

# HUMILITY PROTECTS AGAINST THE EVIL EYE

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1101– Grandfather or Great Grandfather – Who Should be Sandek? Good Shabbos!

## Humility Protects Against the Evil Eye

When Yaakov gave his Bracha to Ephraim and Manashe he said, "May the Angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they reproduce abundantly like fish within the land." [Bereishis 48:16] The expression "*v'yidgo l'rov*" [may they reproduce abundantly like fish] is a strange expression. Rashi explains: "And may they reproduce like these fish that proliferate and become numerous and the evil eye has no effect on them."

Why are fish not affected by the evil eye (*Ayin haRah*)? The Gemara says in Tractate Brochos [20a; 55b]: "Just as fish are covered by the sea (i.e. – they are 'out of sight') and the Evil Eye cannot rule over them, so too the Evil Eye will not be able to rule over Yosef's descendants. Yosef and his descendants have the bracha of "*alei ayin*" [Bereishis 49:22] – they are above the eye and not affected by *Ayin HaRah*.

There is another fascinating aspect as to why fish are not subject to the Evil Eye. It is based on a Chizkuni, which is further elaborated upon by a sefer called the Pa'aneach Razah. These two sources point out that Adam never gave names to the fish "because they are hidden from the eyes of man." The Torah mentions that the Almighty brought all the animals to Adam and he gave them names. The Torah mentions names of various animals – both the Kosher and non-Kosher animals – in various contexts in the Torah. We even know the names of various reptiles and insects. However, names of species of fish are not mentioned anywhere in the Torah.

There are many different kinds of fish. There are thousands of species of fish in the world. If someone does not believe me, they can go down to the National Aquarium here in Baltimore and see the unique fish and their names. Nonetheless, the Torah does not specify fish names! This is a strange thing.

That is why fish are not subject to *Ayin HaRah*. It is because they are anonymous. *Ayin HaRah* only affects people and things that stand out. This is what the Chizkuni and the Pa'aneach Razah are

alluding to. The reason that the fish in the sea are not subject to *Ayin HaRah* is not only that they are under water and hidden. More than that – from the time of Creation they have been anonymous. They are not glaring. Such a situation protects from the Evil Eye.

If we extrapolate this idea to human beings, does it mean that because we all have names, we are all doomed to *Ayin HaRah*? That is not the case. Rashi writes [Sanhedrin 19b D.H. *Tokfo shel Yosef*]: "*Anavah – davar she'ayn lo shem, she'adam oseh lefi tumo*" [Modesty – something which has no name, a person acts simply]. This means if a person has the ability to stay out of the public eye and not stick himself into everyone's face – then even within the context of being a human being who does have a name – he can still achieve a certain amount of anonymity and meld in with the rest of the society. This is a "*segulah*" for avoiding the Evil Eye. Anonymity does not necessarily mean that a person is nameless, but if a person is humble, he too has protection.

The Chidah states this explicitly. The Chidah believes that a person with humility can escape the Evil Eye. Someone who is humble does not prance around and try to attract attention to himself. It is specifically such attention-grabbing actions that attract the Evil Eye. The Chidah points out that the Hebrew word *Anavah* (*ayin nun vov hay*) has the same numeric value as *Ayin* (*ayin yud nun*) plus one, indicating that *Anavah* (modesty) transcends the (Evil) "*Ayin*" (Eye). The *Gematria* of *Ayin* is 120; that of *Anavah* is 121. Thus, the Chidah says that one with *Anivus* "is above" the (Evil) Eye!

This is the same message the Chizkuni and the Pa'aneach Razah are teaching us – fish are hidden and anonymous and therefore they are not subject to the *Ayin HaRah*.

### **Shimon and Levi: Then and Now**

When Yaakov blesses each of his sons, he does not articulate some of the "*Brachos*" in the traditional way of giving a *Bracha* to someone, but in fact, he formulates them in terms of a critique of the particular son. For certain tribes, Yaakov points out their foibles and mistakes. Two of those sons were Shimon and Levi. Yaakov Avinu did not forget what they did to Shechem, and the anguish they caused him because of that incident. Yaakov says – because of this – "I will divide them up amongst Jacob and I will scatter them within Israel." [Bereishis 49:7]

Rashi interprets: "There are a preponderance of poor people – scribes and teachers of young children amongst the Tribe of Shimon – in order that they be spread out – and the Tribe of Levi – he caused them to travel around for their food by going to the threshing floors to obtain *Terumos* and tithes." Levi did not have any farmland of their own and they were dependent on others for their income. Shimon, likewise, took the role of the scribes and the teachers of children.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky wonders: It appears that Yaakov wanted to punish these two tribes for the rash actions of their founders. So what type of "curse" does he give them? "I am going to make you teachers." They will need to go from city to city. They teach in one city for a few years and then for whatever reason, the people do not like them, and they need to travel to another city. These are the teachers of our young children. They are entrusted with the most precious commodity that we have

– our children. Also, the scribes are from Shimon. If a scribe writes a wrong letter *yud* (i.e. – even the smallest letter of the alphabet) a pair of *tephillin* will be *pasul* [invalid]. Someone can go a whole lifetime without fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *tephillin* if he received a pair of *tephillin* written by a careless scribe for his Bar Mitzvah. What does it mean, Rav Kamenetsky asks, that Yaakov *Avinu* "curses" these sons – by giving them the most critical jobs in the Jewish nation?

Rav Yaakov answers, that this is clearly not the correct understanding of the message Yaakov is giving to Simon and Levi. The correct interpretation is as follows: It takes a special type of person to be a *sofer* and it takes a special type of person to be a *Rebbe*. The person needs to be in the job for the Sake of Heaven and he needs to put away his personal considerations. Doing something *l'Shem Shamayim* requires self-sacrifice and dedication (*Mesiras Nefesh*). This level of dedication requires zealotry [*kana-us*].

Shimon and Levi exhibited *kana-us*. They were zealots. They took up the righteousness of the cause of their sister who was violated. The other brothers may have been bothered about Dinah's situation, but they did not do anything about it. Shimon and Levi were incensed that this should happen to their sister! They were willing to be *moser nefesh*. It was not a cakewalk to go into the city of Shechem and rescue their sister. This took a special breed of people.

Rav Yaakov says, that is why they became the teachers of young children. It is because they are zealots, and to be *melamdei tinokos* requires the special *kana-us* that Shimon and Levi exhibited.

Rav Yaakov elaborates, "Let us see what happened to Shimon and Levi. What did they each do with their zealotry?" Levi refined his zealotry. Levi used his *kana-us* properly and in the right vein. When it came time – after the sin of the Golden Calf – when Moshe called out "Who will follow Hashem? Come to me!" It was only the Tribe of Levi that all stepped forward. They answered the call. Over the years, they perfected their patriarch's perhaps unbridled *kana-us*. Rav Yaakov even suggests that they perfected it because they spent the time in Egypt learning Torah. *Shevet Levi* was exempt from the enslavement. So what did they do? They learned Torah. When a person occupies himself with Torah and becomes a *Ben Torah*, that refines, directs, and channels *kana-us* properly. At the critical moment after the Sin of the Calf, they knew what to do. Therefore, at the end of the Torah, when Moshe gives the Tribes his blessings, he comments to Levi: "They teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel..." [Devarim 33:10] That is Levi.

Shimon, on the other hand, never got it right. From the time he first exhibited *kana-us* it was a *kana-us* at the opposite end of the spectrum. When the Tribe of Shimon challenged the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu during the incident involving Zimri and Cozbi, when he publicly had relations with a Midianite princess, it was also a brazen act. His zealotry was never refined, it was never channeled.

At the end of his discussion, Rav Yaakov writes the following: Zealotry which is not directed and tempered by halachic principles is not able to succeed and ultimately will wipe out the zealous person from the world. Only great Torah personalities in each and every generation have the proper

intuition to recognize when one must act with zealotry and protest, and when one must be silent. Only *Gedolei Yisrael* are endowed with the uncanny ability to decide when it is right to stand up and when it is right sometimes to be quiet. The yardstick for this determination is given over only to those who also have been given the key to Torah understanding.

*Kana-us* is a dangerous thing and the only way it can be used is through direction of *Gedolei Torah*. People who employ *kana-us* unguided by appropriate Torah intuition trigger results that never end well.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayechi is provided below:

- # 037 - Establishing Time of Death
- # 079 - The Yissocher-Zevulun Partnership
- # 128 - The Sandik
- # 175 - Embalming, Autopsies, and Cremation
- # 221 - Exhumation: When Is it Permitted?
- # 265 - Yahrtzeit
- # 311 - Funerals in Halacha
- # 355 - Asarah B'Teves
- # 399 - Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuso L'Olam Voed
- # 443 - Aveilus Issues
- # 487 - Determining Date of Moshiach's Arrival
- # 531 - Burial in Eretz Yisroel
- # 575 - Honoring an Older Brother
- # 619 - Fulfilling the Wishes of the Deceased
- # 663 - Belief in the Coming of Moshiach
- # 707 - Fasting on a Yahrzeit
- # 751 - The Rabbi: Master Or Slave?
- # 795 - Hatoras Nedorim - How Specific Must You Be?
- # 839 - Buying Cemetery Plot - Investing in Real Estate for Long Term
- # 883 - Evil Intentions - Do They Matter?
- # 927 - Yissocher - Zevulun Revisited
- # 970 - Being A Sandek - Does It Really Make You Wealthy?
- #1014 - Will We Make Pesach When Mashiach Comes?
- #1058 - Bentching Your Children on Friday Nights

- #1101 – Grandfather or Great Grandfather – Who Should be Sandek?
- #1144 – Supporting Someone To Sit and Learn: Must He Be Altruistic?
- #1187 – Can You Be Sandek More Than Once?
- #1231 – Day of Death or of Funeral? Customs and other Yahrtzeit Issues
- #1275 – I Don't Want Hespelim at my Levaya – Must We Obey?

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