

BELIEFS

Why many are falling for the jujuman's charms

The witchdoctors promise a simple solution to problems and heart's desires

By GAKIHA WERU

Four Cabinet ministers are among thousands of Kenyans flocking to consult witchdoctors and fortune tellers, interviews with charm sellers and soothsayers reveal.

The witchdoctors promise a simple solution to all problems and desires, be it romance, career, health, an errant lover and even political power. They are doing such a roaring business that they advertise the potency of their charms in leading newspapers, such as the *Daily Nation* and the *Sunday Nation*.

Thanks to their services, many prominent Kenyans are therefore walking around wearing charms and talismans, some disguised as gold chains, amulets and bracelets.

Also putting their faith on talismans dispensed by fortune tellers and self-acclaimed astrologers are scores of MPs, businessmen and people with relationship problems, as extensive investigations by the *Sunday Nation* reveal.

Operating from various parts of the city including rooms in three-star hotel rooms, the charm sellers attract clients through advertisements and references.

Others put signboards in city estates proclaiming their services. And they are revered more if they hail from distant places such as Tanga, Zanzibar and Pemba. The medicine men also supply portions to help men rein in unfaithful spouses and bring together estranged wives and husbands. They also claim to have portions that help people win the love of those they secretly admire.

In the interest of research and science

and armed with Sh10,000 from company coffers, the *Sunday Nation* went to see some of the "doctors" to have a long list of problems — including the war in Iraq and world poverty — solved.

Outside one hotel room, the *Sunday Nation* found a queue of smartly-dressed people waiting for their turn.

"On a bad day, I will make Sh10,000 depending on the ability of the clients. There are times I get a single client who will easily part with Sh100,000," says a 'doctor' who hails from Tanzania. He requested not to be identified so as to protect the identity of his clients. When in Kenya, he shuttles between Nairobi, Mombasa, Eldoret and Kisumu.

His clients range from politicians, businessmen, spouses and jobs seekers. Business was excellent during campaigns last year with some politicians paying as much as Sh500,000 for potions to help them win.

Another 'doctor' Hassan Sheikh Yahya Huessin is more forthright about his work. Born in Tanzania, he learnt the trade from his father who has since retired.

A self-proclaimed astrologer works his medicine around the stars which he claims are the key influences on a person's life. "If a person has problems with a wife born between November 23 and December 21, (Sagittarius) I will give medicine that he will have to burn because Sagittarius is the sign of fire."

Unlike the traditional talisman used by many African societies which were readily available, today's charms and potions have been "modernised" to keep with the times and also for the purposes of disguise.

From a "doctor" in Eastleigh, the *Sunday Nation* bought two rings. One is supposed to give the wearer power over the opposite sex. The other one allegedly offers protection from enemies.

But *Sunday Nation* could not find anyone willing to admit that they had consulted a witchdoctor. But the "doctors" said those flashy cufflinks, glasses, chains and gold rings could actually be charms.



Mr Hassan Sheikh Yahya Hussein displays popular prescriptions for his clients' perceived problems at his Nairobi clinic. Left: Rings which double-up as charms. Photos/CHARLES KAMAU

Face-to-face with the 'doctor'

When Hassan Sheikh Yahya Hussein is in Nairobi, he operates from a three-star hotel. The area outside his room, functions as a reception where clients lounge on leather sofas.

Client removes his shoes first. The room is dimly lit and filled with the smell of burning incense. At one corner of the room, is a table on which are several jars with labels that read: Mtego wa Mke (wife trap), Kumvuta Mtu Aliyepotea (Attracting Missing

Person), Nguvu ya Kiume (Male Strength), Kuacha Sigara (Quitting Smoking) and Kuacha Pombe (Alcoholism Cure), among others.

Between the bed and the wall, there is blue carpet upon which a red cloth is spread. Around it are burning candles. Clients sit on the red cloth as Mr Hussein goes through the motions of treating or diagnosing their problems.

I sit on the cloth, the smell of incense overpowering, as Mr Hussein goes about the business of

looking into my future and what it portends. According to the alignment of the stars, I can be a very wealthy man in the future. But for this to happen, I would have to move into the import-export business and travel around the world.

"You are Sagittarius. Sagittarius is an arrow and hence it is constant motion. For you to prosper, you need to move far and wide," he advises me.

-Gakiha Weru

Prove your claims, get Sh2.6 million, miracle workers dared

The Rationalist Society — a movement that styles itself as promoters of free thought — believes there are no such things as miraculous powers and has offered Sh2.6 million in cash reward for any astrologer or witchdoctor purporting to be in command of the supernatural.

Dr T.N Singh, a member of the society, says that people who believe in such miracles have a mental condition that needs healing. For the past 45 years, the Rationalist Society has sought to award Sh2.6 million to anyone who will be able to complete any one deed, in a list of 22, that might be

termed as miracles. The 'miracles' on the list include:

- Read the serial number of a sealed-up currency note.
- Produce an exact replica of a currency note.
- Stand stationary on burning coal for half a minute without blistering the feet with the help of God.
- Materialise from nothing an object demanded by the society.
- Move or bend an a solid object using psychokinetic powers.
- Read the thoughts of another person using telepathic powers.
- Make an amputated limb grow

even one inch by prayer or spiritual powers

- Float in the air
- Stop the heartbeat for five minutes
- Walk on water
- Leave the body in one place and materialise in another
- Stop breathing for 30 minutes by yogic powers
- Develop creative intelligence through any type of meditation
- Speak an unknown language as a result of a rebirth or by being possessed by evil or holy spirits.
- Produce a spirit or a ghost for

purposes of being photographed.

- Disappear from a film when being photographed
- Get out of a locked room by divine power
- Increase the quantity of weight of a substance.
- Detect a hidden object
- Convert water into petrol or wine
- Convert wine into blood
- Astrologers and palmists can win the award if they pick out, within a five per cent margin of error, the number of males and females and the number of the dead and the living.

Complete with their exact times and places of birth. However, there are rules to the challenge. Anyone who accepts the challenge is required to deposit Sh5,000 with the society.

"We insist on this fee which will be refunded in the event that he or she wins the challenge. The fee is meant to discourage time-wasters," said Dr Singh.

But if the challenger fails in his quest, the deposit remains with the society. According to Dr Singh, no 'miracle worker' has ever stepped up to the challenge since its inception in 1963.