

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Vayechi

“The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm should bless the lads. In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and let them increase upon the earth.”

With these words, Yaakov blesses Ephraim and Menashe, the children of Yosef. The Hebrew word used for “teeming multitudes” is veyidgu, a word derived from the root dag--“fish.” Rashi there cites the Gemara in Brachos, which explains: “Like fish, which are fruitful and which multiply and which the evil eye cannot affect.”

R. Eli Boruch Shulman, a Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva University, explains in the name of R. Avraham Yitzchak haKohein Kook (1865-1935) that the power of the evil eye is dependent on one’s state of mind. Our psychology lends itself to detecting animosity and hatred when they are directed towards us. Someone whose sense of self is poorly developed is likely to be particularly affected by this. Negativity expressed in his “direction” will affect him profoundly, limiting his ability to achieve his goals and to be happy.

However, someone with a well-developed psyche and identity will not be affected by the “evil eye.” He will understand that other people’s negative thoughts and expressions say more about them than they do about him. This confidence will empower him to be free of the evil eye. As R. Shulman writes:

“[The evil eye] has power only to the extent that we give it power. If we live by others’ valuation, if we value ourselves by how much others approve of us, if we see ourselves through other people’s eyes, then we give them power over us, and we give their jealousy and animosity the power to harm us.

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But if we live by our own inner light, if our own inner resources are strong, if we don't need other people's approval, then their emotions and jealousies - their [evil eye] - cannot touch us.

Fish are not concerned with anything that is outside the water. They live in their own world, in their own environment. And therefore they represent the kind of inner directedness that renders a person immune from [the evil eye].”

“A deep man believes in miracles, waits for them, believes in magic, believes that the orator will decompose his adversary; believes that the evil eye can wither, that the heart's blessing can heal; that love can exalt talent; can overcome all odds.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Asher Coleman