

Soothsaying and categories of people who visit fortune tellers

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Question 32: What is Soothsaying?

Shaykh Uthaymeen (rahimahullaah): Soothsaying or divination (Kihaanah) is of the measure Fi'aalah and it is derived from al-Kahn which means speaking falsely, and searching for the facts in ways that are completely unfounded. This was the practice of some people during the pre-Islamic era (al-Jaahiliyyah) and with whom the Shayaateen (the devils) established contact, relating to them the hearing¹ they (the devils) steal from the heaven. Those receiving the hearing take each word and add to it whatever they want from the words of falsehood, then they impart it to the people. If the matter occurs exactly as they said, people will be deceived by them and will take them as authority to which they turn to for judgement and for predicting the future events. That is why we say that the soothsayer is the one who informs about the hidden matters in the future.

As for the one who visits a soothsayer, then he may be classified into one of the following three categories:

First: He visits the soothsayer then he asks him without believing him. Then this is legally forbidden, and the punishment assigned to the one who does this is such that prayers extending to forty days will not be accepted from him, as affirmed in the report collected in Saheeh Muslim and in which the Prophet (Sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) said: **“He who goes to a diviner (soothsayer) and asks him about anything, his prayers extending to forty days or nights will not be accepted.”**²

Second: He goes to a Kaahin (soothsayer) and asks him about anything and believes him in what he tells. This is disbelief in Allaah (Azza wa Jal), because he believed him in his claim of knowing of al-Ghayeb (the hidden and unseen).³ Believing men in their claim of knowing al-

¹ The Prophet (Sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) said: “While the angels talk over the clouds about things that are going to happen on the earth [in another narration: “they mention the affairs decreed in heavens”], the devils hear a word of what they say and pour it in the ears of the sooth-sayer as one pours something in a bottle, and they add one-hundred lies to that (one word).” Reported in Saheeh al-Bukhaaree, vol.4, no.508.

² Reported by Muslim. See Saheeh Muslim, vol.4, no.5540.

³ Al-Ghayeb: The hidden and unseen of all unperceived realities related to Allaah, Paradise, Hell and so on.

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Ghayeb is a denial of the Saying of Allaah, The Most High: [**“None in the heavens and the earth knows the Ghayeb (unperceived realities) except Allaah.”**]⁴

And denying what Allaah and His Messenger inform of is Kufr (unbelief). That is why it is mentioned in the authentic transmission:

“Whoever goes to a diviner, and believes what he says then he has indeed disbelieved in what was sent down upon Muhammad.”⁵

Third: He goes to the fortune-teller and asks him about anything in order to expose his situation to the people, and that what he does is merely divination, distortion and misguidance. There is no harm in this. The proof for it is that when the Prophet (Sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) encountered ibn Sayyad (who claimed prophethood), he (Sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) concealed something for him within himself (to test him), and when he (Sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) asked him about what he (Sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) concealed for him, he said: “It is a Dukh intending AdDukhaan (smoke).” Thereupon the Prophet (Sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) said: **“May you be disgraced and dishonoured, you would not be able to go beyond your rank.”**⁶

These are the conditions of those who go to a diviner, and they are three.

- The first is that he goes to him not believing in him, nor intending to test and expose him, and this is unlawful. The applicable punishment upon the one who does this is that his prayers will not be accepted from him for forty days.
- The second is that he asks him about anything, and believes him. This is unbelief in Allah (Azza wa Jal). It is obligatory upon the person who does this to repent from it, and to return to Allaah (Azza wa Jal). Otherwise, he dies on a state of unbelief.
- The third situation is such that he goes to the diviner and asks him in order to test him, and expose his reality to the people. In this there is no harm.

The Ruling Regarding Those Who go to Diviners

Question 33: It would be nice if we could know of the status of people who go to fortune-tellers.

Shaykh Uthaymeen (rahimahullaah): Their situations are as follows:

⁴ Soorat an-Naml 27:65

⁵ Reported by At-Tirmidhee, and Ibn Maajah. It was authenticated by Ahmad Shaakir and al-Albaanee (See al-Irwa' by al-Albaanee, no.2006).

⁶ The story of Ibn Sayyaad, a diviner, is detailed in Saheeh Muslim (Book of Fitan), Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (Books of Janaa'iz, Jihaad and Siyar, alQadar, al-Adab, and others), At-Tirmidhee (Book of Fitan) and by others. In it the Prophet (Sallallaahu alaihi wa sallam) exposed his claim of Prophethood through this test. He was not able to complete the word Dukhaan pertaining to Soorat ad-Dukhaan. The devils imparting the information to Ibn Sayyaad were not able to snatch the complete word, thus it came in this distorted form.

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- First Case: A person goes to the diviner and asks him about anything without believing him, and in doing so he does not intend to expose his reality. Then the person is sinful, and the applicable punishment is that prayers will not be accepted from him for forty days.
- Second Case: He goes to the fortune-teller and then he asks him and believes him. This person is an unbeliever because he denies the Saying of Allaah, The Most High:

[None in the heavens and the earth knows the Ghayeb (unperceived realities) except Allaah.]⁷.

- Third Case: He goes to him and asks him in order to test him, and expose his status and his lies and falsifying to the people. And we have mentioned that there is no harm in this.

And it is a determined matter that if a thing that is legally permissible leads to something forbidden, then itself becomes prohibited. So, if it is determined that in this third case whereby the person goes to the diviner to test him and expose his reality, and as such it may become a reason leading people to be deceived by him—then under such circumstances he should not do that and should not go to him, even if it were to be done for this good intention. Since the rule is that, whatever leads to something prohibited then it is itself, prohibited.

⁷ Soorat an-Naml 27:65