

What your grandmother never told you about
THE EVIL EYE

The evil eye, also known in Hebrew as the *Ayin HaRa*, is usually seen as a mysterious external force, lurking around, waiting to pounce on innocent victims. Some of us are familiar with phrases such as *Bli Ayin HaRa* or *K'nayin HaRa*, which are said in an attempt to ward off the influence of the evil eye. Other protective measures against the evil eye include the wearing of special amulets or visits to those who perform various magical practices like using oil, mercury or eggs in an attempt to shatter the effects of the evil eye. On the other hand, many of us understandably relegate any discussion about the evil eye to superstition and irrationality. However, there is another dimension to the story of the evil eye, which can dramatically transform our relationship to others and the world in general.

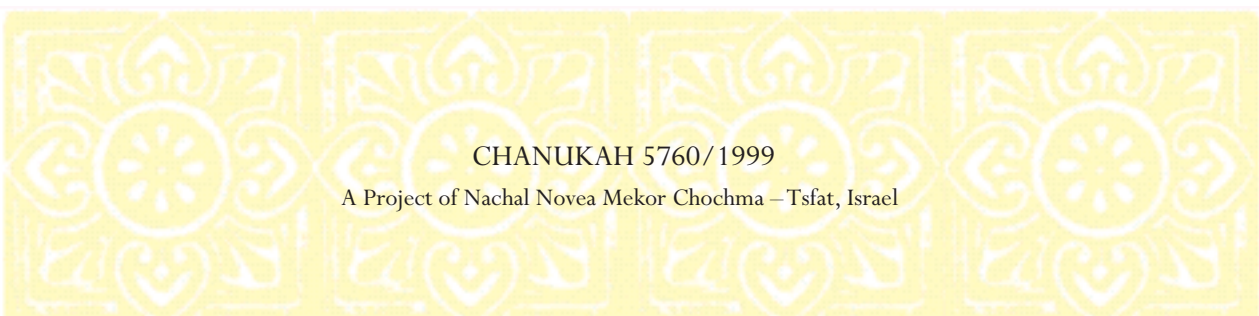
The evil eye is synonymous with greediness, not being satisfied with one's portion, jealousy and begrudging others their good fortune. Someone who has an evil eye possesses these attributes as part of their personality. These characteristics can be manifested in a person quite openly, or sometimes in a much more hidden and subtle way. The potential damaging influence arises when someone who harbors these types of feelings against us, looks upon us, or our good fortune, including our children and our possessions. The negative force only has power over what can actually be seen by the physical eye. This knowledge helps us to understand that it can actually be a blessing not to be so noticeable in the public eye.

But wait – before you start glancing nervously over your shoulder, let's turn this entire idea upside down. Rebbe Nachman writes that we have to pray a lot in order to be saved from the evil eye (*Likutey Moharan* 54). Which evil eye? Our own evil eye! Here is the secret principle: The evil eye only has power over us to the extent that we ourselves have the evil eye (*HaRav Elazar M. Kenig*). According to Rebbe Nachman, there are two types of evil eye. The first type of evil eye is when we see our friend enjoy some elevation or greatness



(and wish it wasn't so). The second type is when we have an evil or begrudging eye toward anything else about our friend. The remedy for this potentially harmful situation is to develop a good eye – an *Ayin Tova* – towards everyone. This means sincerely wishing the best for them at all times, and being genuinely happy for their success.

Rebbe Nachman does point out that one also needs to pray a great deal in order to be saved from the evil eye of another, yet the primary responsibility for avoiding the evil eye lies within us. If we feel that we don't possess the strength to withstand the evil eye of someone else, for whatever reason, we should stay clear of that person until we have strengthened the power of our own good eye. Rebbe Nachman also teaches another benefit to a good eye: By finding merit, in even a wicked person, one is saved from the evil eye. This means not engaging *at all* in the negativity of another who wishes you harm. Respond only positively and pleasantly, emphasizing the good point that can be found in anyone or any situation. Respond to a curse with a blessing – no matter what! Then, the bad has absolutely nothing to grab and hold onto. This brings good into the world, subduing and eventually eliminating the bad completely. Some of us may still insist on using amulets and other practices aimed at breaking the influence of someone else's evil eye upon us, but we need to be aware that, at best, the relief will only be temporary if we don't develop the power of our own good eye. By developing the power of our good eye through a little effort and revision of our habitual responses, we can shift our whole outlook towards the world and those around us. We have the ability to be channels for good to flow into the world; it all depends on our desire. Not only can we wish good for others, but we can actually pray to God that the entire Creation itself be successful (*Rav Ephraim Kenig*). In this way, we are restored as partners with God to repair and heal the world. ■



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