

PROPHET SAMUEL, KING SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR: SPIRITUALISM & POST-MORTEM COMMUNICATION WITH THE DEAD

SAMUEL, KING SAUL, AND THE WITCH OF EN-DOR (I SAMUEL 28:3-17, 20)

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums (*ha-avot*) and spiritists (*v'ha-yedonim*) from the land. The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of Adonai, but Adonai did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.

Saul said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium (*eishet ba-alot ob*), so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said. So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?" Saul swore to her, "As surely as Adonai lives, you will not be punished for this."

Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground." "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, he bowed down and prostrated himself... face to the ground.

Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do."

Then said Samuel, Why then do you ask of me, seeing the Lord has departed from you, and has become your enemy? And the Lord has done for himself, as he spoke by me; for the Lord has torn the kingdom from your hand, and given it to your neighbor, to David; ... Then Saul fell at once full length upon the ground, and was greatly afraid, because of the words of Samuel; and there was no strength in him; for he had not eaten bread all day, nor all night.

BIBLICAL REACTIONS TO SPIRITISM AND COMMUNING WITH THE DEAD

Let no one be found among you any one who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or who uses divination, or a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts (Heb: "*shoel ob*") or familiar spirits (*yidd'oni* - from the verb "*yadah*", to know), or one who inquires of the dead ("*doresh el ha-metim*"). For all that do these things are an abomination to the Lord; and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. (**Deut. 18:9-12**)

Furthermore, *Josiah got rid of the necromancers, mediums, household gods, and fetishes all detestable things in the land of Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill requirements of the law written in the book Hilkiah the priest discovered in the temple of YHVH.*

A man or woman who is a medium (*ob*) or a spiritist (*yidd'oni*) shall be put to death. They will be pelted with stones - their blood will be upon them. (**Lev. 20:27**)

"And when they shall say to you consult the mediums (*ha'ovot*) and the wizards, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living"? (**Isa. 8:19**)

PRIESTLY CONDEMNATION OF APPROACHING/FEEDING THE DEAD

I have not eaten of it [the consecrated food/vidui ma'aser] while in mourning; I have not cleared out [consumed] any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed the voice of YHVH, my God; I have done just as You commanded me. (**Deut. 26:14**)

NECROMANCY IN RABBINIC MIDRASH—HEARING OR SEEING?

None felt the death of Samuel more than Saul... He did not shrink from extreme measures to enter into communication with the departed prophet, and took himself to the Witch of En-Dor, not revealing his identity.. But the witch had no difficulty recognizing her visitor. In necromancy the rule holds that, unless it is summoned by a king, a spirit raised from the dead appears head downward and feet in the air. Accordingly when Samuel stood upright, the witch knew the king was with her. Though the witch saw Samuel, she could not hear what he said., and while Saul heard his words but could not see his persona—another peculiar phenomenon in necromancy: the conjurer sees the spirit, he for whom the spirit has been raised only hears it. And other persons present neither sees or hears it.(**Lev. R. 26:7**)

WHAT IS FOLK RELIGION?

Ideas and practices that never met with the whole-hearted approval of the religious leaders, but which enjoyed such wide popularity that they could not altogether be excluded from the field of religion [**Joshua Trachtenberg, Jewish Magic and Superstition, p. vii**]

RABBINIC LEGEND—RABBI YEHUDA RETURNS FOR SHABBAT

Visions of the Deceased

When Rabbi Yehuda was dying, he called his children to him and said to them: "My dear children, I am lying on my deathbed and desire to make my will. Take care of your mother. Keep a light always burning on my table. Let the table be always set and the bed neatly covered with white sheets, for I will come back every Friday night to my house and pronounce the *kiddush*." And he did return.

One Friday evening, as he was sitting in his house, a neighbor came and knocked on the door, wishing to come in. The servant said: "No one is allowed to come in, for Rabbi is here." When Rabbi Yehuda heard this, he disappeared and never came on a Sabbath eve." [**BT Bava Metziah, 84b, Gaster, Ma'aseh Book, p. 223 #125**]

RABBINIC LEGEND—THE DEAD PROVIDE INFORMATION TO THE LIVING

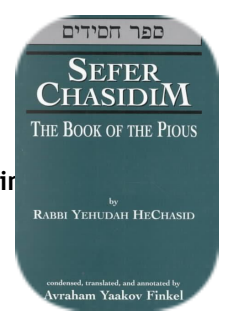
Communication from the World Beyond

R' Ze'iri left a saddle-bag in care of a woman to keep until he returned home. When he returned, he found that the woman had died. So he went to the cemetery to the grave of the woman and asked her what had become of the saddle-bag which he had left in her care. She replied: "You ask me concerning the saddle-bag you left in my charge... I have taken good care of it. Therefore, go back to the house and you will find it in the hole where the bolt of the door enters." He went to the house to look for it and found it exactly in the spot where the woman had told him.[**BT Ber. 18b Gaster, Ma'aseh Book, p. 217 #121**]

RABBINIC LEGEND—INTERCESSORY PRAYERS TO THE PATRIARCHS

Ancestral Guides

Raba said: It teaches that Caleb held aloof from the plan of the spies and went and prostrated himself upon the graves of the patriarchs, saying to them, 'My fathers, pray on my behalf that I may be delivered from the plan of the spies. (**BT Soṭah 34b**)



HASIDEI ASHKENAZ (10TH CENT. GERMANY) —DEAD PRAY FOR THE LIVING

Deceased as Benevolent Intercessors

On certain nights, like the night of Hoshana Rabbah, the souls emerge from the graves to pray. It happened that two men who hid out in the cemetery heard one spirit summon another, "Let's pray together." Thereupon all the spirits came out and prayed and begged for mercy that no decree of death should be rendered against the living, and that they should turn away from their evil ways... They prayed for all the needs of the living and the dead, and that their punishment and that of all the other souls be removed.

Judah the Pious, *Sefer Hasidim*, 452

MAIMONIDES DISCOURAGES CEMETERY VISITATION— MISHNEH TORAH 12TH CENT.

Religion of the Scholars vs. Religion of the Masses

A tombstone is placed on the grave. For the righteous, by contrast, a tombstone is not placed, because their words will cause them to be remembered; a person will not need to visit in the cemeteries. [**Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Mourning" 4:4**]

ZOHAR—CEMETERY PRAYERS TO ZADDIKIM

The Veil Between the Worlds is Permeable

When Israel goes to visit the grave of the *zaddikim* they come in repentance before the Holy Blessed One fasting and with a broken heart, in order that their holy souls may plead for mercy for them before the the Holy Blessed One. And the Holy Blessed One has pity on the world because of them. Consequently, we have learned: Even though a righteous man departs from the world, he is not removed from., or deprived of, all the worlds, because he continues to exist in the all the world greater than in his lifetime. [**Zohar III:71b**]

Ancestral Guides

When the world needs compassion, those that are alive go and inform the spirits of the *zaddikim* and weep over their graves, in order that...the souls of the righteous go inform the "sleepers of Hebron" [Patriarchs and Matriarchs buried in the Cave of Machpelah] of the pain of the world, then all enter the gates of Gan Eden... and God has mercy on the world for all their sins.[**Zohar III:71b**]

LURIANIC KABBALAH—CEMETERY PRAYERS/YEHUDIM OF CHAIM VITAL

Practices for Soul-Alignment with Deceased Zaddikim

Seclude yourself in an isolated house... [and] wrap yourself in a prayershawl, and sit and close your eyes, divesting yourself of the material world as if your soul had left your body, and was ascending to heaven. Following this separation from the material world, recite whatever single Mishnah that you wish, many times in uninterrupted succession. Concentrate your mind upon attaching your soul to that *tanna* [Rabbi] mentioned in the Mishnah. And this is how you should concentrate your mind upon: your mouth is an instrument which articulates the letters of the text of this Mishnah, the soul becomes a throne so that in it there may be invested the soul of this *tanna*, author of the Mishnah, so that his soul will be invested in your own. **Lawrence Fine, "The Contemplative Practice of Yihudim in Lurianic Kabbalah" in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), pp. 64-99. [Vital, *Sha'are Kedushah*, 16r-16v, p. 116]**

YIDDISH FOLK CULTURE—FRUME SARAH VISITS TEVYE IN A DREAM

Deceased Offer Counsel on Marriage and Children

Now Frume Soreh was standing in her place, and this is what she said to me: 'Reb Tevye! I have always thought that you were a learned, honorable Jew; would you kindly explain to me, then, how you can let your daughter take over my house, sit in my chairs, carry my keys, walk around in my coats, put on my jewelry, and wear my pearls?' 'But why blame me? I say to her. 'That's what your Layzer Wolf wants.' 'Layzer Wolf?' she says. 'Layzer Wolf will come to no good end, while as for your daughter Tsaytl—I feel sorry for your daughter, Reb Tevye, because she won't live out three weeks with him. If she does, I promise that I'll come to her in person the next night, and throttle her, like this... [Shalom Aleichem., *Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories*, pp. 50-51.]

HASIDIC STORY TELLING—THE DEAD VISIT IN DREAMS

Teshuvah Continues After Death

In the night after the seven days of mourning for Reb Abraham the Angel, his wife had a dream. She saw a vast hall, and in it thrones, set in a semicircle. On each throne sat one of the great. A door opened, and one who looked like those others, entered. It was Abraham, her husband. He said: "Friends, my wife bears me a grudge because in my earthly life I lived apart from her. She is right, and therefore I must obtain her forgiveness." His wife cried out: "With all my heart I forgive you," and awoke comforted. [Martin Buber, *Legends of the Hasidim*, Vol. I, p. 117]

EARLY MODERN CEMETERY PRAYERS IN AMERICA, c. 1910 - PRAYER ON THE GRAVE OF A WIFE:

Talking Directly to the Deceased

May your pure soul unite with me in prayer before the One who allocates all events, to guard me from affliction, grief and sickness, and grant me and that belong to me, a long and happy life: a life of honor free from care so that I may maintain my children and my household, and train them in service of His sacred name... [Ma'aneh Lashon —*Memorial Prayers and Meditations*, Hebrew Publishing Co. 1910, p. 41]

