

JEWPERNATURAL



**JLI FLAGSHIP
COURSE
—SPRING 5783**

Astrology, Superstition, and the Paranormal in Jewish Belief

Humans have forever been fascinated by the mysterious: that which lies beyond the realm of the natural and rational world we spend most of our time operating in. Even as modern science advances, and our understanding of the natural world deepens, our fascination with the paranormal has only grown stronger.

The significance of dreams; the predictive powers of the stars; the influence of the evil eye; the effectiveness of a curse or blessing; the existence of otherworldly spirits, angels, or demons; and the possibility of interaction with intelligent extraterrestrials are questions that have forever inspired curiosity, eliciting diverse reactions of delight or derision, devotion or dread.

Interest in the paranormal has peaked in recent years, especially on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic uncertainty. Many are experiencing insecurity regarding their life and future, and are turning to the realm of the supernatural for information, guidance, and reassurance.

Rising to the challenge, the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute (JLI) researched the vast depths of the Talmud, Jewish philosophy, and kabbalah and synthesized the resultant insights on the above topics in a brand-new course, entitled *Jewpernatural*. Now, Jewish audiences worldwide will have unprecedented access to a systematic exploration of the genuine Jewish perspective and guidance on the perennial questions of the paranormal.

Exploring the mysteries that lie beyond deepens and enriches our

understanding of the Jewish perspective on basic philosophical questions such as free choice, Divine reward and punishment, and fate. In this way, the study of the paranormal opens a window into core Jewish teachings regarding the world we inhabit, our role and destiny within its setting, and empowering ways in which we can shape and enhance our universe.

Lesson 1

We all dream as we slumber, but do the scenes of our dreams impart messages with lasting significance? And can we control our own dreams, perhaps to reduce nightmares and the like?

In this lesson, students will learn that traditional Jewish sources assert that the degree of meaning our dreams contain correlates with the degree of focus and meaning of our daytime thoughts. The occurrence of nightmares can be reduced through improving the quality of our daytime thoughts, strengthening our faith, and developing a positive Jewish bedtime ritual.

The lesson underlines the basic Jewish belief that there is no destiny that cannot be changed. Even if we are convinced that a particular dream forebodes negative events, we should know that prayer and good deeds can change any destiny.

Lesson 2

Since the dawn of time, the endless sea of twinkling planetary configurations has been read to shed the secrets of individual Homo sapiens, or to eavesdrop on the celestial pulling of puppet strings attached to our lives. Do the stars in fact influence our natures or provide information regarding our unknown futures?

This lesson shows that there is strong—although not unanimous—support in Jewish sources for the basic validity of astrology. However, any Jewish belief in astrology is tempered by the fundamental Jewish beliefs that human beings always retain free choice regarding their moral conduct, and no destiny is absolute. As a result, even the Jewish authorities that

give astrology some validity caution us not to turn to it for information, and to focus instead on faith in G-d, Who shapes our destinies based on our actions.

Lesson 3

Cultures across the map and down the eras have maintained a belief in the negative powers of an “evil eye” and curses, and produced diverse methods of protection from it. What does Judaism have to say? Is there an evil eye, and what might be its effect? Can people harm others by cursing them?

In this lesson, students will learn that there is strong—although not unanimous—support in Jewish sources for the notion that the evil eye and curses can have damaging effects.

The most prominent Jewish theory for explaining the effects of evil eyes and curses is that they attract added Heavenly scrutiny to an individual—and therefore an audit of their behavior in relationship to the blessings they have in their lives.

The lesson then demonstrates a corresponding and effective approach to providing protection through being more private and refraining from unnecessarily flaunting our blessings.

Lesson 4

Is there other intelligent life out there in the universe? Does Judaism believe in angels and demons? Can we communicate with the souls of our deceased loved ones?

This lesson teaches that the question of the existence of extraterrestrial life does not have serious theological ramifications in Judaism, and there are traditional sources either way. The important Jewish principle is that we human beings are the purpose of creation.

Regarding angels, traditional sources describe them as spiritual entities that play a role in processing prayers to G-d and His flow of blessings to us. Demons are depicted as impure spiritual forces that cause harm. But both angels and demons lack any independent authority, and thus they should not be subjects of our focus. It is we humans, created in the image of G-d with the gift of free choice, that have the most meaningful relationship with G-d.

Finally, students will learn that Judaism believes that the human soul is eternal and continues to exist after death. We can “communicate” with the deceased by performing good deeds in their honor, thereby giving them pleasure and advancing them in their new world, but any form of direct communication with the spirits of the dead is forbidden by Torah law.