

Excerpt from:

“The Lot is Cast: The Ancient and Modern Use of Aleph Bet Lots for Divination”

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Using the lots:

Conversations about divination practices often bring to mind cards, feathers, stones, and of course, runes. We may think of tea or coffee, and perhaps entrails. But how many of us think of Jewish divination? Let alone Ancient Jewish divination tools and practices? This article discusses just this: the ancient uses of the Hebrew alphabet, the Aleph Bet, for divination, and how the practice has evolved into modern times.

At its very basic, divination is work we do in order to divine messages or intentions from the metaphysical world: gods and goddesses, our ancestors (or other deceased people), the universe or our own higher self. Casting lots for divination is an ancient practice, and one that appears in various cultures and regions. Words, pictographs, and letters on pieces of wood, stone, shells, etc., have been used as tools for understanding the unseen, the divine, mystical, and magickal realms in which we exist.

The casting of lots in Jewish tradition is an unbroken practice of divination of God’s will (the Source, the universe, or whatever name we use), which goes back to even before *The Bible*. In fact, the casting of lots is mentioned over 70 times in *The Bible*. Its main purpose is clear, as explained in *Proverbs* 16:33: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the

Lord". Lots are often small pieces of ceramics, or wood, or parchment, upon which are written words or symbols that have meaning the reader uses to divine the answer.

As we know, people use lots for answers. Sometimes they need answers to a specific question, even ones as simple as a yes or no question (e.g. "Will I get this job?", "Should I go see X?"). Other times the questions are more complicated ("What should I look for in my next job search?", "How is my date tonight going to go?"), and still other times are truly open-ended ("What does the universe/spirit/guide think I should know?"). Finally, we can also approach the lots without a specific question, leaving the universe to decide what message we should hear. Each one of these types of query is important, and each may be answered with the lots, though the method may be different. For example, we may cast the lots or draw them (and I will explain each below). Whether we cast or draw, we often use multiple lots (one, three and five are common), though we might use a single lot for particular questions. Finally, some use all of the lots at once, though this is uncommon, to tell a wide-reaching narrative in answer to a question.