

# KOL MEVASSER

## Rejecting Superstitions

By Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Edited and rewritten by D. Ezran

There are people for whom superstition and fortune telling prevail over rational thinking. It is worth teaching our children to be on guard for superstitious ways of thinking.

The Torah expressly forbids trying to know the future or to magically affect it. Most of us do not engage in these practices; however, they do appear regularly in popular culture. They sometimes even appear under the guise of Judaism. It is important to let our kids know that these practices go against our values.

In this week's Torah portion, "Shoftim," Canaanite inhabitants of Israel engage in behavior that conflicts with Torah teachings. "Shoftim" warns against paganism and magic. Even though pagan rituals may intrigue us, such cults and cultures often result in socially destructive behavior, injure people and (as the Torah states directly regarding cults of the time) may lead to atrocities such as child sacrifice.

Through archeological records, we know of such cults' existence on many continents. In the Americas, for example, Mayan civilization included detailed astronomical knowledge with which religious practitioners foretold future events. Intellectual knowledge aside, Mayan religion centered around a desire to control the future—sorcery or divination by any other name. And the worship of heavenly bodies and sup-

posedly divine human rulers did, in fact, require human sacrifice, perhaps to ensure the future followed the desired and predicted path.

How much power rested in these beliefs? Mayan religion predicted and claimed to influence fertility, agriculture, weather, and the movement of the heavens.

The desire to influence the course of our lives is not so strange. It's human to want to know the future. But how we handle this desire is our choice. We should avoid false and wishful thinking.

Our Torah text for this week comes from the book of Devarim 18:9-15. Moshe warns the children of Israel not to resort to magical thinking or occult behavior:

*"When you come into the land that Hashem Your God gives you, you shall not learn to do the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that sacrifices his son or his daughter to the fire. Or that uses divination, or an observer of the omens, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations Hashem Your God drives them out from before you. You shall be wholeheartedly perfect with the Lord your God."*

When we analyze these verses, we see that they contain a long list of different kinds of

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## KJ Schedule

### Erev Shabbat

**Friday, August 24, 2012**

Shaharit/Morning Prayer ..... 6:30 am  
 Shir HaShirim ..... 6:45 pm  
 Minhah/Arbith ..... 7:00 pm  
 Shabbat Candle Lighting ..... 7:10 pm

### Shabbat Shoftim

**Saturday, August 25, 2012**

Shaharit/Morning Prayer ..... 8:30 am  
 Women's Tehillim ..... 6:00 pm  
 Rabbi's Class ..... 6:00 pm  
 Minha, Seudah Shlisheet, Arvit ..... 6:30 pm  
 Motzei Shabbat / Havdallah ..... 8:12 pm

### Weekdays

**Sunday, August 26, 2012**

Shaharit/Morning Prayer ..... 7:30 am  
**KJ Youth Choir ..... 11:00 am**

**Monday to Friday, August 27 to 31, 2012**

Shaharit/Morning Prayer ..... 6:30 am

### Erev Shabbat

**Friday, August 31, 2012**

Shaharit/Morning Prayer ..... 6:30 am  
 Shir HaShirim ..... 6:45 pm  
 Minhah/Arbith ..... 7:00 pm  
 Shabbat Candle Lighting ..... 7:01 pm

### TORAH & HAFTARA READINGS

Weekly Portion **Shoftim** 820-835  
 Haftara 835-838

### Kahal Joseph Congregation Rabbi Hagay Batzri

10505 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles 90025  
 www.kahaljoseph.org 310.474.0559

## Shabbat Kiddush

is co-sponsored  
in honor of the marriage of  
Jaimie Naomie Nissan  
& Joseph Miller Rubin  
by Rosy and Albert Nissan  
Congratulations to both families

## Shabbat Kiddush

is co-sponsored  
in honor of their son  
Mason Rahamim Salehani  
by  
Dr. David and Sandi Salehani

## In Memoriam

We remember these yearzeit anniversary of passings, for August 25 to September 1, 2012. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate tzedakah, and attend prayer services the preceding Shabbat.

### 7 Elul / Shabbat, August 25th

Yaacov Aboulafia *Yaacov ben Sarah*

### 8 Elul / Sunday, August 26th

Rachel Ezra Jacob *Rahel bat Lulu*  
Naji Ezra Helali *Naji Ezra Helali*  
Yamin Sassoon *Yamin ben Sassoon*

### 9 Elul / Monday, August 27th

Sam Dabby *Shimon ben Haskel*  
Hilda Deborah *Habiba bat Farha*  
Rachel Hayim Mingail *Rahel bat Miriam*

### 12 Elul / Thursday, August 30th

Menasseh Saltoon *Menasseh ben Nissim*

### 13 Elul / Friday, August 31st

Isaac Ferris Abraham *Yitzhak Faraj*  
Sophie Solomon *Simhah bat Khatoon*  
*Nessim ben Yitro*

### 14 Elul / Shabbat, September 1st

Nathan Assia  
Haim Elazar *Haim ben Haim*  
Harry Brook Moses *Haim Baruch ben*  
*Moshe Ezra*

## Mazal Tov

### Amy and Jonathan Phillips on the birth of your son

Congratulations to the Grandparents  
and to the entire family

## Seudah Shlisheet

is co-sponsored in memory of  
Naji Ezra Helali, z"l  
by Hanina Mathalon and Family

## Seudah Shlisheet

is co-sponsored in memory of  
Ashraf bat Agajohn, z"l  
by The Esfandi Family

## Member of the Week Yvette Dabby

This week we recognize the tireless and devoted efforts of Yvette Dabby, who is always there with a positive attitude and willingness to help and support the community. This month she is preparing, once again, to organize our membership and seating for the High Holy Days, as she does every year with grace and loving kindness. Thank you, Yvette!

## Refuah Shlemah

Gerry Shapiro • Yocheved bat Rachel •  
Salha Matana bat Mazal Tov • Rachamim ben  
Sarah • Mazal bat Malka • Dan Herdoon •  
Mazal Tov bat Salha Matana Amron • Moshe  
Ashkenazi ben Rachel • Gloria Levy-Mazzal bat  
Rahel • Moshe ben Ezra • Evelyn bat Mazal

## High Holy Days & Membership

Now's the perfect time to renew or begin your membership in our lovely synagogue. We are a community and our members' support wonderful programs for young and old. For information contact Sarah at 310.474.0559.

## Condolences

to the family and friends of  
Marcel Ovadia bat Aziza Sion, z"l  
sister of our dear member Joseph  
Samuels. *May Hashem comfort them*  
*together with all the mourners of Zion*

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sorcerers. Although we cannot identify each type of magician today, what the Torah objects to is the magical way of thinking. What is magical thinking? It is simply the belief that by performing a certain behavior, the future will turn out as desired.

In the past, magical thinking led people to take actions we would never consider today. As we mentioned, magical thinking even led people to physically sacrifice their children in times of great anxiety. Today, we “sacrifice” our children’s well-being in different ways, or surrender other valuable aspects of our lives.

The Torah forbids such actions when performed to obtain some control over the future or over our destiny. Magical thinking and magical ritual go against the ethical and spiritual foundations of the Torah. For one, they support irrational behavior and false logic. For another, Hashem cannot be manipulated.

One form of magic explicitly forbidden in the Torah is communication with the dead. Necromancy was practiced in Biblical times and is still practiced today. The Torah forbids attempts to contact the dead or prayers to the dead. The first book of Samuel (chapter 28) describes how a distraught King Saul, fearing an imminent military defeat, sought the assistance of a necromancer to raise the dead prophet, Samuel. King Saul succeeds. But Samuel complains about being disturbed. And, unfortunately, the message he transmits is not one Saul wants to hear.

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The Torah’s message is not that occult practices don’t work. The message is that even if one believes in the occult, such practices are prohibited, because they are destructive to individuals and to society. For instance, the occult was associated with idol worship.

In Judaism we never pray to the dead. At times we pray to Hashem to have compassion upon the souls of those who have died. This differs markedly from addressing the dead directly in prayer.

The Torah directs people to follow its lessons and guidance wholeheartedly. We should follow God and not stray to misleading and unfamiliar ways.

As Rashi commented: *“Walk continually with God in perfect [commitment], put your hope in Him and do not seek out the future. Rather, accept in perfect [commitment] anything that occurs to you. Then you will be His nation and portion.”*

We strive to accept whatever the future brings upon us with belief in God. We beseech only Him and use the methods taught by the Torah to “overturn” the evil decree. For example, on Yom Kippur we fast and pray. As our wise sages have taught us, “Three things annul the [harsh] decree, prayer, charity, and repentance.” (Bereshit Rabbah chapter 44).

Resorting to other, occult means avoids the real issues and offers unproductive distraction. When we are anxious about the future, our predecessors have shown us what to do. We must pray to Hashem. We must give of

**Sold Out**

The Joseph Congregation

*Legacy of Kindness*

*Gala Tribute Dinner*

Honoring  
*Rylla & Benjamin H. Elias*

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our possessions to the needy. We must investigate our actions and repent.

By repenting, a person sees what past behavior might have led to his current dilemma. A person who goes through this process grows spiritually because of his anxiety and becomes a better person.

Magical thinking is often imaginary and has no basis in reality. Problems are not solved through magic, but through real steps taken to improve the situation. Such steps include thinking about the problem, improving oneself, and of course praying for Hashem’s guidance.

**Shabbat Shalom**

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KAHAL JOSEPH'S  
NORMA & SAM DABBY



## HEBREW SCHOOL THE PORTAL IS OPENING...



*Voyage to Mythical Worlds*  
*Touch the Past & Future*  
*Hear Magical Melodies*  
*Taste Enchanting Foods*



**New Interactive Curriculum**  
**Free Month Tuition for KJ Members**  
**with Advance Registration**

Sundays 9:30 to 11 am, Thursdays 4 to 5:30 pm  
Members \$100/month Non-members \$150/month

**Classes Begin September 6th**  
310.474.0559



## KJ YOUTH CHOIR

Calling All KJ Kids • 6 -12 years old  
Sunday, August 26 • 11 to 12 noon  
KJ Main Sanctuary Downstairs



## KJ KIDS BIRTHDAY CLUB

Kids! Tell your parents about the KJ Birthday Club. All KJ kids are invited to join!

As a member of the birthday club you will:

- ◆ Receive a birthday e-mail card
- ◆ Be recognized in the KJ newsletter
- ◆ Be congratulated at Shabbat services
- ◆ Enjoy a birthday treat or gift

All your parents have to do is send an e-mail request to [dafna@kahaljoseph.org](mailto:dafna@kahaljoseph.org) and you're in! All children aged 18 and under of Kahal Joseph members are welcome.

Shabbat Shalom

## Upcoming Guest Speaker Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan "With Love and Not Fear"

**Saturday, September 15th**  
*During morning services*

Join us for an insightful program from our Westwood neighbor, Rabbi Kaplan of UCLA's Hillel Center.



He will provide an in depth look at Rosh Hashanah and discuss why this holiday has no penitential prayers.



11th Annual SEC

## Sephardic Jewish Film Festival Opening Night Gala

**November 11, 2012**  
**at Paramount Studios**

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