



Laws of
Idolatry, Superstition,
Sorcery and the Occult

ECLECTIC TORAH COMPILATIONS

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— TALMUDIC BOOKS —

INTRODUCTION

Judaism is an absolutely pure, undeviating, monotheistic religion with no room whatsoever for belief in any force which competes, even in the slightest way, with the One and Absolute G-d. Worship of any entity other than G-d is idolatrous.

Judaism is also uncomfortable with belief in any number of philosophical systems or doctrines which attempt to understand the Universe, Life and G-d Himself in ways which run contrary to G-d's revealed Torah. As the Rambam quoted below wrote, "It is forbidden to study any philosophy which may cause one to undermine his belief in any of the fundamental doctrines of Judaism" which presupposes that we must be exceedingly prudent in avoiding any belief system or theology which conflicts with the Torah. Once identified as external to Torah belief, said philosophy must be abandoned and no further study of it is permitted.

For in Judaism, the Torah revealed by G-d at Mount Sinai, and the words of our Prophets and Sages are the only bases for absolute Truths. Any variant idea of what Truth may be is of human invention and must be rejected.

But besides worship in false gods and credence in false philosophies, Judaism is highly suspect of superstitious beliefs and the dabbling in the occult, either because these matters are adjuncts to or may lead one to idolatry, or they are just plain stupid and not becoming of the Holy and Dignified People of Israel who should remain aloof of unfounded nonsense.

It has been argued that people are drawn to superstitious practices and the occult because of "a desire to know the hidden future and master Nature". Surely, the penchant for wizardry increases during periods of illness and suffering, distress and trepidation, and when people are

desperate, as in times of trouble or poverty, when anxious to find a spouse or to have children, etc.

And since spirituality and faith are closer akin to religiosity than are intellect and reason, the “religious” man, by temperament, will gravitate towards the esoteric and mysterious and could easily slip into the worlds of the booga-boogas and heebie-jeebies.

The dictum תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך “you shall be wholehearted with your G-d” stands in direct opposition to these impulses. Although Torah study, meticulous observance of the Mitzvahs, perfecting one’s moral character, and fervent prayer are (the only) legitimate ways of influencing G-d’s Will, nevertheless, in the end, we are enjoined to accept our destinies wholeheartedly and not attempt to magically affect the Natural Order. Particularly at times of stress and illness should one make extra efforts to strengthen his complete faith in G-d and not seek ineffectual shortcuts and useless gimmicks.

With this in mind, I have compiled a summary of a few key Laws gleaned from the Rambam, the Shulchon Aruch and other sources to be used as “guidelines” for how one should relate to idolatry, idol worshippers, and dubious belief systems. I have included laws regarding the prohibitions of imitating the Gentiles, superstitions, sorcery and the occult. I have also included a few choice quotes from Rabbi Yaakov Hillel’s book Faith and Folly appropriate to these subjects, and two additional appendices briefly describing several of the world’s more popular religions and better-known philosophical doctrines.

Finally, I must stress that by no means should this booklet be construed as a substitute for serious study of the primary sources with an experienced teacher or rabbi nor should one hesitate to ask a qualified rabbi for guidance and Halachic decisions in specific cases. As such, *the material below is merely for general study only and not to be taken as the final Halacha.*

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24 Shevat 5762

LAWS OF IDOLATRY, SUPERSTITION, SORCERY AND THE OCCULT

4th Edition 5766

A. IDOLATRY

I. GENERAL PROHIBITIONS

1. The prohibition against idolatry¹ weighs against all the other Mitzvahs. Anyone who believes in idolatry denies the entire Torah, the Prophets and what they commanded. Anyone who rejects idolatry affirms the Torah, the Prophets and what they commanded. This is the fundamental Mitzva (MT AC 2:4).
2. It is forbidden to believe in the existence of any god, but the one G-d (שמות 20:3).
3. It is forbidden to worship any entity, but G-d alone (שמות 20:2). No creation, no constellation, no star, no object or element may be worshipped, even if the worshipper also acknowledges the existence of G-d² (MT AC 2:1).
4. It is forbidden to worship any being or element or object as an intermediary between Man and G-d (MT AC 2:1).
5. It is forbidden to read pagan or idolatrous religious literature (MT AC 2:2).
6. It is forbidden to contemplate their theologies and philosophies (ברכות 12b, MT AC 2:2). It is forbidden to study any philosophy³ which may cause one to undermine his belief in any of the fundamental doctrines⁴ of Judaism. We must not consider these matters lest we be drawn into believing that they have validity and veracity. Man's capacity to understand is limited and he can be readily persuaded to believe in apostasy as it says **ולא תתרו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זונים**. Therefore, one should not rely upon his own judgment and assume that he has "found the Truth" (MT AC 2:3).
7. It is forbidden to take idolatry or its mythology seriously (ויקרא 19:4).
8. It is forbidden to gaze at their idols and images (icons) since this may cause us to replicate their forms of worship (שבת 149a, MT AC 2:2).
9. A Jew who worships idolatry is an idolater in every way⁵. He cannot be compared with any other sinner (MT AC 2:5), i.e. his sin is far more serious.
10. Apostates, i.e. those who intentionally violate basic Torah laws but claim that they are not sinning, cannot repent and we make no attempt to return them. Apostates' thoughts are motivated by idolatry (MT AC 2:5).

¹ Idolatry is one of the seven commandments which all of mankind is obliged to observe (סנהדרין 56a). The Gemara (חולין 13b) has already stated that non-Jews outside of Eretz Yisroel are no longer to be considered idolaters, rather **מנהג אבותיהם בידיהם** – they are merely (innocently) following in the footsteps of their forefathers.

² Called "שיתוף" (an alliance), this is considered to be more odious and repugnant than ordinary idol worship.

³ A number of common religions and problematic philosophies are listed in the attached Appendices B and C.

⁴ But, are there "fundamental doctrines" in Judaism? The Rambam felt so, whereas others disagreed and claimed that denial of even one commandment is heretical.

⁵ However, one cannot sell an apostate his **חמץ** for **פסח**. For that he is still considered a Jew.

11. It is forbidden to worship any image or form neither in the way said image or form is typically worshipped (שמות 20:4) nor in those manners specifically prescribed for worshipping G-d: by prostrating, sacrificing or offering incense or libations, even if these are not the ways which these idols are typically worshipped (שמות 20:4, MT AC 3:2, 3).
12. It is forbidden to swear in the name of an idol (שמות 23:13, MT AC 5:10).
13. It is forbidden to cause an idolater to swear in the name of his gods (SO YD 147:3).
14. It is forbidden to encourage or persuade neither a non-Jew nor a Jew to worship idols (שמות 23:13, דברים 13:12).
15. It is forbidden to explicitly mention the name of an idol⁶ (MT AC 5:10).
16. It is forbidden to say to one's friend "meet me near such and such an idol" mentioning it by name, unless the name of that idolatry is specifically mentioned in the Torah, such as Peor, Baal, etc. (MT AC 5:11, SO YD 147:1,3).
17. If the name of their holiday is the same as a personal name, there is no problem in mentioning the name as long as the name is not referred to with reverence, as would the idolaters (SO YD 147:2).
18. Maharam Schick (Shailos U'Tshuvos YD 171) rules that it is forbidden to mention the year in accordance with the Christian reckoning.
19. It is permitted to say to an idolater "May G-d help you or cause you to succeed" (Poskim at SO YD 147:5).
20. It is forbidden to remove one's hat or kneel before a priest or anyone who is wearing a cross.
21. It is forbidden to offer one's children to the Molech (ויקרא 18:21, 20:2).

II. PROHIBITION AGAINST IMAGES

1. It is forbidden to make images for oneself (שמות 20:3) or for others to worship (ויקרא 19:4) or for any other purpose (שמות 20:19).
2. It is forbidden to draw an image of the sun, moon, stars, constellations, angels or a human being (MT AC 3:11). Protruding or sunken images of the sun, moon and stars are forbidden, unless they are to be used for teaching or learning (SO YD 141:4).
3. A ring with a bas-relief form of a human being cannot be worn, but may be used as a signet. If the image is concave, one may wear it, but must not use it as a seal (SO YD 141:5). This is true of other forbidden forms as well (Rama YD 141:5).
4. Some say that the prohibition of drawing the human form, a human face (except a profile) or the image of the mythical "dragon"⁷ applies when the image is complete

⁶ Dysphemisms are often employed when referring to idolatry.

⁷ Or serpent. Possibly employed as an emblem of idolatry.

with all its limbs or elements (SO YD 141:7). If any of these forms are slightly disfigured, it is permitted to draw them (KSO 168:2).

5. It is permitted to draw or fashion an image of an animal, beast, bird, fish or any other living creature, trees, grass, etc. (MT AC 3:11), even in bas-relief (SO YD 141:6).
6. It is forbidden to draw images of the celestial denizens such as the four collocated faces on Ezekiel's chariot, forms of the Seraphim, Ophanim⁸, or the administrating angels. All of these are forbidden even if done for decorative purposes. If an idolater made them, it is forbidden to keep them. This refers to protruding/projecting (bas-relief) images, however concave/sunken images such as those woven into clothing or wall-paintings are permitted (SO YD 141:4).
7. The Rama rules that the cross is an idolatrous image (Rama YD 141:1, 150:3, uncensored editions). However, coins, seals and stamps with crosses are permitted⁹ (Rama YD 141:3).
8. The Taz wrote that it is improper to draw the signs of the Zodiac in our Machzorim at תפילת הגשם (prayer for rain). The Nekudas Hakesef disagreed with this ruling (see Be'er Heitev YD 141:23).
9. Although it is customary to depict lions above the Aron Kodesh, it is best to draw them without crowns on their heads since we are concerned (that the Halacha is in accordance) with the opinions which say that the lion was one of the bearers of the Celestial Chariot. While some permitted and others forbade images of animals and birds in the synagogue (Mordechai 83), nowadays, we are lenient and allow them since they are no longer objects of worship. Full-formed busts, however, are not permitted (ODU p. 349).

III. CHURCHES, TEMPLES AND MOSQUES

1. It is forbidden to enter a church (Rambam, Mishna 1, Avodas Zoroh, IM YD (3) Siman 129[6]) or an idolatrous temple¹⁰. I do not know of a prohibition regarding entering mosques.
2. It is forbidden to enter the courtyard of a place of idolatry, even for purposes of speaking with someone, and even in a case of פקוקה נפש (saving a life) (Tur YD 149).
3. It is forbidden to pass within four Amos (6 feet, 2 meters) of an idolatrous temple or sit in the shadow of the building (Tur YD 142).
4. It is forbidden to have any benefit from a building where an idol was housed, even if the idol is no longer there (SO YD 145 and Shach).
5. Anyone who enters an idolatrous temple violates the Jewish religion and requires immersion in a Mikveh, and lashes (Darkei Teshuvoh YD 150).

⁸ Types of angels.

⁹ See Sha'arim Mitzuyonim B'Halacha on KSO 167:1 for a discussion regarding the difference between crosses used for decorative purposes and those which will be worshipped.

¹⁰ Such as a Buddhist or Hindu shrine.

IV. MONUMENTS AND GENUFLECTING

1. It is forbidden to construct monuments, or pillars for idols, or even for the honor of our G-d, if people will gather around them for worship (ויקרא 20:1, MT AC 6:6).
2. It is forbidden to prostrate or genuflect directly on a stone floor (אבן משכית)¹¹ [without any separation¹²] (MT AC 6:6) except in the מקדש (MT AC 6:7).
3. It is forbidden to bow before an idol even for the purpose of picking something up, because of the impression¹³ given that you may be bowing to the idol (SO YD 150). If one must pick something up, he must first turn his back or side to the idol (KSO 167:6).

V. IDOLS, ACCOUTERMENTS AND OTHER LAWS

1. It is forbidden to show any honor to or respect for an idol, such as kissing, washing or decorating it, etc. (MT AC 3:6)¹⁴.
2. It is forbidden to make (build, construct, sculpt) an idol or commission one to be made (MT AC 3:9).
3. It is forbidden to make decorations or any accouterment which will be used in idol worship, such as fashioning gold or silver jewelry, painting pictures, etc. Concave images may be made (MT AC 3:10).
4. It is forbidden to derive any benefit from idolatry, its ornaments or the accouterments used in idolatrous ceremonies (דברים 7:25-26, 13:18, עבודת זרה 29b, MT AC 7:2) nor any derivative, such as the ash or coal from a burnt Ashera¹⁵ tree (MT AC 7:10). One may derive benefit from the fire of a burning Ashera (SO YD 142:1).
5. Idols, their accouterments and offerings are forbidden even in the smallest amount. Even if one (item) was mixed with a thousand, the entire mixture is forbidden (SO YD 140:1). It is forbidden to use anything connected with idols or idolatry (דברים 7:26). It is forbidden to rebuild that which has been destroyed as a punishment for idolatry (דברים 13:17).
6. It is forbidden to stop and protect oneself from the sun in the shade of an Ashera tree (MT AC 7:11).
7. It is forbidden to use the wood of an Ashera tree or that of any other idol for healing, even for one who is seriously ill¹⁶ (פסחים 25a).

¹¹ Such floors were decorated with mosaics of pagan gods.

¹² A synagogue with a mosaic stone floor should be covered on Yom Kippur since we bow down upon it during the saying of עלינו and the עבודה.

¹³ Literally, "suspicion".

¹⁴ Touching or carrying an idol makes one as ritually impure as a Niddoh (menstruant) (ישעיהו 30, שבת 82a).

¹⁵ The Ashera tree was once an object of worship (עבודת זרה 3:7).

¹⁶ Idolatry, illicit sexual unions and murder are the three cardinal sins which one may not violate, even at the cost of losing a life (סנהדרין 74a).

8. One can have benefit from any object of worship which no human has fashioned or altered in any way (MT AC 8:10). This would include hills, rocks (if they weren't moved from their original location), rivers, springs, trees (if not planted for an idolatrous purpose) and animals (under certain circumstances) (SO YD 145:1).
9. A Jew's idol cannot be annulled¹⁷, whereas as a non-Jew's idol, its decorations and accouterments can be annulled. A non-Jew's idol's offerings cannot be annulled. Decorative accouterments include candles lit in religious ceremonies, vessels, etc. "Offerings" include food offerings or any act performed before the idol which is considered its particular form of worship (SO YD 139:2).
10. Candles and wax used in the worship service of these idols are forbidden for use as candles of Mitzva, such as for Shabbos, Chanukah or in a Shul (SO YD 139:13).
11. Vestments their priests wear in their temples are considered "ornamental" (unless worn as part of the service/ceremonies) and are not part of the Idolatry, per se. Therefore, there is no need to annul them, although some require this (SO YD 139:11). Their priestly garments cannot be made into a Tallis or any other article of Mitzva because to do so would be considered repugnant (SO YD 139:13).
12. Some say that if a Jew is already in possession of their (idolatrous) books, he may sell them (SO YD 139:15). Some (including the Bach) prohibit selling them their hymnals, which some say refers specifically to selling to their priests. One who is strict, however, will be blessed. There are those who are stringent and forbid selling them parchment and inks to write their religious books (Rama YD 139:15).
13. Some say that it is forbidden to lend them money for the purpose of building their temples or making idolatrous jewelry or bind their idolatrous books. One should do his best in trying to avoid such situations where refusing to do so might lead to enmity (SO YD 139:15).
14. It is permitted to bathe in a bathhouse where idols have been erected for decorative purposes and not for worship (SO YD 142:14)¹⁸.
15. It is forbidden to intentionally listen to idolatrous music or gaze at the beauty of their idols for enjoyment (SO YD 142:15).
16. It is forbidden to plant a tree near an idol, neither to worship nor for decoration (MT AC 6:9).
17. It is forbidden to plant trees in the **מקדש** (דברים 16:21).
18. It is a positive Mitzva to destroy idols and their accouterments, particularly in **ארץ ישראל** where we must "pursue" idolatry (MT AC 7:1) and proclaim it "disgraceful"¹⁹ (SO YD 146:15).

¹⁷ Under certain circumstances, objects may be "annulled" by making them unusable for their original purpose and, thereby, made useable for a Jew.

¹⁸ Statues of the goddesses Aphrodite and Venus were commonly found in bathhouses.

¹⁹ The Maharashoh wrote that one makes the blessing **לעקור עבודת זרה מארצנו** when idolatry is uprooted in **ארץ ישראל** (Maharashoh **ברכות** 57b). Other blessings are recited upon seeing a place where idolatry has been uprooted (see ODU p. 306).

VI. ENTICING TO IDOLATRY

1. It is forbidden to entice another Jew to worship idols, even if the attempt is unsuccessful (MT AC 5:1).

VII. IDOLATERS

1. It is forbidden to listen to or love anyone who disseminates idolatry. One must not desist from hating such a person. He must not be pitied or defended but, rather, he must be exposed (דברים 13:9²⁰).
2. It is forbidden to send a non-Jew a gift on his holiday unless the non-Jew states that he is not an idol worshipper (MT AC 9:2).
3. It is forbidden to benefit from an idolatrous banquet. Even if the Jew eats and drinks his own food, it is considered as if he ate at the idolater's celebration (MT AC 9:15).
4. It is forbidden to sell buildings or fields in ארץ ישראל to an idol-worshipper. In Syria, we may sell them houses, but not fields. In ארץ ישראל, we may rent one or two (non-residential) buildings to idolaters, but not three since this constitutes a "neighborhood"; but we do not lease fields to them. In Syria, we lease fields to them. Outside of ארץ ישראל we are permitted to sell them buildings and fields since those are not our lands (MT AC 10:3).
5. Although we are permitted to rent (commercial) buildings to them, we do not rent residences to them since they will bring their idolatry inside, as it says ולא תחנם - לא תתן חנייה בקרקע "you shall not allow them to rest", that is, you shall not permit them to dwell in your lands. As long as they do not actually own land, their dwelling is considered temporary (MT AC 10:4).
6. It is forbidden to praise idolaters or their idols. It is forbidden to compliment the idolaters' deeds or something they have said. They should not find favor in your eyes since this will lead you to be attracted to them and you will then learn from their depraved ways (MT AC 10:4). However, you may compliment them if your praises are directed to G-d (SO YD 151:14).
7. We do not give them "unconditional" gifts (MT AC 10:4) unless we know the idolater personally (SO YD 151:11) because of the prohibition of לא תחנם (Taz).
8. We support the idolatrous poor as we would the Jewish poor, for the sake of peace²¹. We inquire as to their welfare and health, even on their holidays (MT AC 10:5).
9. We visit their sick, eulogize them and console their mourners (SO YD 151:12).
10. We do not visit them in their homes on their holidays to wish them well. However, if we should meet them in the street, we extend Shalom (greetings) to them quietly and respectfully. However, we never "double" our saying of Shalom to them (MT AC 10:5).

²⁰ Interestingly, this one verse contains five distinct Commandments, as does דברים 18:10; although this latter one, along with 18:11 with four, results in two consecutive verses as the sources for nine specific Commandments!

²¹ Either because we are afraid of the non-Jews or because this promotes peace between us.

11. All this was said when Israel was in exile and we lived among the idolaters or when the idolaters had the upper hand on us. However, when Israel has the upper hand, we must not sanction idol worshippers among us. We must not let them live among us even temporarily or allow them to travel from place to place to do commerce until such time as they accept upon themselves the seven Noachide commandments (MT AC 10:6).
12. A non-Jew who accepts upon himself the seven Noachide commandments is a **גר תושב** (permanent resident)²² (MT AC 10:6).

VIII. ECUMENISM

1. It is forbidden to participate in or assist with any aspect of ecumenical discussions between Jews and Christians because their underlying motivation is to missionize and convert us to their faith (IM YD Siman [3] 43)

IX. BLASPHEMY

1. It is forbidden to blaspheme (שמות 22:27, ויקרא 24:16). A blasphemer is equivalent to an idolater (MT AC 2:6). Blasphemy is to euphemistically “bless” G-d using one of His known names (see MT AC 2:7).
2. Anyone who hears directly, or about, a Jew “blessing” G-d must rend his clothing (MT AC 2:10).

X. FALSE PROPHECY

1. It is forbidden to prophesize in the name of an idol (דברים 18:20).
2. It is forbidden to prophesize falsely in the name of G-d (דברים 18:20).
3. One who prophesizes in the name of G-d or one who heard a (real) prophesy from another person and claimed that it was he who received it is a false prophet (MT AC 5:8).
4. One who says that he has received a prophesy in the name of an idol or god and says that he was told to do or not to do something or another, even if what he was told does not go against the teachings of the Torah, is a false prophet.
5. It is forbidden to listen to a false prophet (דברים 13:3-4) even if he produces signs and miracles (MT AC 5:6,7).
6. We are warned not to fear a false prophet nor hinder his execution (דברים 18:22).

²² His residence in the Holy Land is tolerated.

XI. SETTING THE TABLE FOR GAD

1. The prophet Isaiah (65:11) castigates those who abandon G-d as עורכים לגד שולחן “setting the table for Gad”; Gad being either a star or planet or a term for luck, fortune and destiny²³. From this we derive the Law which states that one is not permitted to place a loaf of bread or any other food on the table in the evening and leave it there overnight, for it would appear as if he is making an offering to Gad (SO YD 178:3).
2. One is permitted, however, to set the Shabbos morning table on Friday night with the Challahs, etc. since this is clearly done for the honor of Shabbos (Be'er Heitev YD 178:5).
3. It is forbidden to set the table with different types of food the night before a Bris Miloh if done for the good luck of the baby because of this prohibition (SO YD 179:17).

B. DERIVATIVE LAWS²⁴

XII. TATTOOING

1. Tattooing is forbidden (see SO YD 180 for details, based on ויקרא 19:28).

XIII. SHAVING WITH A RAZOR

1. It is forbidden to shave any of the five “corners” of one’s beard nor one’s Payis (sideburns) with a razor (ויקרא 19:27, SO YD 181). Since the exact locations of these corners is a matter of dispute among the Sages, the G-d-fearing Jew will not shave his face at all using a razor (SO YD 181:11).
2. It is forbidden for a man to shave with a razor nor pluck out the hairs from his armpits, pubic area or any other region of his body which only women typically shave²⁵ (SO YD 182:1).

XIV. CROSS-DRESSING²⁶

1. A woman may not wear men’s clothing nor may a man may wear women’s clothing (דברים 22:5). This is true even if the person cross-dresses with but a single garment and the rest of his/her ensemble is consistent with that of his/her gender in that locality (Rama YD 182:5).

²³ Another deity or planet mentioned in the same verse is “Meni”; I do not know to what this refers. Upon the birth of Zilpah’s first son, Leah said בגד read as two words בא גד. Rashi says that that means “good fortune has arrived.” Isaac Mozeson in his book The Word (page 80) gives the likely etymology that both the words, good and god, are derivatives of gad.

²⁴ Some might add to this list the prohibitions of Shaatnez (wearing garments of both wool and linen) (דברים 22:11) and lacerating oneself over the dead (ויקרא 19:28, דברים 14:1).

²⁵ See Sanhedrin 21a.

²⁶ Rav S. R. Hirsch wrote that idolatry and licentious behavior always go hand-in-hand.

2. A woman may not wear men's jewelry or adornments, such as a man's hat or armor²⁷, etc. in accordance with local custom, nor cut her hair as would a man. A man may not adorn himself as would a woman such as wearing colored clothing or gold jewelry, unless the custom in that place is for men to do so (SO YD 182:5).

XV. DYEING ONE'S HAIR

1. A man may not pluck out or dye black even one of his gray or white hairs among the black ones.

C. PROHIBITIONS RELATING TO IMITATING THE NON-JEWISH WORLD - חוקת הגוים

XVI. GENERAL PROHIBITIONS

1. Chazal have applied the verses *“And in their statutes you shall not go”* (ויקרא 18:3), *“You shall not go in the ways of the non-Jews' statutes”*, (ויקרא 20:23) and *“Take care so as not to follow after them”* (דברים 12:30) in a number of different ways. They have taught that we should not imitate the non-Jewish world in its religious rituals and ceremonies, even if there is nothing inherently wrong with these rites. We must not follow their cultural interests, particularly their forms of entertainment, circuses, theatre and sports, because these activities will ultimately lead us to abandon the Torah and the Torah way of life (MT AC 11).
2. Specifically, Chazal have taught that we must differentiate ourselves from their immoral behavior, their dress, hair styles, thought, custom, culture, etc. (Rama YD 178:1). We may not:
 - i) wear the same clothing worn by their clerics during their idolatrous services
 - ii) wear our hair as they do (particularly cited is the prohibition against growing ponytails and partially shaving the head as do their monks)
 - iii) replicate the design/form of their cathedrals and temples used for their idolatrous worship (SO YD 178:1).
3. It is permissible to wear non-Jewish attire when there is danger (to life) for the Jew, such as for merchants when travelling, as long as there is no suspicion that the change in clothing is motivated by apostasy (various Poskim).
4. It is permissible to wear distinctive clothing or uniforms worn by professionals, such as worn by doctors, or garments which are worn for honor (Rama YD 178:1).
5. It is permitted for Jews to wear non-Jewish dress if it is not licentious and has already been adopted by other Jews (Shailos U'Tshuvos Beis Shlomo YD 1:197).
6. One who is close to the Authorities (e.g. government officials, etc.) may wear their forms of dress and may, if necessary, participate in their ceremonies and formalities (SO YD 178:2).

²⁷ From here we have the one of the key objections to allowing women in the army.

7. We must avoid wearing red clothing. Red has the “hint” of idolatry and was the color worn by the licentious, prostitutes and the royalty²⁸. It is considered detrimental for promoting modesty and humility. The preferred color is black which does instill these attributes (Rama YD 178:1, Shach 178:2).
8. In addition to running contrary to the concept of instilling humility in the worshipper, praying bareheaded is a violation of חוקת הגוים since this is the Christian manner of worshipping (see ODU p. 75).
9. Attendance at theatres, circuses and stadiums are included in the prohibition of חוקת הגוים, if people are gathering there for idolatrous purposes.
10. The Smag says that חוקת הגוים includes speaking like the non-Jews (in manner and language) (see Bach YD 178).
11. Some Achronim say that calling oneself by a non-Jewish name, unless it is a translation of a Hebrew name, is included in this prohibition (Maharam Schick YD 169).
12. Building a מצבה (pillar, monument) is forbidden because of חוקת הגוים.
13. It is forbidden to employ non-Jewish liturgical music in our synagogues (see ET Volume 17:318).
14. Some forbid decorating our synagogues and homes with trees on שבועות since such decorative use of trees has become a non-Jewish religious custom.
15. Some Achronim objected to performing weddings inside a synagogue because of חוקת הגוים²⁹ (see Chasam Sofer, Even HaEzer 98).
16. The Achronim wrote that it is forbidden to inscribe an epitaph on a gravestone in any language other than Hebrew because of חוקת הגוים (Maharam Schick, Choshen Mishpot 56). Other mourning practices which were objected to because of this same restriction include dressing in black for funerals when one usually does not wear black, drawing a black border around death notices, placing flowers and wreaths on graves, and gun-salutes at military funerals³⁰.
17. The despicable, idolatrous Amorite Molech worship of passing a child between two bonfires is included in חוקת הגוים (סנהדרין 64b).
18. Some say that these prohibitions only refer to our imitating any of the seven aboriginal inhabitant nations of Eretz Yisroel. Others say it refers to all non-Jewish people.

²⁸ It is interesting to note that nowadays red neckties are associated with “power” and “authority” and frequently worn by Presidents and high governmental officials.

²⁹ I believe that there was a major uproar about this in mid-19th century Germany. Until then, apparently, Chupahs were held outdoors.

³⁰ It is a truly sad and depressing reflection about contemporary Israeli society that many of these latter items, as well as a whole host of patently non-Jewish ceremonies, have been adopted for state and military affairs and have become standard fare when they were so scrupulously avoided by Jews in Chutz L’Aretz for centuries. For instance, was it necessary to adopt the hollow custom of a “moment of silence” when that precious time could be made more authentically Jewish with a “moment of Tehillim”? This phenomenon can be attributed to the secular desire to replicate the non-Jewish world at the expense of our G-d-given directive to be a unique and holy people. Why do we have to shamefully shirk from our noble mission to appease those who have rejected G-d?

XVII. PROHIBITIONS AGAINST EATING NON-JEWISH FOODS

1. Chazal have forbidden certain non-Jewish-produced or processed foodstuffs in order that we remain separate from them lest we assimilate with them and become accustomed to their ideas, be drawn to illicit sexual relations, and intermarry with them. For these reasons, and other Kashrus concerns, there are specific prohibitions regarding eating their bread (SO YD 112), certain “fit-for-a-king” cooked foods (SO YD 113, 114), wine (SO YD 114, 123-139), and milk, butter and cheese (SO YD 115). See these references for the details.

D. SUPERSTITIONS AND FALSE BELIEFS

XVIII. GENERAL PROHIBITIONS

1. It is forbidden to be superstitious as it says *לא תנחשו ולא תעוננו* “*neither shall you use divinations nor fortune-tell*” (ויקרא 19:26, דברים 18:10). This is understood that it is forbidden for one to change his behavior resulting from chance circumstance, as would be the case if one would say “since a piece of bread just fell out of my mouth or my cane just fell from my hand or my son suddenly called to me, this must be an auspicious sign for me to cancel a planned trip or not engage in a business transaction, etc.” (SO YD 179:3).
2. We are commanded to be wholehearted with G-d as it says: *תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך* (דברים 18:13) which most Rishonim enumerate as one of the 613 Mitzvahs. The Rambam did not³¹. The Rashbo indicates that *תמים תהיה* means that G-d will protect those who have complete confidence in Him.
3. Chazal have said that divorcing ourselves from superstitions and the occult is a prerequisite for inheriting the Land.
4. There is a direct relationship between belief in the occult and its influence on a person. The more one has absolute, wholehearted trust in G-d, the less these spurious “powers” have any influence on him.
5. It is possible to categorize superstitions and false beliefs (*אמונות טפלות*) into two basic types:
 - a) Baseless. Forbidden because they cloud the Jew’s pure faith, even though the belief may be innocuous.
 - b) Based on Idolatry. Forbidden because of the prohibitions of *דרכי האמורי* (Amorite practices), *חוקת הגוים* (imitating the Gentiles) or *כשוף* (magic or enchantment).
6. Practices which today only appear to be superstitious because the original reason has been forgotten are permitted if they are used to prevent danger or illness (See *פסחים 111a/b, חולין 105b*).
7. Common, baseless superstitions include:

³¹ Some believe that he thought this was only a general warning.

- a) **Bad Luck:** Belief that crossing paths with a black cat, stepping on cracks in the sidewalk, walking under a ladder, breaking a mirror, spilling salt, opening an umbrella inside a house, and the number 13³² are considered unlucky.
- b) **Good Luck:** Belief that horseshoes, rabbit's feet, knocking on wood³³, wishing upon a star, crossing one's fingers, tossing a coin into a fountain, lighting as many candles as one's age on a birthday cake, blowing out all the candles in one puff, breaking off the larger part of a wishbone, are considered advantageous for good fortune and fulfilling wishes.

There are a great many baseless superstitions regarding weddings and death, e.g. for brides to wear something new, blue or old, holding one's breath when walking through a cemetery, etc.

8. May Day (May 1) is of pagan origin, possibly based on Aphrodite worship.

XIX. AMORITE PRACTICES - דרכי האמורי

1. More so than other of the ancient, local peoples, the highly superstitious Amorites³⁴ were the most heavily immersed in witchcraft and the black arts. It is apt that all matters of such nature should be called after them.
2. דרכי האמורי are defined as senseless and illogical acts and cover a wide range of proscribed practices, such as needlessly tossing pebbles into the sea or a river or the avoidance of putting a candle on the ground so as not to upset the dead, etc.³⁵ דרכי האמורי were not necessarily motivated by idolatry, they were just stupid.
3. Chazal did not protest³⁶ against irrational behavior which might resemble דרכי האמורי if:
 - a) Non-Jews were not practicing the same thing.
 - b) Needed for curative purposes, particularly in a case of פיקוח נפש, saving a life. Thus, incantations and amulets were permitted if they would help calm or give encouragement to the ill (even if these have no genuine medicinal effects).
 - c) Done to honor the dead.
4. Some Rishonim felt that the ritual of כפרות was דרכי האמורי. However, inasmuch as the Gaonim, other Rishonim and the Achronim mention it, and Jewish communities everywhere adopted it, כפרות became an "acceptable" custom.
5. Anything which has a rationale to it is not דרכי האמורי.

³² Quite the contrary! Thirteen has very positive connotations including being the number of G-d's attributes, years for a bar mitzvah, number of different praises in פסוקי דזמרה and in ישתבח, etc.

³³ It has been said that the custom of knocking on wood is based on the alleged powers of the cross. If so, it would be particularly odious for one to do this, and should, therefore, be fastidiously avoided.

³⁴ The Amorites were a particularly wicked and sinful people who contaminated Israel and lead us to sin.

³⁵ See Tosefta Shabbos 7 and 8 and ODU, p. 87. It is unclear to me if the acts listed there are representative or the list is exhaustive.

³⁶ Some want to suggest that Chazal's leniency stemmed from their recognition of how deeply engrained superstitious beliefs became among the uneducated masses and how difficult it would be to uproot them. The operative principle being that it is preferable that the people transgress a prohibition unintentionally (בשוגג) (being ignorant of their violations) than intentionally (במזיד).

XX. THE EVIL EYE - עין הרע

1. Although the concept of the misfortune-generating Evil Eye, its defenses and remedies are mentioned in the Torah, Mishna and Talmud (e.g. ברכות 20a and 55b), our relationship to it is not fully developed in the Halacha³⁷.
2. The saying of various formula such as “Feig³⁸”, “Pfu-Pfu-Pfu”, “בלי עין הרע” (Kynehoroh), the use of amulets, the Hamsa, the wearing of red threads or ribbons³⁹ and the like are popular, superstitious and questionable methods of warding off the Evil Eye.

XXI. AMULETS AND TALISMANS - קמיעות

1. It is permissible to wear a “proven” or “authenticated” amulet⁴⁰, and only if so advised by Halachic authorities, and only for such purposes as protection against illness, saving a life or when written as a prayer or request of G-d. Amulets may not be used for healing one who was injured or is ill (SO YD 179:12, F&F).
2. Amulets used for charm, wealth, influence, success, and the like, are strictly forbidden (F&F).
3. It is permitted for someone who is ill to wear a proven amulet on Shabbos through the public domain. A proven amulet may be rescued from a fire on Shabbos if verses had been written on them, and certainly if one of G-d’s Names were written on it. (SO OC 301:25 and 27)
4. Yet, a priori, it would be forbidden to write Biblical verses on an amulet. Amulets may be written if the words or letters of verses are intertwined, and that they do not contain Divine Names or names of angels⁴¹ (F&F).
5. Tefillin and Mezuzos are not classified as amulets.

³⁷ It is hard to find an unambiguous definition of the “Evil Eye”.

³⁸ The “Feig”, Yiddish for fig, was considered an effective remedy against the Evil Eye (see ברכות 55b). One would make a fist and place his thumb between the middle fingers forming the shape of a fig, and incant. Another common antidote was expectorating. Pfu and Poo are onomatopoeic spits.

³⁹ There may be some Kabbalistic reference to these customs of which I am unaware.

⁴⁰ Tomim Tehiyeh says that the tradition for writing proven amulets has now been lost due to textual corruptions which have intentionally been introduced to frustrate their unscrupulous use.

⁴¹ It was common to employ names of Biblical personages and angels in amulets to affect certain results: משה was used against fire; דניאל was used against wild beasts, etc.

XXII. NOSTRUMS סגולות

1. Use of charms or nostrums for anything other than protection and saving a life, such as for love, grace, success, wealth or release from jail, is forbidden. סגולות with Torah verses are forbidden for healing, except for saving a life (F&F).

E. SORCERY AND THE OCCULT

XXIII. GENERAL PROHIBITIONS

1. It is forbidden to engage in or inquire of a practitioner of sorcery, fortune-telling, astrology and horoscopes, divination (נחוש), witchcraft, necromancy (acts of אוב), soothsaying⁴² (ידעוני), enchantment, charming, consulting ghosts and the like (ויקרא 19:26, 31; דברים 18:10-11; SO and Rama YD 179:1, MT AC 6:1. See 1 שמואל 25 and שבת 152b regarding the unique case of King Shaul and the witch of Ein Dor.)⁴³
2. Why is sorcery forbidden to Jews? According to the Kabbalah, the source of the Jewish soul is much closer to G-d than that of the Gentiles and our portion is with the “forces of sanctity”. Sorcery, however, manipulates the “forces of evil” to coerce Heaven to negate Nature. This is in accordance with the opinion of the Ramban (שופטים 18:9) who says that with sorcery one can predict the future and perform miracles.
3. The Rambam held the minority position that all matters of magic, astrology, דרכי האמורי, etc. are nonsense, lies and deceptions. Sorcery is not wisdom but “stupid folly preying on the weak-minded” (see MT AC 11:16, F&F, ET 1:318). These practices are forbidden in order to distance the Jewish people from foolishness, unfitting for such a noble and intelligent nation. In contrast, the Achronim wrote that all the other Rishonim accepted these matters as real but are forbidden because of תמים תהיה (see Ramban Shailos U’Tshuvos 283). The Vilna Gaon says that “Philosophy caused him (the Rambam) to err” and that there is too much evidence in the Torah and the Talmud to dismiss these matters as illusionary or unreal (Biur HaGra, YD 179:13).
4. The Gemara (סנהדרין 56b) says that non-Jews, as well, are forbidden to practice sorcery, this being an adjunct to the prohibition against practicing idolatry, one of the seven Noachide commandments that they are commanded to observe (Meiri).
5. The penalty for practicing divination through trances, divining auspicious times, casting lots to predict the future, using incantations, communicating with the dead, using sleight of hand, gazing in a crystal ball or employing astrology, is lashes. The penalty for practicing sorcery and consulting mediums and oracles is death by stoning (F&F).

⁴² i.e. conjuring up the spirits of the dead by means of a medium.

⁴³ There are a great many other terms related to these types of forbidden practices, to name but a few: auspice, augury, diabolism, black magic, clairvoyance, sortilege, sciomancy, cartomancy, haruspication, oneiromancy, geomancy, ornithoscopy, pyromancy, scrying, reading tea-leaves or coffee grinds, etc.

XXIV. NECROMANCY - INQUIRING OF THE DEAD

1. It is forbidden to attempt to practice necromancy (ויקרא 19:31, דברים 18:10-11), i.e. communicate with the dead in order to learn secrets or the future using magical practices.
2. There are several types of necromancy, all of them are forbidden. One is called דורש אל המתים where the necromancer merely speaks to the dead while in his grave. Another is the בעל אוב or ידעוני where the dead is summoned from the grave. Some necromancers would starve themselves and sleep in a cemetery in order that the impure spirit⁴⁴ would descend upon them (SO YD 179:13).
3. Acts of אוב and ידעוני are forms of idolatry and forbidden even in cases of danger to life.
4. It is permitted to make one who is ill swear that he will return after he dies and answer your questions⁴⁵ (SO YD 179:14). Some even permit this after he dies as long as it is the spirit which is sworn and not the body (parenthetical at SO YD 179:14).
5. It is permitted to pray to G-d at the graves of the righteous so that their souls will lift our prayers to Heaven⁴⁶ (Shach YD 179:6, Bach).

XXV INCANTATIONS, CHARMING AND MAGICAL SPELLS

1. It is forbidden to summon together animals, snakes, scorpions, mosquitoes or fleas, etc. by means of incantations, even if done with no intent to cause harm, and even if the intent is to prevent harm, such as to dispatch them to unpopulated areas. This is what is called חובר חבר (SO YD 179:5 and Poskim). Incantations are “magically-invested” words or verses chanted to influence the demons.
2. Use of incantations to save a life is permitted.
3. One may charm a scorpion or a snake which just bit him or is chasing him, even on Shabbos, and even if this is ineffective, since the snake is causing him mental anguish and it may be a case of פיקוח נפש (דברים 18:10-11, SO YD 179:6, 7 and Poskim).
4. Some say that one who incants incoherently to either protect or harm (i.e. placing a magical spell on) someone violates חובר חבר (Sefer HaChinuch 512).
5. It is forbidden to recite or whisper (לחש) Torah verses⁴⁷ as a magical spell to heal a wound or cure an illness, except in a case of danger to life. It is permitted to study the Torah with the intention that in its merit G-d will heal us. Verses may be recited if done as a prayer or for protection, but not for healing (SO YD 179:9, F&F). A healthy person may recite verses to protect himself from danger (SO YD 179:11).

⁴⁴ Either a demon or the spirit of the dead

⁴⁵ I am not sure that I understand this Halacha.

⁴⁶ The Rishonim debate whether one is permitted to pray to the deceased and ask him to beseech G-d on one's behalf or if this is forbidden and a we may pray directly only to G-d, but may request something in the merit of the deceased.

⁴⁷ Especially Sefer Tehillim. As I point out in my booklet on Sefer Shimush Tehillim, Chazal objected to using verses from Tehillim (each of whose chapters is considered protection against some misfortune or a help to ensure some sort of successful endeavor) and elsewhere in Tanach for magical, curative purposes. They permitted, however, the recitation of verses for prophylactic and preventative purposes.

6. The Taz explains that “words of the Torah are not medicinal for the body, but for the soul, and may be recited to protect the healthy from illness. This is why we recite קריאת שמע when going to bed at night⁴⁸” (Taz YD 179:8).
7. It is forbidden to lay a Sefer Torah or Tefillin upon a sick child (SO YD 179:9).

XXVI. DEMONS שדים

1. Conjuring demons is forbidden, although some permit inquiring of them in the case of thievery (SO YD 179:16) or similar since no “act” is performed (Tur)⁴⁹.
2. One who burns incense to a demon in order to force it to do his will or compel it to disobedience is guilty of idolatry (SO YD 179:19).
3. Some forbid filling one’s house with fragrant incense since it would appear as if he is doing this as an offering to a demon or evil spirit (Shach YD 179:21), unless this is done to eliminate a bad odor (SO YD 179:18).

XXVII. BINDING ANGELS BY OATHS

1. It is forbidden to “bind an angel with an oath” or coerce one to fulfill your will (F&F)⁵⁰.
2. One should not “open his mouth to Satan⁵¹” (ברכות 19a).

XXVIII. SPIRITUALISM AND SÉANCES

1. Spiritualism and séances, etc. are included in the prohibition of necromancy (ET 1:318).

XXIX. DYBBUKS

1. Reputable Gedolei Yisroel⁵² have reportedly exorcised “malicious spirits” from the deceased which have transmigrated into another person’s soul.

⁴⁸ and the night before a Bris Miloh (Vachnacht)

⁴⁹ R’ Zvi Hirsch Chajes (Mevo HaTalmud 31) is emphatic that Chazal believed in the existence of demons, the evil eye and evil spirits, witchcraft and the power of incantations, “no other interpretation is acceptable.” The Rambam, as we have seen, disagrees. Interestingly, R’ Chajes points out, the Babylonian Talmud is replete with discussions of these subjects as well as elaborate statements regarding medical practices and curative methods, while there is a near absence of such matters in the Jerusalem Talmud.

⁵⁰ By uttering the name of an angel and binding him with an oath in G-d’s Name one can command the angel to do his bidding and, thus, change the course of Nature. R’ Chaim Vital wrote that his teacher the Ari’zal would never even utter the name of an angel.

⁵¹ “One should not invite calamity by uttering ominous statements”, Encyclopedia Judaica 6:692.

⁵² A few years ago, I asked Rabbi Avrohom Kahaneman, Shlita, about the well-circulated story that his father, the Ponevitzer Rov zt”l, was involved in exorcising a Dybbuk. He claimed that he had never heard the story.

XXX. MEDITATION

1. Oriental meditation should not be practiced. Inspiration comes from perfecting one's character, studying Torah and fulfilling Mitzvahs and, even then, it is difficult to acquire. Kabbalistic meditation is totally unlike Eastern forms and has nothing in common with them (F&F).

XXXI. MAGIC TRICKS AND ILLUSIONS

1. Magic tricks, sleights of hand, optical deceptions and illusions are forbidden (SO YD 179:15) since the magician intends to deceive the observer into believing that he is manipulating Nature.
2. One who performs magic tricks also violates the prohibition of גַּנְבַת דַּעַת - deception.
3. Some say that it is permitted to perform magic tricks at weddings in order to entertain the bride and groom (CO 39:6) although others disagree and disallow all magic acts at any time (Radbaz as quoted in TT). Some say that those who hire the magicians are guilty of לִפְנֵי עוֹר - placing a stumbling block before the blind (KSO 166:4).
4. Some permit watching a non-Jew perform magic tricks (CO 89), others forbid this as well (TT).
5. Learning about magic is permitted, particularly by judges who have to understand enough of this subject to be able to judge if an act is "magic" or not.

XXXII. THE AMGUSHI⁵³

1. One may not learn anything, including Torah, from an "Amgushi", defined either as a sorcerer or a blasphemous and inciteful idolater (SO YD 179:19).

XXXIII. USE OF PERMUTATIONS OF LETTERS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SEFER YET'ZIROH AND USE OF G-D'S NAMES

1. Use of the permutations of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, known as צִירוף אֹתוּיּוֹת as per the Kabbalistic Sefer Yitzeroh, is dangerous and to be avoided since the correct knowledge of how to do this has been lost⁵⁴ (F&F).
2. The Levush wrote that effective use of Sefer Yetziroh requires a level of holiness and purity which, due to our great sins, is no longer found in our generations (Be'er Heitev YD 179:11).
3. Why, then, would have Sefer Yetziroh been permitted? The Shach explains that G-d gave His Names כֹּחַ (power, influence) which, when in the hands of the pious or the prophets, would demonstrate G-d's omnipotence and greatness. The

⁵³ Amgushi is the etymological root of the word magician.

⁵⁴ With Sefer Yetziroh and G-d's Names, one can change Nature and create life.

Kabalists wrote, however, that it would be a great sin to use G-d's Names for such purposes. The Shach concludes by saying, "Blessed be he who desists from this."

XXXIV. PRACTICAL KABALAH

1. It is forbidden to engage in the Practical Kabbalah (TT).

F. FORTUNE-TELLING

XXXV. DIVINATIONS AND OMENS

1. Chazal differentiated between what are known as **ניחושים** - divinations - which are forbidden, and **סימנים** - omens or signs - which are permitted. A **ניחוש** is an illogical connection between completely unconnected events upon which one relies for future actions, whereas a **סימן** has a logical basis, already exists in the world, and one does not rely upon it for future actions⁵⁵.
2. Rabbeinu Yona says that one violates the prohibition of **ניחוש** whether one acts upon or desists from doing something because of the **ניחוש**.
3. Some permit saying to a school-child **פסוק לי פסוקך** "recite for me your verse" i.e. the one you have just learned, and rely on this as a "sign" for the future, since the child's response contains a hint of prophecy (Poskim).
4. Eliezer, Avrohom's servant and Yehonoson son of Shaul also used signs, although some seem to indicate that to do what they did would be forbidden (Tur, Rambam). The Rama praises those who trust G-d with complete faith, and says that they will be enshrouded with mercy (Rama YD 179:4)⁵⁶.
5. In some cases, omens were employed for the success of a particular enterprise. Thus, it became customary to begin learning a new subject (tractate) on Rosh Chodesh or schedule a wedding at full moon.
6. A house, wife or child may be regarded as special omens. Thus, if one was thrice successful in his endeavors after building a house or moving into a new home, marrying or fathering a son, one can retroactively regard these things as having been good omens (KSO 166:2). Some want to say that the omen of a child refers to the case of "recite for me your verse", as stated above.

XXXVI. ASTROLOGY AND HOROSCOPES

1. According to the Kabbalah, Gentiles are ruled by G-d indirectly and through intermediaries such as the constellations which exert influence on them. This is not the opinion of the Rambam who says that it is forbidden to believe that there are intermediaries between man and G-d (MT AC 2:1). Jews who pray to G-d,

⁵⁵ For examples of **ניחושים**, see the paragraph on **Superstitions** above.

⁵⁶ See ODU, p. 87 for an interesting discussion regarding if and how Eliezer could have used an omen to identify the bride destined for Yitzchok.

study Torah and perform Mitzvahs are not affected by the constellations. Therefore, it is of no avail to consult astrology or horoscopes (F&F).

2. It is forbidden to consult astrology and say, “today is a good or bad day”, or “today, this month or year is lucky” (KSO 166:3).

XXXVII. CASTING LOTS

1. Sefer Tomim Tehiyeh categorizes casting lots into three groups:
 - a) To divide something up. It is permitted to use a lottery to divide something up among the participants if all parties agree beforehand to the consequences of the lottery and, some say, if it is to be divided up in equal shares (R. Yehuda HaChosid, Rosh; see SO YD 173:2 and 174:4, 5). An example of this might be the dividing up of an inheritance among the heirs.
 - b) To obligate someone to do something is not permitted, except if done with **רוח הקודש** (the Holy Spirit) which we do not have today.
 - c) To determine the future or inquire into “secrets” is forbidden. Thus, it would be forbidden to determine who among many suspects is the real thief by having them draw lots. It would not be permitted to determine if a marriage or business venture will be successful by drawing lots.

2. There are numerous occasions in Tanach when lots were used or commanded. In all permitted cases, either the Urim and Tumim were also employed or some other form of **רוח הקודש** was operative. A few examples:
 - Determination of which of the two identical goats would be sent **לה'** and which **לעזאזל** during the Avodoh of the Kohen Godol on Yom Kippur⁵⁷ (**ויקרא** 16:8).
 - Choice of the seventy members of the original Sanhedrin (**במדבר** 11:25).
 - Identifying which first-borns would be redeemed by Levites and which would have to pay the fifty Shekels (**במדבר** 3:44-51).
 - Identifying Achan as the one who committed the sacrilege (**יהושע** 7).

In addition, Eretz Yisroel was divided among the tribes by lot, as was the determination as to who would bring the wood to the Beis HaMikdosh, who would live in Jerusalem, and which watch of Kohanim would perform which Avodoh in the Beis HaMikdosh (see **ספר תמים תהיה**).

XXXVIII. BIBLIOMANCY/GORAL HA'GRA

1. Randomly opening a Chumash or Tanach and “reading” a verse or name on that page to answer a question (as with Goral HaGra, also called Goral HaChumash) is permitted provided that it is done privately and it is a problem which cannot be solved with one’s own logic or with the advice of a Torah scholar. Doing so in public is forbidden (F&F).

⁵⁷ For a complete and detailed description of this and all other procedures this day, see my booklet entitled The Avodoh of the Kohen Godol on Yom Kippur.

2. The theory behind bibliomancy is that it is possible to “discern the hidden future and fate or master Nature” through the Tanach.

XXXIX. CHECKING NAMES

1. Rabbi Hillel in Faith and Folly writes that it is forbidden to “check the names” of a bride and groom to see if they are a compatible match.

XL. SHINUY HASHEM – שינוי השם

1. It is an ancient Jewish custom to change the name of someone who is ill in order to remove his evil decree; the presumption being that he is now a different person than the one for whom the decree was made (see ראש השנה 16b).

XLI. PALMISTRY/CHIROMANCY AND PHYSIOGNOMY

1. Although mentioned in the Zohar and elsewhere, the knowledge of how to read palms (palmistry/chiromancy) and faces (physiognomy) has been lost, as have many other secrets in the Torah. Therefore, it is forbidden to tell the future by reading palms or believe in what is seen in them (F&F).

G. SUMMARY OF A FEW OTHER RELATED LAWS

Idolatry and its appurtenances must be destroyed (דברים 7:5, 12:2). A conquered non-Jewish city in Eretz Yisroel where idolatry was practiced must be utterly destroyed and all its contents burned. Should a Jewish city in Eretz Yisroel become perverted with idolatry, its residents must be killed and its contents burned (דברים 13:12-17). The seven Canaanite nations must be destroyed (דברים 20:7), the memory of Amalek must be blotted out and we are to remember what they did to Israel (דברים 25:19).

It is forbidden to break an oath made with one of G-d's Names (ויקרא 19:12), take one of His Holy Names in vain (שמות 20:6) or profane It (ויקרא 22:32). It is forbidden to erase one of G-d's Names or destroy institutions devoted to His worship (דברים 12:4). One is not permitted to “try” G-d (דברים 6:16).

ABBREVIATIONS

CO =	<u>Chochmas Odom</u> , R. A. Danzig	MT AC =	<u>Mishneh Torah</u> , Hilchos Avodas Cochavim, Rambam
ET =	<u>Encyclopedia Talmudis</u>	ODU =	<u>Otzar Dinim U'Minhogim</u> , R' JD Eisenstein
F&F =	<u>Faith and Folly</u> , R' Yaakov Hillel	SO =	<u>Shulchon Aruch</u> , R' Yosef Karo
IM =	<u>Igros Moshe</u> , Rabbi Moshe Feinstein	TT =	<u>Tomim Tehiyeh</u> , R' Yaakov Hillel
KSO =	<u>Kitzur Shulchon Aruch</u> , R' S. Ganzfried	YD =	<u>Yoreh Deyoh</u>

Under no circumstances should anyone deduce the Halacha from this monograph. Specific questions must be addressed to a qualified rabbi acquainted with these laws for his guidance and authoritative response.

APPENDIX A

EXCERPTS FROM FAITH AND FOLLY

A few years ago, the renowned Jerusalem Kabbalist, HaChacham Yaakov Hillel published an excellent book entitled תמים תהיה (translated into English as Faith and Folly [Feldheim 1990]) which outlines normative, Halachic Judaism's attitude to fortune-telling, the occult and mysticism. Here are a few selections:

“Faith is a Torah obligation. Folly, or misplaced faith, is forbidden by the Torah....True faith is the very foundation of the Jewish religion as the Gemara teaches (מכות 24a): ‘Chabakuk...summed up the whole Torah...‘The righteous man lives by his faith.’”

“Total belief in the Almighty as directed by Halacha can work wonders. However, misguided or misplaced faith verges on idolatry. It is forbidden for a Jew to believe in anything or anyone other than the Almighty.

“Any form of mediation between man and G-d is idolatrous. However, it is permitted to seek the blessing of a righteous man who has achieved closeness to G-d through years of studying Torah, fulfilling its commandments and purifying his character.

“The prayers and blessings of one who, beyond his knowledge of the revealed Torah, has also attained the special closeness to G-d that comes through the study of Kabbalah are the most powerful, and capable of working wonders.

“Unfortunately, in contemporary times this concept has become warped and defiled, to the point where anyone who labels himself a ‘Kabbalist’ is accepted as a holy man capable of delivering miracles

upon receipt of payment. If he wears exotic dress and rolls his eyes, he is even considered a prophet.

“In days of yore, there were true Kabbalists, men of piety and wisdom, who were able to control the lower forces successfully and safely through the Practical Kabbalah. However, over the past four centuries, Kabbalists and Halachic authorities alike have forbidden the use of the Practical Kabbalah since no one in our times can achieve the spiritual level necessary for using it safely.”

R' Chaim Vital testified that the Ari'zal never used the Practical Kabbalah. “He knew the language of the trees, birds and angels, he knew physiognomy, he knew people's thoughts, and past and future deeds, he knew what transpired throughout the land and what was decreed in Heaven, he knew the wisdom of the Gilgul (reincarnation), he saw the souls of the righteous of all generations and studied with them....All this my master achieved not by the use of the Practical Kabbalah, which is strictly forbidden, but through piety and asceticism which accompanied his learning.” (Shaar HaHakdomos as quoted on page 80 in F&F.)

“It is a serious mistake to imagine that only those who study Kabbalah (can) reach such heights (referring to spiritual elevation, closeness to G-d and Divine inspiration). True, studying Kabbalah in holiness and purity after saturating oneself with Gemara and Halacha would help one to ascend the ladder of spirituality. However, throughout the generations there have been many holy leaders who reached high levels without knowing

Kabalah; and there have been many people who dabbled in Kabalah improperly and achieved nothing but evil” (F&F p. 83).

Since there are any number of charlatans posing as saintly miracle workers who feed on the innocence and naiveté of the masses, R' Hillel offers several methods for determining the authenticity of a “Tzaddik” (as defined in the Kabalistic sense):

- A person of outstanding wisdom and virtues is first noticed and appreciated by the sages of the generation. Only after they hail him as a saintly man does he become known to the public. If, on the other hand, his fame first comes from the public who were impressed by wondrous tales of miracles, his strange behavior and the like, there is something suspect.
- Beware of anyone who asks for money.
- Beware of anyone who acts with familiarity toward women outside his immediate family. Modesty is the very foundation of the Torah and of sanctity.
- Beware of anyone who does not adhere strictly to the Mitzvahs and Halacha. A sign of a true Tzaddik is that he serves G-d by wholeheartedly fulfilling His commandments. The true Tzaddik hides much of his goodness and greatness behind a veil of secrecy, humility and discretion.
- The true Tzaddik is one who studies Torah, prays, performs Mitzvahs and good deeds, is of impeccable character, behaves simply, and hides more of his actions than he reveals.

In summary, it should be emphasized that the essence of the Mitzva of תמים תהיה is:

- To believe that G-d alone knows the future and has power over everything and to be “wholehearted” with Him.
- One must not consult astrologers about the future or believe anything they say, for G-d changes the orders of Heaven at will. The closer we come to G-d, the more He will change Nature for us (Ramban, Hassagos L’Sefer HaMitzvahs, Mitzva 8).
- Say, “Whatever the Creator wishes will be.” Do not inquire into the future.
- Trust in Him wholeheartedly regarding all worldly matters. Turn to Him alone for seeking a cure to an illness, success in learning, finding a wife or having children.

In addition:

- Before consulting with anyone other than a rabbi for advice, consult with a Halachic authority.
- Many Torah giants opposed any sort of fortune-telling, use of charms, checking names, etc. as these practices involve many serious prohibitions.
- Remember that only “a fool believes everything” (משלי 14:15).
- Seek blessings only from true Torah sages and authorities.
- Beware of anyone who is ignorant of Torah, yet claims to know Kabalah and incantations. One cannot understand the Kabalah without first being a Talmudic scholar of the highest caliber.

In the interest of knowing “how to answer the Apikoris” (Pirkei Avos 2:19), I have included the following two Appendices.

APPENDIX B

BRIEF REVIEW OF SELECTED RELIGIONS

Of the numerous religions around the world, only about eleven long-established “major” religions have more than three million adherents: Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Taoism.

An offshoot of Islam, Baha’i is an attempt to unify all the great world religions into one. All earlier religious figures such as Adam, Moses, Krshna⁵⁸, Zoroaster, Buddha, J., Mohammed and two more recent Baha’i leaders, Bab and Bahauallah are considered “great Messengers”, each of whom revealed something new about the “transcendent and unknowable” G-d.

Buddhism and Confucianism do not believe in G-d, nor do “ethical groups” or “spiritual paths” such as Atheism (whose adherents vigorously reject the idea of a G-d), Agnosticism (who say “we don’t know if there is a G-d or not, and you can’t prove it”), Humanism, and Unitarian-Universalism.

Hinduism and Shintoism subscribe to polytheism. Buddhism and Shintoism are replete with ancestor worship.

Jainism’s and Taoism’s god is Nature. Jains do “not believe in the existence of G-d as the creator, sustainer and moral governor of the world”.

Christianity is monotheism with a twist. They believe in one G-d who somehow subdivides/d into three (called the Trinity), who incarnated or had a son, the possibility of a virgin birth, etc. The many various Christian denominations debate the meaning of these concepts as do they the question of their messiah’s “divinity”. Historically, Christianity adopted many paganistic concepts and practices to accommodate their primitive converts.

In Judaism’s eyes, much of basic Christian theology is irrational and an anathema to our understanding of the absolute oneness and incorporeality of G-d. We certainly reject the idea that the Messiah has already made his appearance on earth in any way, shape or form.

Although the Rambam rules that Christianity is idolatry (commentary on Mishna 3, Avodas Zoroh) much can be said for Christianity’s dissemination of the basic One G-d idea to the peoples of the world, and its message of goodwill and kindness to man.

Moslems are monotheists, believe that J. was a prophet, and that Mohammed was the last and greatest of all the prophets. They reject the concept that J. was a deity. Islam is a severe religion which demands absolute submission to Allah’s will and promises merciless consequences for failing to heed the Prophet. They are

⁵⁸ Intentionally misspelled.

particularly intolerant and have a militant attitude towards anyone suspected as a being a “nullifier of Islam”, i.e. anyone perceived as rejecting or ridiculing the Prophet and his religion. Islam is highly sensitive about itself and dogmatic in its beliefs. Although they believe in a system of rewards and punishments, they contradictorily believe that everything has been preordained.

Both Christianity and Islam nominally accept the validity of the written Torah and our Prophets. However, their claim that the process of revelation continued after these books were “closed” effectively rendered for them the Torah obsolete or incomplete. Both these religions reject any validity of our Oral Law and Tradition as expressed in the Talmud. They claim that Israel’s uniqueness as the Chosen People is no longer valid, and the monotheistic message is now available to all peoples. To them, Jews are a historical remnant stranded with an outmoded philosophy and tedious legal system. Jews are not heathens, per se.

Our adamant and tenacious rejection of J. as the Messiah and Mohammed as the Prophet has been the source of endless tension, and has caused both these religions theological perturbation, and consternation with us to no end.

A mix of Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism believes in a single, timeless and formless G-d who can be “known through meditation”. However, similar to Hinduism, people are

reincarnated and are constantly in the process of repeating the cycle of birth and death. It is forbidden for a Sikh to worship idols or icons.

SUMMARY

It would appear as if Islam and Sikhism are purely monotheistic while it is debatable if main-stream Christianity is or isn’t, particularly if they accept the divinity of J. and the Trinity in its literal sense. Beyond these, all other well-known religions or philosophical belief systems either reject a unique, singular G-d or accept Him but say He has partners or competitors in the running of the universe.

It should be stressed, however, that despite the continued existence of idolatry and heathenism around the world, a good portion of humanity has gravitated toward rationalistic monotheism and acceptable mores, and to not a small degree. This, despite serious setbacks with Western/liberal acquiescence to sexual promiscuity, the “legitimization” of homosexuality, and G-dless secularism. These abhorrent and intolerable cracks in morality will lead to unimaginable social disaster if not squelched and eradicated.

The universal message of Judaism has contributed to the many advances and compels us to continue to be at the leading-edge of morality and ethics for all of the peoples of the world.

APPENDIX C

PROBLEMS WITH SOME WELL-KNOWN PHILOSOPHICAL DOCTRINES

(For simplicity, similar doctrines have been amalgamated)

AESTHETICISM

Doctrine that beauty is the basic principle or chief good in life and underlies morality.

Beauty, art, and good taste are merely superficial and external manifestations.

ANIMISM

Belief that all natural phenomena and objects, such as rocks, trees, the wind, etc. are alive and have souls.

Normative Judaism does not believe this. Living beings might have spirits, and a literal reading of Perek Shira would lead one to believe that certain inanimate objects do too.

ANTINOMIANISM

This Christian sect rejects conventional moral law on the grounds that salvation derives from grace or faith alone.

Salvation or redemption comes from observance of the Torah and when G-d will will it.

DEISM

Religious view that G-d created the universe and the natural laws but no longer directs them. Rejects revelation and authority.

Decidedly not. Our G-d is intimately involved in directing the affairs of the world.

DUALISM, MANICHAEISM

Belief in two gods or forces, one good and one bad. Man has two natures, the physical and the spiritual.

Everything emanates from the one G-d.

EPICUREANISM, HEDONISM

Epicureanism was the classical Greek doctrine that good is sensuous pleasure, especially eating and drinking, and evil is pain. The goal of Man is to have a life of pleasure regulated by morality, temperance, serenity and cultural development.

There is no equation in Judaism of this nature, and this is not our goal.

EXISTENTIALISM, NIHILISM, PESSIMISM

Existentialism says that human beings have complete free-will but no given essence, and must define themselves with absolute responsibility by their choices in a world that is without independent moral values. The universe is purposeless. Each person must oppose his hostile environment through the exercise of his own free-will. Related are Nihilism which rejects conventional morality and religion, and Pessimism which claims that the evil in life outweighs the good.

Man has free-will and a soul. The Torah defines ethics, morality and values.

FATALISM, DETERMINISM

Doctrines that everything is predestined and inevitable, as by fate, and that human will and action are powerless to affect events.

The future is the integration of G-d's Will and man's actions.

HUMANISM

Doctrine that the basic principle of morality is human culture and the well-being of humanity.

Not “the basic” but “a” principle leading to the higher goal of Man’s fulfilling G-d’s Will.

PANTHEISM

Religious view that G-d is present throughout Nature and is identical with it.

Nature is a creation and a separate entity from the Creator.

PERSPECTIVISM, POSITIVISM PHENOMENALISM, EMPIRICISM, IDEALISM, NOMINALISM

Doctrines that there can be no absolute knowledge of truth because no observer can judge from an absolute position. The only thing knowable for certain is our set of sense perceptions or sensations. Knowledge consists of or is derived from actual facts, and that mere feelings and religious or supernatural beliefs are not true knowledge.

The Torah gives us an insight into truth beyond the human perspective.

POLYTHEISM

Belief in several gods.

Obviously not.

RATIONALISM

Doctrine that knowledge can be gained only through reason or intellect; rejects religion on the grounds that it is contrary to reason.

Judaism teaches that true knowledge is derived from learning the Torah.

RELATIVISM, PRESCRIPTIVISM

Doctrines that Truth is not absolute but varies from individual to individual, culture to culture, and age to age.

The Torah is for all times and places.

SATANISM

Cult worship of the “forces of evil” including use of Black Magic and the Black Mass, and characterized by

perverse sexual practices. Rites travesty Christian ceremonies.

However Satan is defined, it is abhorrent to “worship” him in any way whatsoever.

SOLIPISM

Belief that the self – consciousness – is the only thing in existence or, at any rate, the only thing knowable for certain.

The Torah informs us otherwise.

STOICISM

Classical Greek doctrine that the only worthwhile human aim is virtue and an indifference to pleasure and pain. This involves submitting to Nature, suppressing one’s emotions, and bearing pain without betraying one’s feelings.

No such notions exist.

THEOSOPHY

Religious or philosophical system holding that knowledge of G-d comes through mystical intuition.

The premier way to know of G-d is through intensive Torah study.

TOTENISM

Worships the “forces of Nature”.

This is idolatry at its primitive worst.

TRANSCENDENTALISM

Doctrine that the ultimate reality is in a realm beyond everyday experience and that knowledge is obtained by intuition or by reflecting on the reasoning process itself.

Introspection is misleading. Truth is learned from the Torah.

UTILITARIANISM

Doctrine that the greatest good is what produces the most happiness for the greatest number of people.

“Good” and “happiness” are subjective. Our definition is more complex and absolute.