

Segulot – Part 1 – Introduction and Spiritual Realities – JewishClarity.com

Introduction to *Faith and Folly (Tamim Ti'yeh)*

Rav Yaakov Hillel wrote – *Emuna* is the foundation of Torah, but mistaken faith is forbidden by the Torah. The purpose of this book (*Faith and Folly – Tamim Ti'yeh*) is to clarify the thin line, often a mere hairsbreadth, between the two.

As an example, the use of an intermediary between man and G-d is idolatry, while it is permitted to seek the blessing of a *tzadik* who has achieved closeness to G-d through years of studying the Torah, fulfilling its *mitzvot*, and purifying his character. And the prayers and blessings of one who, beyond his knowledge of the revealed Torah, has also attained the closeness to G-d that comes through the study of the *kabalah*, are the most powerful, and capable of working wonders.

Spiritual Realities – Is there any truth or reality to the spiritual practices which the Torah forbids, or are they merely deception?

The **Rambam** famously held that **sorcery was mere deception**, which the Torah forbids in order to keep the Jewish people from foolishness. He wrote –

All these matters are lies and deception that the original idolaters used to fool the non-Jewish nations to follow after them. It is not fitting for Israel, who are wise Sages, to be drawn after this nonsense, nor to imagine that there is any benefit to them.

Whoever believes in these types of practices and considers that they are true and wise, but the Torah simply forbade them, is foolish and lacking intelligence. (*Hilchos Avoda Zara* 11:16).

As certain as the Rambam was in stating his position, he was virtually the only one among the great Sages throughout the generations to deny any truth or reality to these forbidden spiritual practices.

The **Vilna Gaon** wrote that the Rambam's mistaken view was actually a product of his study of Greek philosophy –

Every [Sage] that came after the Rambam disagreed with him. There are many cases in the *gemara* discussing the use of Divine names and sorcery. The Rambam had been influenced by [Greek] philosophy. Therefore, he wrote that witchcraft, Divine names, incantations, demons and amulets are all false. This was all refuted since we see many actual occurrences in the *gemara* of this. The Torah itself testifies, along with the *Zohar*, that there were serpents [that came from a staff]. And there are numerous cases of amulets and incantations. The [Greek] philosophy caused him to err and view these *gemaras* as nonsense, and to uproot them from their simple understanding. (Commentary to *Shulchan Aruch – Yoreh Deyah* 179:13).

The **Shomer Emunim HaKadmon** (1:13) wrote similarly –

It is well known in many places in the *Gemara* and *Medrash* that there is a power to names and amulets to do remarkable things. The Rambam (in the *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:61-62), however, denied this and strongly ridiculed believers in the power of names to do anything. It is also clear from the *Gemara* and *Medrash* that our Sages accepted the reality of demons and witchcraft. Even so, the Rambam decided that they are nonsense and stupid, with no reality. Although magic is mentioned in the Torah in Egypt and in many different verses, the rationalists still reject it and suggest strange and unlikely explanations to avoid contradicting their perspective.

The **Maharal** not only viewed these spiritual realities as real, he saw them, in some sense, as even more real than physical realities – Altering the *mazel* would involve a great miracle. Without a doubt, changing spiritual realities is more difficult than changing physical ones. The physical power of nature is easier to change than the work of Heaven. Change is more relevant to lowly physical things. (*Gevurot Hashem* – chap. 7).

Rav Yaakov Hillel summarized the topic of spiritual realities by explaining – In order to preserve man's freedom to choose between good and evil, Hashem created worlds of impurity corresponding and parallel to the holy worlds. The worlds of impurity, too, He invested with powers to influence earthly beings.

Ultimately, however, He remains sovereign over all, and retains the power to do as He pleases at all levels of Creation and [even] to change that which has already been decreed and ordained. (*Tamim Ti'yeh*).

Segulot – Part 2 – Nichush (Soothsaying) or Darkei Emori vs. Simanei Milsah (Propitious Signs or Omens) – JewishClarity.com

When it comes to healing, the *Rashbah* wrote – A person who falls sick should not rely on miracles. He should seek the help of a doctor while directing his heart to Heaven in full recognition that Hashem is the true healer... And both *segulot* and amulets that are effective are permitted, just like conventional medicine. (*Teshuvot haRashbah* 1:413, 1:408).

In other words, the *Rashbah* permitted any practice which was known to be effective, whether on the basis of natural laws or *segulot*, even if we don't understand how they work. There simply needs to be a recognition that all healing is ultimately in G-d's hands.

The **Rambam**, however, disagreed – “A person who whispers an incantation over a wound and then recites a verse from the Torah, one who recites a verse over a child so that he will not become scared, or who places a Torah scroll or *tefillin* over a baby so that it will sleep, is not only considered to be a *menachesh* (soothsayer) or a *chover* (one who casts spells). Such people are also included among those who deny the Torah, because [based on *Gemara Shavuot* 15b] they relate to the words of Torah as if they are cures for the body, when they are really cures for the soul.

It is, however, permitted for a healthy person to read verses [from the *Tanach*], particularly chapters from *Tehilim*, so that the merit of reading them will protect him and save him from difficulties and injury. (*Hilchot Avodat Kochavim* 11:12).

The Rambam's position seems to be that reciting verses is allowed if it is done as a prayer, rather than with the belief that they possess magical healing powers, and for protection (like saying the *Shema* before going to sleep at night).

However, since the *Gemara* recorded many examples of in-canting spells to effect healing, other *Rishonim* (Rashi, Rosh, and Ran – *Chullin* 77b) did permit it.

And even the Rambam allowed incantations for one that was bitten by a scorpion or a snake – to settle the mind, or to strengthen the heart of the one that was bitten. Although he held that **they actually accomplish nothing at all**, this was allowed lest the person become distraught (*Hilchot Avodah Zara* 11:11).

The Rambam forbade asking a child – “What verse did you learn?” and **acting** on the reply. However, the Rema (*Yoreh Deyah* 179:4) rules according to the opinion held by other *Rishonim*

(Rashi, Reivad and *Smag*) that it is permitted, and that the child's reply is considered to be like a minor form of prophesy.

The **Gemara Shabbat 67a** states the general principle that everything which has a **clear** therapeutic value has no prohibition of *darkei Emori*. Any method of healing that is not applied directly to the sick person's body is, therefore, forbidden because it has no medical benefit.

The **Meiri** explained that the prohibition of *darkei Emori* was referring to practices that have no real basis to them – neither natural nor supernatural (i.e., *derech segulah*), but are being done by the ignorant masses as an aspect of idolatry.

The **Shulchan Aruch** 301:27, therefore, wrote – All is permitted as long as it is clearly therapeutic (*derech refuah*); otherwise it is *assur* because of *darkei Emori*.

And the **Mishnah Brurah** (#105) explained – Even that which is known to be therapeutic as a *segulah* is also allowed.

The **Shulchan Aruch** 301:27 further stated – All incantations are [also] allowed except for those that were checked and found to be ineffective.

And the **Mishnah Brurah** (#106) explained this – Even incantations that have not yet been proven effective to heal are also permissible. Since we know that some incantations are effective therapeutically, we will say that this one may also heal. The only prohibition is for those that are **known** to be ineffective.

In terms of violating a prohibition for the sake of *segulot*, the **Rambam** (*peirush l'Mishnayot* – *Yuma* 8:4) wrote –

The *halacha* is not according to Rebbe Masiya ben Charash who permitted feeding the liver from a wild dog [i.e., non-kosher meat] to the one that had been bitten by it. This would not help except as a *segula*. And the *Chachamim* (Sages) hold that we can not violate any of the *mitzvot* [such as eating non-kosher meat] except for what will actually heal someone according to normal *teva* (nature), logic and experience. But to attempt to heal through *segulot* is forbidden. Their power is weak, they are not logical, and they have no experience behind them.

In other words, the **Rambam** held that the only practices allowed are those that have some logical basis, either in science or in the laws of nature.

Chazal (the Sages of blessed memory) discussed whether one could carry from one domain to another (i.e., what would normally be a full Torah prohibition) with a *kamia* (amulet) or even a **doubtful** type of *segulah* on Shabbat.

Mishnah Shabbat 6:10 – We may go out with [a *kamia* that was written by an expert (**Gemara Shabbat** 61a),] a locust's egg (hanging from an ear which could heal an earache), with a fox's tooth (from a dead fox for insomnia, and from a live fox for being overly sleepy), or with a nail from a gallows/cross (for swelling on a wound, or for a severe fever) for the purpose of healing – *divrei Rebbe Meir*. But the Sages said that these are forbidden even on a weekday because they are *darkei Emori*. (**Hishtadliyyot Ruchniyyot** – *Perek Daled* – *Kochan shel Segulot v'Kamiyot*).

Gemara Shabbat 66a – A woman may go out on Shabbat with an *even tekuma* – a special type of stone that is considered to be able to prevent miscarriage – even if she is not presently pregnant, but may possibly become pregnant.

Therefore we see, many *segulot* are forbidden because of idolatry, some because of *darkei Emori*, and some because they are simply nonsense. In addition, what may have been an effective *segulah* in the times of *Chazal* may no longer work today, because as *Tosfot* (*Mo'ed Katan* 11a) points out, there are cases where the *teva* (nature) itself has changed. The *Magen Avraham* (173:1), in fact, wrote –

We see many things that the *gemara* told us have the danger of *ruach ra'ah* and other issues, but today are not dangerous. This is because the *teva* (nature) has changed. Everything therefore depends on the *teva* of the place.

Casting Lots

Casting lots to predict the future is forbidden. However, opening a Torah scroll in order to find an answer to a question through the verse that appears (i.e., the method known as *goral haGra*) is permitted, provided that it is done (1) privately and (2) to solve a problem that can not be solved with one's own logic, or with the advice of a Torah scholar. Doing it as a matter of course for the public, however, is forbidden (*Yoreh Deyah* 179:6).

Amulets (*kamiot*) for charm, wealth, influence, success, and the like are strictly forbidden.

The *Sefer Chasidim* wrote – If your prayers are not answered, blame your transgressions. Do not wear an amulet given to you by a gentile or a Jew to help you attain charm, wealth or influence, lest you be like the person who approached a prince with his request after the king had refused it. The only amulets that might be permitted are those for protection against illness or to save a life.

Nefesh HaChaim 3:12 – Based on the verse – “*Ein ode milvado* – there is none besides Him” (*Devarim* 4:39), the Rabbis (*Chulin* 7b) learn that not even magic can work without G-d's consent. Since all of the spiritual powers ultimately come from what Hashem created, He can nullify them entirely. Therefore, there is a great and wondrous *segulah* to remove and prevent all other powers from having any control or effect on us. When one fixes in his heart and declares that only Hashem is real, and that there is no power other than Hashem in the world, and this person absolutely nullifies in his heart, and completely ignores any other force in the world, while clinging entirely with his pure thoughts to Hashem alone, then Hashem eliminates the ability of anything else in the world to affect him at all.

Simanei Milsah (Propitious Signs or Omens)

However, we do sometimes use *simanim* (signs or omens), most commonly with various foods on Rosh Hashanah, seemingly as a good omen for the coming year. Why is that allowed, and not considered to be the prohibition of *nichush* (*soothsaying*)?

The *Gemara Horayot* 12a tells us – We anoint kings only by a flowing spring – a steady reliable source of water – as a good *siman* (sign) that this kingship should last.

The *gemara* then discusses other types of *simanim*: One that wants to know if he will live out the year or not, should light a lamp during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in a house with no wind. If the light continues to burn, steadily and without flickering, we know that he will live out the year.

One who wants to begin some business and to know if he will be successful or not, should raise a rooster – which the Maharal explains is a symbol of *zerizut* (alacrity) – important for success in business. And if the rooster is fat and healthy, he will be successful.

One who wants to know if he will return safely from a journey should stand in a dark house; if he sees a shadow of a shadow (i.e., a double shadow) – then he knows that he will return safely. The Maharal explains that a shadow is a symbol of Divine protection.

The *gemara* objects to this last suggestion [of the shadows] according to Rashi, **or, possibly** to all three suggestions, according to the Meiri – but this is not a good idea because he may become discouraged or depressed [if he doesn't end up seeing the *siman*] and this discouragement may end up weakening his *mazel* (spiritual influence).

Rashi explains that while he may be able to return safely even without seeing the shadows, his not seeing them could hurt his *mazel*, making him more susceptible to some other danger on his journey.

Other examples of *simanim*:

We should pour wine through a pipe in front of a *chatan v'kallah* (groom and bride) as a *siman* that positive *mazel* should flow for them. *Brachot* 50b.

We should learn Torah by a river of water – just like the water flows continuously, our learning should also flow continuously. *Horayot* 12a.

Shulchan Aruch – The accepted practice is not to start something new on *Yom Sheni* (Monday) or *Yom Revi'i* (Wednesday), and not to get married except while the moon is increasing [i.e., the first half of the month]. *Rema* – This is why it is customary to begin a new period of learning on *Rosh Chodesh* because, even though we don't consult divination, we do utilize positive signs. [One should consult with a proper halachic authority to determine whether to follow any of this in practice.] If a person knows that some activity is against *mazel*, he should not do it, since this may then require him to rely on a miracle. This verse – “be *tamim* (wholehearted) with Hashem” prohibits us from **seeking out** this information, [but one could and should utilize the information if it has somehow already come to his attention.]

Why are *simanei milsa* allowed and not considered to be the *issur* of *nichush*?

Me'iri on *Horayot* – Many *simanim* have been permitted, even though they look somewhat similar to *nichush*, in order to inspire our hearts to go in a good path. The Rabbis [specifically] established that we should say words that would inspire us to do *teshuva* [i.e., like the “*yehi ratzon* – May it be G-d's will” on Rosh Hashanah] to ensure that we would not stumble in this and relate to these *simmanim* as *nichush*. Of course, this is only an inspiration; the important point is to do the *teshuva* and good deeds, not merely to say the words. When it comes to nonsensical actions, however, they are both wrong to rely on and forbidden.

***Chayei Adam* –**

We are accustomed to eat foods on Rosh Hashanah that express the idea of a good upcoming year. This is based on the principle of the *Ramban* in *Lech lecha* (*Beresheet* 12:6) – the rule of *ma'aseh avot siman l'banim* – what occurred to the *Avot* (forefathers) was an indication of what would later occur to their descendants. When a heavenly decree is expressed in a physical act – that crystallizes it and ensures that it will ultimately be fulfilled. *Nevi'im* (prophets) would, therefore, often do physical actions for their *nevu'ot* to be established. In a similar way, what we do at the beginning of the year, with the *simanim* that we eat on Rosh Hashanah, can ultimately affect the whole year to be good. And, therefore, it is obvious that we need to [also] be extremely careful not to get angry on these days [at the beginning of the year] in order that we will have a

[truly] good year. Our hearts should simply be proper and filled with *simcha*, trusting in Hashem, along with *teshuva* and good deeds.

Maharal based himself on the same *Ramban* in *Lech lecha* (*Bereshit* 12:6) –

Simanei milsa are no problem of *nichush*. *Nichush* is only when there is **no logical connection** between a particular action and what it leads to. These *simanim* don't act as a cause at all, but rather they simply facilitate something that had already begun to then be able to finish. (*Be'er HaGolah* #2).

Mishnah Brurah –The *Eliyahu Raba* wrote in the name of the *Shelah* [in terms of the *simanim* that we eat on Rosh Hashanah] –

One should be inspired to do *teshuva* when saying the “*yehi ratzon*” and be sure to recite it with a *leiv shaleim* (complete heart). Since we are doing all of these as a *siman tov* for the new year, it is obvious that we should be extremely careful not to get angry during these days [as well] in order that it really will end up being a *siman tov*. Rather our hearts should be filled with *simcha* and we should trust in Hashem with our *teshuva* and good deeds.

Summary – While these *simanim* do affect things, they are not at all the only factors that matter. As both the *Chayeh Adam* and the *Mishna Brura* emphasize – we need to be very careful not to get angry on Rosh Hashanah. And while *simanim* do work, they also have a danger – if something goes wrong, they may end up psychologically affecting us negatively.

While **changing one's name** may have some metaphysical impact, the **Rambam** (*Hilchot Teshuva* 2:4) speaks about it specifically as a part of the *teshuva* process, what he calls – *darchei hateshuva* (the ways of *teshuva*).

The principle of the **Ramban** on *Lech lecha* (*Bereshit* 12:6) – *ma'aseh avot siman l'banim* also explains the *Gemara Chulin* 95a, that while *Bayit*, *Tinok*, and *Isha* (house, baby, and woman) are not *nichush*, they do act as *simanim*. The *gemara* says –

If after one builds a house, has a baby, or marries a woman, he has success, that is a *siman* that he will continue to have success. And if after these three things he does not have success, that is a *siman* that he will not be likely to have success afterwards either. *To'elet HaSimanim* (*Hishtadliyyot Ruchniyyot* – *Perek Gimmel*).

Rav Asher Weiss explains that the **Rambam** holds the only reason *Bayit*, *Tinok*, and *Isha* are not *nichush*, but rather permissible *simanim*, is because there is no physical action which is being done with them. The person is simply strengthening himself in his heart that these are positive *simanim*. And it seems logical that this would also be the basis of the Rambam's allowance of all of the *simanim* that are used on Rosh Hashanah.

After discussing the topic of *simanei milsa*, **Rav Asher Weiss** concludes – “And besides the words of the early Sages, it seems reasonable to say that with all these *segulot* and *simanim* that were passed down to us from *Chazal* and established with *ruach hakodesh* (a type of Divine inspiration), there is no prohibition or concern. However, all non-Jewish customs and all which is similar to them, which have no source in *Chazal*, they are all included within the prohibition of “*lo t'nachshu*.”

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.

Segulot – Part 4 – Mazel – JewishClarity.com

While the *gemara* discusses whether or not there is *mazel* (astrological influence) for the Jewish people, it seems clear to all of the classical sources (besides the **Rambam** who viewed it as nonsense) that *mazel* is a spiritual reality which definitely does affect the Jewish people, along with the entire creation. The discussion in the *gemara* involves how great the impact of *mazel* is specifically on the Jewish people, both individually and communally, and how much they can overcome this influence.

Bereshit Rabba (10:6) says this clearly –

There is not a single plant or blade of grass that does not have a *mazel* that strikes it and says – “grow.”

The *Zohar* said similarly –

Everything is influenced by the *mazel* (i.e., constellations).

The **Zohar** (*Shemot* 171b) explained –

There is a ruler appointed over all of the stars and constellations. Every single blade of grass has its own star and constellation that rules over it. And each star has its own ruler who also serves before Hashem. Ultimately, every star serves the world by supervising one object in the world.

The *Zohar* explained further –

When the Torah was given, the people of Israel were chosen to be the portion of Hashem, with their souls bound to Him. They went out of the sphere of influence of the *mazel* and into the sphere of influence of the upper levels of sanctity – on condition that they would learn Torah and keep the *mitzvot*.

In terms of the impact that *mazel* has upon us, Rava said (*Gemara Mo'ed Katan* 28a) –

[Length of] life, [number of] children, and wealth do not depend [only] on merit, but rather, on *mazel*. He supported this with the story of Rabbah and Rav Chisda who were both completely righteous sages, as we see from the fact that both of their prayers for rain were answered. Yet they seem to have had very different *mazel*. Rav Chisda lived 92 years, while Rabbah lived only until 40. Rav Chisda's household had 60 weddings, while Rabbah's household suffered 60 deaths. Rav Chisda's household had enough fine flour bread even for the dogs, while Rabbah's household struggled to find enough lowly barley bread for people.

The *Gemara* (***Shabbat* 156a**) addressed the roots of *mazel* –

It was written in R. Yehoshua ben Levi's notebook that the **day** of the week we are born will affect us: *Yom Rishon* – Extremely good or extremely bad; *Yom Sheini* – angry or irritable; *Yom Shlishi* – wealthy and promiscuous, *Yom Revi'i* – wise and shining; *Yom Chamishi* – kind and giving; *Yom Shishi* – hard-working; Shabbat – great and holy person.

1. Chanina, however, taught – One's *mazel* does not depend on which day he was born, but rather, the **hour** he was born (i.e., which of the seven planets was dominant then)... [As an example,] one that is born during the hour of Mars will be a spiller of blood... [with the choice to be] a blood letter or a thief, a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) or a *mohel* (performing circumcisions).
2. Chanina held – “*yeish mazel l'Yisrael* – there **is** *mazel* in Israel,” while others held – “*ein mazel l'Yisrael* – there is **no** *mazel* in Israel.”

However, all three stories the *gemara* (***Shabbat* 156b**) uses to show – “*ein mazel l'Yisrael*” simply show that certain actions, like a great level of *tzedaka* or instilling a great *yirat Shamayim* [fear of Heaven] from a young age, can overcome a negative *mazel*.

Rabeinu Bachye wrote –

According to what is known, G-d fixed in the Heavens the paths of the stars and gave them the power to influence that which is beneath them. Therefore, these stars have either constructive or destructive influence in this world, and everything seems to be dependent on the specific influence of *mazel*. Our Sages did not deny or reject this notion and, in fact, some of them were expert astrologers... Even though Hashem gave *mazel* this power over the lower realms, it is not absolute power, since Hashem retains control over the stars. Hashem has the power to bring low the mighty and to elevate the lowly. He can sustain that which was decreed by the stars, or increase or decrease their influence.

Rabeinu Bachye –

When the Rabbis teach – *Ein mazel l'Yisrael* (Israel is not governed by *mazel*), the explanation is that the Jewish people are not governed by *mazel*, but every individual Jew is. The Rabbis would never have contradicted the great and esteemed science of astrology.

The **Ran** (**Derashot HaRan** #8) qualified how *mazel* impacts us –

When it comes to *mitzvot* and transgressions, *mazel* only gives an orientation, it doesn't force one's behavior... While Rebbe Chanina and Rebbe Yochanan argue over whether *mazel* affects *Yisrael*, both of them agree that *mazel* does affect intelligence and wealth, but not *mitzvot* and transgressions. [In other words,] *mazel* affects the physical, not the spiritual... The Rabbis argue whether *mitzvot* can protect one from the harm of *mazel*, but agree that this world is run through *mazel*.

The **Ran** (Sanhedrin 65b) explained further –

Authentic astrology is real, and *mazel* will impact our nature unless we work to overcome it. As the *Gemara Shabbat* (156a) says – the time when we are born will affect our traits. We can use this information to try to overcome anything negative from the *mazel*... The Ramban said that the only prohibition is to make an inquiry, but one is permitted to guard oneself against harm [i.e., from the *mazel* if one happens to find out what it says], and this seems correct. The Rambam, however, forbids all of this as divination, which is difficult to understand.

The **Nimukei Yosef** (*Sanhedrin* 16b DH Tanu) wrote –

The understanding that people have about the arrangements of the stars and their influences is not *nichush* (sorcery) but rather a great wisdom. Hashem arranged to run the world this way [through the constellations] from the very beginning of creation. Therefore, every *chassid* (pious individual) should daven to nullify the decree of the *mazel* from himself. Everything comes from Hashem and He has the ability to change it as He desires.

The **Meiri** (Shabbat 156) wrote –

We follow the *gemara* which tells us that Jews are generally not controlled by *mazel*, and disregard the opinion that says Jews are controlled by *mazel*... This means that we are confident that reward and punishment, based on the actions that we ourselves choose, [ultimately] determine everything, and not *mazel*... If, for example, one is born under the constellation of Mars, and is a blood spiller by nature, he will still have full freedom of choice, with nothing pushing him to transgress. Through the guidelines of the religion, one can control his nature, as opposed to simply following after one's inborn inclinations. Through effort and struggle one can fulfill the purpose of the Torah by overcoming his nature.

The great majority of the Sages followed the **Ramban's** opinion (*Devarim* 18:9) concerning the spiritual reality of *mazel* –

In terms of sorcery... Hashem placed power over the earth and everything on it in the stars and constellations... as has been proven empirically in the science of astrology. And over these stars and constellations, Hashem further placed angels and celestial ministers in control, who are the life force of those stars... However, it was among G-d's mighty wonders that He incorporated within the power of these supernal controllers certain possibilities of change and capabilities to alter the control exerted by that which is beneath them... And this is the secret behind the sorcery and their power, which the Sages said – “they contravene the celestial legion” (*Chulin* 7b). This means that they are contrary to the ordinary powers [of the universe], and they are contrary to the legion [of stars and constellations] in one particular aspect. It is, therefore, logical that the Torah should prohibit them so that the world may be left to carry on its ordinary conduct and natural state, which is the desire of the Creator... All this is not an abomination among the nations; on the contrary, it is considered a mark of wisdom for them. In fact, the *medrash* tells us that Shlomo *HaMelech* learned this among his many fields of wisdom. It was the acts of **sorcery** [not astrology] which are an abomination before Him... The Jews are beyond the influence of the

constellations... Their situation improves as they improve their deeds or increase their bonding to Hashem through prayer and learning Torah.

Ibn Ezra (*Shemot* 20:1) wrote –

G-d rules over the nations of the world through the structure of the *mazel*, whether for good or bad. While, according to the system of the *mazel*, the Jews should have continued to be slaves, through G-d's love of the forefathers, His power created a different reality from the *mazel*. G-d thereby removed the Jews from the control of *mazel* to make them His inheritance. Our Sages, therefore, said that Israel has no *mazel*.

Ibn Ezra (*Shemot* 33:21) then pointed out –

The statement of our Sages (*Shabbat* 156a) that there is no *mazel* for Israel, is only true if they observe the Torah. If they don't follow the Torah, however, then *mazel* will control them as we see... This has occurred for both the nation and the individual.

The **Maharal** (*Shabbat* 156a) addressed the concept of “*Ein mazel l'Yisrael*” –

This means that it is possible to affect the impact of *mazel* through the merit of *mitzvot*. This change of the *mazel* can occur even without prayer; a mitzvah itself can affect the impact of the *mazel*. But prayer can [also] certainly change the *mazel*, since G-d can do whatever He wants in heaven and earth.

While “*Ein mazel l'Yisrael*” is referring to the overall Jewish community, even individual Jews can affect the impact of their *mazel* through *mitzvot*. The Jewish people are not affected by *mazel* because of their elevated reality, and individual Jews can attain that [elevation] through their *mitzvot*. This doesn't mean that *mazel* has no affect on Jews. Everything [in existence actually] depends on the influence of the *mazel*...

However, “*Ein mazel l'Yisrael*” means that *mazel* never controls everything like with the other nations. The principle is that Jews can transcend the influence of *mazel* when they are on their true spiritual level, and not limited by their transgressions... Similarly, individual Jews can rise above the influence of *mazel* through doing *mitzvot*.

The **Maharal** (*Shabbat* 156a) clarified –

There is no prohibition of seeking out an astrologer or relying on various *simanim* (signs) for a mitzvah. Otherwise, this would be a violation of *tamim ti'yeh* (being complete with G-d).

The **Meshech Chochma** (*Devarim* 4:19) wrote –

It is well known that the the nations are governed through the intermediary of *mazel*... This is not true for the Jewish nation. They are directed exclusively through *hashgacha pratit* (personal [Divine] supervision), and not *mazel*.

And, finally, the **Chafetz Chaim** (*Sheim Olam* 1:3) clarified –

Hashem appointed a *mazel* above everything, as we say – There is no blade of grass below which does not have a *mazel* above it. This *mazel* is the source of its sustenance and what allows it to grow. However, we should never think that Hashem removed His *hashgacha* (supervision) and allowed the *mazel* to control it as an independent power. That is [certainly] not true. G-d Himself is the only power in the Heaven above and on the earth below... The *mazel* is merely the

agent to do G-d's will, and Hashem will alter the *mazel* whenever He wants, as we know with the leaving [of the Jewish people] from Egypt.

In some cases, however, it seems that it is simply not possible to overcome the *mazel*.

The *Gemara Ta'anit* 25a tells the story of Rebbe Elazar ben Pedat who was exceedingly poor. One time he let some blood (a practice done for health) but had nothing to eat afterwards. He became weak and passed out, and later recounted what had happened in his dream or vision.

Rebbe Elazar asked Hashem – How long will my difficulties continue in this world?

Hashem answered him – Would you like me to recreate the world from the beginning? [If so,] then **perhaps** you would be born [with positive *mazel*] for income.

Since this would only have **possibly** helped his situation, and he had already lived the majority of his life, Rebbe Elazar declined the offer [to recreate the world]. Hashem then showed him the enormous *s'char* (benefit) that awaited him in *Olam Haba*.

Rav Dessler, in the name of the Radak, pointed out that the word *mazel* comes from the *shoresh* (root) of *nazel* (flow), and is expressing a flow from above to below. It refers to the tools and environment that one is given to fulfill their role in this world. From the words of *Tosfot* it appears that there is really no *machlokut* (argument) – in some cases the *mazel* can not be changed, and in some it can be changed through a great *zechut* (merit). We need to understand what it is which determines whether the *mazel* can be changed or not.

Sometimes one's poverty or wealth is merely a tool to fulfilling one's role in the world, and then it would be possible for it to change.

But sometimes, how one deals with poverty or wealth is the actual task [of one's life], and then it can not be changed at all.

In a case where some aspect of one's life is not central to their role in the world and it would, therefore, be possible for it to change, that is where a change in one's place or one's name could contribute to a change in one's *mazel*. That is [what is expressed by] the popular expression – “*Meshaneh makom, meshaneh mazel* – Change [your] place, change [your] *mazel*.” And this is also the basis of the custom brought by the Rema in *Yoreh Deyah* 335:10 to change the name of one that is very ill – “since a *shinui sheim* (change in name) can tear up the *gazar din* (decree) of a person.”

Rav Dessler explained further –

Whatever is required for one to obtain his portion in *Olam Haba* has been given to him – both the means and whatever assistance is required is precisely provided... This is also the subject of *mazel*... In other words, the *mazel* is selected before birth to provide the person with the necessary means for his service of G-d.

A person has the ability to change his *mazel*, as we say – *shinui makom shinui mazel* (change [your] place, change [your] *mazel*)... When he changes his *mazel*, his means of serving G-d also changes. Thus a person can expand or build upon what he has through *mazel* so that he will [be able to obtain] a greater portion in *Olam Haba*.

The *sefer Hishtadliyyot Ruchniyyot* (Perek Vav – *Shinui HaMazel*) sums up the topic of *mazel* by explaining –

The foundation of our *emunah* is that whatever happens to a person is dependent on his actions. However, we also find that everyone has a certain *mazel*.

While the whole topic of *mazel* is quite complicated, *Tosfot* (*Mo'ed Katan* 28a dh – *ela*) concludes that *mazel* does, in fact, impact us. And there are some situations where we are [actually] unable to change our *mazel*. Other times, however, we are able to change our *mazel* through a great *zechut*. And it may be that this is specifically what the different arguments are all about – [not whether there is *mazel* which affects us, but rather] to what degree we are able to change our *mazel*.

Segulot – Part 5 – The Very Best Segulot of all

There are actually numerous *segulot* that not only have no risks, but are the ones that our greatest Rabbis and sources have constantly urged us to utilize and practice. The book “*Eitzot l'z'chut b'din b'yamim hanora'im* – Advice to merit a [positive] judgment on the Days of Awe,” from Rav Chanoch Karrelenstein, discusses many of these exemplary practices that are virtually guaranteed to help us in so many different ways.

Chapter One – “Kol Hama'avir al midotav – Ma'avirin lo al kol p'sha'av”

“*Kol HaMa'avir al Midotav – Ma'avirin lo al kol P'sha'av* – All that overlook what happened to them – all of their own transgressions are [also] overlooked.” (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a).

Rashi explains that this person is not *medakdeik limdod midah l'metza'arin oto* – he is not particular to respond proportionally to someone that caused him pain.

Rabbeinu Chananeil wrote that one will have years added to their life because of this.

Based on the *Selichot*, we learn that through *s'virat hamiddot* (breaking or conquering our character traits) we will merit to *rachamei Shamayim* (mercy from Heaven). And one of the very greatest *s'virat hamiddot* would be to not respond even if someone degrades us. As it says in *Gemara Shabbat* 88b – One that is degraded but doesn't degrade back, one that is insulted but doesn't insult back, is viewed by the verse (*Shofetim* 5:31) as possessing incredible strength and power.

The Rambam points out in *Hilchot Teshuva* (7:3) that the obligation of *teshuva* (returning from negative behavior) certainly includes working on bad *middot*. This is very logical since *tikun hamiddot* (fixing one's character traits) is the *yesod* and *hakdamah* (foundation and introduction) to the entire Torah (*Rabeinu Yonah* on *Avot* 3:17 and *Sha'arei Kedusha* from Rav Chaim Vital 1:2).

Ideally, one should not even be *makpid* (particular or resentful) in one's heart, but rather accept this [degradation] with love, and forgive the other person with a full heart and a willing spirit. The *Arizal* said that if a person would know just how valuable this disgrace was for him, he would [actually] chase after these people in order for them to disparage him. This is [significantly] more beneficial for him than other types of afflictions or fasts.

Hashem establishes the world in the merit of those that hold themselves back in a time of conflict (based on *Chulin* 89a).

The *Zohar* (1:106b and 1:54a) wrote similarly that the world is only established in the merit of those that are *ma'avir al midotav* (overlook what happens to them). Furthermore, they will have a good life in the world to come, merit to be saved from difficulties in this world, and Hashem will relate to them with *middat harachamim* (the trait of mercy).

To help us to conquer our *middot* and to restrain ourselves from conflict, we should simply try to think ahead. In a conflict, we generally have two different possibilities. If we lash out at the other person, it may initially feel good but afterwards we will probably regret it. Or we can hold ourselves back, conquer our *middot* and anger, and keep quiet. While this will be extremely difficult to do initially; in the end, when we have overcome our anger, this will be very sweet. We will feel great that we kept control over ourselves. [Therefore,] by looking ahead it will be much easier to hold ourselves back.

Another insight to help us overlook what happened to us is what the *Sefer HaChinuch* wrote in terms of the prohibitions of *nakima* and *natira* (not to take revenge or bear a grudge). The prohibitions against *nakima* and *natira* help us to appreciate that whatever pain or difficulty people cause us, is actually coming to us from heaven; these people were merely the agents carrying it out. What is happening is, therefore, really a function of our own actions and choices, not theirs.

What is the logic of *ma'avir al midotav* (overlooking what happened to us) resulting in *ma'avirin lo al kol p'sha'av* (all of our transgressions then being overlooked)?

The **Chidah** says that this will cause a *kaparah* (spiritual cleansing) for our transgressions.

The **Rambam** (*Hilchot Teshuva* 1:4) explains that some *aveirot* will only be able to have a complete *kaparah* once one has undergone *yissurim* (painful afflictions). The pain of overlooking what happened to us can serve as these *yissurim*.

And the *sefer Torat Asham* says that one who is *ma'avir al midotav*, easily appeased, and neither takes revenge nor bears a grudge, will thereby merit to have miracles and wonders done for him, will be saved, will have his days and years lengthened, his prayers heard, the entire world will be established for him, and he will also merit to acquire Torah. Implied in his words is that this will also help him to deal with pain and *yissurim*.

Besides all of the help that this will give him in this world, this will also give him a treasure in *Olam Haba*. The *sefer Yesod HaAvodah* (3:3:4) wrote –

“A small amount of pain in this world is equal to a thousand times more pain in *Olam Haba*.”

The *yissurim* (pain and difficulty) that come from the struggle of *tikun v'hitgabrut hamiddot* (fixing and controlling our character traits) are considered *yissurim* that come from the Torah. Through [accepting] these types of *yissurim*, other *yissurim* will [then] be held back from us.

It is well known from the *Gra* (*Even Shleima* 1:62) that –

“The essential existence of a person is to constantly strengthen himself with *s'virat hamiddot* (breaking or conquering his character traits). And if not, what then is his life for?”

The *Porat Yosef* (*Lech lecha*) also wrote –

“I heard in the name of *Rabeinu Sadya Gaon* that the essential existence of a person in this world is *s'virat hamiddot ra'ot* (breaking or conquering one's negative character traits).

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein told his students that *s'virat hamiddot* (breaking or conquering one's character traits) also helps for the *illuy neshama* (elevation of the soul) for one that had passed away. It is, therefore, clear that both *s'virat hamiddot* and being *ma'avir al midotav*, will be a [great] *zechut* (merit) for life and for all good.

Some *Rishonim* say that if one does not do *teshuva* for *aveirot bein adam l'chaveiro* (transgressions between a person and his friend) through requesting *selicha* (forgiveness), then he will not be able to gain a *kaparah* on *Yom Kippur* even for different *aveirot bein adam l'makom* (transgressions between a person and G-d). This is actually very logical – how is it possible that Hashem would be *ma'avir al midotav* (overlooking what this person did against Him) if this person, who is base and physical, will not himself be *ma'avir al midotav* (overlook what happened to him)?

Based on *Baba Metziah* 30b, we see that since the Jewish people did not act *lifnim m'r'shurat hadin* (beyond the letter of the law), *Yerushalayim* was destroyed. If, however, they would have acted *lifnim m'r'shurat hadin*, they would have merited to [great] prosperity in Israel.

All *s'virat hata'avot* (breaking or conquering one's desires) arouse *midat harachamim* (the trait of mercy) for a person. And this is even more true for *s'virat hamiddot* (breaking or conquering one's character traits), which is *s'virat hata'avot* of the *nefesh*, and much more difficult to accomplish.

Some other *segulot* discussed in *Eitzot l'z'chut b'din* that our greatest Rabbis and sources have constantly urged us to utilize and practice:

Kol hameracheim al habriot – merachamin alav min haShamayim – All that are merciful towards people – mercy is given to him from Heaven.

Rabim tzrichim lo – One that is needed by the community.

Chizuk amal haTorah – Strengthening toil in Torah.

Hevei dan es kol ha'adam l'chaf zechut – Judging everyone to the side of merit.

***Segulot* from Rabbi Dovid Winiarz:**

For wealth – Give *Maaser* (10% of your income to *tzedaka*). Hashem promises He will then open the windows of Heaven and shower blessings upon you.

The *Vilna Gaon* wrote that one who keeps his mouth shut in this world [i.e., from speaking negatively] will merit the hidden light of *Gan Eden* (i.e., **for insights in Torah**).

To protect you from punishment – Don't speak *lashon hara*. Just as you keep your mouth closed about the misdeeds of others, Hashem will force the Prosecuting Angel to keep his mouth closed about you too.

The most guaranteed *segulot* are what we say in the davening on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – that *teshuva*, *tzedaka*, and *tefillah* (prayer) nullify negative decrees.

The Ger Rebbe said that the best *segulah* would be to fulfill the *possuk* in *Yitro* – to strive to be G-d's treasured people.

Segulah for *shalom bayit* – *ahavah*, *savlanut* (bearing challenges) and *vitur* (giving in) (*Sanhedrin* 7a, *Baba Metzia* 59a, *Vayikra Rabba* 9:9).

Segulot from Rav Aviner:

Rav Chaim Kanievsky was once asked – “How do we know which *segulot* are true?” His response – “I only know that which is written in the *Shulchan Aruch*.” *Segulot Raboteinu* pg. 321.

Belzer Rebbe – Rav Aharon Rokeach – *Segulah* against traffic accidents – Follow the traffic laws with the strictness of the 10 Commandments, and also give rides to those who need them. In the merit of these kindnesses which he does on the road, he will be saved from bad occurrences (*Shut Shevet Ha-Kehati* 5:241).

One of the most well-known segulot for a long life is what the verse in *Tehillim* tells us – “Who is the man that desires life and loves days of seeing good? Let him guard his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking evil.” (*Tehillim* 34:13-14).

Rav Chaim Kanievski related that someone once came to the *Brisker Rav* and asked for a *bracha* that his son should be a Torah scholar and G-d-fearing. The *Rav* said that a boy will be a Torah scholar based on how much his father learns Torah with him, and he will be G-d-fearing based on how many tears his mother sheds while davening for him (*Minchat Todah* p. 89).

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein wrote (*U-Piryo Matok – Bereshit*, p. 140) a *segulah* for *Shalom Bayit* – A husband should help his wife or, more precisely, the two of them should take care of the family's needs together, since theirs is a shared life. Once, on a Saturday night, the *Satmar Rebbe* saw that one of his *chasidim* was the last one still in the *Beit Midrash* and was folding his *talit* with great precision. The *Rebbe* asked him what he was doing. The *Chasid* said that he saw in various books that care in folding one's *talit* is a *segulah* for *shalom bayit*. The *Rebbe* responded – **A better segulah is to go home and help your wife wash the dishes.** (Others say this in the name of Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, *Rosh Yeshivat Mir*).

Segulot – Part 6 – Segulot sometimes don't work, Better Alternatives to Segulot, Proper attitudes, and “Tamim ti'yeh im Hashem Elokecha”

Segulot sometimes don't work

How do we understand that sometimes, even with the use of *segulot*, what we were hoping would happen may still not actually occur?

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (quoted in *Hishtadliyyot Ruchniyyot* – chap. 1, pg. 21) suggested that sometimes the cost for a request to be answered could be greater than its benefit. The example he gives is the [strong] davening that Yitzchak and Rivka did to have children with no more delay. As a result of Eisav and Yaakov being born five years earlier than they would have been without the *tefillot*, Avraham ultimately needed to lose five years of his life, to avoid seeing Aisav “*yotzei l'tarbus ra'ah* – going out to a negative life.” While they were certainly correct to *daven* for children, which they ultimately did receive, when we ourselves don't get what we desperately want, with or without *segulot*, we should try to remember that there may be factors beyond our understanding that are blocking our request.

Better Alternatives to Segulot

Rav Irons once said – “We used to be an “*am segula*” (treasured nation), and now we’ve become *am hasegulah* – a nation with *segulot*.”

The method to achieving the greatest degree of success, of course, is simply by learning Torah, doing the *mitzvot*, and refining one's character.

Eliyahu haNavi taught his disciples – I call heaven and earth to witness that anyone – man or woman, gentile or Jew, freeman or slave – can have Divine inspiration come upon him. It all depends upon his deeds. (*Tanna d'vei Eliyahu Rabbah* – chap. 9).

Rav Yaakov Hillel pointed out – Throughout the generations, there have been many holy leaders who reached high levels without knowing *kabbalah*, and [conversely] there have been many people who dabbled in *kabbalah* improperly, and achieved nothing but evil.

Proper attitude with *segulot*

Perhaps the clearest statement about the attitude that we should have with *segulot* is spelled out by the **Mishnah** in **Rosh Hashanah** 3:8. The *Mishnah* quotes the verse (*Shemot* 17:11) – “And it happened that when Moshe raised his hand – Yisrael was stronger, and when he lowered his hand – Amalek was stronger.” The *Mishnah* then asked – “But do the hands of Moshe win the battle or lose the battle?” Rather, the verse comes to say – “As long as Yisrael gazed upward and subjugated their heart to their Father in heaven, they overpowered them [their enemies], but if not, they would fall.”

And similarly, [it quoted the verse] – “Hashem told Moshe – Make yourself a fiery [serpent] and place it on a pole, and it will be that anyone who is bitten will look at it and live.” The *Mishnah* asked again – “But does a serpent kill and does a serpent give life?” Rather, when Yisrael gazed upward and subjugated their heart to their Father in heaven, they were healed, but if not, they perished.”

We need to remember that the most that any *segulah* can ever be is a tool to help us to connect more effectively with Hashem.

As **Rav Berkowitz** explained – Any *segulah* only works (and is therefore permissible) if it helps your *kavana* (intention to connect with Hashem); whereas treating it merely like a good-luck charm could, G-d forbid, end up approaching *avoda zara* (idolatry). We need to ask ourselves – Are we looking for something external to change us, or are we willing to put in the effort to change ourselves?

In addition, **Rav Wolbe** wrote – We have a tradition from our master, the **Chazon Ish**, that some prayers are answered more quickly than others, but no prayer returns unanswered. Why then should we seek a blessing through a back door [i.e., with *segulot*]? The gates of prayer are open before us when we pray from the depths of our heart and with tears. The great men to whom people turn for help [i.e., with *segulot*] should teach the public to pray, and tell them that – “Hashem will not withhold good from those who walk [with Him] wholeheartedly.” (*Tehilim* 84:12).

The “flipside” of *segulot*, and the guiding principle in Judaism, is – “*Tamim ti'yeh im Hashem Elokecha* – You shall be wholehearted with G-d, your L-rd.” (*Devarim* 10:12).

Rashi explains that this verse refers to our **relationship with Hashem** –

[We should] walk with Hashem wholeheartedly, look ahead to Him (i.e., trust what He has in store for us), and not investigate the future. Rather, accept whatever comes upon us wholeheartedly. We will then be with Him, and [among] His portion.

***Ohr HaChaim* –**

Since He commanded us [in the preceding verses] not to engage in negative spiritual activities, He now tells us to be wholehearted. There is no reason to violate any of these [prohibitions] to [try to] know the future or to fix any lack. If you are with Hashem wholeheartedly, then you will not lack anything.

Ramban –

Dedicate our hearts to Hashem alone since only He knows the future, and He is the power above all powers. There **are** powers out there but we should not be limited to that. Hashem is the *Baal hakochot kulam* (Master of all powers). [*"Tamim ti'yeh"*] not only involves prohibitions, it is also a *mitzvat asei* (positive obligation).

We shall wholly dedicate our hearts to Him and realize that He alone does everything. He is the one who knows the real truth of every future event, and from Him alone should we inquire about the future, through His prophets or the *Urim v'Tumim*. We should not inquire of the stargazers, or trust that their words will be fulfilled completely. Rather, if we hear a statement from them, we should say – *Hakol biyedei Shamayim* (All is in the hands of Heaven), for He is the G-d over all the powers, Who alters the arrangements of the stars and the constellations as He wishes. And we should believe that all that occurs to a person is according to how close he has made himself to the service of Hashem. Therefore, after the Torah prohibits inquiring about future events from a diviner or one that consults with the dead, it states that you should be wholehearted with Hashem in all these matters. This is also the opinion of Onkeles, who translates this verse as – “You shall be complete in the fear of G-d your L-rd,” meaning that you should not be lacking in your fear of Him. The word *tamim* means whole, as in a *keves tamim* (whole lamb), meaning with no blemish or anything missing. This verse is a *mitzvat asei* (positive commandment).

Rav Binyamin Zilber explains that according to the Ramban, G-d's instruction to Avraham – “Go before Me and be perfectly faithful,” is the first *mitzvat asei* (positive commandment) [that G-d gave to him]. This means that a person should not try to search out the future and look into horoscopes, for Hashem can change a horoscope from good to bad, and vice versa.

***Sefer Chareidim* –**

The elevated mitzvah of *bitachon* – to trust in Hashem, is learned from this mitzvah to be *tamim* (Dev. 18:13). This teaches us that it is a mitzvah to trust in Hashem with all of our heart, and in terms of every aspect of this world.

Rav Hirsch –

Just like *tamim* with *korbanot* means a complete animal, with no flaws or blemishes at all to disqualify it, [*"tamim ti'yeh"*] refers to a complete wholehearted devotion and trust with Hashem with nothing missing at all. The goal of *temimut* (wholeness) in our relationship with Hashem is a complete surrender of our entire being and a *bitul* (nullification) of everything besides Hashem – both internally and externally.

Maharal (Be'er HaGolah #2) –

The notion that being *tamim* with Hashem would mean not to guard ourselves from danger, and simply to be naive with all of our actions, since Hashem will protect us, is irrational. We are not supposed to rely on miracles. G-d gave man wisdom and knowledge to be able to be an intelligent person with all of his actions, so why shouldn't he protect himself from harmful things? The Torah commanded us to be *tamim* with G-d and not to follow after negative spiritual practices, like saying that some times are good for certain activities or similar things. However, to guard oneself from danger, and to think about one's life situation, is what any intelligent person would do, without using sorcery or magic. This is so obvious that there is no need for any elaboration. Whoever would think this [irresponsible notion] is simply lacking intelligence and is wrong.

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