

1. Alan Dundes: The Origin of "Evil Eye"?

[Professor Alan] Dundes theorizes that the evil eye, which has a Middle-Eastern, Mediterranean, and Indo-European distribution pattern and was unknown in the Americas, Pacific Islands, Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa or Australia until the introduction of European culture, is based upon underlying beliefs about water equating to life and dryness equating to death. He posits that the true "evil" done by the evil eye is that it causes living beings to "dry up" – notably babies, milking animals, young fruit trees, and nursing mothers. The harm caused by overlooking consists of sudden vomiting or diarrhoea in children, drying up of milk in nursing mothers or livestock, withering of fruit on orchard trees, and loss of potency in men. In short, the envious eye "dries up liquids," according to Professor Alan Dundes – a fact that he contends demonstrates its Middle Eastern desert origins...

Ancient Sources

2. Genesis 21:11

And the matter was very evil in Abraham's eyes

3. Deuteronomy 15:9

Be careful lest there be an evil thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year nears, the year of release,' and your eye will be evil against our brother, the needy person, and you will not give him.

4. Deuteronomy 28:54-55

The soft and very pampered among you will have an evil eye against his brother... Refusing to give them...

5. Proverbs 23:6

Do not eat the bread of one whose eye is evil

The sages of the Talmud

6. Pirkei Avot 2:11

Rabbi Yehoshua taught: Evil eye, evil desire and hatred of others remove a person from this world.

Commentary of Maimonides to Avot 2:11: Desire for wealth, excess of desire and an evil spirit

7. Pirkei Avot 5:19

One who has an evil eye, haughty spirit and broad [complacent] soul is of the students of wicked Bilam.

8. Talmud, Rosh haShanah 16b

One who passes judgment to Gd regarding another person will, himself, be punished first.

9. Talmud, Moed Katan 17b

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel taught: Wherever scholars have turned their eyes, death or poverty has ensued.

Should Jews take these Evil Eye concerns seriously?

10. Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Guide of the Perplexed 1:62

These lies created by early fools were recorded, and the books were brought to good people of soft spirit, fools who lacked a scale with which to know truth from falsehood. They hid these books, which were found in their estates, and people thought them to be true. In the end, a fool will believe everything.

11. Tosefta Shabbat 7:11

One who ties a red string: Rabban Gamliel says this is not an Emorite practice; R' Elazar son of R' Tzaddok says it is an Emorite practice.

12. Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Guide of the Perplexed 3:37

The practices of the nations, which they considered forces and *segulot*, even practices which lack a scent of idolatry, are prohibited... The Torah prohibited all of their practices which are titled 'Emorite practices' which came to them from idolatry...

And yet...

13. Nachmanides (13th century Spain) to Bava Batra 59a

Regarding damage one causes to property by sight, this is vandalism via 1) evil eye, 2) harmful speech or 3) violation of privacy.

14. Rabbi Joseph Caro (16th century Israel), Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chaim 141:6

One may call two brothers or a father and son consecutively - but we don't permit it, due to the evil eye.

15. Rabbi Moshe Stern (20th century Hungary, New York), Beer Moshe 8:36

Question: Is there a source for tying a red string on a child, carriage and so on because of the evil eye?

Answer: That was the universal practice; they were careful to tie a red string on a carriage and crib of a child because of the evil eye. All of these are the practices of elderly women, regarding which Rabbi Shlomo ibn Aderet wrote that we should not mock their words and practices, for they are certainly founded in the sacred mountains, even if we do not know the reasons.

Sticky: The moral value of avoiding the impact of the evil eye

16. Talmud, Berachot 20a

An eye that does not desire to benefit from others' property cannot be affected by an evil eye.

17. Talmud, Eruvin 64a-b

What should one do upon acquiring the property of a deceased convert? He should use it to acquire a Torah. Rav Sheshet added: The same for a husband who inherits from his wife. Rava added: And even one who receives great profit from a business investment. Rav Pappa added: And even one who finds something.