 18:21), the infant would actually be burned in fire. In any case, the point of the ritual was to offer the infant as a sacrifice to the demons, who would then "reward" the parents with impure powers.

Sanhedrin 63b

והספרוים שרפים את בניהם (ואת בנותיהם) באש לאדרמלך וענמלך אלהי ספרוים...אף חזקיה מלך יהודה ביקש אביו לעשות לו כן, אלא שסכתו אמו סלמנדרא .

“...and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adramelech and Anamelech, the gods of Sepharvaim (II Kings 17:31). King Chezkiyahu’s father [Achaz] also wanted to do this to him [pass him through the fire] but his mother smeared him with the salamandra to protect him from the flames.

Note: Rashi explains that the “salamandra” is a small creature that comes forth from a fire that burns for seven years, and one who smears its blood on oneself is protected from fire.

2. Divination (*Kosem*)

Rambam (Avoda Zara 11:6) explains that in this form of magic, one does a certain action to direct his mind until he becomes possessed with a spirit and starts revealing the future. For example: writhing on the ground, screaming, chanting, gazing intensely in a mirror or leaning on a staff while rhythmically beating with it.

Arbarbanel (Deut. 18) explains that it involves manipulating sticks or instruments in order to tell the future as in the verse, “My people ask counsel of a piece of wood, and their staff declares to them” (Hoshea 4:12). This may be done by using sticks to draw lots or by flipping them like a coin. Alternatively, the practice of divination may as in the verse, “The King of Bavel stood at the parting of the way...to use divination, he shook the arrows” (Yechezkel 21:26). This can involve either sharpening the metal point of an arrow until it appears as a mirror for meditative gazing, or shooting the arrows to determine the future based on how they fall.

Note: Hagahot Tzioni, Parashat Vayera asserts that these acts certainly work since the same thing can be done through pronouncing divine names while gazing intensely in a mirror.

3. Soothsayer (*Me'onen*)

Rabenu Bachaye asserts that the Hebrew word *me'onen* has three possible roots: *ona* meaning time; *anan* meaning cloud; *ayin* meaning eye.

Similarly, Rambam (A.Z. 11:8) describes it as using Astrology to divine auspicious or inauspicious times by gazing into the heavens, or alternatively as deceiving the eye as if something happened which in reality did not.

The following source offers an example of magic being used to create an allusion:

Sanhedrin 67b

רב אשי חזינא ליה לאבוה דקרנא דנפיץ ושדי כריכי דשיראי מנחיריה...א"ל רב לרבי חייא לדידי חזי לי ההוא טייעא דשקליה לספסירא וגיידיה לגמלא וטרף ליה בטבלא וקם אמר ליה לבתר הכי דם ופרתא מי הואי אלא ההיא אחיזת עינים הוה זעירי איקלע לאלכסנדריא של מצרים זבן חמרא כי מטא לאשקוייה מיא פשר וקם גמלא דוסקניתא אמרו ליה אי לאו

זעירי את לא הוה מהדריןן לך מי איכא דזבין מידי הכא ולא בדיק ליה אמיא. ינאי איקלע להווא אושפיזא אמר להו אשקין מיא קריבו שתיתא חזא דקא מרחשן שפוותה שדא פורתא מינייה הו עקרבי אמר להו אנא שתאי מדידכו אתון נמי שתו מדידי אשקייה הואי חמרא רכבה סליק לשוקא אתא חברתה פשרה לה חזייה דרכיב וקאי אאיתתא בשוקא.

Rav Ashi saw the wizard Avuha d'Karna sneeze and blow pieces of cloth from his nostrils...Rav said to Rav Chiya, I saw a certain Arab that took a sword and cut a camel to pieces, then rang a bell and it [came back together and] stood up. He asked, afterwards was there any blood? Rather, it was just an illusion [since there was no blood]. Zeiri went to Alexandria in Egypt. He bought a mule and when he gave it water to drink, it disappeared and became an old piece of wood. They told him, if you weren't Zeiri, we wouldn't return your money – does anyone buy anything here without first testing it with water [which dissolves the magic]? Yanai arrived at an inn. He said, bring me water. They brought him to drink. He saw that [as she brought the water] she was whispering something in her lips. He poured a bit [on the ground to test it] and it turned into scorpions. He told them, I drank from yours – now you drink from mine. Then he gave her to drink, she turned into a mule and he rode her into the marketplace. Her friend came, dissolved the magic and he was seen riding a woman in the market.

Note: One may wonder how Yannai used magic since it's forbidden. Rashi explains that for this reason he is not referred to here as Rabbi.

One explanation for the appearance of this illusion is that it occurs through the power of demons. Not that the demons can create anything, but rather they have the power to create an illusion by enveloping reality with a false appearance. When the power is dissolved, the true object is disclosed from within the demonic illusion.

4. Enchanter (*Menachesh*)

Rambam (A.Z. 11:4) explains that this involves reading of omens such as one who says, since bread fell from my mouth or since my staff fell from my hand I won't go as planned because I won't be successful. Or since a fox passed my right side, I won't leave my home since I'll meet a thief. It also includes reading the chirping of birds to ascertain the future.

Ramban (Deut. 18:9), however, writes that telling the future by comprehending the chirping of the birds or by observing the movement of their wings is permitted.

Josephus Flavius relates that Agrippa, the son of Herod, was captive in Rome through the orders of Caesar Tiberius. He was very depressed until one day an owl appeared before him flapping its wings and acting very strangely. There was a barbarian from Germany there who understood bird language and revealed the owl's message: Even though you're depressed about your current situation, soon your fortune will change. You'll escape and become so successful that all your enemies will envy you. But when you see this bird again, you'll die five days later. He was released by Caesar Kayo, and eventually ruled Palestine. One day, while addressing a great multitude of admirers in Caesaria, he saw the owl. He died five days later.

This phenomenon of telling the future through the birds is explained in the Zohar:

Zohar, Parashat Pikudei

וכל אנון כרוזי מכרזי ואמרי בכל אנון רקיעין כך וכך אתגזר מבאי מלכא, עד דנטלי ההיא מלה בהיכלא דלתתא, ומתמן נפקי ומכרזי מלה עד דאשתמע בכלהו רקיעין, ונחתי ואדעי מלה לכולהו דלתתא. ונטלו מלה כלהו תתאין מדרגא לדרגא, אפילו צפרי שמיא ועופי דארעא כלהו נטלי מלה ואודעי לה בעלמא.

All decrees are announced in all of the heavens [from the upper worlds to the lower worlds], saying such and such has been decreed from the Palace of the King. Until the matter is passed down to the lower chamber [of the angels] and from there it goes forth until it is heard in all of the heavens [from the highest angels down to the lowest ones], and then it goes down and the matter is made known to all the lower realms [of the demons]. The matter is taken through all these lower realms from level to level [from the higher demons to the lower ones] until the flying creatures of the sky [the demons, transmit it to] the birds of the earth [who fly in the air where the demons dwell] who take the edict and announce it in the world [the birds promulgate the decree in this world as the messengers of G-d, the angels and the demons].

5. Witchcraft (*Mechashef*)

Sanhedrin 67b

אמר ר' יוחנן, למה נקרא שמן כשפים? שמכחישין פמליא של מעלה.

Rabi Yochanan said, Why are they [this type of magic] called keshafim? Since they deny - mekacheshim the upper realm [i.e., that G-d runs the world].

This is like Pharaoh's magicians who, spurred by Pharaoh's audacious question, "Who is G-d that I should obey his voice" (Ex. 5:2), sought to deny the existence and providence of G-d. In fact, ancient Egypt was a hotbed for *keshafim*:

Kiddushin 49b

עשרה קבים כשפים ירדו לעולם, תשעה נטלה מצרים ואחד כל העולם כולו.

Ten portions of witchcraft came down to the world, nine portions were taken by Egypt and one portion went to the rest of the world.

Yalkut Shimoni 235

שני מכשפים היו במצרים יוחני וממרא ועשו להן כנפים בכשפים ופרחו באויר ונתלו ברומו של עולם. אמר גבריאל, ברוב גאונך תהרוס קמיד. מיד אמר הקב"ה למיכאל, לך ועשה בהם דין. תפסן מיכאל בציצת ראשן וקעקען על פני המים. הה"ד 'אתה פוררת בעזך ים שברת ראשי תנינים על המים'.

Two [Jewish] male witches were in Egypt, Yochni and Mamre. They made themselves wings with witchcraft and flew up in the air and hovered above the earth. Gavriel told G-d, 'In your greatness lower the haughty'. Immediately G-d told Michael, "Go execute judgment upon them'. Michael grabbed them by their ear locks and threw them down into the water. This is the meaning of the verse, 'In your might you dissolved the sea; you broke the heads of the serpents on the water'.

Witchcraft is also found among women: "Do not leave a woman witch alive" (Ex. 22:17).

Sota 22a

יוחני בת רטיבי - אלמנה מכשפה היתה וכשמגיע עת לידת אשה, היתה עוצרת רחמה במכשפות. ולאחר שמצטערת הרבה היתה אומרת אלך ואבקש רחמים אולי תשמע תפלתי והולכת וסותרת כשפיה והולד יוצא. פעם אחת היה לה שכיר יום בביתה והיא הלכה לבית האשה היולדת. ושמע השכיר קול הכשפים מתקשקשין בכלי כמו שהולד מקשקש במעי האם ובא ופתח את מגופת הכלי והכשפים יצאו והוולד נולד וידעו כי בעלת כשפים היא.

Yochni bat Rativi was a widow and a witch. When it came time for a woman to give birth, she would close her womb with witchcraft. When the woman would be in great pain, she would say, 'I'll ask mercy for you, perhaps my prayer will be answered'. Then she would go and nullify the witchcraft and the baby would come out. One time, she had a workman in the house. She went to the house of a woman in labor and the workman heard the sound of the witchcraft banging inside a vessel as a fetus bangs in the womb of the mother. He came and opened the stopper of the vessel, the spell departed, the baby was born, and everyone found out that she was a witch.

6. Charmer (*Chover Chaver*)

This involves using incantations to manipulate or subdue animals. For example:

"Their poison is like that of a snake, they are like a deaf adder that stops its ear, which will not hearken to the voice of the charmers" (Psalms 58:6).

"Behold, I will send venomous serpents among you which will not be charmed and they shall bite you" (Jeremiah 8:17).

Another form of charming uses incantations to cure illness:

Yerushalmi, Shabbat (in Nishmat Chaim 3:25)

מר ברה דרבי יהושע בן לוי הוה לה בלע (חולי בבית הבליעה). אתא חד בר נש לחש ליה משמות שלימד ליה בן פנדרא ונרפא. כשיצא שאל לו, מה לחשת לי? (ואמר לו האמת) אמר ליה, ניחא לי אלו מיית ולא כן אשמע.

Mar, the son of R' Yehoshua ben Levi, was ill and couldn't swallow. A man came and whispered names that he learned from Pandera and he was cured. As the man left, Mar asked what he whispered. When he told him, Mar said, better that I would have died and not heard [those names of impurity].

Avoda Zara 27b

מעשה בבן דמא, בן אחותו של ר' ישמעאל, שהכישו נחש ובא יעקב איש כפר סכניא לרפאותו ולא הניחו ר' ישמעאל. וא"ל: ר' ישמעאל אחי הנח לו וארפא ממנו ואני אביא מקרא מן התורה שהוא מותר. ולא הספיק לגמור את הדבר עד שיצתה נשמתו ומת. קרא עליו ר' ישמעאל 'אשריך בן דמא שגופך טהור ויצתה נשמתך בטהרה'.

It happened that ben Dama, the nephew [literally: the son of the sister] of R' Yishmael, was bitten by a snake. Ya'akov of Kfar Sachnia came to cure him, but R' Yishmael wouldn't let him. He [ben Doma] said to him, 'Rabbi Yishmael my brother, leave him be and let me be cured by him and I'll bring a verse in the Torah that it's permitted'. He didn't finish speaking when his soul departed and he died. R' Yishmael called out regarding him, 'You are praiseworthy ben Doma that your body is pure and that your soul departed in purity [free of sin, since he knew this Ya'akov was a witch].

7. Medium (Ov)

Rambam (A.Z. 6:1) explains that this is done by burning incense while waving a myrtle branch and chanting incantations until the requester hears the low voice of a spirit answering from the ground.

“And your speech will be low out of the dust as a medium out of the ground” (Is. 29:4).

In an act of desperation, King Saul also used the Ov to call up the soul of Samuel in order to ask whether he should go to war and what would be its outcome:

“And they came to the woman by night and he said, Divine for me by means of the Ov and bring up for me who I name” (I Samuel 28:8).

Note: Even though Saul was well intentioned, he was punished for transgressing the prohibition of witchcraft: “And Saul died because of the treachery that he had committed against the Lord, concerning the word of the Lord that he did not keep, and also because he had inquired of the dead spirit” (I Chron. 10:13).

Rabbi David ben Kimchi (Radak) writes that the name of this form of witchcraft is related to the Hebrew word *ovot* - ‘inflated wineskins’ since the voice sounds like one is speaking through the air in them. For example, “My belly...is ready to burst like new wineskins (*ovot*)” (Job 32:19).

The following gemora reveals a curious variation about how the Ov speaks:

Sanhedrin 65b

תנו רבנן: בעל אוב, אחד המעלה בזכורו ואחד הנשאל בגולגולת. מה בין זה לזה? מעלה בזכורו - אינו עולה כדרכו, ואינו עולה בשבת. נשאל בגולגולת - עולה כדרכו, ועולה בשבת.

The Rabbis taught, the medium of Ov is either one who raises it with/upon his zichuro [explained below] or one who [causes the spirit to rest in a skull] and asks of the skull. What is the difference between them? One who raises with zichuro – [the spirit] doesn't rise normally [i.e. it rises upside down] and it doesn't rise on Shabbat. One who asks of the skull – it rises normally and rises on Shabbat.

Regarding the first case, Rashi explains *zichuro* to mean “his male organ”: i.e., the medium raises and seats the spirit of the dead on his male organ. Tosafot argues that this can't be the case since Saul had Samuel raised through the medium of a woman. Rather, Tosafot explain that the term *zichuro* is an uncertain term associated with the Ov.

Support may be offered for Rashi from non-Jewish sources. They record that a certain type of female witch, namely the 'Pitia' of the temple of Apolini Dilfico, call up spirits of the dead to speak through the female organ. For example, the non-Jewish historian Lukano relates that before Julius Caesar and Pompey battled in Macedonia, Pompey's son went to a witch named Irikto who caused a spirit to speak through her female organ to reveal the outcome of the war. Since this is so regarding female mediums such as 'Pitia', it is likely that a male medium, called in our sources a 'Pitom' (San. 65a), does a similar thing. (Nishmat Chaim 3:26).

8. Wizard (*Yidoni*)

Rambam (A.Z. 6:2) explains that here, one puts the bone of a bird called "Yadua" in his mouth, burns incense and does other acts until he falls and the bone tells the future from within his mouth.

9. Necromancer (*Doresh el HaMetim*)

Rambam (A.Z. 11:13) describes this as one who fasts and goes to sleep in a cemetery and calls upon souls of the dead to come to him in a dream to reveal what he requests. Others wear certain clothing, chant incantations, burn incense and sleep alone in order for the soul of the dead to communicate with them.

This latter type is illustrated by the following:

Baba Batra 58a

ההוא אמגושא דהוה חטיט שכבי. כי מטא אמערתא דרב טובי בר מתנה, תפשיה בדיקניה. אתא אביי א"ל במטותא מינך שבקיה. לשנה אחריתי הדר אתא, תפשיה בדיקניה. אתא אביי לא שבקיה עד דאייתי מספרא וגזיא לדיקניה.

A certain magician used to dig after the dead for the purpose of stripping them [of their clothing]. When he arrived at the burial cave of R' Tuvi bar Matna, he [R' Tuvi] grasped him by the beard. Abaye came and said [to R' Tuvi], 'With your permission sir, please release him'. [He did so.] The next year the magician returned [to the burial cave of R' Matna intending to strip him of his clothes] and R' Tuvi grasped him by his beard. Abaye appeared [and pleaded for his release but] R' Tuvi would not let him go until Abaye brought scissors and cut off his beard.

Summary: Magic and witchcraft work primarily through "the dark side of the force", namely demons and other negative, harmful forces. It is for this reason we are enjoined not to pursue knowledge or power through them. Regarding this the verse states, "For these nations, which you are to possess, hearken to diviners of auspicious times and soothsayers, but as for you, the Lord, your G-d, has not given you these things. A prophet from among you...G-d will set up for you, you shall hearken to him" (Deut. 18:14,15).

Ramban (Deut. 18:9, end) explains, "He gave you great eminence in setting you on high above all nations of the earth in that He will raise up a prophet in the midst of you and place His words in his mouth and you will hear from him what G-d will do. To know the future it will be unnecessary for you to resort to a diviner or soothsayer who receives from the stars or the lower powers whose words are not all true and who do not provide all necessary information. But prophecy informs us of G-d's desire and not one of His words

will be untrue...Thus you are His portion and His treasure, hearing counsel from His mouth, while theirs is the portion of the constellations.”

May we merit to see the return of prophecy and our complete redemption speedily in our days!