

The Importance of Being Earnest

Part I

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(based on a class given on *Motza'ei Shabbat Shoftim* 5765)

In the portion of *Shoftim*, we find one of the most important verses of the entire Torah: "You shall be sincere with *Havayah*, your God."¹ According to Maimonides, this verse is inclusive of all the commandments of the Torah. Many of the problems that we encounter as individuals and as a society today are rooted in our loss of a sincere and innocent belief in God and the Torah. On the one hand, the modern individual is full of cynicism and contempt for anyone who still seems to hold on to his innocence. On the other hand, the same modern person is finding himself more and more drawn to various forms of witchcraft, magic, alternative remedies, psychic readings, etc., all with the hope of finding some comfort, solace, and security from life's difficulties and infirmities. The first part of this article will explain the connection between sincerity and faith, and the central role that sincerity plays in the psyche. This part will center on how occult rituals attack our sincerity and leave us even more frustrated. Part 2 will be devoted to a renewed explanation of the definition of sincerity and will center on a special form of proactive sincerity, which allows us to regain feelings of trust and simplicity.

Sincerity and Faith

"You shall be sincere with *Havayah*, your God" is a particularly important verse because of the Rebbe Rashab's wish that we all be *temimim*—individuals who are sincere—which is why he named the Lubavitch Yeshivah: *Tomchei Temimim*. In his Chassidic discourse *Besha'ah Shehikdimu*, the Rebbe Rashab explains the inclusiveness of sincerity. Not only is it the experiential aspect of the *sefirah* of acknowledgment/thanksgiving (*hod*), but the inner core of all the *sefirot* together, from crown down to kingdom.

The first thing that a Jew says when waking up in the morning is: "I thank You, living and eternal King, that You have returned my soul into my body with compassion; Your faithfulness is great." What these first words recited every day reveal to us is that acknowledgment/thanksgiving is the product of super-rational faith. In Kabbalistic terminology we would say that acknowledgment—

the *sefirah* of *hod*—is in its essence super-rational and connects us with that which is beyond our conscious life. And, in the language of Chassidut: the source of *temimut*, acknowledgment's psychological experience, lies in faith (*emunah*), the highest aspect of the crown and the consciously manifest form of the internal aspect of the *partzuf* of *Atik*. Thus, of all the attributes of the heart, it is specifically acknowledgment that picks up and brings into our consciousness our simple faith in the Almighty.

Temimut can be translated in English in three different ways: 1) sincerity, 2) simplicity, or 3) completeness. In Yiddish it is usually translated as *ehrenskeit*, which is similar to the English "earnestness," meaning "sincerity." The Rebbe Rashab also says that *temimut* it is the most fundamental of all human attributes and if a person does not have it naturally it is the hardest attribute to acquire. We might say that *temimut* is the essence of holistic Judaism. What is meant by "holistic" is that three things in Judaism must be whole: the Torah, the people of Israel, and the Land of Israel, as stressed many times by the Lubavitcher Rebbe. If any letter of a Torah scroll is missing or defective, then the whole scroll is defective and cannot be used to read from. Likewise, if any Jew is still unaware of his connection to the Jewish people, then we are incomplete as a nation. And, if any part of the Land of Israel is "missing," then the entire earth is lacking and there is no way to achieve peace and harmony for all.

Rashi's Earnestness

Many works of Chassidut note that *Rashi's* commentary on this verse is unique among his commentaries on the Torah. *Rashi* writes:

Walk with Him with temimut; always look for Him and await Him; do not investigate or think about the future; accept everything that He does with temimut; and then you will be with Him and a part of His portion in the world.

Rashi's commentary naturally divides into five parts, which correspond both to the five worlds from Primordial Man to Action and, in a beautiful example of self-reference, to the five words of the verse itself, as follows:

letter of <i>Havayah</i>	<i>Sefirah</i>	word in verse		<i>Rashi's</i> commentary
tip of <i>yud</i>	Crown	תמים	Sincere	Walk with Him with sincerity
<i>yud</i>	wisdom	תהיה	you shall be	always look for Him and await Him
<i>hei</i>	understanding	עם	with	do not investigate or think about the future
<i>vav</i>	loving-kindness thru	הוי	Havayah	accept everything that He does with simplicity

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	foundation			
<i>hei</i>	kingdom	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	your God	and then you will be with Him and a part of His portion in the world

Let us say a few words about this correspondence:

Walking with God is the clearest example of the consciousness associated with Primordial Man (*Adam Kadmon*, in Hebrew). This was the particular consciousness that God guided Abraham in attaining through the commandment of circumcision, "Walk before me and be sincere" (Genesis 17:1) which serves to awaken our simple faith in God, the quality of faith of the World of Primordial Man.

"Look for Him and await Him," which corresponds to the quality of anticipation that comes from the World of Emanation. The World of Emanation corresponds to the *sefirah* of wisdom (חכמה), whose Hebrew name is a permutation of the letters of the word מחכה, which means "he is waiting." Specifically, the anticipation that one experiences is to see God's Divine Providence at work, especially in the form of personal Providence.

The middle part of Rashi's commentary, "do not investigate or think about the future," includes the most literal and direct interpretation of this verse's meaning. It is with this part that we will be mostly concerned in this article.²

In Judaism, thoughts of the future ultimately culminate with thoughts about the World to Come. In the *Zohar*, the World to Come is associated with the *sefirah* of understanding and the mother principle; as if to say that our current perspective on reality is limited like a babe in its mother's womb, and in the World to Come we will gain the "mother's" perspective. In Hebrew, the word עם, "with" or "together," is the outer manifestation of the word אם, "mother."

The state of our existence is like a point in space. At times we feel that we lie comfortably in the middle and at times we feel that we are approaching an extreme. As explained elsewhere, the three dimensions of space, which altogether have six extremities, correspond to the six emotional *sefirot* from loving-kindness to foundation. The power of *temimut* mentioned in the fourth part of Rashi's commentary gives us the ability to meet life's extremes with simple and sincere faith that all is good, but that our human perspective cannot always see it. In the 11th epistle of the *Tanya*, the Alter Rebbe explains that if a person believes that even those things that seem negative are really for the best, they will be transformed so that their good becomes visible.

[A well-known story illustrates the power of this idea: the Lubavitcher Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, was sick with Typhus and was hospitalized in a closed ward with other victims of the disease, from which it was not

expected that they recover. Day after day, a friend of his came and shouted from outside the hospital ward the content of the 11th epistle. After a few weeks, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak miraculously emerged healthy from the hospital. He then related that every time that he heard the 11th epistle being read, he felt a little bit better until, eventually, he overcame the typhus.]

The fifth and final part of Rashi's commentary on the verse, "and then you will be with Him and part of His portion in the world" expresses the same idea as matrimony between a man and a woman, where the man belongs to his wife, and the woman belongs to her husband. *Temimut*—sincerity and simplicity—are thus the key ingredients in creating a bi-directional relationship with the Almighty. Becoming a "part of His portion," is like a woman whose property is included within that of her spouse's.

The Jewish Antidote to Magic and Sorcery

Let us return to the middle and central part of Rashi's commentary: "do not investigate or think about the future." In the Torah, this verse is the concluding statement of a series of a series of prohibitions against performing the pagan practices categorized as *Darchei Emori*, the customs or ways of the Emorites. The early pagan inhabitants of the Land of Caanan (before it was conquered by the Children of Israel) practiced abominable rites of sorcery, magic, and witchcraft. The basic tenet of the Chassidic way of studying Torah is that every statement in the Torah is relevant to every person, in all states of being and at all times. Though many of us are under the impression that idolatry and superstitions no longer have a following in the world and that therefore we are all automatically "sincere with God," we will see that unfortunately this is not the case and that these prohibitions are still applicable in today's world.

According to *Rashi*, our verse explains that the unifying principle behind all of these pagan rituals of magic and witchcraft was the attempt to reveal the future and seek protection from the unknown. In order to be sincere and to walk simply with God, the Torah not only forbids us from practicing these pagan rituals and customs, but also forbids us from adopting the conscious mind-space of those who are weary of the future and seek protection from the unknown. Thus, the first antidote to sorcery and magic is complete refusal to enter into the mind-space of those who practice it. As the sages say, they cannot affect those who do not believe, or fear them.

We can now see how this verse actually summarizes the content and moral attitude of the entire Torah. The verse also means that "in order to be *tamim*"—in order to be sincere, simple, and whole—you must be "with *Havayah*, your God."

God's Name *Havayah*, is the "Name of mercy," the Name of God's attribute of mercy. "Your God," which is a translation of another of God's Names, *Elokim*, is the Name of God's severe judgment. In order to be sincere and simple, one must believe that even *Elokim*, even God's apparent severe and harsh decrees are included within His Name *Havayah*, within His attribute of mercy. Mercy is the overriding manner in which God rules and guides the world. Indeed, the essential statement of Jewish faith, the *Shema*, relates this same idea: "Hear O Israel, *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is one." In other words, *Havayah* alone is God (*Elokim*).

Why is it that the Jewish people do not need the sorcery, witchcraft, and divination of the gentile nations? The next verse in the Torah answers this question. God promises that in every generation there will be a prophet like Moses: "God will elevate a prophet, like me, who is of your brethren; to him you shall listen" (Deuteronomy 18:15). [In passing, let us note that this verse is one of only three verses in the Five Books of Moses that begins and ends with the letter *nun* (נ), thus alluding to the fiftieth gate of understanding that Moses acquired at the end of his life and from which his inheritors' prophecy emanates in each generation.] The *Tikunei Zohar* calls this prophet who is like Moses the "*itpashtuta de'Moshe bechol dara vedara*" — the extension of Moses in every generation. Because the Jewish people always have a prophet who is Moses' extension, they do not need to seek out diviners like the non-Jews.³

Every *parashah* in the Torah is traditionally divided into seven parts, whose content reflects, in order, aspects of each of the seven *sefirot* from loving-kindness to kingdom. The verse, "You shall be **sincere** with *Havayah* your God," is the concluding verse of the fourth part of the *parashah* meaning that it reflects an aspect of the *sefirah* of **victory** (*netzach*). We will return later to examine this seeming intertwining of sincerity (the inner experience of acknowledgment) with victory. For now let us merely say that this inter-inclusion of acknowledgment within victory indicates that there is a proactive form of sincerity. The verse promising that there will always be a "Moses" in the generation is situated in the fifth part⁴ of the *parashah*, so it reflects an aspect of acknowledgment. The *Zohar* indeed identifies the main source of the prophetic experience in the *sefirot* of victory and acknowledgment.

Moses' extension into our generation was the Lubavitcher Rebbe. After "*gimel Tamuz*" (the day that the Lubavitcher Rebbe passed on) it has become customary to ask him for guidance by writing one's questions down and placing them in between random pages of his multi-volume letters. Indeed, from the location of the verse describing the "Moses of the generation" (*Moshe shebador*) in the fifth

part of the *parashah*, we learn that this practice must be done with the utmost sincerity and simplicity. We will return to this point in part 2.

Maimonides' Earnestness

Many people think that prophecy is just another form of magic or sorcery. This is of course not true. To highlight the difference between prophecy—the highest form of intellectual achievement—and forbidden magical practices Maimonides' writes that a wise, intelligent Jew knows that all the magical practices of the nations are superstitious nonsense and are of no utility.⁵ Thus, according to Maimonides, a person who is earnest and sincere with God is one who has no use for superstitious mumbo-jumbo. Such a person will always know how to tell the difference between what is nonsense and what is real. Said another way, for Maimonides, sincerity (*temimut*) has a clearly proactive aspect: being wise and knowing what is and what is not real. Thus, accordingly, sincerity is not dependent on the presence of a prophet.

Maimonides' answer to the question of why Jews do not need sorcery and the like is not because we have prophets, but because magic and the related concepts are simply superstitious nonsense that no rational person would believe in. Elsewhere, we explained that from *Rashi's* commentary it is impossible to know if magic and sorcery are mere superstitious nonsense or whether they actually work. *Rashi* simply states that for a Jew they are forbidden practices.

Superstition As Habit

This discussion brings us to an important question (especially according to Maimonides): What exactly are superstitions? The most general way of defining a "superstition" and understanding the use that people have for it in their lives is that a superstition is a "bad habit" that a person has adopted. *Rashi* describes a superstition as a "bad omen," meaning that a particular event, call it X, happens and the superstitious person immediately assumes that something else, call it Y, will also happen. These are chains of cause and effect that seek to "reveal the future" before it has happened. They are an abomination of the natural human tendency to seek order in reality.

In fact, in its early stages of development, it is hard to tell science, which is supposed to reveal real physical laws of the universe, apart from magic and sorcery, which seek to find "order" by introducing the existence of extraneous forces or powers that contradict the healthy, logical attitude of a "sincere" person, as per Maimonides' definition. Furthermore, when science attempts to be all-inclusive, it falls into a sacrilegious abyss that has led many people to lose

touch with the Almighty and to exchange the simple and sincere understanding that everything that happens is in the end unified under God's will, with the "sophisticated" idea that nature is void of Divinity. Thus, we see that Maimonides' definition of sincerity is very complex. On the one hand it means having an inquisitive and logical mind. On the other hand, it goes hand in hand with a deep belief that everything that comes to pass has its direct origin in the Creator.

Returning to our definition for superstitions, we see that we all carry superstitions at some level, which is why the prohibition against the ways of the Emorites and the Torah's demand that we be sincere with the Almighty are still very much relevant even in the modern world.

Essentially, superstitions are the applied version of incorrect associations that we make. Our ability to associate two things (whether it be in the manner of cause and effect—X causes Y—or in finding other relationships between X and Y) is dependent on our powers of imagination (כוח המדומה, in Hebrew). That is why in some Chassidic works, especially those of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, incorrect associations and correspondences are identified with the evil inclination itself. When a person's associations and correspondences are false, it is a sure sign that his power of imagination is not yet rectified and under the influence of his evil inclination. Accordingly, it is only God's prophets whose powers of imagination and association are a hundred percent rectified.

One example that we have of rectified omens, i.e., relationships of cause and effect that are permitted and rectified, can be found in the laws of Family Purity. According to *halachah*, there are certain "omens," physical premonitions, by which a woman knows that her menstrual cycle is about to begin and that she will shortly be impure to her husband. In practice, this type of Halachically sanctioned premonition is rare today and most women cannot rely on them.

Albeit that there are some correct "omens," in general associations of this kind are habit-forming and negative. Even performing *mitzvot* and learning Torah not purely for God's sake can become superstitious. One of the deepest reasons that we have so far failed to break through the exterior level of our lives and bring the Mashiach is that we have been unable to free ourselves from superstitions as such and to truly believe that it is the Almighty alone who is guiding reality. To break through superstitions we need the proactive power of victory. This begins to explain why the commandment to be "sincere with God" appears in the part of the *parashah* that corresponds to victory.

The Ways of the Emorites

The general name for superstitions and their practice is known in the Talmudic literature as “ways of the Emorites.”⁶ That the sages called superstitions “ways” identifies them directly with damage to the *sefirot* of victory and acknowledgment, which in the human body correspond to the feet. The *sefirot* of victory and acknowledgment are directly responsible for habituating our actions (together with foundation, they are the habitual powers of the soul). When they are damaged, we have a tendency to take on negative habits.

The term “Emorites,” indicates that the superstitions that are most difficult to break free from are those that are part and parcel of the non-Jewish culture within which one is living. The habits, customs, and mannerisms of non-Jewish culture are the result in most cases of superstition. Our inability to live our lives based on purely Jewish, Torah-based culture is what prevents us from inheriting the Land of Israel.

The Partzuf of Defiled Victory and Acknowledgment

In all, the Torah enumerates 9 different types of such forbidden practices:

There shall not be found among you (1) anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, (2) one who uses divination, (3) one who practices witchcraft, or (4) one who interprets omens, or (5) a sorcerer. Or (6) one who casts a spell on animals, or (7) a medium, or (8) a spiritist, or (9) one who calls upon the dead.

As we shall see, *Rashi* divides the practice of witchcraft (מעוין) into two types, making the final tally 10 forbidden practices. Let us first present these forbidden practices in the form of a *partzuf*, corresponding each of the different superstitions listed in the Torah to a *sefirah*. As is the case oftentimes, the order in which these practices are listed in the Torah is the order of the *sefirot* from bottom-up (almost exactly, with understanding preceding knowledge). Since all these superstitions are a corruption of the *sefirot* of victory and acknowledgment, we may identify the *sefirot* in this *partzuf* as the defiled aspects of victory and acknowledgment.

understanding בינה
spiritist וְשֹׂאֵל אוֹב

wisdom חכמה
calling the dead וְדָרַשׁ אֶל הַמֵּתִים

knowledge דעת
a medium וְיִדְעֵנִי

might גבורה

loving-kindness חסד

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sorcery	וּמְכִשָּׁף	animal hypnotism	וְחִבְרָה חֶבֶר
		beauty	תְּפָאֵרֶת
		interpreting omens	וּמְנַחֵשׁ
thanksgiving	הוֹד	victory	נֵצַח
witchcraft	מְעוֹנֵן	witchcraft	מְעוֹנֵן
		foundation	יְסוֹד
		divination	קֶסֶם קְסָמִים
		kingdom	מַלְכוּת
passing children thru fire	בְּאֵשׁ בְּנֵי וְבָתוֹ		

Let us explain each of these practices and their relationship with the *sefirah* that they correspond to. In addition we will explain how each of these practices appears today as a type of superstition.

"Passing children thru fire" (Kingdom)

The Hebrew name of the idolatry that practiced this rite is "*molech*," a word that is related to the Hebrew word meaning "kingdom." This practice was related to education. The prohibition translates today into not initiating your children into the non-Jewish "fires" of the culture of the land that you live in, whether you reside in the United States, the Land of Israel, or elsewhere. The initiating fires of foreign culture divide into both a right and left side. The right is the enthusiasm for the norms of the foreign culture. The left is the fears that that culture harbors.

"Divination" (Foundation)

The greatest diviner in history, Bilam said of the Jewish people: "there are no omen-tellers in Jacob and no diviners in Israel."⁷ In this verse divination is associated with Israel. As explained in Kabbalah, where Jacob corresponds to the *sefirah* of beauty, Israel corresponds to foundation. Rashi explains that "divination" is performed by a person holding a staff and using it to decide whether "to go, or not to go." Maimonides explains that the diviner enters a pseudo-meditative, trance-like state and while in this state speaks about the future. To facilitate entering this state, he may use physical objects like beating a stick on the ground. Divination is done for either one's own "benefit" or at the request of others. The holy aspect of foundation is related to the concept of creating a covenant in order to bind man with God (as in the covenant over the Land of Israel the God made with Abraham, or the covenant He made with Noah, etc.) or two people (as in matrimony). Thus, the counterpart of divination

in holiness is the state of clinging and binding with the Almighty (*d'veikut*), which also corresponds to foundation.

The "stick" used in this ritual (mentioned by both Rashi and Maimonides) is related to foundation, which corresponds to the male procreative organ. Though the procreative organs have no unique names in Hebrew (the reason for which it is called the "holy language," according to Maimonides), the male organ is referred to as "גיד," usually translated as a "vein," or "conduit," but also stemming from the verb meaning "to inform." This peculiar connection between the diviner's "stick" and its ability to "provide information," is explicitly mentioned in a verse: "My people consult their wooden idol and their diviner's cane informs them...."⁸

Today this hypnotic state is used in many types of (pseudo) Healing techniques, which is why a Jew should stay clear of all of these methods since they border on forbidden practices.

"Witchcraft" (Acknowledgment and Victory)

In the Talmud⁹ we find differing opinions on what the Hebrew word "*me'onen*," which we have translated as witchcraft, actually includes. According to Rabbi Akiva, the word "*me'onen*" is derived from the word "*onah*," which means "time." Thus, the "*me'onen*" is an astrologist who guides people in their lives by "revealing" the right time to do this or that. The sages say that "*me'onen*" stems from the Hebrew word "*ayin*," meaning "eye," and refers to an illusionist who tricks people into acknowledging that they saw something happening when it was really just a product of the illusionist's sleight of hand. Obviously these two practices exist today in a way that is close to their original form.

Maimonides rules that the word "*me'onen*" indeed carries both meanings and that Rabbi Akiva and the sages complement one another.¹⁰ Kabbalah offers a beautiful explanation for why these two meanings are offered separately. When analyzing the essence of each we see that the astrologist abominates time, while the illusionist desecrates our simple trust in what our eyes tell us and teaches us that sincerity and simplicity are naïve. The astrologist defiles our *sefirah* of eternity (*netzach*, which is in fact the only *sefirah* whose name includes a clear reference to time) and the illusionist, or magician desecrates our *sefirah* of acknowledgment. A person who has been fooled even once by a magician or illusionist loses the natural propensity to be awed by real miracles and turns cynical whenever anyone claims that a miracle has happened. This cynicism is then pointed at the miracles described in the Torah, and a person's simple faith

(as explained above that faith appears in the vessel of acknowledgment) is destroyed.

"Interpreting Omens" (Beauty)

A person who interprets omens believes that if something peculiar or negative happens to you, like a piece of bread falling out of your hand as you are about to eat it, it is a "sign" to either do or not do something or that something good or something bad is about to happen. Supposedly, interpreting omens would seem to increase your awareness of Divine Providence, for it makes you believe that nothing is without reason. But at its essence, this practice of interpreting things that "happen," desecrates our *sefirah* of beauty. In the psyche, beauty is experienced as sensitivity to mercy, specifically to God's mercy.

No person is without misdeeds and to help us cleanse ourselves of them the Almighty, in His mercy, makes us suffer small mishaps. Even something as slight as reaching into your pocket to take out two coins and coming up with only one is considered a cleansing mishap. The sages tell us that if a person has not experienced even the smallest mishap for forty days then he should know that his eternal reward has been given to him and that he has been vanquished from the World to Come.¹¹ Our ability to interpret peculiar and negative occurrences as God's infinite mercy upon us at this very moment is damaged if we are taught to interpret them as omens or signs about the future.

Taking a deeper look, we find that the interpretation of omens stems from a heightened degree of self-consciousness. When leading a rectified, Torah way of life (Torah corresponds to the *sefirah* of beauty), a person simply shrugs off small mishaps, understands that they are a sign of God's mercy and continues on without a second thought. A person who pays attention and makes a big deal out of these small things is overtly aware of his self and his interests. This is a clear sign of overt self-consciousness. In Kabbalah, overt self-consciousness begins in the bottom two-thirds of the *sefirah* of beauty. Thus, the fear of and interest in omens is caused and causes a defilement of our *sefirah* of beauty.

"Sorcery" (Might)

How is sorcery different than witchcraft? As explained above, the second meaning of witchcraft is an illusionist. An illusionist does not actually do what he is claiming to do, he is only "holding our eyes" and misleading us. But, the sorcerer is one who believes that the "magic" that he is working is real and has a real power over the laws of nature. Sorcery is therefore punishable by death, but witchcraft is not.

The holy Name by which the Almighty created the heavens and the earth and structured their physical laws is "*Elokim*" (see Genesis, chapter 1), the Name associated with the *sefirah* of might.¹² Thus, the Hebrew word for sorcery is explained by the sages as an acronym for the phrase "denying the role of the heavenly consorts," referring of course to the various physical laws. As such, sorcery is an abomination of the *sefirah* of might.

In his commentary, Rashi does not explain what sorcery is. When Rashi does not address a certain word, it is because its meaning is well known. The same is true today when, out of all these rituals, sorcery is the most ubiquitous.

"Animal Hypnotism" (Loving-kindness)

In the Torah, the next four rituals are described in a separate verse. Rashi explains that the animal hypnotist controls snakes and scorpions to bring them together. Maimonides explains that he also imagines that it is some gibberish that he is saying that joins these animals together. The Hebrew name of this ritual literally means "making friends" and is a clear allusion to the *sefirah* of loving-kindness whose inner experiential state is love. Thus, the animal hypnotist defiles our *sefirah* of loving-kindness.¹³

"Spiritist" (Understanding)

The next three practices are strongly related to one another. In Kabbalah, they correspond to the intellectual *sefirot*, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, whose close relationship is apparent in that all three are "contained" in the human form within the hollow of the skull. Unlike many of the other practices, all three have capital punishment.

The spiritist and the caller of the dead both directly try to create a link with souls that have passed on. One type of ritual used by the spiritist's is what we call a *séance*. The sole example of a spiritist in the Bible is a woman who lived in the village of Ein Dor and whom Saul, the first King of Israel went to consult because of his fear of the imminent war with the Philistines.¹⁴ The literal meaning of the Hebrew term for spiritist is "questioner of the Ov." The very concept of a "question" symbolizes the mother principle in Kabbalah, as the *Zohar* in its introduction states on the verse: "Raise your eyes above and see Who has created all of these."¹⁵ In a beautiful example of self-reference, Saul's name in Hebrew also stems from the verb meaning "to question." Thus, a spiritist defiles our *sefirah* of understanding.

Séances were popular in mainstream society at the end of the 19th century, but have since been relegated to Ouiji boards and other forms of quackery. The

Israeli army today is unfortunately full of séances, which of course destroy the soldiers' joy—the experiential manifestation of understanding—that they should feel at the opportunity to perform the important *mitzvah* of protecting the Jewish people.

"Medium" (Knowledge)

Rashi explains that this is the practice of placing the bone of an animal whose name means "known" (*yadoa*) in one's mouth, and making it talk. The purpose of this "chatter" is to give the spirits of the dead a voice.

The relationship between this practice and the *sefirah* of knowledge is clear, as its name in Hebrew, "*yidoni*," stems from the root that means "to know." That the bone is placed in the sorcerer's mouth is a desecration of the holy aspect of knowledge, of which the *Zohar* says: "knowledge is concealed in the mouth."¹⁶

"Calling the Dead" (Wisdom)

This final abominable practice is a person who consciously converses with the dead, either by the sorcerer employing his masculine organ, or by using the skull of a human being. This practice defiles the basic principle of Jewish faith in the resurrection of the dead and thus represents an impure wisdom, the *sefirah* with which the dead will be resurrected. That this ritual can be carried out with a skull receives special meaning in our Kabbalistic analysis. The skull is considered a part of the *sefirah* of crown, which here is revealed to be included within wisdom, just as in the letters of the *Havayah*, God's essential Name, the first letter, *yud*, which represents wisdom, also contains a "tip," which alludes to the crown.

The intelligence required to carry out this ritual is evident from its Hebrew name: "to inquire of the dead." The word "inquiry" in the Torah has an explicit association with a court of law where the verity of the witnesses' testimony must be "inquired" about.¹⁷ To inquire, for the sake of revealing truth, is a faculty of the *sefirah* of wisdom (in particular, of the understanding included within wisdom).

One final practice employed by those who call upon the dead is sleeping in cemeteries. While this is an abomination of wisdom, there are even knowledgeable Jews who do not know the difference between this last practice and the traditional Jewish practice of going to a Tzadik's grave and talking to him. Doing so is considered in Chassidut to be a proactive form of sincerity. The relationship to a tzadik's gravesite and the whole concept of proactive sincerity, especially as it relates to the Lubavitcher Rebbe will be our topic in part two of this article.

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1. תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם הוֹי אֶלְקִיךָ, Deuteronomy 18:13.
 2. We have written about this extensively in the article "Rashi's *Temimut*," in the Hebrew volume, *Tom Va'da'at*.
 3. See *Rashi* to Numbers 23:23.
 4. "Fifth" in Hebrew is written חמישי, a permutation of the word משיח, "Messianic." Thus the "fifth" of anything includes a Messianic element in it. In our case the Messianic element is of course the fact that Moses himself is the soul of the Mashiach, as the sages say: "He is the first redeemer, he is [also] the final redeemer [the Mashiach]."
 5. *Hilchot Avodah Zarah* 11:16.
 6. See *Shabbat* 67a-b and *Tosefta Shabbat*, chapter 7.
 7. Numbers 23:23.
 8. Hosea 4:12.
 9. *Sanhedrin* 65b.
 10. *Loc. cit.* 11:8-9.
 11. *Arachin* 16b-17a.
 12. See in length in the upcoming volume *Everything You Need to Know About Kabbalah*, ch. 11.
 13. In modern Israeli culture, this abomination has taken the form of trying to bring the figurative snakes and scorpions of the Arab people together in order that they "do away" with certain elements of the Jewish people which the Zionist establishment cannot tolerate.
 14. I Samuel 28:7-25. Indeed, Saul consulted her when his attempt to communicate with God through a prophet and the *Urim* and *Tumim*—the breastplate of the High Priest—failed.
 15. *Zohar* I, 1a.
 16. *Ibid.* II, 123a.
 17. Deuteronomy 13:15, 17:4.