

**What are non-physical or inner senses?** Human beings possess a number of senses, eleven according to some neurologists. In addition to the five physical senses, first identified by Aristotle, every person has non-physical or inner senses, oftentimes referred to as clair senses. (Clair means "clear" in French.) These senses become sharper or more acute with use. The more people see, hear, feel, smell, and taste with their inner senses the more fully they express their humanity and divinity, which are one. Five of the clair senses correspond to the physical senses: clairvoyance (sight), clairaudience (hearing), clairsentience (touch), clairscent (smell), and clairsavorance (taste). Of these, people most frequently experience clairsentience, commonly known as intuition.

**What is divination?** For mystics, including Jewish mystics, every single thing that exists contains a spark of the Divine, which means, of course, everything is Divine and everything is alive! The Divine is constantly communicating, with us, with all of life, with Itself.

Every form of divination started out as an attempt (on the part of those already using their inner senses) to decode Divine communication, and it gradually evolved into a mode of communication or a language. A particular form of divination is a language, in which the Divine together with practitioners of divination or diviners converse. Divining, then, is conversing. Some diviners are adept at one, some at several, forms of divination or languages.

**What is licit and illicit divination?** Both the Bible and Talmud contain numerous examples of divination, which we will examine, revealing that some of the greatest personalities in biblical and talmudic history were diviners, such as Joseph (father of Ephraim and Manasseh) and Rav (whose scholarship helped to give rise to the Babylonian Talmud). The rabbis of the Talmud engaged in divination, several forms actually, but never recognized what they did as such; in their view, they did not divine, they discovered "omens." They permitted practices similar to their own (licit divination) and forbade those that were different, labeling them divination (illicit divination). Oftentimes, however, the line between licit and illicit divination became blurred, especially for those rabbis who were diviners.

According to Abba Arika or Rav (third century C.E.), those who practice divination, that is, illicit divination, CLAIM TO KNOW THE WILL OF THE DIVINE THROUGH THEIR INTERPRETATIONS OF PHENOMENA AND ACT OR ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO ACT SOLELY ON THE BASIS OF THEIR INTERPRETATIONS (Hullin 95b). He based his teaching on two separate accounts of divination found in the Bible (Genesis 24:14-27 and I Samuel

14:8-15), that is, the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh, which Christians refer to as the Old Testament.

### **What does the Bible say about divination?**

(Unless otherwise noted, quoted verses are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society of America Version of the Tanakh.)

Many people are surprised to learn that the Tanakh offers very mixed messages about divination, which, presumably, gave the rabbis of the Talmud license to engage in it. Let us begin by examining verses from the Torah (Pentateuch) that condemn divination (as well as other crafts) and then move on to explore those that mention seers and various forms of divination.

(The verses from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, which appear immediately below, are quoted from the Judaica Press Version of the Tanakh.)

You shall not eat over the blood. You shall not act on the basis of omens or lucky hours (26)... You shall not turn to [the sorcery of] Ov or Yid'oni; you shall not seek [these and thereby] defile yourselves through them. I am the Lord, your God (31) (Leviticus 19: 26, 31).

There shall not be found among you anyone who passes his son or daughter through fire, a soothsayer, a diviner of [auspicious] times, one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer (10), or a charmer, a pithom sorcerer, a yido'a sorcerer, or a necromancer (11) (Deuteronomy 18:10-11).

Leviticus 19: 26 and 31 identify five practices, quoted here in both Hebrew and English:

toch'loo al-hadam, eat over the blood (26)  
t'nacha'shoo, omens (26)  
t'onaynoo, lucky hours (26)  
ha ovot, [the sorcery of] Ov (31)  
ha yeed'oneem, [the sorcery of] Yid'oni (31)

According to Maimonides or the Ramban, "eat over the blood" refers to the practice of pronouncing incantations over blood, which had been collected in a ditch, for the purpose of foreseeing the future (Interlinear Chumash). Rashi, in his commentary on Leviticus 19:26 and 30, sheds light on the meaning of "omens" and "lucky hours" but fails to offer any concrete details about "[the sorcery of] Ov" or "[the sorcery of] Yid'oni."

According to him, one who acts on the basis of "omens," bases one's behavior on the real but hidden meaning of events, and one who acts on the basis of "lucky hours," bases one's behavior on (what has been interpreted as) the ideal time to commence or terminate an endeavor. In his commentary on related verses in Deuteronomy, Rashi explains what is meant by the terms "[the sorcery of] Ov" and "[the sorcery of] Yid'oni," practitioners of which he identifies as pithom sorcerers and yido'a sorcerers, respectively.

Deuteronomy 18:10-11 identifies seven different practitioners, quoted here in both Hebrew and English:

kosaym k'sameem, soothsayer (10)  
m'onayn, diviner of [auspicious] times (10)  
oom'nachaysh, one who interprets omens (10)  
v'chovayr chaver, charmer (11)  
v'shoayl ov, pithom sorcerer (11)  
v'yeed'onee, yido'a sorcerer (11)  
v'doraysh el-hamayteem, necromancer (11)

In his commentary on the above verses, Rashi gives us an idea of how each of these practitioners worked. The "soothsayer" communicates with inanimate objects (such as a wooden rod), the "diviner of [auspicious] times" determines the most ideal time to commence or terminate an endeavor, the "one who interprets omens" discovers meaning in events (such as a deer crossing a person's path), the "charmer" calls creatures (such as scorpions and snakes) to come together, the "pithom sorcerer" raises the spirits of the dead who go on to speak through his or her armpit, the "yido'a sorcerer" places a bone (yido'a) into his or her mouth through which words emanate, and a "necromancer" raises the spirits of the dead who proceed to speak through his "membrum" (penis) or through a skull.

It is not known with absolute certainty what role each played in the life of the individual or community. That said, let us point out some basic similarities and differences among them.

To provide information or answer questions, these practitioners can be divided into two groups. The charmer, the pithom sorcerer, the yido'a sorcerer, and the necromancer, who comprise the first group, depend on either creatures or spirits, while the soothsayer, the diviner of [auspicious] times, and the one who interprets omens, who comprise the second group, rely on their inner senses to perceive phenomena, which they later interpret. This second group, along with the seers of the Bible, can be regarded as the direct ancestors of modern-day practitioners of divination.

**The seers of the Bible.** More than two dozen times, the Tanakh mentions the figure of the seer, ro'eh or chozeh in Hebrew. I and II Samuel are in fact named after the greatest of seers, Samuel.

I Samuel 9:1-27 introduces us to Samuel (Shmuel in Hebrew), the first seer mentioned in the Bible. In this story, young Saul (who later becomes Israel's first king) and his servant search for some lost asses. Unsuccessful, the servant suggests they seek out a "man of God" to help them (9:6), a significant suggestion because it reveals that a man of God occupied himself with problems as mundane as locating stray beasts.

This man of God, it seems, is the town psychic. When Saul and his servant reach the vicinity where he resides, they ask a group of girls, "Is the seer in town?" and the girls immediately reply, "He is up there ahead of you" (9:11-12). Their words imply that the man's community regarded him as a seer.

According to the text, the seer makes his living using his inner senses to provide information. Saul's servant, for instance, says, "I happen to have a quarter-shekel of silver. I can give that to the man of God and he will tell us about our errand" (9:8). And when Saul finally encounters Samuel, he asks him, "Tell me, please, where is the house of the seer?" and Samuel responds, "I am the seer" (9:18-19). Samuel, as his reply indicates, understood himself to be a seer. He goes on to say, "As for your asses that strayed three days ago, do not concern yourself about them, for they have been found" (9:20). Alas, the seer gave Saul and his servant the information they had sought.

Besides Samuel, the Tanakh introduces us to nine other seers: Zadok, Gad, Heman, Iddo, Hanani, Jehu, Asaph, and Jeduthun. I Samuel 9:9 states the seers were forerunners of the prophets, II Chronicles 29:25 suggests they were contemporaries, and II Samuel 24:11 implies an individual could be both.

Though prophets, throughout the history of Israel, played a distinct role in their communities, they sometimes took on the work of seers. In I Kings 14:1-3 the prophet Ahijah accepts compensation for helping people with their concerns.

The text reads: At that time, Abijah, a son of Jeroboam, fell sick. Jeroboam said to his wife, "Go and disguise yourself, so that you will not be recognized as Jeroboam's wife, and go to Shiloh. The prophet Ahijah lives there, the one who predicted that I would be king over this people. Take with you ten loaves, some wafers, and a jug of honey, and go to him; he will tell you what will happen to the boy."

Though royals, Jeroboam and his wife, like any couple, want to know whether their sick child will get better, and Ahijah provides the information they seek. Unfortunately, the child will not recover; the prophet tells Jeroboam's wife, "As for you, go back home; as soon as you set foot in the town, the child will die" (14:12).

### **Divination through naturally-occurring events (in the Tanakh)**

Let us move on to examine forms of divination in the Tanakh that require the diviner to interpret naturally-occurring events for the purpose of providing information or answering questions. As mentioned above, a form of divination can be understood as a language and divining as conversing or talking.

**Divining through shadows.** In II Kings 20: 8-11, we encounter a form of divination known as **sciomancy**, which requires the practitioner to interpret shadows. The text tells us that a lingering King Hezekiah of Judah asks the prophet Isaiah to identify the "sign" that will point toward his recovery.

Isaiah responds by asking him a question, "Shall the shadow advance ten steps or recede ten steps?" (20:9). And Hezekiah replies, "It is easy for the shadow to lengthen ten steps, but not for the shadow to recede ten steps" (20:10). Isaiah then "called to the Lord, and he made the shadow which had descended on the dial of Ahaz recede ten steps" (20:11). Later on, the text tells us that Hezekiah died but not immediately after this exchange with Isaiah. The receding shadow may have symbolized the retreat of death.

This account is significant for two reasons: one, Isaiah invites the king to practice, together with him, this form of divination, which he does; two, the prophet acknowledges the Lord as the source of the phenomenon, which may have involved clouds covering the sun, thereby changing the position of the shadow on the sundial. Isaiah testifies to the reality of the Divine communicating with us, with Itself, through a mode other than the vernacular.

**Divining through the sound of moving branches.** II Samuel 5:23-24 shows clearly that a particular form of divination is indeed a specific language. Says the text, "David inquired of the Lord, and He answered, 'Do not go up, but circle around behind them and confront them at the baca trees (23). And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the baca trees, then go into action, for the Lord will be going in front of you to attack the Philistine forces'" (24).

David, who must have been conversant in the language *Sound of Moving Branches*, listened for a very distinct sound in the “tops of the baca trees,” and if he could interpret it as the “sound of marching,” he would know that the Lord had already gone to battle and he and his men must follow suit.

**Divining through the flight of birds.** Ecclesiastes 10:20 makes reference to interpreting the flight patterns of birds, a form of divination—a language—known as **ornithomancy**. “For a bird of the air,” says the text, “may carry the utterance, and a winged creature may report word.” If this is not the intended reference, then this verse may point to the belief that the song of birds (and other creatures with wings) was intelligible to certain individuals. Some ancient commentators believed that the “bird of the air” refers to the raven, which Babylonian diviners regarded as especially communicative.

**Divining through the speech of others.** Genesis 24:14-27 and I Samuel 14:8-15 contain examples of **cledomancy**, a form of divination that requires the practitioner to interpret the remarks of another person. Rav cited both accounts in his definition of divination, that is, illicit divination; he did not object to this particular form of divination but to the way in which Eliezer (in Genesis) and Jonathan (in I Samuel) practiced it. Let us take a brief look at each of these stories.

In Genesis 24:14, Eliezer, who is on a mission to find a wife for the son of his master Abraham, prays to the Lord, saying, “Let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your jar so that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac.” Eliezer does three things here: he spells out a sequence of events, declares its realization to be the will of the Lord, and then bases his behavior solely on the occurrence of that sequence. We subsequently learn that Eliezer chose Rebecca to be the wife of Abraham’s son because of the words she spoke to him, which were spoken in response to what he had said to her.

In I Samuel 14: 8-11, Jonathan says to his arms-bearer, “We’ll cross over to those men and let them see us. If they say to us, ‘Wait until we get to you,’ then we’ll stay where we are, and not go up to them. But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the Lord is delivering them into our hands. That shall be your sign” (14:9-10). Like Eliezer, Jonathan does three things: he spells out not one but two different sequences of events, declares the realization of the second sequence to be the will of the Lord, and then bases his behavior solely on that sequence’s unfolding. We subsequently learn that Jonathan and his arms-bearer pursued the Philistines because of the specific words those men spoke to them.

Eliezer and Jonathan practiced divination, that is, illicit divination, because they CLAIMED TO KNOW THE WILL OF THE DIVINE THROUGH THEIR INTERPRETATIONS OF PHENOMENA AND ACTED SOLELY ON THE BASIS OF THEIR INTERPRETATIONS. In the rabbis' view, crystallized centuries after these stories were recorded, it was entirely permissible for Eliezer and Jonathan to regard the words spoken to them as omens. Ascribing those words to the Lord and then allowing them to be the single determinant of their behavior was another matter, however.

**Divining through the behavior of others.** In Judges 7:4-8, the Lord tells Gideon that he still has too many troops under his command and then gives him a plan to reduce their number. "Set apart," says the Lord, "all those who lap up the water with their tongues like dogs from all those who get down on their knees to drink" (7:5). Those who drank by lapping were indeed separated from those who drank by cupping their hands together. The former went on to battle the Midianites and the latter returned home.

In this account, the Lord tells Gideon to practice this form of divination in public for the ultimate benefit of the community. He explains to him what to look for and how to interpret it.

### **Divination through created events (in the Tanakh)**

Let us now take a look at forms of divination in the Tanakh that require the diviner to interpret created events, a sequence of created events, for the purpose of providing information or answering questions. In every instance, the events were created by the diviner through the use of a divinatory device. Again, a form of divination can be understood as a language and divining as conversing or talking.

**Divining through Urim and Thummim.** We begin by turning our attention to the Urim and Thummim, the most celebrated and mysterious divinatory device mentioned in the Tanakh. We first encounter the Urim and Thummim in Exodus 28:30 and then again in Leviticus 8:8.

We read in Exodus, "Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim, so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord at all times" (28:30). And in Leviticus, "He [Moses] put the breastpiece on him, and put into the breastpiece the Urim and Thummim" (8:8).

As an officially-sanctioned divinatory device, the Urim and Thummim were used by the Levites (Deuteronomy 33:8) for the purpose of making decisions

(Numbers 27:21). It is clear that priests, other than the high priest, possessed them (I Samuel 23:9; Ezra 2:63; and Nehemiah 7:65).

Apparently, the Urim and Thummim were "lots" (I Samuel 14:41-42, 23:9-12) used to answer yes-no questions (14:37). Those who utilized the Urim and Thummim practiced **cleromancy**, a form of divination that requires the diviner to interpret lots, such as pieces of bone. I Samuel 14:41 gives us a good idea how they were used. In the Septuagint, this verse reads, "Why have you not responded to your servant today? If this iniquity was due to my son Jonathan or to me, O Lord, God of Israel, show Urim; and if You say it was due to Your people Israel, show Thummim (14:41)." Urim indicates yes and Thummim no.

The meaning of I Samuel 14:41-42 (in the New Jewish Publication Society Version of the Tanakh), which, as previously mentioned, speaks of the Urim and Thummim being used as lots, now becomes clearer. "Jonathan and Saul were indicated by lot, and the troops were cleared" (14:41)—Urim (yes), guilt rests on Jonathan and Saul; Thummim (no), it does not rest on the troops. "And Saul said, 'Cast the lots between my son and me;' and Jonathan was indicated" (14:42)—Thummim (no), Saul is not guilty; Urim (yes), Jonathan is guilty of eating food when it was forbidden to do so.

**Divining through liquid.** In Genesis 42:8, Joseph, now the vizier of Egypt, comes face to face with his brothers, who fail to recognize him. According to the story, Joseph commands his house steward to plant his silver goblet in the bag of his youngest brother, Benjamin. The text twice states that Joseph uses this very goblet for divination (44:5, 15). Joseph instructs his steward to confront his brothers over the missing goblet and to say to them, "It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination" (44:5). And when his brothers are brought before him, Joseph asks them, "Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?" (44:15).

Joseph, with the aid of a divinatory device, a silver goblet (filled partially or completely with one or more liquids), would create phenomena (events) to be interpreted. As to the form of the divination he practiced, that would have depended on what he actually did with the goblet: he may have interpreted patterns formed by wine clinging to the goblet's walls (**oinomancy**); he may have interpreted the patterns formed by oil floating on the liquid's surface (**lecanomancy**); he may have interpreted the ripples and sounds of objects (such as gemstones) dropped into the liquid (**hydromancy**); or he may have interpreted the images he was able to make out inside of the filled goblet (**scrying**).

Daniel, another renowned biblical figure, was highly adept at divination and others crafts. In an attempt to comfort King Belshazzar of Babylon, frightened over the appearance of writing on a wall, his mother / wife speaks very favorably of Daniel.

She says: "There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him; in your father's time, illumination, understanding, and wisdom like that of the gods were to be found in him, and your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, exorcists, Chaldeans, and diviners (11). Seeing that there is to be found in Daniel (whom the king called Belteshazzar) extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, to explain riddles and solve problems, let Daniel now be called to tell the meaning [of the writing]" (12) (Daniel 5:11-12).

If Daniel possessed "the spirit of the holy gods" as well as their qualities and attributes ("extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, to explain riddles and solve problems") and if he was "chief of the magicians, exorcists, Chaldeans, and diviners," he surely engaged in, if not excelled at, the same crafts as these practitioners.

His having "understanding to interpret dreams" suggests that he, like Joseph (Genesis 37 and 40-41), explained their meaning, a form of divination known as **oneiromancy**.

**Divining through sticks.** Interpreting the appearance and / or movement (interaction) of sticks is a form of divination known as **rhabdomancy** or xylomancy. We find an example in Numbers, where Moses, at the Lord's command, instructs the twelve chieftains of the ancestral houses to carve their names on their staffs, which he then places before the Pact so one of them can sprout. "The next day," according to the text, "Moses entered the Tent of the Pact, and there the staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had sprouted: it had brought forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and borne almonds" (17:23). The sprouting of Aaron's staff confirmed that the Lord had chosen him and his sons to serve as priests.

This short account, similar to the one involving Gideon and the troops who stop to drink, is compelling for several reasons. The Lord tells Moses, just as he told Gideon, to practice this form of divination in public for the benefit of the community. And he explains to him, just as he explained to Gideon, what to look for and how to interpret it.

We also find a possible reference to this form of divination in Hosea. There, the prophet says, referring to Israel, "It consults its stick, its rod directs it!" (Hosea 4:12). If we are interpreting this verse correctly, the stick and the rod

function as divinatory devices. Rhabdomancy, by the way, is closely related to another form of divination known as **dowsing**, which requires the practitioner to use a forked stick (divining rod) to find something beneath the ground, such as a source of water.

**Divining through music.** The kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom, unable to locate a source of water while in pursuit of their common enemy (the king of Moab), seek out a prophet of the Lord for assistance. They turn to Elisha son of Shapput who abruptly says to them, "Now then, get me a musician" (II Kings 3:15). "As the musician played," says the text, "the hand of the Lord came upon him [Elisha]" (3:16). The prophet goes on to identify the wadi that would yield an abundance of water and to forecast victory for the kings.

Though a prophet of the Lord, Elisha clearly relies on music to achieve a state of awareness conducive to providing this information. A similar occurrence can be found in I Samuel 10:5, where Saul encounters a "band of prophets," who, "preceded by lyres, timbrels, flutes and harps," are "speaking in ecstasy." Elisha and others, however, may have been more dependent on music than it appears at first glance. They may have interpreted the musical notes (in order to provide the information), which would have made the musical instruments into divinatory devices.

In Ezekiel, in the "third oracle concerning the sword," we learn that the king of Babylon engaged in three forms of divination, two of which Israel also practiced. "For the king of Babylon," the text states, "has stood at the fork of the road, where two roads branch off, to perform divination: He has shaken **arrows**, consulted **teraphim**, and inspected the **liver**" (Ezekiel 21:26). As we will see, in the practice of divination, arrows, teraphim, and the liver of an animal can all function as divinatory devices.

**Divining through arrows.** Shaking arrows refers to a form of divination known as **belomancy**, which requires the practitioner to interpret the way arrows fall or land. In II Kings 13:15-19, the prophet Elisha, while on his deathbed, instructs King Joash of Israel to shoot an arrow and then to strike a bunch of arrows on the ground, which he does.

The prophet interprets the shooting and striking of the arrows, allowing him to forecast the king's future performance in battle:

Elisha said to him, "Get a bow and arrows;" and he brought him a bow and arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, "Grasp the bow!" And when he had grasped it, Elisha put his hands over the king's hands. "Open the window toward the east," he said; and he opened it. Elisha said, "Shoot!" and he shot. Then he said, "An arrow of victory for the Lord! An arrow of victory

over Aram! You shall rout Aram completely at Aphek." He said, "Now pick up the arrows." And he picked them up. "Strike the ground!" he said to the king of Israel; he struck three times and stopped. The man of God was angry with him and said to him, "If only you had struck five or six times! Then you would have annihilated Aram; as it is, you shall defeat Aram only three times" (15-19).

Just as Isaiah leads Hezekiah and the Lord leads Gideon and Moses to practice divination, step by step, Elisha leads King Joash. Hezekiah and Joash were more instruments than assistants, unlike Gideon and Moses.

**Divining through teraphim.** Consulting teraphim refers to **theomancy**, a form of divination that requires the practitioner to interpret the communication of an oracle. The teraphim, the oracles, were more than likely figures or statues that were believed to speak (Zechariah 10:2). They were small enough for Rachel, who had stolen them from her father Laban (Genesis 31:19), to conceal inside of the camel cushion on which she sat (31:34), and at least one of them was large enough for Michal to place in a bed and disguise as her husband David, which facilitated his escape (I Samuel 19:13).

It is noteworthy and understandable that Rachel, one of the four matriarchs of Israel, while in the process of fleeing and embarking upon a completely new and uncertain life with her husband Jacob, had need of her father's teraphim (Genesis 31:19); perhaps Laban's practice of divination, to which he admits (30:27), involved these very teraphim. It is also noteworthy that David and Michal possessed teraphim (I Samuel 19:13) even though both were born long after the Law (containing the anti-divination prohibitions of Leviticus 19:26, 31 and Deuteronomy 18:10-11) had been given to Israel at Sinai.

In the story of Micah (Judges 17 and 18) we learn that teraphim and the ephod are kept at the same location, within the same sacred space. The text tells us that Micah constructed a "house of God" (17:5) and then hired a Levite to serve as his priest (17:10). His shrine contains an ephod, teraphim, a sculptured image, and a molten image, all of which are eventually stolen by the Danites (tribe of Dan) (18:17-18) who go on to make use of the sculptured image (18:30-31).

If this particular ephod was similar to the one created for Aaron (Exodus 28), over it may have lay a breast piece of decision in which were placed Urim and Thummim. The ephod itself, apart from Urim and Thummim, was associated with the asking of yes-no questions (I Samuel 23: 2-6 and 9-12).

Micah's shrine, it seems, contained two divinatory devices, teraphim and the ephod. Eventually, use of teraphim was loudly condemned (I Samuel 15:23) and prohibited (II Kings 23:24).

**Divining through the liver.** Inspecting the liver, if you will, refers to a form of divination known as **hepatoscopy**, which requires the practitioner to interpret the appearance and movement of the liver as it is removed from a recently-slain animal. The king of Babylon's inspecting the liver is the only instance of hepatoscopy contained in the Tanakh.

### **What does the Talmud say about divination?**

The Babylonian Talmud, like the Tanakh, communicates mixed messages about divination. It makes mention of rabbis who engaged in divination, which shouldn't surprise us when we consider that it also speaks of rabbis who practiced magic, such as Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Oshaia, who, while studying together on Shabbat, used the Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Creation), an ancient mystical work (focused on the creative power of the Hebrew alphabet), to create a calf to eat (Sanhedrin 65b and 67b).

**Definition of Divination / Illicit Divination.** Rav, in tractate Hullin (95b), says, "An omen which is not after the form pronounced by Eliezer, Abraham's servant, or by Jonathan the son of Saul, is not considered a divination!" In our discussion of what the Bible says about divination, we examined the stories of Eliezer (Genesis 24:14-27) and Jonathan (I Samuel 14:8-15), instances of divining through the speech of others, to which Rav refers.

As pointed out, in Rav's view, it was entirely permissible for Eliezer and Jonathan to regard the words spoken to them as omens; ascribing those words to the Lord and then allowing them to be the single determinant of their behavior was another matter. Rav did not object to the form of divination, which he failed to even recognize as divination, but to the way in which Eliezer and Jonathan practiced it, to the conclusions they reached. Both engaged in divination, that is, illicit divination, because they CLAIMED TO KNOW THE WILL OF THE DIVINE THROUGH THEIR INTERPRETATIONS OF PHENOMENA AND ACTED SOLELY ON THE BASIS OF THEIR INTERPRETATIONS.

### **Divination through naturally-occurring events (in the Talmud)**

Let us now examine forms of divination in the Talmud that require the diviner to interpret naturally-occurring events for the purpose of providing information or answering questions. Once again, a form of divination can be understood as a language and divining as conversing.

**Divining through final outcomes.** In tractate Hullin (95b), Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar tells us that the outcome of one's building a house, having a child, or getting married can point to the success or failure of future endeavors. "R. Simeon b. Eleazar says," according to the text, "Although a house or a child or a marriage must not be used for divination, they may be taken as a sign. R. Eleazar added, Provided it was established so on three occasions." Rabbi Eleazar cautions that all three outcomes must be positive or negative for them to have any predictive value.

**Divining through the movement of a ferry boat.** In the same tractate (Hullin, 95b), we find Rav interpreting the movement of a ferry boat, a form of divination for which there is no known name. "Rab," the text tells us, "was once going to his son-in-law R. Hanan when he saw a ferry-boat coming towards him. Said he to himself, "When the ferry-boat comes to meet one it is a good omen." His words literally mean, "it will be a good day in there," that is, "at the place where he proposed to go."

Rav, it seems, was familiar with a particular sequence of events that consistently pointed to a favorable outcome: If one, while traveling toward a destination, encounters an oncoming ferry, the circumstances surrounding one's arrival at that destination will be pleasant. Rav acted inside of the Law by interpreting the oncoming ferry boat as indicative of a favorable outcome for his journey. If, however, he had not seen the ferry boat and had gone on to say, "The Lord wills that I must not go beyond this point," and had proceeded to stop, to end his journey, he would have acted outside of the Law.

**Divining through the speech of others.** In tractate Megillah (32a), Rabbi Shefatiah, repeating a teaching of Rabbi Johanan, tells us if, while reading from the Torah, one hears a man repeat himself or a woman repeat herself, especially if she is in a place where she isn't normally, it is permissible to look for a connection between what is being read (from the Torah) and what is being said (by that person). Says Rabbi Shefatiah, "Whence do we know that we may avail ourselves of a chance utterance [as an omen]? Because it says, And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying. This applies, however, only if one hears the voice of a man in town and of a woman in the country, and only if it says, yes, yes, or no, no" (Megillah 32a).

The meaning behind words of Torah, then, can be elucidated or enhanced by the words spoken by a person in an unrelated place and situation. Here, we have another example of **cledomancy**, a form of divination that requires the practitioner to interpret the remarks of another person; we encountered cledomancy in Genesis 24:14-27 and I Samuel 14:8-15.

## **Divining through created events (in the Talmud)**

**Divining through books.** In tractate Hullin (95b), we encounter Rabbi Johanan, who, before setting out to visit his colleague Samuel, engages in **bibliomancy** or stichomancy, a form of divination that requires the practitioner to interpret words, lines, or passages of a book, often the Bible. The same tractate tells us that Samuel himself practiced this form of divination; he regarded a randomly selected "passage from a book" as a "sign" (95b).

Says Rabbi Johanan, "It is clear that I have a Master in Babylon; I must go and see him." And the text continues, "So he said to a child, 'Tell me the verse you have learnt.' He answered, 'Now Samuel was dead.' Said [R. Johanan], 'This means that Samuel has died.' But it was not the case; Samuel was not dead then, and [this happened] only that R. Johanan should not trouble himself" (95b).

Interestingly, Rabbi Johanan did not practice divination, that is, illicit divination, as defined by Rav. The text does not state whether he regarded setting out or not setting out on his journey as reflecting the Divine will or whether he proceeded onward or remained behind (upon hearing the child quote I Samuel 28:3). Rabbi Johanan simply interpreted the event, and it so happens that he interpreted it incorrectly; he believed his colleague Samuel had died instead of concluding that it may not be an opportune time for him to receive visitors.

In tractate Horayoth (12a), Rabbi Ammi endorses three particular forms of divination, although he does not recognize any of them as divination. He mentions **divining through flames**, **divining through the behavior of a rooster**, and **divining through shadows** and then describes, as if providing instructions, what exactly the practitioner of each must do.

**Divining through flames.** Says Ammi: "He who wishes to ascertain whether he will live through the year or not shall, during the tens days between the New Year and the Day of Atonement, kindle a lamp in a house wherein there is no draught. If the light continues to burn he may know that he may live throughout the year." He clearly describes **pyromancy**, pyroscopy, or lampadancy, a form of divination that requires the practitioner to interpret the movement of flame or fire.

**Divining through the behavior of a rooster.** Continues Ammi: "He who desires to engage in business and wishes to ascertain whether he will succeed

or not, let him rear up a cock [rooster]; if it grows plump and fine he will succeed.” He refers to **alectromancy**, a form of divination that requires the practitioner to interpret the behavior of a rooster, particularly the way in which it feeds; the words “plump and fine” say something about the rooster’s behavior—it eats and appears in every way to be healthy. Alectromancy can be described as a very distinct type of **zoomancy**, a form of divination that requires the practitioner to interpret the behavior of animals.

**Divining through shadows.** Says Ammi: “He who desires to set out on a journey and wishes to ascertain whether he will return home again or not, let him station himself in a dark house; if he sees the reflection of his shadow he may know that he will return home again.” Here, we have another example of **sciomancy**, a form of divination that requires the practitioner to interpret shadows; we encountered sciomancy in II Kings 20: 8-11.