

1. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Magic

1. the use of means (as charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces 2. an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural source

### Magic in the Torah – Real or Phony?

2. Exodus 7:10-11

And Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and did as Gd had instructed, and Aaron cast his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a lizard. Pharaoh also called his sages and *michashfim*, and the *chartumim* of Egypt also did thus with *lahateihem*.

3. Exodus 8:14-15

And the *chartumim* did thus with *lateihem* to produce the lice and they did not succeed, and the lice were on the people and animals. And the *chartumim* said to Pharaoh: This is the finger of Gd! And Pharaoh's heart was strengthened and he did not listen to them, as Gd had said.

4. Midrash, Psikta Zutrita Shemot 7:22

"*B'lateihem*" With their incantations, appearing to act but not acting, like the Arab merchant who struck his camel, and then it rose... and many like these in the Talmud, which the sages recorded from their times. The deeds of the *chartumim* of Egypt were all deceptions of the eyes.

5. Leviticus 19:26

Do not eat blood; do not read omens or calculate propitious times.

6. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, Commentary to Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 4

What you must know is that the complete philosophers do not believe in Talismaot, but rather they make fun of them, and of those who believe that they have power. An explanation of this would take quite some time, but I will say this, because I know that most people are fooled with this and with similar things, and think that they are real, when this is not so - to the point where good and righteous Jews think that such things are real, and that they are only forbidden by the Torah [*but have real power*]. They don't realize that these things are empty and false, and that we are commanded not to perform them in the way that we are commanded not to lie in any way.

These are things which have been spread greatly by the idolaters, chiefly by the Sabeans, and they are the people from whom Abraham came. He argued with their errors and their confused logic, with the wisdom which Gd put into his heart. They would raise and honor the stars, and ascribe to them all kinds of acts which they didn't perform. These are the people who wrote books on rules of the stars, and magic and invocations and spiritual zodiacs and planets and demons and fortune telling and witchcraft and superstition and seances, and many similar things, against which the true Torah has unsheathed its sword and eradicated them; those types of things are the essence of idolatry...

### The Talmud's Debate

7. Talmud, Sanhedrin 67b

Rabbi Eivo bar Nagri cited Rabbi Chiya bar Abba: *b'lateihem* refers to acts of *sheidim*; *b'lahateihem* refers to deeds of *keshafim*, like "And the turning *lahat* of the sword."...

Abbaye stated: The laws of Magic are like the laws of Shabbat: some have a death penalty, some are forbidden but are not punished by human courts, and some are permissible. Performing a real act is forbidden, with a penalty of death. Grabbing someone's eyes is forbidden, but not punishable. The permitted case is like that of Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Oshia; every Friday they would study *The Book of Creation*, and create for themselves a fat calf and eat it.

Rav Ashi said: I saw Karna's father sneeze and hurl silks from his nostrils!

Rav told Rabbi Chiya: I saw an Arab merchant take a sword and slash a camel, and then he knocked on a table and the camel arose! Rabbi Chiya replied: Afterward, were blood and feces around? Rather, he simply grabbed your eyes.

8. Talmud, Sanhedrin 67b

Rabbi Yochanan said: Why are they called *keshafim*? For they counter [*mak-khish*] Heavenly forces [*pamalya shel maalah*].

It is written: "There is no other power, besides Him." Rabbi Chanina said: Even magical forces.

There was a woman who would continually try to take dirt from beneath the feet of Rabbi Chanina. He said to her, "If it will work for you, go do it; it is written, 'There is no other power besides Him!'"

But is this so? Didn't Rabbi Yochanan say, "Why are they called 'Mechashfim?' For they contradict the Heavenly forces!" Rabbi Chanina is different, for he had great merit.

9. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, *Emek haNetziv*, Sifri Bamidbar 42

The evil a person commits generates its own evil, and the good generates its own good... This is what Gd desired when He created the world – He wanted one human being to be able to affect another, even to do harm, and even for evil to happen to a person on earth simply because of bad *mazal*.

10. Proverbs 22:5

*Tzinim pachim* are in the path of the crooked; one who guards his life will distance himself from them.

11. Talmud, Moed Katan 28a

Children, lifespan and earning a living do not depend on merit, but on *mazal*.

### A Third Perspective

12. Rav Hai Gaon, Otzar haGaonim Chagigah 14b (pg. 26)

As to your question regarding the definitive difference between prophecy's deeds and magic's deeds: Signs of prophecy are far from deeds of magic and similar things, for deeds of magic are all found in nature, or could be performed by Gd's creatures...

13. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, *Moreh haNevuchim* 3:37

This magic of which you have heard are deeds which the Sabeans, Babylonians, Chaldeans, and even more the Egyptians and Canaanites, performed. They would make others imagine, or they would imagine themselves, that they were performing marvelous, mysterious, deeds; whether to a single individual or to an entire town. Logic doesn't require a belief in these deeds, nor does sense trust that they can cause anything to happen.

14. Bertrand Russell, *Why I am a Rationalist* (<http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/russell7.htm>)

As far as I can see, the view to which we are committed, one which I have stated on a former occasion, is that we ought not to believe, and we ought not to try to cause others to believe, any proposition for which there is no evidence whatever.

15. Arthur C. Clarke, *Profiles of the Future*

Clarke's Third Law: A sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

16. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 11:16

All of these are words of falsehood and deception, which the early idolaters used to trick the nations to follow them...

17. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, *Moreh haNevuchim* 3:14

Do not ask me to agree with all of the calculations of nature I have mentioned. Fields of academic knowledge were deficient in their day, and [the sages] did not report these ideas as received tradition from the prophets; they were the experts of the generation in those [magical] matters, or they heard these things from the experts of the generation in those matters. I won't deny the truth of their statements, or claim their accuracy is coincidence, where they are true; wherever it is possible to explain a person's words in such a way that they match reality as we see it, this is the appropriate path when dealing with a great person who acknowledges and practices truth.