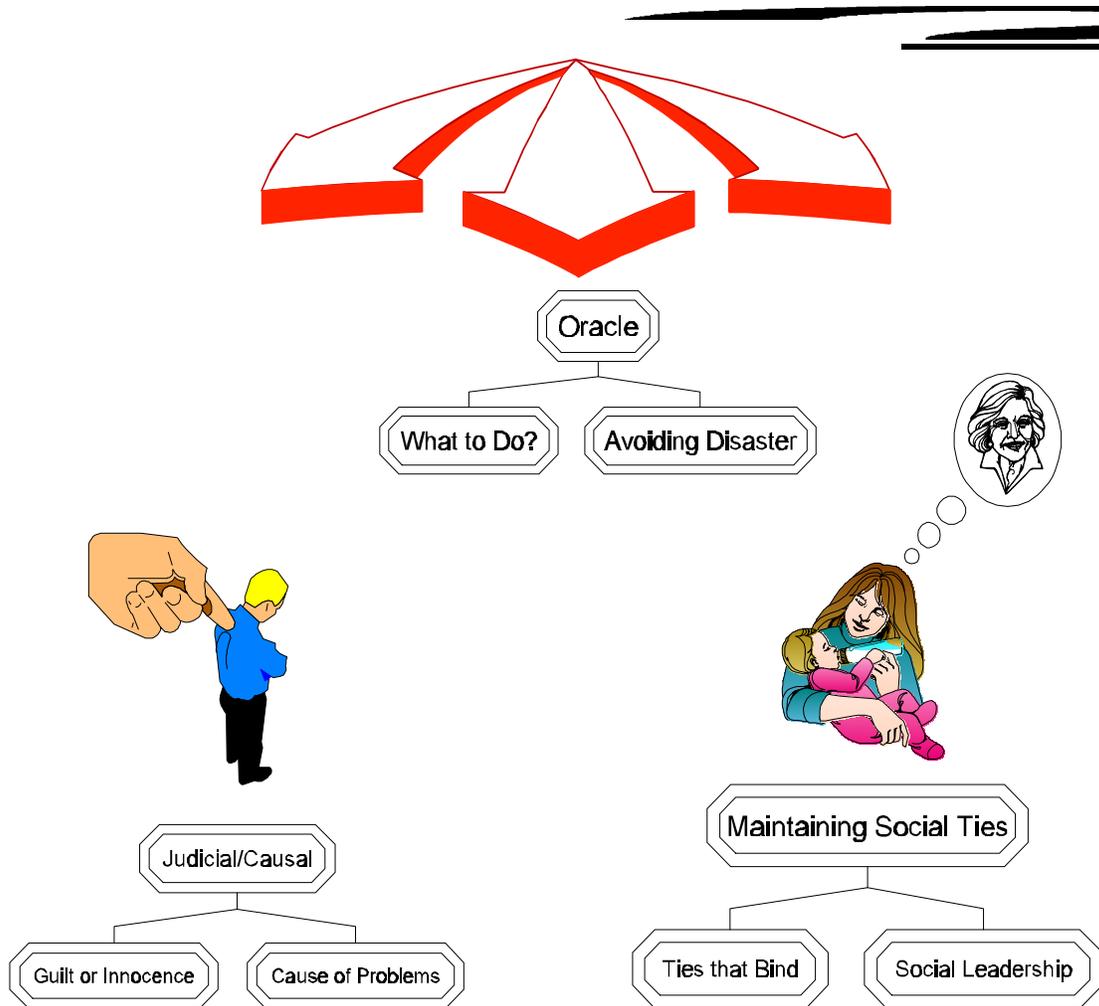


Means of Guidance in Folk Religions

1. What are some of the major functions of guidance?



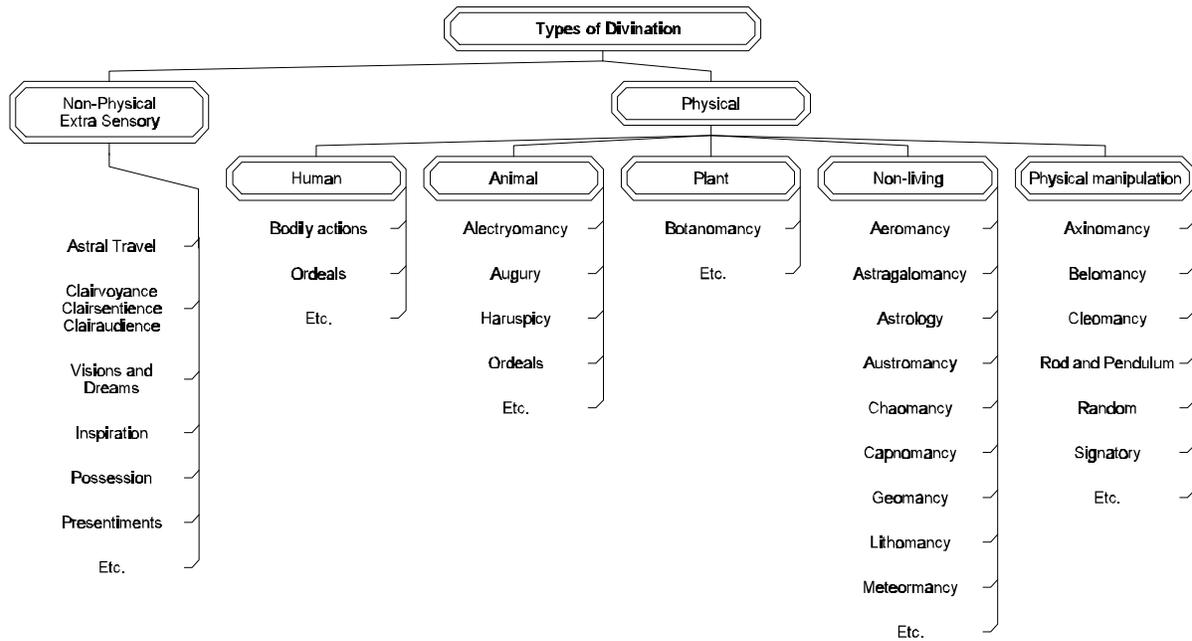
- a. Determining course of action: (marriage, business, planting crops, moving, etc.) Methods used include palm reading, astrology, divination, fortune telling (e.g., tea leaf readings), tarot cards, etc.
- b. Selection for office: we tend to use elections. However, in many societies (even if they use elections) selection to an office must either be confirmed or initiated through the spirit realm. We see this in the selection of Matthias to replace Judas as an apostle in Acts 1 (done through selection by lot). Note the differences between Western and Indian approaches/assumptions:

Western Assumptions	Indian Assumptions
Court	Panchayat
Enforcement by force	Enforcement by ostracism
Concern with justice	Concern with repairing social fabric
Deals with narrow point of law	Deals with whole social problem
Accuser vs accused	Accuser and accused both on trial, set apart from society
Elected leaders	Elders who gain leadership by reputation
Judges uninvolved and supposedly unbiased	Elders part of community and interested in settlement
Judges pass judgment	Elders try to mediate

- c. Avoiding disaster: How do we avoid future problems (impending disasters such as business setback, failure in love/marriage, inability to produce children in marriage, etc.)?
- d. Discovering the cause of problems: This includes discovering the immediate cause (e.g., the ancestors were dissatisfied that no sacrifices had been offered recently, and so made a child sick to get the family's attention) as well as the precipitating cause (two elder brothers of the family were disputing, and unable to offer sacrifices because of the dispute). Typically, once the source of the problem is known, the prescription follows a typical schema.
- e. Determining guilt or innocence: Usually involves ordeals, tests of truth, curses, and oaths.
- f. Contacting ancestors: especially in times of crisis or when facing a major decision in which the advice of elders is important

2. What types of guidance are found in folk religions?

- a. Divination: Communicating with spirits/ancestors by means of empowered objects (*hakata* bones of the Shona; the Urim and Thummin of the OT??). Essentially a way of discovering what transempirical beings/forces will do or what they want us to do. It involves tapping into supernatural forces, and is usually left to a trained expert. A suggested classification of the major forms of divination is tri-fold:



Possession	Obtaining knowledge through spirit communication
Wisdom	Interpretation of the operation of impersonal laws expressing a coherent divine order (e.g., the I Ching)
Intuition	Focused in the insights of the diviner, generally features his/her heightened consciousness and guessing ability

The types and means of divination are almost limitless. Major categories and selected examples include (see brief explanations in charts below):

Non-Physical Divination

Means	Explanation
Astral travel	Travel in another dimension (the spirit dimension)
Clairvoyance, clair-sentience, clair-audience	Respectively: The ability to know facts without being told; ability to diagnose diseases without examination; and ability to

Non-Physical Divination

Visions and Dreams (Oneiromancy)	Interpreting dreams
Inspiration	Being led (though the one inspired still maintains control)
Possession	Loss of control to an outside spiritual agency; the possessed is not viewed as responsible for his/her actions or statements
Presentiments	Intuitive ability to know things or guess correctly

Physical Divination

Type	Means	Explanation
Human	Bodily Actions	Sneezing and stumbling seen as omens
	Ordeals	Subjecting people to physical ordeals (picking up a rock from boiling water, touching a red-hot iron bar to the tongue, etc.)
Animal	Alectryomancy	Observing cocks or roosters in a circle
	Augury	Looking at the flight of birds, movement of clouds, etc. because these are thought to be caused by the spirits or the dead
	Haruspicy	Reading animal entrails
	Ordeals	Subjecting animals to physical ordeals (e.g., poison rituals)
Plant	Botanomancy	Seeing the way the leaves blow
Non-Living	Aeromancy	Reading air currents/movements of the wind
	Astragalomancy	Using small bones
	Astrology	Reading the future from the position of the stars/planets/moons
	Geomancy	Reading the geographical shapes and contours of the landscape
	Hydromancy	Reading ripples in water or looking into the water to see reflections (like crystal ball reading)
	Lithomancy	Reading rock formations
Physical Manipulation	Cleomancy	Reading the pattern of pebbles thrown in the sand
	Rod and Pendulum	Pendulum, dowsing rod, etc.
	Random	Coin toss, lot, casting of bones, tarot cards, tea leaf or other apparently random events with the belief that spirits manipulate them
	Signatory	Floating/sinking of rice; racing/non-racing of pulse, or other binary events used in yes/no question divination

Biblical references to divining include:

- i. Astrology (Isa. 47:13; Jer. 10:2; Matt. 2:9)
- ii. Augury (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10, 14; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chron. 33:6)
- iii. Dreams as divination (Gen. 37:5-11; 40:5-19)
- iv. Hepatoscopy (examining the liver or entrails of a sacrifice)
- v. Hydromancy (Gen. 44:5, 15)
- vi. Lot (Jos. 18-19; Lev. 16; Jos. 7:14; Jon. 1:7; 1 Chron. 24:5; Est. 3:7; Matt. 27:35; Acts 1:25-6)
- vii. Necromancy (Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:11; 1 Sam. 28:8; 1 Chron. 10:13; Isa. 8:19-20; 65:4)
- viii. Rhabdomancy (using sticks or arrows thrown into the air; Exek. 21:21; Hos. 4:12)
- ix. Teraphim (images of dead ancestors; 1 Sam. 15:23; Ezek. 21:21; Zech. 10:2)

- b. Omens (as noted above): objects or events that warn people about the presence of power (or mana) or of the consequences of certain acts; a type of supernatural NORAD. They can be good or bad. They may include seeing a corpse on a wedding day, seeing a hawk flying while going to a meeting, having a cow die on the day of a birth, seeing a rainbow, smelling incense on a certain day, etc.
- c. Ordeals: tests invested with supernatural powers to determine truth/falsehood and guilt/innocence. They involved physical tests of people (witch or thief trials in Africa) or animals (chicken poison rituals among the Azande) as well as oaths or curses in which one or both parties would claim innocence and the spirits would be expected to attack the guilty party. The belief behind this is that the spirits, if approached appropriately, will show truth to the inquirers through protecting, withdrawing protection, or delivering judgment.
- d. Dreams and visions: The belief that dreams are affected not just by the events of life but by the spirits, who would use them as a means of communication. Visions can occur spontaneously or as the result of vision quests (exhausting the body, using hallucinogens, extended fasting, meditating, or other forms of self discipline).