

Parasha Balak

Should I be Afraid of *Ayin Hara* (The Evil Eye)?



Dear Rebbetzin Chana Bracha,

I'm concerned about *Ayin Hara*. Last week, someone commented on my special water bottle: how nice and unique it was. The next day it broke. Similar kinds of things happen often to me and to people I know. For example, someone asked my friend if she could look at her chicken coop to get an idea of how to make her own. The next day my friend found one of her favorite chickens dead. This could not be just a random incident, since none of her chickens had died for the last several months. I've become really afraid of the evil eye. Each time someone mentions something nice that I have or do, I cringe inside with fear that I may now lose it. I am trying my hardest to hide whatever I get that is new, but you cannot hide everything, like a new car! On the other hand, I've heard that *Ayin Hara* has no power if you don't believe in it. Yet, how can I not believe in the evil eye when I have experienced time after time the loss of something precious, soon after someone has been enchanted by it?

Ma'ayan Iris (name changed)

Dear Ma'ayan,

I can understand that you are concerned about *Ayin Hara*. Although it is said that the evil eye doesn't harm people who don't believe in it, nevertheless, the Torah, Talmud and Halacha are replete with cases of *Ayin Hara*. Moreover, the Sages were very careful to protect themselves against *Ayin Hara*, and established numerous halachic guidelines to protect oneself from *הזקק ראייה/hezek reiyah* – the damage of the eye. For example, we do not call a father and son up to the Torah one after the other, in order to avoid *Ayin Hara* (*Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim* 141). It is forbidden to stand by the neighbor's field and look when the crops are high, in order not to damage them by *Ayin Hara*... It is good manners, when one sees one's neighbor busy at his work to bless him, "May you succeed in your work" (*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 183:6, *Laws of Financial Damage*). Some people do not believe in *Ayin Hara*, claiming, "I'm the master of my own destiny; therefore other people's energy cannot hurt me." There is truth to this claim but it is not exact. We do have free will, but so does the person who sends negative energy. Therefore, we need to find the right balance between taking protective precautions without becoming overly neurotic about *Ayin Hara* and negative energy. Too much preoccupation and fear of *Ayin Hara* lowers our vibration and makes us more susceptible, according to the principle of, "what you resist persists."

The Human Eye Has Power to Affect Our Environment

Just as we are surrounded by air that cannot be seen, so is there invisible energy all around us. When we come into a holy place, where people, who are close to Hashem think holy thoughts, pray, learn Torah and perform mitzvot, we can feel the holy energy. On the other hand, in a place where people with negative thoughts and actions reside, negative energy can be sensed. Dr. Masaru Emoto found that human thought has the power to directly affect the world around us. He demonstrated this with pictures of frozen water under a microscope, after people had directed their thoughts at the water. Amazingly, when subjected to good thoughts, the frozen water crystalized into beautiful shapes. Conversely, when people thought negative thoughts near the water, the shapes became lop-sided and ugly. Even more potent than thoughts, the human eye is an energy center that can send out

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either negative or positive energy. By means of looking, a person affects reality, through *Ayin Hara*, and *Ayin Tova* (The Good Eye). *Ayin Tova* has an even greater influence (Rav Tzadok of Lublin, *Takanat Hashavin* 6). Some people have a high threshold of susceptibility to negative energy, but even they are not always able to avoid the influence of very high density of *Ayin Hara* that some people send out.

Bil'am's Evil Eye

The concept of *Ayin Hara* plays a pivotal role throughout *Parashat Balak*. The Torah tells us that Bilam lifted up his eyes in his third attempt to curse the Jewish people:

ספר במדבר פרק כד (ב) וישא בלעם את עיניו וירא את ישראל שכן לשבטיו ונתהי עליו רוח אלהים:
 “Bilam lifted up his eyes, and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes...” (*Bamidbar* 24:2)

Rashi learns from the expression, “lifted up his eyes” that Bilam tried to impose the evil eye upon Israel. Rabbeinu Bachaya adds that when Bilam saw “Israel dwelling according to its tribes,” he noticed that their camps were organized in such a way, that the tent openings faced away from each other, to avoid causing evil eye to one another. Why did Bilam, specifically now, after realizing that the doors of Israel were facing away from one another, try to impose his *Ayin Hara* on Israel? The camp of Israel was covered by the Cloud of Hashem until the sin of the Golden Calf, when the Cloud departed and the camp of Israel was revealed. *Ayin Hara* only has power over that which is revealed to the eye. Therefore, when Bilam realized that the tribes of Israel were exposed, he wanted to send them his evil eye. However, even so, Bilam’s evil eye had no power over the Children of Israel because of the holiness of the camp of Israel. This holy protection was the result of the opening of each tent facing away from one another, so that the insides of the tents would not be revealed to one another (The Taz on the Torah, *Bamidbar* 24:2).

Developing a Good Eye is The Best Protection from the Evil Eye

“Anyone who has mastered these three things is from the students of Avraham Avinu, and [anyone who has mastered three other things is from the students of the wicked Bil’am. One who has a good eye, a low spirit and a humble soul – is from the students of Avraham Avinu. One who has an evil eye, a high spirit and a wide soul – is from the students of the wicked Bilam...” (*Pirkey Avot* 5:19).

Avraham is praised for having a “good eye” which entails the characteristic of *הסתפקות/histapkut* – ‘satisfaction.’ This is exemplified also by Ya’acov, who said, “I have everything” (*Bereishit* 33:11), rather than Esau, who claimed, “I have a lot” (*Ibid.* 33:9), implying that he still wanted more. We need to be students of Avraham Avinu, who was satisfied with what he had, and didn’t constantly seek to amass more material possessions. Even a shoelace and string he refused to receive from the King of Sedom. This character trait of developing a good eye is the best protection from the evil eye.

The Mitzvot Protect against *Ayin Hara*

Rabbi Dessler asked his father how it could be fair that a person may suffer because of the jealousies of another. His father answered him that the person, whose possessions have caused jealousy, may have been careless and flaunted his possessions causing jealousy to arise. This jealousy causes the other person to cry out in pain and his cry rises up to the Heavenly Court. Pele Yoetz adds that although a person should not flaunt his wisdom, his good deeds, or his wealth, he must

simultaneously act thoughtfully so that others do not sense that he is being cautious. If someone is poor and notices that wealthy people avoid him, or someone who is childless notices that a blessed mother of many children is avoiding her, this could cause them distress. We must also not refrain from doing any mitzvah due to being concerned about *Ayin Hara*. For example, we should not be afraid to bring a poor man into our home or speak publicly to teach people Torah wisdom. One “who keeps a mitzvah will be not know any evil,” for a mitzvah protects – it is a shield and armor.

Strengthen Your Emuna System and Protect Yourselves Against Negative Energy

We cannot just dismiss the power of negative energy as nonexistent if we don't believe in it. Just as there is light and holiness in the world, so does the opposite exist. We would be foolish not to strengthen our immune system in order to protect ourselves against virus and bacteria. Likewise, we need to strengthen our emunah system in order to protect ourselves against negative spiritual energy. By raising our spiritual vibration, developing self-esteem and viewing ourselves with Hashem's perpetually kind and open eye, it is possible to rise above the influence of negative energy. We can also work on removing our own negative energy toward others by consciously sending positive energy to them. Yet, the greatest protection is to become happy with our portion like Avraham, and thereby avoid sending out an Evil Eye to others, as it states, “the evil eye has no power over the eye which did not want to take nourishment from what did not belong to it” (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 20a*).