26 Esoteric topics in Jewish Folklore

1) ruach rah רוח רע as relating to mental illness and depression,

2) ayn ha-rah עין הרע the evil eye developed in the more in depth context revealed when looking up this term in the Asplakaria [http://www.aspaklaria.info/] or as a key phrase in Bar Ilan,

3) Shaydeim (שידים)

4) derosh el hamaytim דורש אל המותim as a theurgic practice in necromancy predominant among Chabad Hasidim at the Ohel in Queens NY where the Friedicker Rebbe and the 7th Lubavitch Rebbe are buried, what Chaim Dalifin calls the Meron of America. Also the prevalent practice of sleeping at the kevrot of Tzadikim buried throughout Israel could deserve more attention, as well as the massive exodus of Bratslaver Hasidim to Uman for Yamim Noraim as an anthropological pheneomena,

5) segulot סגולות for example davoning for a friend to get married at one’s own wedding under the chupah, eating the etrog after Sukkot made into jams etc, or teveling in a mikvah in 9th month allows for easy pregnancy and after a pregnant women has done so, the second women can get pregnant more easily

6) linchosh nichush לוחשNichush (forms of divination, such as that practiced when Yosef says, “Don’t you know that a man like me practices divination” or when the witch of Endor conjures up the ghost of Shmuel for Shaul plagued by depression, which the Redak notes was that in fact she fooled Shaul with ventriloquism,

7) mazikim מזיקין (damaging demons for instance the folk belief that breaking a glass at a wedding not only serves to remember the Hurban, but also serves to tangle and ward off evil demons,

8) Shomair pita'im שומר פתאים (G-d’s providence over fools and simpletons,

9) hishtanot teva hishtanot teaches (changing nature i.e. the ability of certain Mikubalim to actually cause weather pattern disturbances, block out the sun with clouds, and effect storms etc.,

10) amulets קמטים (kameot) as revealed in the plethora of rabbinic texts referenced under this term in the Asplakaria and searches in Bar Ilan.

10) Also perhaps separate entries on Hasidic davoning techniques such as “bitul ha-yesh” (see: Louis Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer). A humorous ma’aseh surrounds this concept of negating the ego in the true story about a Talmud Hakham who spent his whole life in yeshivah and as an old man was to be honored by the Yeshivah with a chicken and kugel dinner. All the guests were looking forward to a brilliant davar torah when the honoree was to step up to the podium. Instead the old zakan with a long white beard who knew nothing in life except learning, living over 50 years on “yeshivah lane’ got up to the podium, banged his hand on the podium saying 3x: ikh bin a gornisht ikh bin a gornisht, ikh bin a gornisht .... And sat down. In this humorous anecdote we see the extreme ego negation via the bitul ha-yesh amplifying Pirke Avot’s notation of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai that great humility and
sheful ruach accompanies great learning. Much comic play is made of this regarding a rabbi who on 
YK upon seeing the many coming to the shul for the first time all year, dramatically threw himself 
down and said “I am a nothing” just before Kol nidrei. The cantor not to be “outdone” just before 
beginning to lead Kol Nidrei also dramatically threw himself on the floor and said “I am a nothing.” 
Upon witnessing this theatricality the President of the shul also threw himself hysterically down on 
the floor crying “I am a nothing.” The cantor looked up at the rabbi from the floor and comments: “Look who thinks himself a nothing!”

(11) Also a separate entry would have been welcome on the related concepts of (a) Yesh mi-ayin, (b) 
“Asifa”, (c) ayn-sof and (d) imkei ha-ayin which in the sefirot is said to be located even above and 
beyond Keter. See footnote by David B. Levy in the Montreal AJL Conference Proceedings on “Asifa” 
as related to the Kabbalistic notion that Hashem, engaged in ma’aseh bereshit by negating an 
“absence or void” in Himself, to create “yesh miayin”, the depths of the ayin residing correlative in 
“asifa”. The Greek term: Meontology as it relates to nothingness touched upon the doctrine of 
creation ex nihilo or yesh mi-ayin which intrigued medieval Kabbalists. A Kabbalistic interpretation of 
Bereshit is that God is said to have created not out of chaos/void (tohu abuhu) but “out of the 
nothing.” Scholem in Kabbalah and its Symbolism writes:

"The chaos that had been eliminated in the theology of the creation out of nothing reappeared in a 
new form. This nothing had always been present in God, it was not outside Him, and not called forth 
by Him. It is this abyss, within G-d, co-existing with His infinite fullness, that was overcome in the 
Creation, and the Kabbalistic doctrine of the God who dwells 'in the depths of nothingness,' current 
since the thirteenth century, expresses this feeling in an image which is all the more remarkable in 
that it developed from so abstract a concept."[see: Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah and Its Symbolism 

For the Kabbalists, nothing is taken as God’s innermost mode of being. God being ayin (nothingness) 
created the world out of Himself. In this sense God being unrepresentable in image can be described 
as a circle whose center is everywhere, but whose circumference is nowhere, as Nicholas of Cusanus 
held. Like Spinoza's substance (ousia), it is causa sui, nothing except more of the same can generate 
out of it. This Kabbalistic view is opposed to the Greek notion of there always being something eternal 
that was always there, a dilemma whose ontological and eschatological status bids to be resolved. 
Commentators have noted that keter (crown) was that sefirot of the Kabbalistic system of pleromatic 
emanation that is the origin of being, the place where something comes to be out of nothing. Keter is 
a figure signifying zero. The mystical "O" of the Kabbalah may refer to the "Hollow Crown" of keter.

Ein-Sof as ayin or aphisah involves the negation of a boundry/peras/gevul/grenzen. So, grammatically in 
Greek if one wants to state that "the soul of human being is immortal" one posits, "Psuche ton 
anthropos a-thanatos." The mystical alpha negates the boundries of mortality. Likewise it is with the 
mystical aleph with which the Maharal put the golem out of commission spelling met from the emet 
written across its forehead, a word containing the first, middle, and last letters of the twenty-two 
otiot. The mystical aleph in Hebrew can negate the limits of what it means to be alive while in Greek 
the mystical alpha negates the limits (peras) of death. The nothingness of which the Kabbalists speak
therefore can be negated too. Essentially, this nothingness is the barrier confronting the human intellectual faculty when it reaches the limits of its capacity. Nothingness for Kabbalists can separate the world that is articulate and the world of apparent nonsense. Thus ben Zoma, when he returned from Pardes, is recorded in the gemarah to be speaking what appears to the untrained as nonsense, but in reality it is a language encoded with Kabbalistic significance. Nothing may separate the realm of linguistic cogency from linguistic nonsense. Wittgenstein may gesture towards this realm in the Tractatus when, in his seventh proposition, he writes, "Wo von Man nicht sprechen kann, Daruber muB Man schweigen." Ein-Sof which turns toward creation manifests itself as ayin ha-gamur (complete nothingness) or God who is called Ein-Sof in respect of Himself is called Ayin in respect of His first self-revelation. Some Kabbalists allowed no interruption in the stream of Atzilut from the first Sefirah to its consolidation in the worlds familiar to medieval cosmology. Creatio ex nihilo may be interpreted as creation from within God Himself. Ramban speaks of free creation of the primeval matter from which everything was made. Ramban's use of the word ayin in this Perush al sefer Iyov 28:12 and allusions in his comments on Bereshit that the meaning of the text is the emergence of all things from the absolute nothingness of God. The commentary to Sefer Yezeirah by R. Yosef Ashkenazi (attributed in the printed editions to Abraham b. David) defined the first Sefirah as the first effect--the leap from Ein-Sof to ayin. R. David b. Abraham ha-Lavan, in Masoret ha-Berit (at the end of the thirteenth century), defined the ayin as having more being than any other being in the world, but since it is simple and all other simple things are complex when compared with its simplicity, so in comparison it is called nothing.

A separate entry access point might have been listed for “imkei ha-ayin”. In Kabbalah the term imkei ha-ayin (the depths of nothingness) is operative. It is said, that if all the powers returned to nothingness, the Primeval One who is the cause of all would remain in equal oneness in the depths of nothingness. The encyclopedia does not develop fully the concept of nothingness in Kabbalah as it relates to meontology.

(12) angels and angelology. For example absent is mention of Amtulta associated with the scales of justice who Mikubalim pronounce this name “Amtulta bat Karnivo to tip the scales of justice in one's favor, often pronouncing formulas with her name while holding a sefer torah or a mezuzah with parchement. Mikubalim invoke a myriad of angels. One of whom is called Amtulta who dwells in the darkness of nothingness according to the Targum on Sefer Iyov also associate with powers of the scales of justice etc. The question regarding the name of amtulta [bat Karnivo] is brought down to come from the root a mtul meaning "for the protection of" or "for the sake of", on account of. see Targum Yonatan Lev. IX, 7; a. fr. v. mitul and preced. w. Amtulta (feminine form) is brought down in Targam Yonatan Lev. IX, 7 and Targum Iyov I, 10 around him protecting him. Targ. Psalms VII. 8; a.e. Keth. 67th Amtultah for his sake Also see Amitah implying balances, scale. Pesk. B'shall. p. 82; Amiylah Tosef Maasr. III, 6 ed. Zuck., V. Hamtaliah Al pi Kabbalah the se terms are associated with a Malakh who protects. In general the entry on angels leaves out many important ideas.

Little mention is made of angels In the Second Temple period as noted in the makloket between Saducees and Pharisees. Unlike the Sadducees denial of the existence of angels (Acts 23:8), the Essenes like the Pharisees believed in angels. Fragments from I Enoch and Jubilees have been found
and these works are sources of angelology. The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400-407, 11Q17, Mas1k) is fully developed angelology. Temple Scroll (11Q19) on the other hand does not mention angels at all. A few pesharim use an angelic lexicon (Q174, 4Q177, 4Q182, 11Q13) whereas others do not. Allusion to the Nephilim in Bereshit 6:4 is made in the Damascus Document when reference is made to “the watchers of heaven who fell”. The allusion to the misadventures of the sons of G-d in Gen. 6:2 becomes the locus classicus for belief in evil angels. In the Book of Enoch the specific names of angels are given. This may beg comparison with Maseket Haggigah 12b-14b where angels such as the barakim, hashmalim (see Ps. 104:4), etc. are described. Jewish texts of the Greco-Roman time add detail to the traditions of angels found in the Tanakh (Jubilees 2:2; Ben Sira 16:26-30). In Enoch III angels have a hierarchical serving order in relation to G-d, each designated with a sphere of authority. Mention is made of Uriel, Raphael, Peniel, Metratron (not to be pronounced), and many others (I Enoch; Tobit; IV Ezra). Exceptional persons like Enoch, Elijah, and Serach bat Asher are elevated to angelic status (I Enoch; Zohar : 100a, 129b; T.Z. Hakdamah 16b). For the Qumran sect angels are divided into two camps in accordance with their proclivity to dualism. Angels of light and angles of darkness are illuminated in The War Scroll and The Manual of Discipline. The concept of fallen angels appears in the pseudepigraphic writings (I Enoch 6, from the section called, Book of the Watchers). It can be argued that this theological dualism of the concept of fallen angels becomes a major motif in Christianity. Starting in late antiquity including Beit Sheni inter-testamental period, angels are increasingly related to and seen as part of everyday life of persons and the functioning of the world. Thus the Dead Sea Scroll sect evokes the protective properties of specific angels. This later plays itself out perhaps in the appearance of amulets, magical inscriptions, and formulaic equations.

Josephus notes the Essene practice of keeping angelic names secret (The Jewish War 2:142). Angels in Qumran texts serve functions of ruling over nature, serving G-d, watching over the tree of knowledge, etc. Dead Sea Scroll texts are rich in angelic terms derived from combinations with the words El (G-d) or Elim; for example the War Scroll (1QMx.8). The phrase “holy ones” are also employed who appear at G-d’s side to destroy the sons of darkness (IQM i.16). Holy ones takes on double meanings as does ruah. “And a perverted spirit you purified from great violation, so that it might stand in rank with the host of holy ones, and so that it might come together with the congregation of the son’s of heaven. And you cast for man an eternal lot with the spirits of knowledge (1QHa ix [i]). Spirit like holy one can designate in the same context angels and human beings. Some scrolls refer to angels as “spirits of knowledge” (Elei da’at). The Dead Sea Scrolls also use the term “prince” or commander (sar). We must however be wary of systemization of Dead Sea Scroll angelology, for the “Prince of light” in the Rule of the Community from Qumran Cave 1 need not be the archangel Michael or Uriel. The Melchizedek scroll (11Q13) places Melchizedek in opposition to Belial (the evil one) and his angels. Melchizedek is a savior figure for the end of time. The Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen) speculates whether the appearance of the newborn Noah is a sign that his parents are indeed the watchers (angels who descended according to 1 Enoch). The three angels at Mamre hosted by Avraham as seen as angels in the Ages of Creation (4Q180). The dualism of the Sectarians influences their communion with angels. The sons of light and the sons of darkness are allotted to the principal angelic Princes of Light and Princes of Darkness. The dualistic division of humankind is formulated in the Treatise on the Two Spirits now part of 1QRule of the Community
A future battle of the prince of light with the sons of light against the forces of darkness is a dualistic impulse. The War Scroll develops the eschatological battle against Belial and his angels (1QM i.10-11, ix. 14-16, xii. 1-9). We are told that for the ultimate battle the names of the archangels will be written on the shields of the towers (1QM ix. 14-16). Certain people are banned from the camp because “for the angles of holiness are in the camp, together with their hosts (1QM vii.6).” The communion of the members of the Qumran commune with the angels is an explanation for the function of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400-407). Angels are not only involved with the fulfillment of liturgical and eschatological tasks but struggle for the future of individuals as in the Visions of Amram (4Q543 3, 6; 4Q544 3.12-14, 6.2-3). It is a matter of debate whether the sectarian saw the transformation of the just into angels based on the War Scroll (4Q491) which speaks of a figure enthroned in heaven. In Hodayot there is a certain critique against some of the angels (1QH xviii.34-35 [x.32-33]). G-d is in dispute with angels and seeks justice among them. In this text the angels’ knowledge of G-d is limited and they are unable to stand before his wrath. Punishing angels or demons are mentioned also.

Angels may be invoked and employed by humans diviners appears in the Testament of Solomon and later ma'asei Merkavah texts. Rabbinic texts minimize the importance of angels when compared with their role in the priestly Qumran, apocalyptic, and mystical traditions. In Shabbat 88b and Gen. R. 48:11 angels are said to have no free will, differing from the Qumran notions. Rabbis however conceded that angels do have intellect and inner life and are capable of errors (Sanh. 38b; Midrash Psalms 18:13). For the Rabbis most angels exist to do a single task (B.M. 86b; Gen. R. 50:2) and as exalted as they may be are subordinate to the Tzadikim (Gen. R. 21; Sanh. 93a; Ned. 32a; Deut. R.1). Rabbis see many divine actions in the Tanakh as ascribed to angels (Deut. R. 9; Gen R. 31:8; Sanh. 105b). The Pesah Haggadah is an exception to these opinions. It denies that angels played an important role in the yitziat mimitzrayim (see Magid).

The pusek, Na-aseh Adam betzelmenu kidemuteinu is seen as the heavenly host. Gabriel is seen as the angel who guards the gates of Gan Eden with the sword that flashes every which way. Three malakhim are hosted by Avraham and Sarah at Mamre, one being Raphael to cure Avraham of the brit milah. At the Akedah (Gen. 22) Sforno names the malakh who stops Avraham from shechting Yitzak as, Michael, when he says, “al tishlach yadchah al ha-naar.” Rashi names the unnamed man as an angel who instructs Yosef that his brothers are sheparding their flocks at Dothan. An angel is said to be with the children of Israel in the desert. In Haftorah Yetro the seraphim, ofanim, and hayot hakodesh is the subject of great exegesis in the Rabbinic imagination. These angels appear to be winged parts of Hashem’s throne (Isa. 6) or of the divine chariot (Ezek.1). That all angels (and not just seraphim and cherubim have wings is mentioned in Chag. 16a; PdRE4). Al Kanfeh Shekhinah (under the wings of the Shekhinah) also evokes wing imagery. In Homer we find the phrase “winged words” but in Rabbinic parlance angels have wings and move at different speeds depending upon their mission (Ber. 4b). G-d’s speed is often given in parasangs, a Persian measurement. The idea of seraphim being associated with fire may find correlaries with the Islamic ifrit, or from the oxymoronic (opposites uniting) unifications of fire and water (Sefer Yetzirah 1:7; S of S R. 10; J.R.H. 58; Gedulat
Moshe; Rashi on the hail as fire and water). In post-modern science we are interestingly told of a real state where water exists as a gas, liquid, and ice, known as the triple point!

The rationalistic philosophic tradition of Rambam and Ralbag however holds that angels are immaterial, incorporeal disembodied intellects. Rambam spurns the notion that “angels eat” and even Rashi concedes that the 3 angels at Mamre hosted by Avraham, from the midrash, only “appear to be eating.” This is a controversy in rabbinic texts (see Judg. 13; Gen. R.48:14; B.M. 86b; Zohar I: 102b).

The strong philosophic rationalism of the Rambam and Ralbag intellectualizes angelology within an Aristotelian modality. Rambam expounds on angels in Hilchot Yisodei Ha-Torah (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah). His expertise in classification is applied not only in halakhah but in this esoteric area. Rambam classifies angelic ranking into ten levels. In the Moreh Nevukhim further elaboration is given equating angels with Aristotelian “intelligences.” These “intelligences” mediate between the spheres. They possess the attribute of consciousness and govern the spheres in their motion. Influenced from Aristotle, Rambam holds that they are forms (eidos) of natural causation rather than supernatural beings, has vehalilah with bodies. As forms of causation they are thus absolutely incorporeal without bodies. Rambam in the Aristotelian mode remarks on the libidinous impulse of the “angel of lust.” As remarked before the Rambam holds that the “sense of touch is a shame to us” a remark also found in Aristotle, but not to be understood in the Christological sense of shame, but rather for those who have experienced the life of the mind totally as pure spirit (not Hegelian necessarily) or the experience of the sekel hapoal as transcendent even of time itself. To enter into the perfection of the tautology of what it is to think thinking itself as sui generis, is beyond all body and gashmius. Rambam denies that angels ever take corporeal form. They are extensions of the faculty of the human and divine intellects. As such the encounters in the Tanakh according to Rambam of angels are only the dream visions of the Avot, and Matriarchs. Moses is the chief of the prophets in that his prophecy was completely vibrant and clear not in dreams but while awake. To Moses, night appears as day (see Moreh Nevukhim). By contrast other Rabbinic traditions like the German Pietist such as Eleazar of Worms, adhere unapologetically to supernatural angelology. Rituals for summoning angels, especially angels who can reveal secrets of Torah (sitrei Torah), like the Sar ha-Torah and Sar ha-Panim (The prince of the Torah and Prince of the Presence of Haderat Panim), are sighted, cited, and sited! The Hasidic tradition also departs from the strict Maimonidean rationalism in this regard and regards texts such as Sefer ha-Razim catalogs of hundreds of angels, along with how to influence them and employ their names in constructing protective amulets, throwing curses, and gaining spiritual power as a mode of practical Kabbalah. The Zohar is sighted with its tradition of angelic taxonomy, ranking angels to the four worlds of emanation (I. 11-40), as well as assigning angels feminine and masculine attributes (I: 119b).

In Rabbinic tradition little children are told to recite the formula before going to sleep that Gabriel is at the left, Michael at the right, Oriel in front, and Raphael behind one.

For the rabbis an angel is a spiritual entity in the service of Hashem with no will other than Hashem’s. Angels can be classified into the following types: Malach, Irin, Cheruv, Saraf, Ofan, Cahyyah, Sar, Memuneh, Ben Elokim, Kodesh. The malach (messenger) is one variety. Distinguished from malakhim are the Irinim (Watchers/High angels). Sarim (Princes), Serafim (Fiery ones), Chayyot
(Holy Creatures), and Ofanim (Wheels) are different types. They are alluded to in collective designations that include: Tzeva (Host), B’nai ha-Elokim, or B’nai Elim (sons of G-d), and Kedoshim (Holy ones). Their divine assembly is sometimes called Adat Kel (Ps. 82, Job 1). Their forms are unspecified as in Judg. 6:11-14 and Zech. 4). They appear humanoid in most biblical testimonies (Num. 22) and are therefore indistinguishable from human form (Gen. 18, 32: 10-13; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 13:1-5). Sometimes they manifest in pillars of fire and cloud, or the firey bushes that are not consumed (Ex. 14:3). On the Aron ha-Kodesh (Ex. 25) cherubim were artistically represented and the shekhinah was felt to dwell there. The idea that angels envy humanity is found in pseudepigraphic texts and in rabbinic and medieval texts (Sanh. 88b-89a; 109a; Gen. R. 118:6; ChdM).

The function of Biblical angels can convey knowledge to mortals (Zech.1-4), shielding (Ex. 14), rescuing (Gen. 21), and smiting Israel’s enemies. They have responsibility but no authority except in the Book of Daniel. Daniel holds that all the nations of the world have their own angelic prince, arranged hierarchically, with limited spheres of control over mortal realms (also see Deut. 32). Angels have prominent roles especially in biblical roles written by Kohanim who were prophets including Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. In Zechariah the host of heaven is differentiated into groupings of angels governing and serving different levels of heaven. Zechariah makes reference to the seven eyes of G-d (4:10), referring to seven arch angels, or the seven angel hosts in the seven heavens. This has parallels with Enoch 61 and Testament of the Patriarchs, Levi.

The Jewish concept of personal angel, of malach sharet, mazal, or memuneh, “ministering” or “guarding angel” and an angelic “deputy” also is apparent in texts such as Rashi on Meg. 3a; Mid. Prov. 11:27 and Sch 129, 633, 1162. The rabbis expand in commentary to a great extent on angels forming choirs of singing praises to G-d (i.e. Gen. R. 78:1) and yet G-d is “beyond” even the greatest of praises (lailah liailah) which is invoked during the Yamim Noraim.

Gershom Scholem has recently brought to light the motif of angelology as a component of ma’aseh merkavah mysticism within the academic discourses. These texts describe how the practitioner to the Pardes in this world, or the pilgrim disembodied soul in the next life, wishing to ascend through the palaces of the heavens and achieve a vision of the divine glory needs to know “passwords” to get past the archons (gatekeepers) at each level (III Enoch). For how this archetype relates to Kafka’s parable Vor Dem Gesetz (Before the Law) and the Jewish mystical subtexts in texts ranging from Hechalot Rabbati and Zutrat to Orhot Tzadikim, see: http://student.ccbcmd.edu/~dlevy11/Kafka.pdf The second half of this paper has been retracted from the reshut harabim on Rabbinic advise that this material should not be made public! Angels can be conjured to be summoned and brought down to earth to serve the human practitioner. Many rituals and practices devoted to this end are preserved in Hechalot writings.

The rabbis offer the opinions on the origins of angels. Some hold that angels did not pre-exist Creation, but were formed as part of the heavens on the second day (Gen. R. 1:3, 3). Another rabbinic opinion posits their origin on the second day (Gen. R. 1:3, 3). A third opinion holds on the fifth day along with the winged and gliding beings (bird and fish) creations. In Chag. 14b; PdRE 4 speculation is asserted reconciling Midrash Rabbah that different kinds of angels came into being at different stages.
of Creation. The Zohar teaches that all angels result from specific manifestations of sefirot. For examples angels of love emanate from hesed while punishing angels emanate from gevurah, each type coming into existence coinciding with the manifestation of the sefirah that is its source (I: 46a-b). Chag 14a and Gen. R. 78:1 reveal the distinction between angels which are enduring and anonymous ephemeral angels, which are constantly coming in and going out of existence (kiyamut). According to Rabbi Chaim Vital, the Talmud Mivuhak of HaAri HaKodesh, and other Chasidic masters, the ephemeral angels are the direct result of human actions. Goodly deeds create good angels while destructive behavior creates destructive angels, etc. Thus some angels are the products of “gathering the sparks.” The power of the word “amen” itself can create multitudes of angels. Human actions thus become the cause of angelic and demonic forces (kelipot). Human action and decision have infinite consequences. As Louis Jacob’s book Their Heads in Heaven (see review by David B. Levy) alludes… man stands upon the earth and his head reaches to the heavens, and the angels of the Eternal ascend and descend with him (Ben Porat Yosef 42a). Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizansk thus brings down the interpretation that the ladder that Yakov dreams, with angels going up and down, has the gematria of mammon (correlating to Tzedakah), kol (voice correlating to prayer), and tzum (fasting). Thus Chasidic masters emphasize the value of seeking the help of angels. The Rambam as rationalist however views such intermediary worship as avodah zarah and insists that one must only davon to Hashem. The most comprehensive Chasidic meditation on angelology is Sichat Malachei ha-Shareit (Meditation on the Guardian Angels) by Tzadok ha-kohen Rabinowitz.

The Essenes also have their own system (makreket) for hierarchical designation of the angels (angelos, or messengers.) The priests who contributed to the Dead Sea Scrolls believed in a transitory fusion with angels when they performed their mystical liturgy. The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice illustrate this. Ma’asei Merkavah mystics who descend to the chariot to ascend to the palaces, also engaged in corollary kinds of angelic experiences through their techniques of ascent. A Midrash holds that in the 9 months of pregnancy a malakh teaches the developing fetus all the torah, and our job in life is to remember and recollect what the malakh taught. Michael, the angelic prince over Israel, serves as Kohan Gadol in Yerushalyim shel malah, (Chag. 12b). L’havdil this is different than Plato’s notion of recollection of the truth (aleithea/wahrheit) before being born. Aletheia is not the equivalent of the Hebrew Emet. In Jewish law Emet is trumped in the scenario for example if someone is hiding Jews from the Nazis, and the Nazis demand, “Are you hiding Jews?” Torah law dictates lying to save the Jews.

A great interest in folk traditions surrounding Elijah have seen light in recent years. Legends concerning this prophet turned angel (Ber. 4b) is a motif in many maseh (tales) of the Hasidim. Elijah frequently appears among mortals, bearing revelations of childbirth, parnassah, miracles, and heavenly news, as well as resolving kashes of difficult problems.

(13) Chaim Soloveitchik has recently released volume one of an intended three volume set of his previous published essays. In volume one he includes an appendix on the subjects of: (1) differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardim on the eating of “Kitnus” on Pesah, and (2) the differing minhag between Hasidim and Mitnagdim on whether one should eat in the Sukkah on the 8th day of Sukkot, Shemini Atzerot. The encyclopedia does not reference Soloveitchik’s work. Neither does the
encyclopedia reference Soloveitchik’s teacher’s work, the historian Yakov Katz, who has written some very interesting articles on “Halakhah and Kabbalah As Competing Disciplines of Study”, “Post-Zoharic Relations between Halakhah and Kabbalah”, and “Controversy Over Mezizah” all of which have some interdisciplinary relationships with folklore and minhag (see Divine Law in Human Hands: Case Studies in Halakhic Flexibility, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998).

(14) A more extensive entry should be given on Tashlich performed around Rosh Hashanah, exploring what the mitzvah of throwing bread or other food into a body of water, to be eaten by fish or ducks, symbolically indicates, theurgically it is believed reciting the final 3 verses of Michah (7:18-20) that are in essence a summary of the 13 divine attributes, while over the years other prayers such as those composed by the Chida are added for extra believed effect. Early sources such as that of the Maharil (1365-1427, Germany) should be referenced whereby Rabbi Moelin notes that the ceremony is in commemoration of Akediat Yitzchak. In the Yalkut Shemoni (Vayera 99) the story is told that when Avraham and Yitzchak were on the way to perform the Akeidah, they were confronted by Satan, who attempted to block their path by assuming the form of a river. Avraham plunged in and the waters reached his neck. He then recited Ps. 69:2 to which G-d responded and dried up the river. Tashlich therefore recalls zekut avot of the Akedat Yitzchak. Tachlich is mentioned by the Rema (OC 583:2) since the Arizal approved of the practice, a kabbalistic component was added and it spread to Sephardic communities and Yemen. The Rema in Darkei Moshe (OC 583) offers an explanation based on the Sefer Minhagim of Rabbi Tirna that the appearance of live fish represents the berachah that Bnei Yisrael should proliferate like fish who are immune to the ain ha-rah. The Rema clarifies that one when goes to a river or sea and observes the majesty of G-d’s creation and is struck by the glory of G-d as the Creator of worlds, this will cause the person to regret any misdeeds, and G-d will forgive his sins, which will symbolically be “thrown into the depths of the sea.” Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe (the Levush, 1530-1612) a student of the Rema adds further that the fish remind us on RH (Levush haTechelet, no.596), fish an at any moment get trapped in a net and thus show the precariousness of lives for judgment as evoked in Unetaneh Tokef. King David (Melakhim 1:33, 38) instructs his son Shlomo be brought to the Gihon spring to be coronated and from here the Talmud learns (Horiyot 12a) that all kings are anointed at a body of water. This symbolizes that the new king’s reign should have continuity, just as a spring of water flows continually. After Shlomo’s anointing, Tzadok hakohen blew a shofar (Melakhim Alefph 1:34:39) and similarly on RH we coronate G-d as King by a body of water and blow the shofar. (see Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 129:21, 5). The Rashban (OC 201) also associates malchut with water by noting that Ezra gathered the people at the water gate, the nearest gate to the water source on RH for a public reading of the Torah (Nech 8:1). Jacob Lauterbach tapping into Philo’s remark that on Hoshanah rabbah the Jews said a tefillah at a body of water, noes that there is an early belief traceable to Bereishit 1:2 (G-d’s spirit hovered over the surface of the water) that G-d can be found near sources of water. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich notes that water symbolizes humility in that it always flows to the lowest level and thus the custom of Tachlich is an attempt to relate our humility to that of the Avot and Moshe Rebeinu who is referred to being not merely humble but very humble. A Kabbalistic tradition holds that the mystery of the tetragramaton not be related except once ever 7 years, to only the most meritorious students, at a body of water, preferably with a water fall (cateract). The practice of Tashlich was not performed by the GRA, his star
pupil Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, and the Chaye Adam does not record the custom. Furthermore the Aruch haShulchan advises women not to go to tashlich so as not to create a mixed scene and if they do go men should stay home.

(15) segulah of Shiluach ha-kan (sending away the mother bird to warrant long life). As Milton Steinberg’s historic-fictional novel, As a Driven Leaf, notes Aher, Elisha ben Avahu witnessed someone trying to fulfill this mitzvah and fell out of the tree and was not given long life but instead was killed.

A number of midrashim should have been cited in the entry which state that the fulfillment of this mitzvah is a segulah for having children. Derived from the words “V’es habanim tikach lach” Mirdrah Rabbah Ki Setzei 6:6 Yalkut Shimon 930. This segulah is cited in the Sefer ha-Chinuch (545) as well. The Chinuch and Ksav Sofer ha-torah explain how this is a function of midah k’neged midah. and a segulah for getting married and for acquiring a new house since the parsha is followed by ki yivneh ish bayis and ki yikach ish issa (Tanchuma Ki Setzei 1; Kli Yakar Dvarim 22:7). The Yalkut Shim’oni (Devarim 930) notes, “Hashem said, ‘if you fulfill the mitzvah of shiluach hakan, then even if you are infertile and physically incapable of having children, I swear by your life that I will give you children.’”

As it says in the Torah: You shall surely send away the mother bird and if you have don son, then “the young take for yourself etc.” Midrash Rabbah (Ki Seitzei 6:6) notes: There are some mitzvos whose reward is wealth, and there are other mitzvos whose reward is honor. But what reward is granted for this mitzvah of shiluach ha-kan? That if one who fulfills this mitzvah has not children. I Hashem will grant him children. How do we know this? For the verse states You shall surely send away the mother bird. And what reward do you receive if you fulfill this commandment? The young take for yourself, “Further Midrash Tanchumah (Ki Seitzei 2) remarks, “How do we know the principle that one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah? For it is written: Should a bird’s nest chance before you… you shall surely send away…. So that it will be good for you and you will lengthen your days…. And what is written afterward? If a man marries a wife i.e. as a result of fulfilling shiluach ha-kan, you will merit to fulfill additional mitzvos by marrying and having children.”

Statement of some of the basic halakhic aspects of this folk belief should be more extensive. The mishna states that kan mezuman (a prepared nest) is exempt from fulfilling the mitzvah derived from the pasuk stating “ki yik arei- when you happen upon a nest. (Chulin 138b, Shulchan Aruch YD 292:2). This means that the mother bird and her offspring must be ownerless. Since the halacha states that a chatzer, private property, acquires objects on behalf of its owner even without the owner’s knowledge, a nest in on’e yard would generally be ineligible for this mitzvah. However a minority position is that before the eggs are laid, one may have in mind that he does not want his property to acquire on his behalf (Sefer Shalayach Teshalach, p.66; see Chasam Sofer Chulin 141b, and Igros Moshe Y.D. 4:45). Also according to Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg one may declare in fornt of 3 people that the eggs or chicks on his property are hefker and proceed with the mitzvah. Without the declaration of hefker the nest and offspring would automatically belong to the owner. I the nest is on private property it may be necessary for the owner to be mafkir. Therefore some authorities hold that one could fulfill the mitzvah only with nests in public places (a karmalite), such as a park. (Birchei Yosef 292:3; Rav Shlomo Salman Auerbah (Michas Shlomo 2:97:26), Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, quoted in Kovets Torani Mevak shel Torah, ch. 106. See Chochmas Adam 105:3. ) After one has taken
the eggs or chicks, they may be declared hefker by the one who acquired them by hazaka (lifting them three tefachim) and then returned to the nest.

Classic mefhorshim and their kabbalistic derivatives, should be more extensively referenced in such an entry. The Ramban states that compassion for the mother bird herself is not a motive alone for this mitzvah, since human needs override those of animals. Rather the Torah wishes us to act compassionately so that we instill this trait in ourselves. He also references a profound Kabbalistic reason (sod) for this mitzvah. Rebbein Bachya states that taking the mother and her offspring at the same time is analogous to destroying the same species. Rashi comments that Shiluach haKan is a relatively easy mitzvah to carry out, involving little hardship or cost. One earns the tremendous reward of long life through the performance. We can therefore only imagine how great the reward will be for more difficult mitzvos. Like the mitzvah of honoring parents, the mitzvah of Shiluach han is said to warrant long life, which means having children. The Zohar (Zohar Chadash Rus pg. 94, Tikunei Zohar 6 pg. 23a, cited in Rabbainu Bachya) explains the reason behind the vast rewards of this mitzvah as the bird's distress elicits Hashem's compassion, and He showers His mercy on Klal Yisroel and individuals in need so that in turn as part of the chain reaction, Hashem then rewards the person who brought this about.

(15) Mezuzah. Martin L. Gordon wrote an excellent article on the question of the mezuzah as "protective amulet or religious symbol" in Tradition that could have been cited more in depth. Further not referenced in the entry on mezuzah is the famous letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1976 to the Akeres habayis who are the "foundations of the home" to ensure "protection and guardianship" in accord with the promise "I will dwell among them" by making sure the mitzvah of mezuzah is not only done, but that the mezuzot are checked to protect the home which "embraces member of the household when they go out of their houses as written, “G-d will guard your going and coming from now and forever.” The Rebbe notes that the divine name (shin-dalet-Yud) spells out the words, “Shomer Dalsos Yisroel” (Guardian of Jewish doors). The Rebbe adds that each additional mezuzah affixed to all doorposts of the house, although the bathroom is referred to the room without a mezuzah, “adds to the protection of all our people everywhere.” The affixing of mezuzot on the doorposts the Rebbe notes will bring “Hatzlocho” and inspire others to do likewise, and the Zechus Horabim (the merit you brought to the many) will further stand you in good stead before the King of king’s throne! (see Iggerot Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rosh Chodes Elul, 5736).

(16) The entry on Kaparot should be much more extensive beyond the famous remark of Rabbi Yosef Karo codifying the opinion of the Rashba, that the practice constitute darkei ha-Emori (OC 605:1) vs. the Rema who brings it down in the tablecloth (Mah pah) to the Shulchan Arukh that the practice is beneficial as based on the opinions of many Ashkenazi Rishonim including Rabbeinu Asher, Yoma 8:23, Mordechai, Yoma no. 723, and Tashbetz Katan no. 125). This minhag of waving a chicken over the head and reciting a statement that transfers his iniquities onto the chicken, and then slaughters the chicken, which is given to the poor, is recorded in the Teshuvot HaGeonim, Sha’arei Teshuva n. 299, although much controversy surrounds its origin and expediency for theurgic effect. Long before Rabbi Yosef Karo the Ramban (cited in Orchot Cahim, Hilchot Erev Yom HaKippurim no. 1) rules that kaparot is a violation of darchei ha-Emori (Vayikra 18:3). Rashba, Teshuvot HaRashba 1:395 notes
that he did not allow kaparot in his kehillah. According to the Mahari Veil, the purpose of kaparot is not necessarily to transfer one’s iniquities onto the chicken, vicarious atonement, but rather to elicit thoughts of repentance. R. Moseh M. Karp (HilchotChag b’Chag, Yamim Nora’im, p. 276) suggest that the dispute between the Ramban and the Ashkenazi Rishonim is the subject of a dispute between Rema (Yoreh Deah 178:1) and the GRA ad loc. Rema (based on Maharik no. 8) maintains that there is no violation of darhei ha-emori if there is some practical purpose to the activity in question. However the GRA (based on Tosaftot Sanh. 52b, s.v. Ela) asserts that any activity which is practiced by idolaters may not be practiced by Jews, even if there is a practical purpose to it. R. Karp suggests that since there is a practical purpose to kaparot- to provide atonement, it is justifiable according to the Rema. However according to the GRA kaparot would constitute darchei ha-Emori since the ritual had previously been practiced by idol worshipers. Also Rabbi Eliezer of Metz (Sefer Yere’im no. 313) rules that the prohibition of darchei ha-Emori is limited to cases listed in Tosefta (Shabbat ch. 7 and 8). Any activity that is not listed in the Tosefta is not included in the prohibition of darchei ha-Emori. The entry in the encyclopedia does not reference the recent opinions of Rav Ovadia Yosef in depth who in (Yechave Da’at 2:71) notes that because of the pressure on the shochet to slaughter many chickens in a short amount of time some of the chickens may not undergo a valid slaughter and their invalidity goes unnoticed etc. Rav Obadiah Yosef also feared that workers might use dull blades to slaughter chickens and called for caution with Kappaort as reported in Haaretz Newspaper. R. Efraim Z. Marguiles (Beit Efraim, Yoreh De’ah no.26) notes that due to the large number of people who perform kaparot on erev YK there is an unusually long waiting time between waiving the chickens and their slaughter. As a result, many chickens are not handled properly and this is a violation of tza’ar ba’alei chaim (cruelty to animals). Magen Avraham (605:2) cites the ruling of Arizal that a pregnant women should perform tow additional sets of kaparot. The GRA (Biur HaGRA, OC 605:1) explains that the dispute between the Rema and Arizal is based on a Talmudic dispute regarding the status of a fetus. The gemara in numerous places (i.e. Yevamot 78a) queries whether a fetus is considered a limb of a mother (ubar yereh imo) or whether it is considered its own entity (ubar lav yerech imo). The GRA explains that Rema follows the opinion that the fetus is considered a limb of the mother. Ergo an additional set of kaparot, is only necessary if the fetus is a male. The Arizal follows the opinion that a fetus is considered its own entity and ergo one would perform two additional sets of kaparot (one male and one female) in order to account for either gender of the fetus.

(17) There should be a separate entry on the development of the minhag of a pre-wedding fast. Daniel Feldman in Tradition (35:1, 2001) has written an excellent article on this minhag.

(18) There might have been an update on the medicinal properties of the Etrog, as confirmed by modern science found at many sites such as: http://www.bionity.com/en/encycloepdia/citron.html or theworldwidegourmet.com/.../lemon-...

(19) There should be separate entries or a more in depth essay on animals in folklore in general as many excellent rabbinic studies exist on dimensions of this topic such as: (1) Alfred S. Cohen’s “Animal Experimentation” (the Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society) (2) Sidney B. Hoenig’s The Sport of Hunting: A Humane game?” (Traditon), (3) Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach’s famous comments about giving brachot upon seeing animals at the Biblical zoo and Aquarium based on for instance OC: 225:8
and Aleihu Lo Yibol OC 168). Rav Auerbach and other poskim of course differentiate the zoo from the condemned Roman “circus” because according to Rashi the problem with the arena or circus is that a form of entertainment is made out of aspects of brutality to animals, (4) voluminous commentary on Rebecca’s act of ‘watering the camels of Eliezer” which is seen as a good midah of rahamim (Bereshit 24:14) which has recently been treated in an article by Andrew Schein (Tradition 31:4, 1997).

(5) Exploration might be made on how non-Jewish idolatrous ideas about animals might have influenced Jewish folk beliefs surrounding animals. In the ancient world divination was associated in some way with the animals of rats, birds and fish. (a) rats: Isaiah 66:17 may allude to myomancy, a method of theriomantic divination by rats and mice whose cries of distress was seen as a prognostication for oncoming evil etc. (b) birds: the augur was a “priest” and official in the classical period in ancient Rome and Greece whose role was to interpret the future by studying the flights and behavior of birds- whether they are flying in groups or alone, what noises they make as they fly, the direction of flight and what kind of birds they are, and the appearance of their livers after caught and sacrificed? This was known as “taking the auspices”. The ceremony and function of the augur was central to any major undertaking in Roman and Greek society often including matters of war, commerce, and religion. The flight patterns of birds and augury is a major theme in well known classics from Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey to the Roman Cicero’s tractate “de divinatia” (on divination). (c) Fish: Paul the Octopus hatched Jan. 2008 was a common octopus from Weymouth England, who lived in a tank at a commercial attraction, the Sea Life Centre in Oberhausen Germany. Paul became famous after his feeding behavior which allegedly was used to predict the winner of each of Germany’s seven matches in the 2010 world Cup as well as the outcome of the “final” match.

(20) In general the entries on superstitions could be more extensive and in depth. An article by Yitchok Gutterman titled, “Segulot, Superstitions, and Darchei Emori” (Journal of halakchah and contemporary society). Gutterman shows how idolatrous superstitious that appear apparently innocuous have crept into Jewish homes such as: not walking over a small child, not walking under a ladder, the practice of blowing out candles, on a birthday cake and making a wish, etc. All of these practices although perhaps rooted in some logical justification had their origin most likely in superstitions which in general the Torah forbids. For example my mother (zl) told over that her grandmother Keila Leiba Gluskin Helfgot (zl) indicated that from eastern Europe it was a general superstition not to put a “hat on a bed”. My mother justified this practice by reasoning that “in Eastern Europe the people often had lice and thus the lice could be transferred from bed to hat or hat to bed, but this may not have been the reason given by the grandmother who may have associated mystical theurgic magical significance to the situation.”

(21) There might have been a more extensive entry on Safed, the center of mystical activity in the 15th and 16th centuries. For example what is the coincidence that many superstitious practices are recounted there according to Rabbi Chaim Vital, the talmid mevuhak of HaAri HaKodesh regarding, in Sefer HaHezyanot records the prevalence of palmology (palm reading), placing oil drops on water and prognosticating from their formations, etc. at the time of luminaries such as Rabbi Moshe Cordevero, Rabbi Moshe Alschek, HaAri HaKodesh, Rabbi Yosef Karo etc.
(22) The entry on dreams, is not extensive enough. Significant more space should have been devoted to the autobiographical work of Rabbi Yosef Karo titled haMaggid Mesharim. In this work the Mehaver recorded his dream life where a malakh gave over sitrei torah in the form of the shekhina as an embodiment of the Mishnah.

(23) The Talmudic practice of curing blood disorders by placing a pigeon on the belly button to draw heat should be a separate entry.

(24) The entry on exorcism should be more extensive taking up the occurrence to precedent day Mikubalim in Boro Park and Meah Sharim who perform exercises for those possessed by a dybuk. This should also be analyzed more fully from the point of view of Ansky’s drama and the film interpretation.

(25) The Talmudic practice of casting of an ayn ha-rah by melting lead, sacrificing a chicken, and then interpreting the congealed lead formations upon cooling should be taken up to the present day as this practice is performed by numerous Mikubalim from Statan Island to Jerusalem.

(26) Minhagim (customs)