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**Laban:** Jacob's father-in-law (Gen. 30) was not only the cunning, manipulative person as portrayed in the Bible, he was a master of **witchcraft** (Targum Yerushalmi, RaSHI on Gen. 30:27; Zohar I: 133b, 164b). In one tradition, he is identified as the grandfather of **Balaam** (Tanh., Balak 12).

**Labyrinth:** Conceptualizing the path to enlightenment as a maze that the spiritual pilgrim must travel is a theme that appears in several religious traditions, including Judaism. The Jewish use of labyrinths is almost entirely limited to storytelling, written narratives, and diagrams. **Maimonides**, for example, tells the parable of the multi-chambered King's Palace to illustrate the journey to wisdom (Moreh Nevukhim). Several of the parabolic tales of Rabbi **Nachman of Bratzlav** feature a quest that involves negotiating mazelike forests and castles. The **Baal Shem Tov** describes the "palace of the King" (the world) as a place of many locked doors and many keys, in which the soul must somehow make its way (Or Yesharim).

A small 18th-century book for Holy Land pilgrims, *Zicharon Bimshalayim* ("Memory of Jerusalem"), includes a woodcut illustration of Jericho in which the city sits amidst a seven-walled labyrinth.<sup>1</sup>

The **sefirot** can be understood in terms of a labyrinth. This is made clear by one of the few existing graphic illustrations of a Jewish labyrinth, which consists of a Kabbalistic "perspective diagram," a drawing of the ten first letters of the names of the sefirot nested inside each other, so that the lines of each letter represent the walls and the gaps in the empty spaces of each letter represent the openings (Pardes Rimmonim).

1. Karp, *From the Ends of the Earth*, 87.

**Lailah:** "Night." Not to be confused with **Lilith**, this is the **angel** of conception (and sex). Lailah escorts new souls to their bodies and erases from their memories all the **To-rah** they knew in the **Guf ha-Briyot** (Nid. 16b; Sanh. 6b, 96a; Tanh., Pikudei 3; Zohar I: 91b).

**Lamed:** Twelfth letter of the **Hebrew alphabet**. It has the numeric value of 30 and the linguistic value of "l." The word *lamed* itself derives from the root verb for learning. It also signifies majesty and emotion (*lev* is the Hebrew word for "heart"). Since *lamed* is also used as the sign for the preposition "to/toward," it conveys purpose and direction.<sup>1</sup>

1. Munk, *The Wisdom of the Hebrew Alphabet*, 138–43.

**Lamed-Vavniks:** "The Thirty-Six [Righteous]." Those people who are the minimum number of righteous people in each generation that are necessary to sustain the **world**. The legend evidently evolved from an earlier tradition of interpreting the "thirty shekels of silver" mentioned in Zechariah 11:12 as an allegory for godly people; God ensures there will always be thirty righteous people in every generation. (Gen. R. 49:3; Zohar I: 105b; Tikkunei Zohar, 21).

In the earliest version, found in Gen. R. 49:3, there are forty-five, "fifteen in Babylon, thirty in the Land of Israel."

There is no firm explanation for how the tradition settled on the number 36 (Sanh. 97b). Perhaps it is because in **gematria**, 18 is the numeric value of the word for *chai*, "life," so 36 (double *chai*) signifies "abundant life." The term *Lamed-Vavnik* is Yiddish, constructed from the Hebrew

letters *Lamed* and *Vav* (these two letters have the combined numeric value of 36) and adding the Russian/Yiddish genitive *-nik*. According to the “thirty-six” legend, most of the thirty-six are *nister*, unknown, anonymously doing their good work unnoticed by the world. The reward for their anonymous labors is to be privileged to directly experience the **Shekhinah**. One of them in each generation is suitable to be the **Messiah** (Sanh. 97b; Suk. 45b; Gen. R. 35:2; Mid. Teh. 5:5). *SEE* RIGHTEOUS, THE.

**Lamps:** In the Bible, lamps are a symbol of enlightenment, wisdom, and the **Torah**.

Both the **Bible** and rabbinic literature assume oil lamps to be the primary means of portable or personal **light**.

The Chanukah **menorah** serves as a reminder of a miraculous event entailing a lamp, the rededication of the **Temple** by the Maccabees, when enough oil for only one day’s burning miraculously burned eight days.

Lamps can be used for the divination of death **omens**. A lamp is lit in a house sufficient for the duration of the Ten Days of Awe. If it extinguishes during that time, it is a sign that someone in that house will die within the year (Hor. 12a). In **Sefer he-Razim**, a lamp is used as part of a **ritual** to summon angelic beings.

The use of wicks embedded in wax tapers is relatively recent among Jews. But as the times and places where candles were used for Jewish rituals (Sabbath, festivals, and commemorating the dead) proliferated, so also did the mention of candles in supernatural contexts. They are used in **incantations** (Sefer Raziel), **divination**, **exorcisms** (Shoshan Yesod ha-Olam), and magical defense. The **Zohar** (ca. 13th century) mentions a candle-gazing **meditation** technique. European Jews in the early modern era practiced a custom of measuring out a **cemetery** with thread, then using that thread to make candlewicks for the home. It was believed that the merit of the sainted dead buried there could be transferred to the household using the taper.<sup>1</sup>

1. Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians, and Doctors*, 147, 255n.

**Language:** (*Lishon*). “Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). In contrast to contemporary thought concerning language, which holds that words are pale and inadequate symbols for the rich realities they try (but fail) to signify, Judaism has traditionally taught just

the opposite—words *are* reality, the highest and most divine form to be found in the universe. Often a text will speak of God “hewing” or “carving” the letters, as if they are physical artifacts. Words are constructive—language makes things happen. This is exemplified by the story of Creation found in Genesis, in which God creates the universe solely through speech-acts.<sup>1</sup>

Words, if correctly used, will manifest their latent divine power. Humans, having the same godly power of speech, can tap into this creative potential that exists in language. Because of this, Jewish esoteric teachings place special value on language as a vehicle of occult knowledge and power.<sup>2</sup> *SEE* HEBREW ALPHABET; INCANTATIONS; MAGIC; NAMES OF GOD; YETZIRAH, SEFER. (*SEE ALSO* APPENDIX, FIGURE 1.)

1. Munk, *The Wisdom of the Hebrew Alphabet*, 16–30.

2. Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, 45–61.

**Law and the Paranormal:** Jewish law (*Halakhah*) has had an ambivalent relationship with both magic and mysticism. The **Bible** itself forbids many magical, mantic, and spiritualist practices (see Ex. 22:18; and especially, Deut. 18). The **Talmud** reconfirms many of these prohibitions (Tos. Shab. 7, 8:4–12). Still, despite some controversy (M. Sanh. 10), Jewish legalists opened the door to many paranormal practices with their liberal attitude toward virtually any method for **healing** illness, as well as their willingness to recognize spiritual visitations, **omens**, and veridical **dreams** (Shab. 67a–b; Ber. 55b–57a).

In time, even as Jewish law continued to emphatically condemn the practice of **witchcraft**, it came to tolerate both **sorcery** and mediumism in various forms: medical **theurgy**, **astrology**, and the **summoning** of and consulting with spirit guides, such as an **angel** or a **maggid**. In the case of one medieval legalist, the enslavement of **demons** for beneficent purposes is also permitted.

Repeated attempts are made in Halakhah to draw distinctions between licit and illicit paranormal practices and beliefs (the so-called **Ways of the Amorites**) (Shab. 61a–b, 67a–b; Rashba, Teshuvah 408, 409, 413), but in the descriptions of the various practices preserved in Jewish texts, it is evident that the boundaries between the permitted and forbidden become quite blurry. Many Hebrew magical manuals of late antiquity and the Middle Ages effectively ignore all rabbinic limits and prohibitions, or honor them only in the most tendentious fashion.<sup>1</sup>

Jewish law also attempts to place severe restrictions on how one engages in mystical pursuits, as well as limiting who may do so (Chag. 12a–b). Over time many of these strictures come to be disregarded. Still, in contrast to the magicians, Kabbalists have almost universally worked within the parameters of Jewish normative practice, and Jewish mysticism has sought to uphold and validate the value of Jewish tradition. This was especially the case in the medieval controversies over rationalist philosophy and how it threatened to undermine normative Jewish practice; mystics almost universally rallied to the defense of the traditionalists. Often Jewish mystics have taught and practiced at the boundaries of Jewish law, but rare is the example of a mystic who crossed over into full-blown rejection of all rules and norms of behavior—**Shabbatai Tzvi** and **Jacob Frank** being the two notable exceptions.

Jewish legal scholars certainly took seriously the reality of paranormal events. Meir of Lublin, in one of his legal opinions, entertained the question of whether a woman seduced by an incubus that appeared to her in a human form (but not the form of her husband) was guilty of adultery (he concluded she was not) (Responsa #116). The place where Jewish law asserts itself most emphatically is on the issue of new revelations or interpretations of the law itself. It rejects decisions that are derived from **visions**, **angels**, or heavenly voices (B.M. 59b). Jewish legalists almost universally refuse to recognize as valid any opinions or edicts that are credited to paranormal sources. The major exception to this was a period of controversy among the medieval Rhineland Jews when **Jacob of Marvege** claimed to receive solutions to legal questions through angelic and dream revelations. **Joseph Caro** also may have drawn upon a paranormal authority to help him in writing his great legal opus, *Beit Yosef*, though the role of his personal **maggid** in this part of his writings is ambiguous.

Some later legal digests, such as the *Aruch ha-Shulchan* (ca. 19th century), actually go so far as to claim that certain practices derived from the *Zohar* and the teaching of Isaac Luria can take precedent over norms established by non-esoteric legal sources.<sup>2</sup> *SEE KABBALAH; MAGIC; SHE'ELOT CHALOM; SHE'ELOT U-TESHUVOT MIN HA-SHAMAYIM; SORCERY.*

1. Fishbane, "Aspects of Jewish Magic in the Ancient Rabbinic Period," in *Solomon Goldman Lectures II*, 25–34. Also see Roth, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 11, 708.
2. Rosen, "The Interaction of Kabbalah and Halachah in the *Aruch ha-Shulchan*." Also see Zimmels, *Magicians, Theologians, and Doctors*.

**Lecanomancy:** The art of divining by pouring **oil** on **water** and studying the patterns the oil forms on the surface. This is the practice alluded to by Joseph when he accuses his brothers of stealing his divining cup (Gen. 40). This author could find no mention of it in the **Talmud** or early rabbinic literature, but the practice resurfaces in other Jewish texts, such as **Sefer ha-Razim** and Geniza fragment T-S K 1.80, around the Mediterranean in late antiquity. **Chayyim Vital** describes consulting a **witch** who was an expert in "oil gazing" (*Sefer ha-Hezyonot* 5). *SEE DIVINATION; OIL.*

**Lecha Dodi:** A mystical liturgical poem composed by **Solomon Alkabetz**. It personifies the **Sabbath** as the bride of Israel. It is recited Friday night, when the Sabbath commences. *SEE SABBATH QUEEN.*

**Lechishah:** "Whispering/murmuring," "spell." A healing **incantation**. In the **Talmud**, Rabbi **Akiba** expressly condemns the use of spells whispered over a wound, but the prohibition didn't take hold, even among the Sages (M. Sanh. 10; Shab. 67a–b). When the practice is questioned again in the Middle Ages, one authority prohibits only *lechishot* that involve invoking **demons**, but permits other forms of word spells that, for example, use verses from the **Bible**. *SEE HEALING; LAW AND THE PARANORMAL; MAGIC; SEGULLAH; SORCERY.*

**Left:** The left side of the **sefirot** structure is the side of power and strict justice. It is also the female side, and represents the principles of separation and distinction. It signifies the fearsome awe of God. The unrestrained dominion of the left side gives rise to **evil**. The **Sitra Achra**, or "Other side" of the divine emanation, is the source of the demonic.

Thus, as in Christian tradition, the left can signify weakness, impurity, or evil. The **Zohar** emphasizes that certain **ritual** acts, like washing the hands, should begin with the right hand. Chasidic pious customs expand this to include always starting any bodily act, such as lacing one's shoes or taking one's first step, from the right side to avoid making oneself vulnerable to the impure powers of the left side. *SEE FINGERS; PURIFICATION; TREATISE ON THE LEFT EMANATION.*