

THE EVIL EYE AND 10 WAYS TO GET RID OF IT

By Rabbi Nechemya Klugman

What can be confusing and unclear to newcomers to Judaism is the idea of ayin hara/evil eye. As explained in Chapter 1b, an ayin hara is created when someone sees something that another person has (such as wealth, children, beauty, etc.) and feels bad that he lacks that thing (1). This can cause the other person much harm. But to the uninitiated it sounds like some type of superstition. You might also have heard about various things done to ward off ayin hara, such as wearing a red string or pouring lead. Again this seems odd and unscientific.

Another related topic is that of segulas, certain types of supernatural remedies. For example, upon losing something, people will put money into a Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes tzedakah box and say a certain formula in order to find the lost item. Or pregnant women wear a certain stone to prevent miscarriage. This too needs explanation. It is also important to know the proper way to view segulas, and how and when they should be used.

A. Evil Eye/ Ayin Hara

Ayin hara is definitely not a superstition, and is mentioned numerous times throughout the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch. There are a number of ways in which ayin hara operates. One is that the eyes have a certain power to them. When a person is stared at, he “feels” the other person’s eyes on him. Therefore, looking at a person in a negative way can cause damage supernaturally (2). R’ Dessler explains further that all people are intrinsically connected in a spiritual sense, and hence each person’s life is dependent on the other. The power of ayin hara is that through the negative feelings that one has towards another person, he diminishes the amount of spiritual “life force” that the other person will receive. As a result of this the other person can suffer much harm.

However, there is another aspect to ayin hara. A person cannot be punished unless he has done something wrong. Thus, without some sort of sin, any negative powers of the eye can have no effect. In this too ayin hara plays a role. First of all, the object of the ayin hara may be guilty of causing the observer pain, especially if he is flaunting the good that he has (see Chapter 1b) (3). Furthermore, ayin hara can cause a person’s

“books” to be opened. That is, most people are not completely righteous, and do sins from time to time. However, Hashem treats a person compassionately and does not punish him right away. Ayin hara changes all of that. When person “A” is jealous of person “B” and thinks that person “B” does not deserve a particular good thing, this is taken very seriously by Hashem. Hashem examines person B’s records, and, more often than not, sins will be found. Thus, person B will not only lose that particular item, but might be punished for his other sins as well (4).

THE RED STRING AND OTHER REMEDIES FOR AYIN HARA

The most effective way to avoid ayin hara is to be modest and not flaunt what we have (5). In this way we are sensitive to the feelings of others, and prevent the ayin hara entirely. Another way to stop ayin hara is to refrain from being jealous of other people and causing them an ayin hara. Hashem repays a person who behaves in this way measure for measure, and does not allow the ayin hara of others to affect him (6). If this does not work, there are some segulas that might help. As we will explain below (Section B), segulas have a certain power even though we may not understand how they work. One is permitted to engage in segulas if they have a proper source, and are used correctly.

One segulah for ayin hara is “lead pouring” (blei gissen). Lead is cooked up in a pot and poured out, along with the recitation of certain Kabbalistic formulas. This practice is mentioned in several sefarim and has Rabbinical approval (7). However, this is not something that anyone can do. Rather, one must go to people who have a tradition as to how this segulah is done.

Another segula to protect from ayin hara is to wear a red string. Some wear any red string, but others have the custom to encircle Kever Rochel with a red string, and then to wear a piece of that string. There are several sources for this segula, and it has been practiced for many centuries (8). However, some Poskim hold that wearing such a string falls under the category of “darkei emori” (the ways of the non-Jews) and is therefore forbidden (9). Therefore, one whose family custom is to wear a red string may do so. However, one who does not have such a custom should seek Rabbinic guidance.

It should be pointed out that some people encase the red string in a nice bracelet. However, this is surely counterproductive in preventing ayin hara. One of the reasons for the red string is that it draws people eyes to it, so they will not notice the person’s looks or what he is wearing. Putting the string in a piece of jewelry, though, will likely draw more attention to oneself (10).

B. Segulas – The Proper Balance

Segulas are certain spiritual remedies that can be used for success in all types of areas: health, happiness, financial stability, having children, etc. However, a healthy balance must be struck when approaching segulas. On the one hand, segulas do have certain powers and should not be belittled. On the other hand, segulas are not mitzvos, and practicing them is no substitute for the fundamentals of Judaism.

Our main focus in life is to perform mitzvos, study Torah, develop our emunah, develop our character, and draw closer to Hashem. Judaism is not fundamentally a religion of mysticism. Therefore, one should not get caught up with all sorts of segulas and forget about what Judaism is really all about (11). R' Pam Zt"l would recommend that one should always try natural means before resorting to segulas (12). And in the spiritual realm, the main way to deal with a troubling situation is by davening to Hashem, and examining one's deeds to see if anything needs improvement (13).

Furthermore, one must make sure that any particular segula has a reliable source. Some so-called "segulas" might actually involve idol worship or are forbidden under darkei emori (the ways of the Idol worshippers). Not only are such segulas forbidden, they can cause more harm than good (14). One must also be wary of unscrupulous people who make a business out of these types of unreliable segulas (15).

On the other hand, reliable segulas are real, and should not be dismissed as superstitions, even though we do not understand how they work. The Rishonim point out that the Gemara in many places discusses remedies that do not have a rational explanation (16). The Rashba explains that when Hashem created the world He created certain things that heal in a natural, scientific manner, but He also made things that have the power to heal (or fix other problems that people might have) not according to the laws of nature, in ways that transcend the laws of nature (17). Other sources explain that segulas such as amulets (pesukim or kabbalistic formulas written on a piece of parchment or paper) operate in the spiritual world, which in turn affects the physical world as well (18).

Therefore, a segula that has an accepted source or tradition, and is used under the correct circumstance, can be very beneficial. One should always make sure, however, to consult with a recognized Rabbi before engaging in any particular segula.

SEGULAS AND BITACHON

It is important to understand that segulas work similar to all other human endeavors, in that ultimately everything is up to Hashem. Even when we do segulas, this is just the vehicle for Hashem's will to be fulfilled. If Hashem does not want something to happen, all the segulas in the world will not help. If Hashem does want something to happen, he sends us the means for this thing to come to fruition. These means include both natural types of actions and segula types of actions. Doing such actions (called "hishtadlus") are necessary for Hashem's will to be carried out, because Hashem does run not the world with open miracles, but under the guise of nature. However, ultimately Hashem is in charge (19).

The best segulas

Until now we have discussed what people call "segulas." These are not mitzvos, but are actions that have spiritual powers. However, there are many mitzvos that have segula-like powers. That is, they give a person a merit that brings to a specific result. These types of segulas are the best of both worlds, because a person is doing a mitzvah and serving Hashem, and at the same time can merit a certain blessing. To name a few: Honoring one's parents brings longevity (20). Giving respect to a Torah scholar is a segula to merit son-in-laws who are Torah scholars (21). Someone who is quiet when other people wrong him and refrains from saying things he shouldn't say merits the "or haganuz" (the hidden light) (22). Saying Birchas Hamazon properly is a segula for earning a decent livelihood (23).

Commonly used segulas

There are numerous segulas discussed in the seforim, and it is beyond the scope of this work to cite all of them. We will therefore suffice with listing ten segulas that many people do and have reliable sources.

The first two segulas are the ones mentioned at the beginning of the chapter:

1. If someone loses something, he should give some money to tzedaka in the memory for R' Meir Baal Hanes and recite a certain tefilah (24). He should also recite the passage from the Midrash stating that a person is essentially "blind" until Hashem opens his eyes (25). (This tefilah and Midrash are printed on the R' Meir Baal Hanes Tzedaka boxes). Part of the idea of this segula is to express our belief that Hashem controls what we see. It is this belief that provides the merit to find the lost item (26).
2. It is a segula for pregnant woman to wear the "even tekuma," a type of ruby, to prevent her from miscarrying her unborn child r"l. This segula is mentioned in the Gemara (27), and contemporary Rabbis have given their approval for its use (28).

Eight additional segulas:

3. A segula for parnassa is to bake a “shlissel challa,” a challah with a key inserted into it, after Pesach, and to eat that challa on the first Shabbos after Pesach (29).

4. Another segula for a pregnant woman is for her to invalidate the esrog used on Succos. Either she removes the “pitam” of the esrog, or takes a bite out of the esrog. She should then say a certain prayer (30). This is a segula for an easy labor and delivery. Some say that she should do this specifically on the last day of Succos, Hoshana Rabbah. However, others say that an esrog has the status of “muktzah” on Succos, and therefore one should wait until after Yom Tov to practice this segula (31). One should consult with a Rabbi regarding this question.

5. The Gemara (32) states that eating warm bread or drinking a hot drink on Motzaei Shabbos has the power to heal illnesses. Some say that the bread must be baked fresh on Motzaei Shabbos in order for this segula to work (33).

6. If one is stricken with the rash known as “roseola,” he should take some of the oil left in the Chanuka Menora and smear it onto the affected area (34).

7. If a person is sick with Hepatitis (a type of liver disease), it is a segula to place white pigeons on the patient’s navel. The pigeons draw out the disease, and then die (35). [Practically speaking, one should not do this on his own, but should consult with Rabbis who are knowledgeable in how exactly the segula is performed.]

8. If someone is choking on a bone, those present should place another bone of the same type on the person’s head, in the place where tefillin are worn. They should then say the following formula: “Chad, chad, nachis, bala; bala, nachis, chad, chad” [חַד חַד חַד נָחִית בָּלַע, בָּלַע נָחִית חַד חַד]. This segula is cited by the Gemara in tractate Shabbos (36). The Maharil states that nowadays we do not practice any of the medical remedies listed by the Gemara, because we do not know exactly how they are done. However, the above segula is something that we know how to do, and is known to work even in our times. It is important to make sure that the bone used for the segula is from the same type of animal as the bone the person is choking on. For example, if the person is choking on a chicken bone, another chicken bone must be used, not a meat bone (37).

9. A husband whose wife is in her ninth month of pregnancy should open up the Aron Kodesh when the Sefer Torah is removed for Krias HaToraH. This is a segula for an easy birth. The husband should open the Aron at least one time during the ninth month.

Some say that opening the Aron multiple times increases the power of the segula (38).

10. A segula for parnassa is to recite the pesukim that describe how Hashem sustained the Jew people in the desert by providing them with “mon.” These pesukim are found in most siddurim under the title of “parshas haman.” Some people recite the parshas haman every day, either before or after shacharis. It is especially auspicious to say the parshas haman on Tuesday of the week of Parshas Beshalach (in which these pesukim appear) (39).

1. It should be noted that ayin hara can sometimes occur without any bad feelings or jealousy. For example, if something unusual occurs to a person and people are amazed and wonder about it, this can also create an ayin hara. Here we discuss the more common form of ayin hara, which is when there is some sense of jealousy. See Sefer Ayin Hara (by R' Moshe Yagudiyov) Ch. 3.
2. Rabbenu Yonah, Avos 2:11; Abarbanel, parshas Ki Sissa; Pardes Yosef, Vayikra 11:16.
3. Michtav MeEliyahu Vol. IV p. 5-6.
4. Ail HaMiluim (by R' Leib Kaaro, a descendant of R' Yosef Kaaro, author of the Shulchan Aruch) parshas Ki Sissa; Sefer HaCharedim 66:64. See also Sefer Ayin Hara p. 193-194.
5. Bava Metzia 42a with Maharsha; Tamid 32a with Rashi.
6. See Kli Yakar to Bereishis 49:22.
7. See Teshuvos Tzemach Tzedek, Orach Chaim 38. R Chaim P. Scheinberg Zt”l writes in his Haskamah, “This segula is mentioned in the sefer of the צמח צדק and other seforim, this segula is known in Klal Yisrael for many generations and Mekubalim had given their approval to this segula.” See also Segulos Rabboseinu (by R' Yishai Mazlumian) p. 336 and 338. However, R' Chaim Kanievsky Shlit”a, cited ibid. p. 336, rules that the segula of lead pouring should not be performed.
8. See Chasdei David to Tosefta Shabbos 8:4, Teshuvos Beer Moshe Vol. 8, 36:3, Teshuvos Rivevos Efraim, Vol. 8, 51:3. Sources for using a red string from Kever Rochel: Teshuvos Meoros Nassan, Hilchos Chanuka p. 15, Yesod Lkr”a (Lekever Rochel Imeinu) p. 220, Mekomos Hakedoshim (by R' Yechiel Michel Stern) p. 650.
9. See Darkei Teshuvah 178:11 citing Raishis Chochma, Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu p. 136 citing R' Shlomo Zalman Aurbach Zt”l and R' Chaim Kanevsky Shlit”a.
10. Heard from R' Wallerstein Shlit”a. See also Teshuvos Rivevos Efraim ibid.
11. See Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu p. 8.
12. Heard from R' Reisman Shlit”a.

13. See Brachos 5a, see also Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu footnote p. 142-143.
14. Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu p. 8-10.
15. See Krayna D'Igarta Vol. 1, 60, Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu p. 29 citing R' Ben Tzion Abba Shaul Zt"l.
16. See, for example, Teshuvos Harashba Vol. 1, 413 and 825, as well as the many sources cited in Sefer Ayin Hara p. 259-272.
17. Teshuvos Harashba ibid. 413. See also Sefer Segulos Yisrael, Hakdama.
18. See Sefer Rafael Hamalach p. 205, 207.
19. Teshuvos Nafshi Beshailosi (Vol. 1, 59) cited by Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu p. 27-28.
20. Shemos 20:12.
21. Shabbos 23b.
22. Iggeres HaGra.
23. Mishnah Berurah 185:1.
24. Sefer Refoel Hamalach p. 11, citing Medrash Talpiyos.
25. Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu p. 38.
26. Ibid. pages 38-39 in footnote 7.
27. Shabbos 66b.
28. See Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu (p. 36, footnote 3) citing the Steipler Zt"l and R' Chaim Kanievsky Shlit"a.
29. See Sefer Ohaiv Yisroel p. 185-186, 217 by R' Yehoshua Heshel of Apt, cited by Taamei Haminhagim #596-597.
30. Cited in Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu, footnote 120.
31. Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu, p. 111.
32. Shabbos 119b.
33. Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu p. 184, 311.
34. Ibid. p. 185.
35. ibid. p. 162, Taamei Haminhagim p. 574.
36. 67a.
37. See Sefer Segulos Rabboseinu p. 145-147.
38. Ibid. p. 114-115.
39. Ibid. p. 155, and footnote on p. 157.

[It should be noted that some of these 10 segulos are likely not be subject to R' Pam's rule to avoid segulos when possible. For example, the segulas of reciting the parshas haman and opening the Aron Hakodesh are probably considered a miztva-type segula, which need not be avoided. Also, the segula to bake a shlissel challah might have the status of a minhag, which is also not a problem.]