

# Magic

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The ancient world, indeed our world today, believed in magic, in curses in evil eyes. And Balaam was the best of the magicians and was paid a lot of money to come and curse the Children of Israel, to stop them dead in their tracks and make them disappear. But he failed because God had other plans.

Amongst the statements of Balaam comes the phrase Ki Lo Nachash beYaakov, velo Kessem be Yisrael. There is no divination in Jacob and no magic in Israel. I don't think you could get a clearer statement of disapproval of magic and superstition. All the more so as it comes after Moses showed the limitations of Egyptian magicians and astrologers.

The message of Balaam's poetry is that the Jewish people is capable of withstanding whatever is thrown at them provided of course that it is united, morally upright and honest. And that remains true today. No one will harm us unless we fail ourselves. Every one of us has a direct line to God, regardless of how humble. If we are afraid it is to God we must turn not to magicians, peddlers of hocus pocus or instant solutions. We and God share control over our destinies. We must do our part if we ask of God to do what we want. Times have not changed in three thousand years. We humans still long for someone else to solve our problems. We look for easy, simple solutions that make minimum demands upon us. Any watered down minimalist Kabbalah or wonder rabbis promising what they cannot fulfill. Whereas once we called it worshiping idols. Now its worshiping other false gods.

People vary and some need simple answers. The difference between magic and religion is that you know in advance what is required. The laws, customs and ideals are all laid out. Nothing unpredictable, fantastic, irrational or weird. Balaam was weird.