

## Segulot Part 3 – Ayin HaRa – JewishClarity.com

There are **numerous examples** of the *ayin hara* all throughout classical Torah sources:

1. Sara put an *ayin hara* on Yishmael (**Rashi** on *Bereshit* 21:14) which gave him a fever and an inability to walk. That explains why, when Avraham threw Hagar out of the house, Hagar needed to actually carry Yishmael. *In addition, the medrash (Bereshit Rabbah* 45:5) says that Sarah caused Hagar to miscarry through using the *ayin hara*.
2. Yaakov told his sons not to all enter the same gate when they first went to Egypt to buy grain – to avoid an *ayin hara* (**Rashi** on *Bereshit* 42:5).
3. *Ayin hara* is one of the five possibilities of the *derech ra'ah* (bad path) that we should avoid – *Pirke Avot* (2:14). It is also one of the things that remove us from the world – *Pirke Avot* (2:16). This seems to be related to jealousy.
4. The first set of *luchot* (tablets given to Moshe at Mount Sinai) were given with much publicity, which led to an *ayin hara* and destruction; while the second set, given more quietly, were able to last forever.
5. We give a half-*shekel* [for the purposes of a census] and don't count Jews directly to avoid an *ayin hara*.
6. *Orach Chaim* (241:6): Relatives don't get consecutive *alliyot* – to avoid an *ayin hara*.
7. *Baba Metzia* 107a – Rav Yehuda told Ravin not to buy property adjacent to the city, because it would then be subject to an *ayin hara* which would be able to damage it.
8. *Shulchan Aruch* – It is forbidden to stare at another's property in a case where this could damage it. This is called *chezek re'iya* (damage from the eye).
9. *Shabbat* 33b – After spending twelve years learning Torah in a cave, Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai burned up various things that he looked at in the world outside the cave.
10. *Brachot* 58b – Rav Papa and Rav Huna gazed upon Rebbe Chanina when they felt he had followed a strange approach with a particular *bracha*, and this caused him to die.
11. *Baba Metzia* 14a – The Rabbis gazed upon Rav Acha bar Yaakov after he had accomplished something close to miraculous with his writing of a *sefer Torah*, causing him to die.

**Therefore, we see that *ayin hara* is a very well-established Torah concept.**

Interestingly, in **quantum physics**, there are cases in which our observation also seems to affect the actual reality (i.e., with Schroeder's famous cat experiment).

*Baba Metzia* 107b – Rav explained the verse – “Hashem will remove all illness from you” (*Devarim* 7:15) as a reference to the *ayin hara* – the source of most illness. And, in fact, he once went to a cemetery and discovered that **99 out of 100 had died from an *ayin hara***, while only one had died from other causes.

**Three approaches to understanding what the *ayin hara* actually is**

**First Approach – Destructive Force of Nature:**

**The** Maharal understood the *ayin hara* as a natural force which, through the human eye, can focus a type of burning energy to inflict tremendous damage on a person or an object. One, therefore, needs to be extremely careful – both to protect oneself, as well as one's property, from the *ayin hara*. (*Netivot Olam – Netiv Ayin Tov – perek aleph*).

The *Chazon Ish* (*Baba Batra*) similarly discussed a *gemara* in which – “The Rabbis placed their eyes on someone and he died”. He wrote – Among the foundations of the creation, a person can use their thoughts to spur the hidden causes in the world of action. A simple thought [expressed through one's eyes] can cause terrible destruction even among solid physical things. This is one of the mechanisms

which Hashem uses to carry out His *din* (judgment) in the world. And it is possible that the greater a person is, the greater will be the power contained within his eyes.

According to the *Chazon Ish*, who understands *ayin hara* to be a destructive force of nature, exposing oneself to an *ayin hara* would be effectively like putting oneself into a *makom sakana* (place of danger). Therefore, the *Pele Yo'etz* (*Erech Ayin HaRa*) wrote that protecting oneself from an *ayin hara* is included within the principle of “*v'nishmartem m'od l'nafshoteichem* – guard your souls very carefully (*Devarim* 4:15).”

And, finally, the **Rabeinu Yona** (*Avot* 2:11) explained – One that is not *same'ach b'chelko* (happy with his portion) and thinks in terms of another that is wealthier than himself – “When will I acquire great wealth like he has?” – causes damage to both himself and to this other person. As the experts in *teva* (nature) have said – A force goes up from this thought and burns up whatever he was thinking about with his *ayin hara*. He also burns up within himself since he is desiring something beyond his grasp. This thought can destroy his body since it limits his energy, and removes him from the world. This is the *ayin hara*.

## **Second Approach – Showiness that could lead to Jealousy:**

**Rav Dessler** (*Michtav M'Eliyahu*) wrote – The Rabbis (*Gemara Eruvin* 64ab) teach us –

One that becomes wealthy should [be sure to] do a mitzvah with some of his money to prevent an *ayin hara* from damaging it. What exactly is this *ayin hara* which is spoken about in so many different places? It is clear that if one causes his friend to become jealous of him, he is responsible and liable for the pain he caused him. And this could even cause him to ultimately lose his wealth. He, therefore, needs to do *mitzvot* to protect himself from difficulties.

The mechanism of the *ayin hara* is rooted in the spiritual reality of all people being connected to one another. *Ayin hara* means that one is jealous of another, is bothered by his very being, and [therefore] he wants only bad for him. Since all people's lives are mutually dependent on one another, it is possible that this will cause the [successful] person's life to be limited, and thereby more susceptible to injury or damage.

The Maharal taught that even a lack of concern for another can be considered like an *ayin hara*. Whoever is aware of another's needs and has the ability to help him, but is uninterested in doing so, is declaring that this other person is irrelevant and superfluous to him.

When one is jealous of another and gazes upon him with an *ayin hara*, this can cause damage. However, justice demands that this will only happen if the recipient of the *ayin hara* had previously done something to make himself vulnerable to the *ayin hara*. One possibility would be that he had caused the first person to be jealous of him in a very specific manner.

It is clear and well-established that one who is not self-focused, is a giver and not a taker, in all of his matters, will not arouse any jealousy. This is why the descendants of Yosef are not susceptible to the *ayin hara* – because Yosef was so selfless. *Chazal* are thereby teaching us that one who lives out of the public eye, and whose aspirations are completely separate from those of the street, will not arouse jealousy.

The *Gemara* (*Baba Metzia* 42a) gives us a practical suggestion for how to minimize the impact of the *ayin hara* (which it expressed in two similar but differently worded phrases):

*“Ein habracha metzuyah ella b'davar hasmuyi min ha'ayin – Blessing is only found on whatever is hidden from the eye.”*

*“Ein habracha metzuyah ella b'davar sh'ein ha'ayin sholetet bo – Blessing is only found on whatever the eye has no control over.”*

### **Third Approach – Psychological Impact:**

**Rav Soloveitchik** (*Shiurei HaRav – HaDarom* 61) wrote –

The matter of the *ayin hara* is crystal clear to me. There are people whose lives are entirely dependent on the thoughts of others – whether they approve of them, forget about them, or praise them. At the moment they realize that others no longer approve of them or care about them – this immediately destroys their spiritual strength and self-confidence... People like this see themselves exclusively from the perspective of others, without recognizing their independent abilities. For people like this, the *ayin hara* can be devastating. When others gaze upon them with an *ayin hara*, meaning some degree of opposition or disapproval, their very humanity can be completely destroyed.

This was the meaning of Rebbe Yochanan when he said – “I am from the offspring of Yosef.” He did not mean he had a tradition that he was actually his descendant, but rather that in this quality he was similar to Yosef. Yosef understood his spiritual strengths from his own recognition, not from the perspective of others. And without this recognition that he had of his own abilities, independent of the values of others, in this case his brothers, Yosef would never have amounted to anything, and his dreams would have immediately ceased.

And finally, Rav Moshe Feinstein wrote (*Igrot Moshe – Even Ha'Ezer* 3:26) –

We definitely need to be concerned with the *ayin hara*, but not overly particular. With these types of matters, the principle is – the one that is not bothered, it doesn't bother him, like we find with the issue of *zugot* (pairs of things) in *Pesachim* 110a.