

LESSON SEVEN MAGIC

TEXT ONE --- II Kings 20:1-11

In those days (King) Hezekiah fell dangerously ill. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came and said to him: “Thus said the Lord: Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die; you will not get well.” Thereupon Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord. He said, “Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before You sincerely and wholeheartedly, and have done what is pleasing to You.” And Hezekiah wept profusely.

Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: “Go back and say to Hezekiah, the ruler of My people: Thus said the Lord, the God of your father David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. I am going to heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the House of the Lord. And I will add fifteen years to your life. I will also rescue you and this city from the hands of the king of Assyria. I will protect this city for My sake and for the sake of my servant David.” Then Isaiah said, “Get a cake of figs.” And they got one, and they applied it to the rash, and he recovered. Hezekiah asked Isaiah, “What is the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I shall go up to the House of the Lord on the third day?” Isaiah replied, “This is the sign for you from the Lord that the Lord will do the thing that He has promised: Shall the shadow advance ten steps or recede ten steps?” Hezekiah said, “It is easy for the shadow to lengthen ten steps, but not for the shadow to recede ten steps.” So the prophet Isaiah called to the Lord, and He made the shadow which had descended on the dial of Ahaz recede ten steps.

TEXT TWO --- Talmud, **Megillah** 7b

Rabbah and Rabbi Zera joined together in a Purim feast. They became intoxicated with wine, and Rabbah arose and cut Rabbi Zera’s throat. The next day, he prayed on his behalf and revived him. Next year, Rabbah said: “Let the master come and we will have the Purim feast together.” Rabbi Zera replied: “A miracle does not happen on every occasion.”

TEXT THREE --- Eliezer of Worms, Sodei Razzaya, *Hilkhot Nevuah* ("Laws of Prophecy")

Just as the Name is (found) on the angel, so also the tefillin (are found) on the hand and likewise on the head: *And with the shadow of My hands I have covered you* (Isa. 51:16). He safeguards the righteous, so that the prophet sees, so that he may know who was upon me, and who safeguards me by means of the shadow of his hand. This is just as it is now, on the night of **Hoshanah Rabbah**: whoever has a shadow will live, but whoever has no shadow, and his head is small, without a neck, he will die within the same year, since He then decides in relation to {the amount of) water (of that year). And the prophet sees the glory, that has been created in order that he will see in accordance with the Divine Will.

TEXT FOUR --- Elijah de Vidas, Reishit Chokhmah, *Sha'ar ha-Ahavah* ("Gate of Love"), ch. 7, sect. 39-40, 1:472-473.

Another kind of knowledge...is practical Kabbalah, the (knowledge of) God's holy Names which can be permuted into a number of different forms, such as the Name of forty-two, and the Name of seventy-two. Similarly, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai of blessed memory explained about the Name of seventy-two: "Through this Name is a link to the ancestors through many paths: for judgment, mercy, aid, lovingkindness, awe, (guidance in) Torah, life, death, good or evil. Happy are the righteous who know the ways of Torah and know how to walk (the path of) the Torah of the Holy King." (Zohar III:151a) And even though the truth is that it is not proper for every individual to make use of these Holy Names--for who is worthy to use the scepter of the King, other than one who is close to the King--still, we know without any doubt that one who knows how to use (them) and is worthy to do so, can bring about wondrous things, as I have witnessed and have heard from one who did so.

TEXT FIVE --- Joseph Taitazek (15-16th c. Salonika), on "automatic writing"

You shall now hear the wonders of the living God about this subject, the secret of the celestial writing, without a hand, without a foot, without ink...It is the same secret by which the Tablets of the Covenant were written, with the finger of God.

You shall then know the secret of the celestial finger and the celestial hand...Gabriel is the one who writes, and Michael the angel is the scribe. These two angels have the power, derived from their station, to write, if you invoke them, and they write without ink...Many in Israel have fathomed it, and so do Joseph and me, we have learned it with great effort and toil. (Here is omitted a detailed section concerning the writing of the holy names of twelve and seventy-two letters)

I have sworn in the name of the living God of Hosts, that immediately an angel will descend downward, in order to write, without a hand, without a foot, without a pen. This is what you should say after reciting those holy names: “May there be the will of God,” and every time you read the names say the following: I hereby invoke you by the explicit names I have mentioned, that you should immediately show your power and your writing in the lower world, in this paper or this book or this wall or this air, right now, at this time, (show) it and subjugate it by the secret of the celestial ink, whatever it is that I wish, in abbreviated words and the letters and the vocalization marks above, and you should announce it, the meaning of the words, what each word means. I am invoking you with all the power of the letters which I have mentioned, so that immediately, at this time, you should write and engrave and imprint in fire these letters in paper and that the divine fire will not burn the paper, and that the writing will be visible to every eye...so that all will know and recognize that this is a divine phenomenon, when they see that there is no ink in it.

I am invoking you, the princes of the celestial writing and the princes of the writing of divine writing with the finger of God. I am invoking you with all the power of the sanctity which I have mentioned and which I intended, that you should immediately demonstrate your power and your writing down here, without delay and without any hindrance. I invoke you with the full power of “*one God whose name is one*” (Zech. 14:9, as quoted in the prayer **Aleinu**) and with the full power of the sanctity which is hidden in the secret of every point (i.e., vowel marks), and the full power of the secret of his fire and its color, and in the power and secret of the point, and in the power and secret of the hidden thought, and in the full power of the two halves of a ball, and the full power of “*one God whose name is one*” which is connected to the supreme point, that immediately your power and your fire will come down and will immediately write this thing which I demand on this paper which I have placed in a certain place, a true thing, or on the wall if it is white. You shall then mention the wall or the air or the place you wish them to write and

imprint the writing. You shall then use four kinds of **ketoret** (holy incense) ... three times with a smoking paper, and in order to give it the needed strength the paper should be treated by smoke before that, and after it is smoked you should enter a room clean of any impurity, and you should recite the names which I have instructed you, forward and in reverse.

After you have recited it seventy times with the invocation every time, immediately the secret of Gabriel and Michael will descend, their whole stature and their power, and they will write what you ask them to or what you will wish to know whether it is true or not. I am swearing in the name of God, Praised be He, that it will happen exactly as I am telling you. And then, when you envision this celestial writing, you shall know that there is a God in Israel, you and everyone else who observes this...*and the spirit of God is upon you* (Is. 59:21).

The secret of this supernal writing is the secret of the descent of the power of God in His glory, and the people of the world call it “a written question.” The secret included in this writing should be believed by everyone, like the one who had written it originally, for it is real prophecy and will come true fully. This is the secret of the supernal writing. With this power you can achieve the ability to write whatever you wish, be it a great deal or just a little. You shall understand the secret of the writing Name, guided by an angel, whenever you wish it, and everything written in this way you should believe to be true as if it were done by God Himself...With this secret there is nothing which you cannot achieve, like actual prophecy itself...Do not hesitate to try it alone or in any way you wish, only the room should be clean and pure of any impure thing, and this you should observe.

This practice should be done with full observance, without any neglect. The woman of the house should be clean of any impurity. It should begin by two days of complete fasting, and on the third day it should be performed. The person doing it should not drink any wine and he should eat on that day only after performing the practice. Before that he should eat three eggs, to give him the power for the Names. It should be performed in the morning and also after midnight...He should use it only in sanctity and purity, and after he has separated himself from a woman for three days and nights; the practice should be performed on the fourth day.

You should preserve this writing, not showing it to scholars and ordinary people, for if he reveals how it was written he will frighten anyone who sees it. This is the secret of the supernal writing, which should be revealed only to those who worship God and revere His Name and to the righteous, only they deserve to know it, and not the evil-doers and the sinners of this evil generation, a sinful generation which is completely guilty.

TEXT SIX --- Chayyim Palaggi, Torah v'Chayyim (1846), p. 78a

Even one who does not understand or even know how to read the language of the Zohar (should read it), for it has the marvelous power to purify and illuminate the soul...

TEXT SEVEN --- Gershon Winkler, Magic of the Ordinary, p. 103; creative retelling of a story from Me'irat Einayim, **Vayikra** 184.

The thirteenth-century Rabbi Isaac of Acre was once observed performing a shamanic rite by an intellectual not of the Jewish persuasion. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the guest approached the rabbi and asked how so wise a sage as he could dabble in such superstitious nonsense. Patiently, the rabbi told the following parable: There once lived a man who had never before seen another human being, having grown up in the wilderness far from any human habitation. One day, while venturing about, he happened upon a village. Curious, he approached one of the homes and peered in through the window. To his utter shock, he observed a man and a woman struggling desperately with one another, panting, sweating, and moaning as they grappled. He then burst into the house, pulled the two apart, and asked them what they thought they were doing! They explained to him that they had been engaged in a sacred ritual that joined Creator with Creation, Sky with Earth, Spirit with Matter, and oftentimes even resulted in the formation of another human being! The stranger reacted strongly to such a suggestion, that such a base and vile act could be in any way considered sacred, let alone powerful enough to create another being. So he left in a huff and returned to the wilds. "So you see," Rabbi Isaac explained, "how one cannot comprehend the sanctity or worthiness of a ritual, when one is witnessing it from outside the context of the tradition that conceived that ritual."