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### Trying to define "The Occult"?

The word *occult* is derived from the Latin word *occultus* which means "hidden". *Occult blood* is a medical term which refers to blood which cannot be seen, except perhaps under a microscope. *The Occult* has been defined as any activity which

1. is esoteric (employs knowledge that is not known to the general public, but which is only revealed gradually to a selected few in training), and
2. depends upon those talents which lie beyond the five senses, and
3. engages with the supernatural.

Unfortunately, such a definition has serious flaws:

- The beliefs, rituals, and practices of many activities which have traditionally been considered to be occultic have now been thoroughly documented and published. The public can go to a bookstore and purchase written material on just about any "occultic: activity. Little remains secret. ¶ For example, most lists of occultic activity includes [Wicca](#) (often referred to by the public as "White" Witchcraft), and various methods of foretelling the future (e.g. astrology, casting runes, reading Tarot Cards, ¶ I Ching, etc.). Literally hundreds of books have been published on these topics. Anyone can learn as much as they wish by simply buying or borrowing books. Since knowledge is not hidden, these beliefs and activities do not meet the first criteria above.
- Consider a person who joins an adult religion class at their local church and is taught special techniques of effective prayer -- methods that are unique to that church and not generally available to outsiders. This activity would meet all of the three criteria for the Occult: it has to be taught; it can be a silent prayer - a means of communicating without spoken words; it is directed at God.
- Consider a ceremonial magician performing a healing spell. She/he might believe that the spell taps into perfectly natural forces - parts of the universe that science has not yet been able to explain. They might feel that they are not part of the Occult, since they are not dealing with the supernatural.
- During mass, a Roman Catholic priest will perform a ritual which involves certain words and actions. The end result is that the wafer and wine is believed to literally become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This act of magic would meet these three criteria, and thus be occultic.
- The Wiccan faith is a reconstructed religion of the ancient Celts. Wiccans

develop an intimate connection with their Goddess and God, perform religious rituals, and observe seasonal days of celebration. In doing so, they differ little from followers of other religions. Although many Wiccans also engage in divination and/or healing spells, some do not. Among those who do not, their faith is devoid of occultic components.

We would offer the following rather simple definition:

**OCCULT:** *A set of mostly unrelated divination and/or spiritual practices or activities which appear to tap into forces that have not been explained by science, and which are not conventional practices seen in traditional religions.*

Note that this definition does not attach any value judgment to occultic practices. Thus, Tarot card readings might still be considered:

- a dangerous example of the Occult, as seen by an Evangelical or Fundamentalist Christian,
- an integral component of their religion, as seen by some [Wiccans](#),
- a harmless hobby or pastime as seen by a [Unitarian Universalist](#).

This is how the term is used in practice; people in different faith groups have very different meanings for "the Occult". No consensus on its meaning exists.

### **Conservative Christian beliefs about the Occult:**

There is no consensus on the nature of the Occult:

- Some people (particularly individuals involved in occultic activities) look upon the Occult as fascinating, harmless, mysterious, spiritual and a source of knowledge and healing power.
- Others (particularly conservative Christians) see it as being profoundly evil, criminal, destructive, life threatening, and Satanic. It is a word that generates horror and revulsion.

Although it is common for people to differ in their religious views, it is rare to have a disparity as extreme as this.

Many Evangelicals and Fundamentalist Christians define the Occult as including an enormous range of practices. We have seen references to:

- **Religions & Spiritual Movements**
  - Ceremonial Magick. This includes the use of rituals, spells, chants to change the material world.
  - [Christian Science](#): An established Christian denomination centered in Boston MA.
  - A Course in Miracles

- [Eckankar](#): A religious and spiritual path, sometimes called the *Religion of the Light and Sound of God*.
- [Gothic Satanism](#): This is a non-existent, anti-Christian faith whose members were believed to engage in cannibalism, human sacrifice, etc. It is an imaginary faith created during the latter Middle Ages. It justified the extensive Witch burnings and hangings of the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- [Hinduism](#): The third largest of the world's great religions.
- Hindu sects of various types, such as [Hare Krishna](#).
- [Jehovah's Witnesses](#)
- Kabala
- [Macumba](#): This is a syncretistic religion combining elements of Roman Catholicism and African native religions. It is similar to [Vodun](#).
- [Mormonism](#) (a.k.a. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)
- [New Age](#): This is a system of thought including belief in monism, pantheism, reincarnation, personal transformation, spirit guides, etc. Includes practices such as channeling, use of crystals, meditation, etc.
- Palo Mayombe
- Rastafarianism
- Rosicrucianism: An ancient syncretistic religion dating back to the 17th century.
- [Santeria](#): A Caribbean religion which combines Roman Catholicism and African native beliefs.
- [Satanic Ritual Abuse](#): The abuse and murder of children by Satanists during rituals. This appears to be a non-existent phenomenon.
- [Satanism](#): A modern religion based on a pre-Christian concept of Satan, who is recognized either as a principle or as a supernatural being.
- [Church of Scientology](#): A religious movement based on the writings of L R Hubbard.
- Seances, Spiritualism: Communication via a medium with the spirit world.
- Shamanism
- Theosophy: A religious group whose beliefs are largely based on the writings of Helena Blavatsky.
- UFO cults: Groups who believe that extra-terrestrial beings are attempting to communicate with us and lead humans to a higher plane of understanding.
- [Unification Church](#): An established Christian denomination originating in Korea.
- [Vodun](#): A syncretistic Caribbean religion which combines Roman Catholicism and African native beliefs.
- Voodoo: A non-existent religion from the Caribbean invented for Hollywood horror movies).
- [Wicca](#): A Neo-Pagan earth-based religion similar to Native American spirituality. It is sometimes called "White Witchcraft" by the public.
- **Divination Techniques** -- methods of foretelling the future:
  - Astrology
  - Biorhythm

- Crystal divination
  - I Ching
  - Palm Reading
  - Rune casting
  - Tarot Card Reading
  - Tea Cup Reading
  - **Games**
    - Adult games (e.g. Ouija Boards).
    - Children's TV programs and cartoons (e.g. She-ra).
    - Children's toys (e.g. Smurfs).
    - [Fantasy role-playing games](#) (e.g. Dungeons and Dragons)
  - **Medical and therapeutic techniques:**
    - Aura reading
    - Various holistic medical processes
    - Hypnotism
    - Iridology (diagnosis from study of the iris)
    - Reflexology (diagnosis from manipulation of the foot)
    - Visualization techniques (a.k.a. guided imagery)
  - **Other Activities**
    - Educational courses - a range of modern methods of teaching
    - Fire walking (bare-foot walking on a bed of glowing coals).
    - Heavy metal rock music.
    - Holistic Health Practices (healing by acupuncture, flower remedies, homeopathy, etc.)
    - The Masonic Lodge (or similar men's fraternal organizations).
    - Meditation.
    - Reading novels by specific authors (e.g. Carlos Casteneda).
    - Yoga and other exercise techniques.
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## Impact of Occultic activities:

Many conservative Christians believe that if a person engages in occult experiences, then "*points of contact or entanglement with demonic entities*" will occur, and "*malevolent spiritual entities*" (demons) can infiltrate their mind and body. They become [demon possessed](#).

Many Evangelical Christian authors often visualize the opening of occultic "*doorways*" through which malevolent forces have a "*legal right*" to infiltrate the person's home and cause serious spiritual problems. These demons can become attached to the person's location and can cause inter-generational infestation over a period of decades or even centuries.

Rex W. Rosenberg, a conservative Christian clinical psychologist who has specialized in [Multiple Personality Disorder](#) believes that such infiltration can

lead to what he calls "*demonically-mediated dissociation*" (DMD). This is one form of a mental disorder that others call [Multiple Personality Disorder](#) (MPD) or Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). <sup>1,2</sup>

These views correspond closely to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE beliefs in possession by demons and evil spirits. They have been abandoned by most psychiatrists, psychologists and other mental health professionals for centuries. Within the professional therapeutic communities, such beliefs now appear to be confined to a small minority of mental health professionals who are Roman Catholics or conservative Protestants.

### **Beliefs about the Occult by Occultists and others:**

Religious liberals and occultists regard the Occult to be simply a list of mostly unrelated practices and activities. "Occultist" is a very rarely used term that refers to a person active in an occultic activity. It does not exist as an organization. *Occult Crime* does not exist, any more than *Christian, Muslim or Jewish Crime* exists. No ritual abuse is committed by occultists. Some Wiccans and other Neopagans do engage in divination. Some individuals who engage in divination use many different techniques. Otherwise, there is little connection among the various occultic activities.

There are many definitions of the Occult; no general consensus exists. Some groups divide the Occult into three branches:

- **Divination:** Various harmless methods of foretelling the future:
  - **Astrology:** The concept that one's future is dependent upon the precise location of the sun, moon and planets at the time of birth.
  - **I Ching:** an ancient Chinese oracle book which some believe can be used to foretell the future, answer questions, etc. The practitioner generates a number from 1 to 64 by selecting sticks, or casting dice or coins. The oracle book assigns different meanings to each of the possible numbers.
  - **Numerology:** the practice of assigning a digit to each letter in a person's name, and deriving a series of numbers which have special significance to the person.
  - **Palm reading:** foretelling a person's future by the creases in their palm and shape of their fingers.
  - **Runes:** a group of from 16 to 31 (typically 26) letters of an ancient Northern European alphabet. The letters are inscribed on small rocks or pieces of paper or plastic. A group is cast, and the future foretold from the runes that land inverted and not inverted, as well as from their position.
  - **Scrying:** a technique of producing visions of the future by gazing into a crystal ball, black mirror, bowl of water, hot coals from a fire, etc.
  - **Tarot cards:** fortune telling through the use of a pack of 78 Tarot cards which can be divided into four suites (wands, cups, [pentacles](#) and swords).  
1 Each suite has number cards (ace to 10), a king, queen, knight and knave.

In addition, there are 22 additional cards which form the greater arcana; they include the Chariot, High Priestess, Juggler, Lovers, Moon, Sun, Strength, Death, Devil, etc. The cards are shuffled; a few are dealt and laid in a specific formation (circle, cross, square, etc.). The cards are interpreted according to their inherent meaning, as modified by the significance of their location.

- **Teacup reading:** foretelling the future by the shapes formed by tea leaves after a cup of tea has been consumed
- **Other methods:** Future events have been predicted through the use of dice, dominos, dream interpretation, pendulum movements, playing cards, etc.
- **Religious and Spiritual Pursuits:** These are normally a group of unrelated minority religions:
  - Eastern religions, such as [Hinduism](#), [Buddhism](#), [Taoism](#), etc.
  - Syncretistic religions from the Caribbean, such as [Santeria](#) and [Vodun](#).
  - [Satanism](#).
  - [Wicca](#), and other Neopagan religions.
- **Magick:** This is a list that includes ceremonial magick and many other schools of practice involving rituals and spells. They are used to change the environment, in order to reach the magician's goals.

## Occultic techniques in the Hebrew Scriptures:

There are a number of instances in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) where respected biblical leaders were involved with various black magic, divination and [occultic](#) activities as a normal part of their daily activities -- apparently without any condemnations from God:

- In *Genesis 44:5*, Joseph's household manager refers to a silver drinking cup "...in which my lord drinketh and whereby indeed he divineth". Later, Joseph accuses his brothers of stealing the cup, saying "*that such a man as I can certainly divine [the identity of the thieves]*". These passages show that Joseph engaged in scrying. This is an ancient occultic method of divination in which a cup or other vessel is filled with water and gazed into. This technique of foretelling the future was used by Nostradamus and is still used today.
- *Numbers 5:12-31* describes a ritual of black magic that the Priest would perform on a woman if her husband suspected that she had committed adultery. Verse 17 says: "*Then he shall take some holy water in a clay jar and put some dust from the tabernacle floor into the water..*" She and her husband would go, with an offering of barley meal, to the tabernacle. The priest would make a magical drink consisting of holy water and sweepings from the tabernacle floor. He would have the woman drink the water while he recited a curse on her. The curse would state that her abdomen would swell and her thigh waste away if she had committed adultery. Otherwise,

the curse would have no effect. If she were pregnant at this time, the curse would certainly induce an abortion. Yet nobody seems to have been concerned about the fate of any embryo or fetus that was present. There was no similar magical test that a woman could require her husband to take if she suspected him of adultery.

- The Urim and Thummim were two objects mentioned in *Numbers 27:21* and *1 Samuel 28:6* of the Hebrew Scriptures. They were apparently devices (perhaps in the form of flat stones) that the high priest consulted to determine the will of God. They might have worked something like a pair of dice.
- Elisha was on his way to Bethel. Some small boys came out of the city and made fun of him because of his lack of hair; they called him "baldy". In a violent display of the power of black magic, Elisha cursed the children in the name of God. Two bears, apparently prompted by God, came out of the forest and tore 42 of the boys to shreds. The implication is that the children were all murdered. See *2 Kings 2:23-24*.
- Lots -- pieces of wood or stone with markings -- were used to determine the will of God. They were similar to dice. See: *Numbers 26:55*; *Proverbs 16:33* *Proverbs 18:18*.
- Daniel, the prophet, was employed for many years in Babylon as the chief occultist to the king. He was supervisor "*of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers*". See *Daniel 5:11*.