THE NOTION OF AN EVIL EYE

IN JEWISH TRADITION

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CHAPTER I

SUPERSTITION AND THE EVIL EYE

Superstition is an integral part of our tradition. It is the basis for many Jewish rituals and has shaped scores of our everyday rites and practices in ways that are not apparent to us. To reject superstition as an important element in our tradition is to ignore the substantial impact that it has had on our evolution as a people.

Superstition "is closely related to magic, to the idea that man can use supernatural forces to control the world...in all cultures, some old customs are not only retained, but they are reinterpreted and given new meaning."[1] Such a definition of superstition may be employed to describe the Jewish experience. Thus, one might conclude that belief in God is a superstition because, through the power of ritual (i.e. prayer), we may, at least theoretically, control some of God's actions. That is to say that through successful prayer we may feel we have the ability to change God's mind, as it were. Thus with a notion known as the evil eye, it has been accepted throughout the generations that one could control this malevolent force through rituals of exorcism, through the use of amulets, and perhaps even through prayer, as we shall see.

The "evil eye" is widely recognized as the malevolent glance of another which causes great harm to the one who receives such a look. This definition has broadened, however, and the definition of the evil eye includes all evil spirits, as they are all perceived to possess the evil eye. However, the evil eye is an evil spirit, but an evil spirit is not the evil eye. That is to say that the evil eye is one of many evil spirits linked to our tradition. The eye is the organ used

to seduce and to persuade. Thus it may be perceived as a source of evil because the eye is capable of leading one astray and can therefore cause great calamity to fall upon an individual or a community.

It would be most appropriate to classify Jewish adherence to the notion of the evil eye as a "folk belief" as well. Practices deriving from any folk belief are known as folk customs. Therefore, all practices derived from adherence to the evil eye may be classified as folk customs. Such a belief amongst our people has experienced growth and change over the years, as we shall see, and as this notion has evolved, so too have many Jewish practices and customs relating to the evil eye. In its earlier stages, the Jewish idea of the evil eye was a superstitious belief; not a folk custom. It is also correct to classify this notion as a superstition because it developed out of a need to control a world which was seemingly uncontrollable. Therefore, in this thesis, I may refer to the Jewish idea of the evil eye as either a superstition or a folk belief.

It is not merely the quality of seduction and persuasion attributed to the eye which has earned it the distinction of being universally dreaded. Other aspects of the eye have contributed to its power. Many common cliches, terms, and perceptions of the organ of vision, in our society and others, demonstrate the intensity which the eye emits. "If looks could kill..." one common adage tells us. Homicidal psychotics are sometimes identified by the characteristic "wild" look in their eyes. Many people are able to "feel" the power of a

stare, even when they are not looking straight at the one who is staring. Such terminology and perception is indicative of the power contained within the eye.

While much has been written about the eye's considerable power, it is one quality of the eye which has perpetuated its reputation as a potent organ. This attribute may be found in the eye's pupil. When one gazes into the eye of another, the image of the one who is looking into the eye is reflected back. Thus in many cultures, the pupil is referred to as "the man in the eye." The Hebrew word for pupil is אִישׁוֹן which means "little man." This phenomenon of the pupil has resulted in the universal belief that the eyes are the seat of, or the window to, the soul. When one looks deep into the eyes of another, not only is his or her image reflected back, but the softness or the coarseness of a person may be perceived by the gazer. The notion that one can determine the qualities of a person through the eyes has therefore arisen from the apparent tell-tale nature of the eye. Another widespread quality of the evil eye has developed out of this notion that the eyes are the window to the soul. Because it appears as if one has access to the soul through one's eyes, it is felt that both good and evil emanate from within and leave the body via the eyes. Therefore, when one fixes a stare upon another, evil thoughts may emanate from the soul and embrace the object upon which the person with the evil intention is gazing.

Of all superstitions and folk beliefs held by human beings, the evil eye is the most intriguing of all. The evil eye is

a universal folk belief. Virtually no culture nor region lacks some notion of this concept. Its origins, however, remain mysterious. One scholar said that "the beginnings of mystical and superstitious practices are very difficult to trace. They are by-paths of faith and are studiously ignored by the select."[2] Therefore, it is quite difficult to identify the precise origins of the evil eye in any culture. Nevertheless, it is widely believed that primitive societies adhered to this belief, though it cannot be proven. The earliest recorded information comes from Babylonian and Sumerian cuneiform documents.[3]

The core areas for such a belief have been identified as the Near East, the Mediterranean, Southern Asia, Northern Europe, Northern Africa, and parts of Eastern Africa.[4] Each of these areas, and the cultures residing within them, is no stranger to the evil eye, yet societies in each region view the evil eye differently. Hence, while the notion of the evil eye is universal, each religion, society, and region react differently to this folk belief.

According to Clarence Maloney, there are seven universal features of the evil eye.[5] Such features are present in virtually every region and culture throughout the world. Maloney has identified these features as follows:

1) The power from the eye strikes the person or the object.
2) The stricken object is one of value; the destruction or the injury is sudden.
3) The one casting the eye may not be aware that he or she has the power.

4) The one who is afflicted may not be able to identify the source of power.
5) The power of the eye can be deflected.
6) The belief helps to rationalize sickness and misfortune.
7) Envy is a factor.

While this list of factors is certainly accurate, one feature which Maloney omitted from the list is the attraction of the evil eye to infants and children. This is a universally held notion of the evil eye and may have arisen as a result of the natural need to protect the child. It is generally the beautiful or handsome baby that is most susceptible to the evil or envious glance of another. Thus, as we will see in greater detail, virtually all cultures have specific defenses against an evil eye which is attracted to young people.

The belief in the evil eye, along with many other superstitions, developed as a response to a world which offered the unexpected. The notion of the evil eye was a way to attach meaning and origin to inexplicable phenomena. And as Maloney asserted in his seven universal features of the evil eye, such a development of this superstition as a response to the world's mysterious nature was universal. It would be erroneous, then, to say that this superstition/folk belief is merely irrational (to call it untrue is another matter altogether). This notion developed out of a universal belief in the potency of the eye which was, and still is, very powerful for many people. No other superstition/folk belief has enjoyed the longevity nor the widespread adherence as has the evil eye.

Because many folk customs derive from Jewish tradition, many are, in reality, minhagim. Therefore, many practices associated with the evil eye may be classified as minhagim. Jewish tradition teaches that custom is tantamount to law,[6] ergo, many minhagim associated with the evil eye have been practiced as if they were law.

CHAPTER II

CROSS-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE EVIL EYE

As we already know, the evil eye is a cross-cultural phenomenon found in all four corners of the earth. Virtually no culture nor area is without such a folk belief. While the qualities and characteristics of the evil eye vary among communities, there are some aspects of the evil eye which remain static throughout the world. Because the evil eye is a world-wide phenomenon, and because there are cross-cultural similarities, it is necessary to view the evil eye as unique in that no other folk custom is so widely held.

What adds to the mystique of the evil eye is the fact that while its origins are unknown, and will certainly remain so, such a belief is most likely as old as the human race. Primitive cultures may have adhered to a belief in evil spirits. Objects believed to be amulets dating back to a pre-historic era have been uncovered. These charms consisted of rocks which were strung on animal hide, or on tree branches, and hung around the neck.[1] The shapes and sizes of these stones indicate that these primitive people searched for unusual looking rocks to use for this purpose. Most commonly, stones which were perforated, or contained holes in the middle so that the string could easily be placed through it, were used at that time.

Though we cannot be sure just what purpose such primitive jewelry served, we do know that amulets date back at least as far as ancient Mesopotamian cultures which thrived over five thousand years ago. Whereas no form of written communication existed during the Stone Age, we do have cuneiform records from the Sumerians, the Babylonians, and the Assyrians. These records date back to the third millenium B.C.E. and indicate

that early civilized people utilized amulets and feared the evil eye.[2]

Babylonian mythology teaches, as other mythologies do, that evil spirits have eternally existed.[3] These evil demons dwelt, along with other gods, in a liquid abyss known as Apsu. When the gods began to create the world, these evil demons tried to obstruct their path, but the strongest of all the gods, Marduk, succeeded in quelling their uprising. Nevertheless, Marduk was not completely victorious, for these evil demons continued to exist. The early Babylonians, therefore, wore amulets as a defense against these evil spirits.

Thus the fear of evil spirits dates as far back as recorded history, and may have existed even earlier than 3000 B.C.E. Many of the customs of this early time remain with us today; effecting many cultures and regions globally.

At about the same time as this early Babylonian mythology was recorded, the Egyptians were creating their own folk beliefs which adhered to the notion of an evil eye. Like the Babylonians, such an evil force was as old as the beginning of the world.

In ancient Egyptian tradition, the god Khepera began creating the world but an evil spirit known to the Egyptians as Set placed obstacles in front of Khepera's creations. Set, the evil god of darkness, was defeated by Ra, the god of light. But because darkness continued to prevail in the world, Egyptian legend taught that the evil gods, and thus evil, were never exterminated.[4]

Early Egyptian religious teachings ascribed three characteristics to the human eye.[5] These traits were common

among many Mediterranean cultures. According to Egyptian religious doctrine, the eye is the seat of the soul. We already know that this belief was widespread, but it may have been the Egyptian culture which gave birth to this notion. The Egyptians also perceived the eye as an organ which may perpetuate benevolence, yet conversely one which can emit evil (these are the second and third traits). Thus, again we have an early example of a belief which has endured thousands of years. The eye may serve both benign and malevolent purposes. As we shall see later, such a belief is prevalent in Jewish religious literature.

As we know, virtually every region and every culture maintains some belief in an evil eye. Some have retained this belief in more profound ways; continuing to practice exorcism and perpetuating the need to avoid an evil glance at all costs. While certain universal traits and characteristics were identified earlier, each culture has its own unique perception of the evil eye and has developed various means to exterminate the evil that surrounds them. In some cultures the evil eye is a primary force which guides the people's actions. In others it is a power to fear and to avoid, but does not significantly find its way into the culture's nor the region's everyday lifestyle. In such places behavior is minimally affected, yet most people are aware of its potential.

According to Pearl Binder, "nowhere is the evil eye more believed and more dreaded" than in Muslim countries.[6] It is in the Mediterranean basin, where many Muslim nations exist, that the evil eye developed and flourished for thousands

of years. It is quite apparent, in studying the phenomenon of the evil eye in Mediterranean countries, that early Egyptian notions influenced the perception of such evil in these cultures.

Early Mediterranean societies were pagan in nature. Such cultures adhered to the belief that evil was created by one god who liked to cause trouble. The evil eye, therefore, has become associated with satanic forces in these Mediterranean countries; an anti-god connected to all evil in the world. According to Leonard W. Moss and Stephen C. Cappannari, "the duality of good and evil plays an important role in sustaining belief in the power of the eye to cause evil. If a good and loving God has ordained a perfect world, then the seeds of evil are sown by earthly man. Man's greed, envy, malice, aggression, are concentrated in his soul and projected outward through the eye in a destructive manner.....historic and ethnographic evidence tend to support the thesis that dualism aids in a continuation of this belief."[7] Thus in Mediterranean cultures, it is this very belief in dualism which has perpetuated the notion of an evil eye, and, perhaps, the polar idea of a benevolent eye.

Across the Mediterranean, in European communities, the evil eye takes on a somewhat different posture although some similarities do exist among the many cultures. In Italy, the evil eye is a fixed part of society. It has endured more in certain parts of the country than it has in others, however. Although all of Italy has, at one time, feared the <u>mal occhio</u>, as they call it, Northern Italy has shed its adherence to such a belief while Southern Italians still avoid it at all

costs.[8] In Italian culture, the evil eye is perceived as a malicious power tantamount to a virus or a plague.[9] According to Italian folk belief, the evil eye can cause poor harvests, miscarriage, sterility, severe illness (both mental and physical), and the rotting of food.[10] In Italy anyone may be suspected of casting the evil eye, but it is high religious officials such as priests, cardinals, bishops, and popes who are most likely to possess the mal occhio. It was believed, in fact, that Pope Pius IX could cast the evil eye upon anyone he encountered. Thin people and gypsies are also thought to possess the evil eye as well as one who compliments a child; for the evil eye is especially attracted to beautiful children in Italy, as it is universally.[11]

As we see in the case of Italian society, it is a specific type of person who is thought to possess the evil eye. Each culture identifies those people who are most suspected of harboring an evil eye. It certainly differs from culture to culture, and this seems to be the feature which most significantly varies among societies. In Ethiopia it is the outsider who possesses the evil eye. This xenophobic perception of the evil eye places the suspicion upon people known to Ethiopians as buda. While a buda may be anyone unknown to a community, it is the wandering artisan who is most likely to possess the evil eye, according to Ethiopian folk belief. Nevertheless, a buda cannot be positively identified. The one known as rega, in Ethiopian society, is a higher class of person (one from among the masses). The rega does not possess the evil eye but is susceptible to the evil glance of a buda.

It is believed that a buda can change into a demon at night, attacking its prey with the evil eye or perhaps even murdering its prey.[12] Such a belief is similar to the belief in Jewish tradition that Lilith gave birth to children of Adam, but these demonic offspring appeared as normal people and thus could never be identified nor avoided.

Among all of the nations and cultures in the world, Indian society is among the most extreme in its perception of the evil eye and in acting upon its fears. Much of India's everyday practice is dictated by the widespread avoidance of the evil eye. The Indians believe in an ordered universe. All that occurs, occurs for a reason. Diseases affecting adults are usually attributed to specific deities. Yet infants and young children, according to Indian folk belief, are affected by the evil eye. The illness of a young child is blamed on the evil eye because children cannot sufficiently combat the evil eye since their personalities are not yet developed.[13]

While all living beings, including animals, and deities are vulnerable to the attacks of an evil eye, some people are more suspect than others. Older people, especially those dissatisfied with life, may carry the evil eye. Those who have reason to be envious such as barren women, or one who is hungry, are likewise believed to possess the evil eye. It is the envious person who is universally believed to bear the evil eye.[14]

We have now seen cultures and societies where the evil eye is believed to be cast by strangers, animals, envious people, clerics, gods, and gypsies. In Iran the evil eye can

be transmitted through the malevolent glance of one's kin. In Tunisia, on the other hand, the evil eye cannot be transmitted from one relative to another, but, as in Ethiopian folklore, it is possessed by the marginal person. In Mexico, as in Ethiopia, the evil eye is carried by strangers.[15]

Cross-cultural beliefs do not differ merely on the way one might receive an evil eye. Antidotes employed to exterminate or defend against the evil eye vary between societies. Every society adhering to the notion of an evil eye possesses antidotes and cures for one struck by an evil glance. Some cultures exorcise the evil eye through prayer or meditation. Other societies concoct special brews and potions. The most common and widespread defense is the amulet; an ornament which is usually worn around the neck. Such amulets will be discussed in greater detail later.

It is common, even in America, to see women of Indian descent wearing a forehead dot. This is a commonplace Indian defense against the evil eye. Both Hindu and Buddhist philosophies teach that one possesses a magical third eye. This third eye is said to be located on the forehead, between the eyes. Apparently, one of the functions of this third eye is to guard against harm and evil. Therefore Indian women wear the forehead dot to ward off evil spirits. Similarly, in some regions of India, ashes are placed on the foreheads of sick children as a cure for whatever ails them.[16] Because sickness is a manifestation of the evil eye, ashes on the child's forehead serve as a cure for the evil which has invaded the youngster's body. A black string tied around the waist

or a limb is commonly used by people all over Southern Asia whether Moslem, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist.[17]

The common antidote in Italy is iron.[18] As iron attracts magnets, so too does this strong metal attract the evil eye. If the iron attracts the evil eye, then this malevolent force will not strike its human target. The iron is a symbolic means to dissolve the evil eye.

In addition to iron as a means to repel the evil eye, the Italians have traditional ways of determining the presence of evil spirits based on their practice of Christianity. One method is to mix three drops of oil with a cup of water. These drops of oil represent the Trinity. If the oil spreads, the Italians believe, the evil eye is present and one must immediately make the sign of the cross on the forehead[19] (in the same place that the Indians place the forehead dot).

The Ethiopian means of ridding one of the evil eye is through the rite of exorcism. Priests within the community are called upon to identify the bearer of the evil eye which has afflicted a certain individual (if the individual himself or herself is unable to identify the perpetrator). Once the one who has cast the evil eye is identified, the priest expunges the evil spirits inhabiting the person's body through means of exorcism.[20]

In many cultures, simple utterances may suffice to avoid the evil eye. In China, children, who are particularly susceptible to the evil eye, as in most other cultures, are called hogs, dogs, or fleas. It is assumed that evil spirits would have no desire to inhabit such disdained animals. In

India, young children are often referred to as "dunghill", "beggar", or "blind." In Romania, young people are called "ugly thing."[21] Any compliment, especially one directed at a child, is often perceived, universally, as a projection of the evil eye onto the one receiving the compliment. Traditional Jews often rename a child who is suspected of having attracted the evil eye. The new name sometimes reflects a strong animal such as a bear, a lion, or a wolf (Dov, Aryeh, or Ze'ev). Often the name will indicate a desire for the afflicted person to live a long and healthy life (Chaim, Chaya, or Alter). Some people who do not disclose their age out of fear that the evil eye is waiting to pounce on the person who divulges such information. To announce one's age, many believe, is to gloat about how long he or she has endured. The evil eye, they perceive, is ready to stalk the person who has lived a long life. For if one is to hear of another who has lived a long and healthy life, the envy of the one who hears the gloating will unleash the evil eye.

Many of the amulets which are utilized as defenses against the evil eye in other cultures have grown to represent charms to promote good fortune in American society. The horseshoe is a common symbol of good luck in our society. Such a charm developed from the view that iron, out of which horseshoes are formed, may be used to ward off the evil eye. The rabbit's foot is likewise utilized as a defense against the evil eye in other cultures. Because rabbits are born with their eyes wide open, they are perceived as enemies of the evil eye. A rabbit, on guard from birth, it is believed, will deter

the evil eye.[22]

We have now seen that the evil eye is a cross-cultural phenomenon. While there are both similarities and differences between various regions and societies, adherence to the evil eye is universal. To have discussed each area's folk beliefs concerning the evil eye in a detailed fashion would have been too lengthy. Such an overview is important, however, because in order to understand the Jewish concept of the evil eye it is necessary to see how such a folk belief has developed, and is practiced, in other regions. As we shall now see, Jewish adherence to the evil eye is most very interesting and involved.

CHAPTER III

THE EVIL EYE IN JEWISH TRADITION

For the Jewish People, the evil eye has long been a source of malevolence to dread. Many Jewish practices and customs have developed out of fear for the evil eye. According to Clarence Maloney, the evil eye is a religious phenomenon.[1] He denies the assertion made by many scholars that adherence to the evil eye is one of superstition or folk belief. Jewish literature and Jewish experience have certainly exhibited that the evil eye, indeed, has played a significant role in establishing and determining a multitude of Jewish customs and practices.

As we already know, there is a relationship between the evil eye and evil spirits. The evil eye is but one category within the multi-faceted concept of evil spirits. Sir Ernest Budge has written that "evil spirits and the evil eye have from time immemorial been regarded as one and the same, and it is for this reason that among many peoples, both in the East and the West, the evil eye has been regarded as a being with a form and a personality...and it has been generally assumed throughout the world that every kind of evil spirit possesses the evil eye."[3] Indeed, this is true. Yet within Jewish religious literature the evil eye is one of many evil spirits. According to Sefer Chasidim, "the angry glance of a man's eye calls into being an evil angel who takes vengeance on the cause of his wrath."[4] We therefore see that Jewish sources do, in fact, view the evil eye as a corporeal being with its own unique characteristics. Other sources in Jewish tradition, however, perceive the evil eye as a manifestation of human behavior; the result of one's envious gazes, malicious

stares, or greedy leers.

Our study of the evil eye in Jewish tradition begins with this phenomenon as recorded in biblical literature. Most scholars agree that the evil eye, as we have known it through later literature, does not appear at all on the pages of the Hebrew Bible. While this is most obvious to one reading through all three sections, the Bible refers to both evil and good eyes while it also refers subtly to the evil eye as we know it in other Jewish sources. The following pages will analyze various sections and verses of the Hebrew Bible, which some say may be connected to the development of the evil eye concept in Jewish tradition.

It is quite clear in reading biblical literature that the authors were adamant about the necessity to ignore all superstitious impulses. The pagan environments, of which the Israelites were a part, allowed for an abundance of superstitious practices. Such temptation apparently led the Israelites to superstitious pursuits, and in response the Bible is replete with warnings against such undertakings. The most concise example may be found in Deuteronomy 18:9 where it says: "When you come to the Land which the Lord your God gives to you, you shall not learn to engage in the abominable practices of those nations." The Hebrew were certainly no strangers to the notion of an evil eye.

The continuous warning, in the Bible, against the practice of idolatry is merely one manifestation of the biblical edicts against superstitious pursuits. Amulets and jewelry figured greatly into a pagan practice adopted by the Israelites, as

portrayed in biblical verse, and repeated warnings against the use of such charms appear in this literature. In the next chapter this aspect of superstition shall be explored.

In the Bible the eye is portrayed as an organ possessing both positive and negative attributes. Something that is good is said to "please the eye" or to "find favor in one's eyes." In Genesis 3:6, the forbidden tree is said to be pleasing to Eve's eyes (תַּאֲוָה הִוא לָעֵינַיִם). Such a pleasing sight, it is interesting to note, lured Eve into one of the most notorious transgressions in Jewish literature. And furthermore, as a result of such a sin, Genesis 3:7 teaches us that "the eyes of both (Adam and Eve) were opened" (וַתִּפָּקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם).

The term, in Hebrew for the evil eye is עַיִן רָעָה. In biblical literature we have a variation on this terminology. The Hebrew Bible makes several references to רַע עָיִן and conversely טוֹב-עָיִן. These terms clearly refer not to **the** evil eye or **the** good eye, rather to **an** evil eye or **a** good eye. This biblical evil eye possesses characteristics which are somewhat different than the evil eye known to Jews in the post-biblical era.

Proverbs 23:6-7 admonishes us not to "eat of a stingy man's food, nor long for his victuals..." The term for "a stingy man" is רַע עָיִן. On the other hand we have a reference, one chapter earlier, in Proverbs 22:9 which teaches that "a generous man will be blessed if he has given his food to the poor." In this citation the word employed for "a generous man" is טוֹב-עָיִן. This terminology also appears in Proverbs 28:22 where we learn that "a stingy man pursues wealth." Here

we see the stingy man (denoted by רַע עַיִן) as a man who covets. A jealous person, by the era of the Amoraim and Tannaim, was subsequently believed to possess the evil eye. We perhaps have some antecedents of this later development in Proverbs 28:22, but nevertheless this reference to the רַע עַיִן is not one to the evil eye as we know it during later years.

In other places, it is the actions of people which invoke thoughts of the evil eye in biblical text. Some see the twenty fourth chapter of II Samuel as an example of the evil eye in the Hebrew Bible.[5] It is here where David haughtily appraises his army; taking a census of its people-power. As a punishment, God plagues Israel and Judah; killing seventy thousand people. Envious as a result of this powerful army, some say, the evil eye strikes. Those who have theorized this to be the case, have missed the point that while God is most certainly capable of meting out punishment, the Eternal does not possess an evil eye as we know it from its traditional roots and manifestations.

In addition to the above example from Genesis 3, the Bible contains numerous references to the human eye; too many to analyze in this thesis. There are some, however, which deserve a brief examination. One such passage may be found in the Book of Job. It is in verse 16:9 where we find the curious phrase צָרִי יַחַד עֵינָיו which means "my enemy sharpens his eyes upon me." This statement, made by Job, relates to God whom Job perceives as his adversary; the One who brought calamity upon his household. In Hebrew, the root חדד means to "sharpen" and the idiom חָדַד עֵינַיִם means to "stare."

Although it was most likely not the intention of the author to suggest that the evil eye was to blame for all that befell poor Job, such a statement is indicative of the evil eye as understood in the post-biblical era. From the period during which the Rabbis flourished, and onward, Jews believed that one could cast his or her angry eyes upon another person consequently causing catastrophe to strike the subject of the malevolent gaze. It is not outside the realm of possibility that such a prooftext may have been used later; during the development of the evil eye concept. Nevertheless, the evil eye here is attributed to God. This, we already know, is not an attribute of the later evil eye.

Finally, the eyes of the Ultimate One in biblical literature are often portrayed as eyes that guard or sustain; not merely as angry like we saw in the example from Job. This characteristic of God's eyes is shared by humans in their capacity to keep an eye on one another, so to speak. It is a Jewish superstitious practice to watch the figure of one who is embarking on a journey disappear over the horizon.[6] The sense that one's eyes will protect the traveler assures the one who watches, as well as the traveler, that the trip will be a safe one.

In both the Books of Psalms and Proverbs, this trait of eyes that protect is likewise ascribed to God. Proverbs 22:12 tells us that "the Lord's eyes protect the wise one..." Psalms 17:8 similarly reads "guard me like the pupil of your eye." It is this sense of guarding or keeping that assures the pious Jew that the eyes of God will let no harm befall him or her. It is also this sense of guarding or keeping (the

roots in Hebrew being עשן or עזר) which appears on amulets that are utilized to counteract the effects of evil spirits. This we shall encounter in the next chapter.

The transition from the teachings of biblical literature to rabbinic literature is significant. It is here where the contrast is striking. Whereas a concept of an evil eye in biblical literature is dubious, if indeed it exists at all, it is clearly written in rabbinic literature. By the time of the destruction of the Second Jewish Commonwealth in 70 C.E., and the concurrent dominance of the Pharisees, monotheism in the Jewish tradition was more strongly rooted. There was no great need, as there was in the biblical era, to preach against superstitious practices. The rabbis were apparently more secure with the practices of the Children of Israel and, as a result, legislated decrees concerning the evil eye. In spite of the rabbis' leniency, rabbinic legislation stopped short of giving Israel the right to freely engage in superstitious practice. Their allowances were ones of guarded permission; perhaps these allowances were, in reality, concessions. Many of the cures and remedies were influenced by earlier Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian literature.[7]

Before we look at the evil eye as it appears in the Talmud, we shall look at one grammatical characteristic of the term עין הרע. People commonly mispronounce this term in Hebrew. It is treated by such people as if עין and הרע were two separate words. However, together these two words are in the interdependent form which we know of as <u>semichut</u>. According to two leading Hebrew dictionaries, the correct pronunciation

is עין הרע ; not עין הרע .[8] Other sources agree.[9]

It is common, in rabbinic literature, to encounter the term עין צרה which denotes an evil eye. This, I believe is often closer in meaning to the biblical עין רעה than it is to the term עין הרע which is often found in rabbinic texts. The difference between these two terms is best illustrated by two nearly adjacent passages in Pirke Avot. These passages of reference are found in Pirke Avot 2:14 and 2:16. In the former citation, Rabbi Jochanan tells five of his contemporaries to "go and see which is an evil path from which one should be far..." The first answer, that of Rabbi Eliezer, is "an evil eye (עין צרה).

This reference of Eliezer's is clearly to that of **an** evil eye; not **the** evil eye. Like its biblical counterpart (עין רעה), the evil eye to which Eliezer refers is the trait of stinginess. Rabbi Eliezer was saying that the wrong path to choose is the path of the miser. In the preceding verse (2:13), Eliezer teaches that the right path is the one of generosity, or a "good eye" (עין טובה). By teaching this lesson, some say, Eliezer was preaching the virtues of restraint from envy; a similar message to that of Proverbs, as cited above. Nevertheless, the עין צרה, as portrayed in this passage, is different than the עין הרע known elsewhere.

In contrast to the earlier passages from Pirke Avot, 2:16 is clearly a reference to the evil eye known amongst the Jews during the rabbinic era and later. It is designated as עין הרע. Here Rabbi Joshua teaches that "the evil eye removes a person from this world." Some have said that Joshua

was referring to one who pursues wealth and covets his or her neighbor's possessions in the process. Such a person is never happy with his or her portion in this world. This is clearly the case of one who casts a jealous eye upon his or her neighbor. This individual, in casting the evil eye, is pursuing what we call (in Hebrew עין רעה) wealth. Pirke Avot 4:1 teaches that a rich person rejoices in his or her portion. It follows that such a person will never cast the evil eye on others by coveting what belongs to another. What one might gather from these teachings in Pirke Avot, therefore, is that a person who does not possess the evil eye, i.e. does not covet his or her neighbor's wealth (as commandment number ten teaches), is the one who is wealthy. Nevertheless, these passages from Pirke Avot support the contention that רע עין in the biblical text refers only to one who is miserly, while טוב עין refers to one who is generous.

Of all the superstitious practices on the pages of the Talmud, the evil eye is among the most recorded. It is the rabbis themselves who are said to have had the ability to cast an evil eye upon their people. The next several pages of this thesis will be devoted to the phenomenon of the evil eye as recorded in rabbinic literature, with an emphasis on the Talmud.

The ability of rabbis to cast an evil eye was limited to a few. In Baba Batra 75a, the Rabbis are discussing Leviathan; the mythical creature. They have a debate on what should be created for the righteous; a tabernacle of Leviathan's skin, or something less. In arguing over a verse from Isaiah

(Isaiah 54:12 וּשְׁעָרַיִךְ לְאַבְנֵי אֶקְדָּח "and your gates of precious metal"), Rabbi Jochanan b. Zakkai declares that this teaches that God will place precious stones at the gates of Jerusalem. A certain student takes issue with this assertion whereby Rabbi Jochanan looks at him; turning the student into a pile of bones (הסתכל בו ונעשה גל עצמות). Perhaps the true intention of this story was to teach that respect for one's teachers is a virtue. Nevertheless, for our purposes, it is important to note both the fact that Rabbi Jochanan possessed an evil eye and that the result was his student becoming a heap of bones. It should also be noted that it was anger which moved Rabbi Jochanan to cast the evil eye.

Earlier, in Baba Batra 14a, we have a case where a group of rabbis cast the evil eye upon a colleague. Here these rabbis argue over the appropriate size for a Torah scroll. Rabbi was asked to expound on the appropriate size but he did not know the size of a Torah scroll with thin parchment. R. Huna created seventy Sifre Torah but hit upon the correct size only once. Rabbi Acha b. Jacob wrote a Sefer Torah on calf skin and produced the correct size on his first attempt. His colleagues consequently gazed upon Rabbi Huna with envy; killing him (הסתכלו בו רבנן עי"ה ונח נפשיה). Here the evil eye is cast by a group of rabbis who are filled with envy; a common prerequisite for the evil eye.

In another part of the Talmud, it is Rabbi Eliezer b. Hyrcanus who is the perpetrator of the evil eye. In Baba Metzia 59b, we have the well known account of the argument over the oven where Eliezer claims that this oven is ritually pure

while all of his friends argue differently. Though the halachah favors the interpretation of Eliezer, Rabbi Akiva excommunicates him. The Talmud teaches that on the very day the Eliezer was excommunicated, "every place upon which he looked with his eyes was burnt" (שבת מקום שנתן בו עיניו ר"א נשרף).

In another example of sagely destruction, Rabbi Simeon b. Yochai, in Shabbat 34a, casts the evil eye upon one who disbelieves his announcement that he has purified the City of Tiberias; turning him into a pile of bones. He immediately spies a detractor, Judah, and does likewise to him. Just one page early, after hiding in a cave with his son for twelve years, Rabbi Simeon emerges only to destroy a man with a malevolent leer. As a punishment, God immediately banishes him back into the cave for twelve months.

Not only could the Rabbis murder people or burn objects with the look of an eye, our Sages were also capable of creating natural disasters with a glance, according to one story in the Talmud. We learn from Taanit 24b that Rab Judah encountered a couple of men carelessly wasting bread. In anger he shouted that their actions indicated there must be plenty of food in the world. Turning his raging eyes in the men's direction, Rab Judah brought a famine upon the land.

Like in Italian society, as we have seen, Jewish tradition attributes the power of an evil eye to those who are most revered in the society; figures of holiness, as it were. Rabban Simeon b. Gamliel puts it concisely in Chagigah 5b where he says that "wherever the rabbis place their eyes there may be either death or poverty."

I have only begun to scratch the surface in my survey of the evil eye as portrayed in the Talmud. There is so much information pertaining to the evil eye within the pages of what we know of as the Gemara. So much of what we know of the evil eye, and so much of what is still practiced today, among the Jews of Eastern European descent, has originated in the Talmud. It is no wonder, then, that Jews have feared such a malevolent threat for many hundreds of years. According to Baba Metzia 107b, the Sage Rav went to visit a cemetery. While there, he performed certain charms which led to his well known discovery that ninety nine people out of one hundred had died from the evil eye. He said, at that time, that the evil eye is the cause of all sickness in the world. To those Jews who adhered to the belief in an evil eye, therefore, such a malevolent force was something to be avoided at all costs. The Talmud, then, was the perfect source for those who feared the evil eye, for it explicitly formulated ways to avert it.

It is necessary to look at the terminology in the above passage from Baba Metzia 107 in order to understand the possible underlying meaning of the passage. The evil eye is referred to as עין הרע in this passage. Based on the biblical sources, and what we have seen from Pirke Avot, Rav may be saying not that the evil eye is responsible for the deaths of so many people, rather that it is greed which causes one's death. It may be recalled that עין הרע in other sources refers to greed.

The most effective way to avoid an evil glance, according

to the Talmud, is to claim descent from the seed of Joseph. This antidote is the one which appears most frequently on the pages of the Gemara. Such a statement is borne out of the rabbinic interpretation of a biblical passage. This quote may be found in Genesis 49;22 which says that "Joseph is a fruitful vine; a fruitful vine by a fountain..." (בֵּן פֹּרָת יוֹסֵף בֵּן פֹּרָת עֲלֵי עָיִן). The Rabbis believed this to mean that those from the household of Joseph could not be afflicted by the evil eye. In interpreting the Hebrew from the biblical text, the Rabbis isolated the term " עֲלֵי עָיִן " which literally means "by the fountain." The Rabbis, however, believed the term " עַל עַיִן " to mean "above the eye." The Hebrew words for "eye" and "fountain" are both " עַיִן " and the word " עַל " may mean "above" in this tongue as well.

Among the many places where one may find this in the Talmud, is in Baba Batra 118a. It is here we learn that Rabbi Jose, son of Rabbi Chanina, taught that we may see support for the contention of Genesis 49:22 which teaches that Joseph's offspring are immune to the evil eye, in the text of Genesis 48:16. This passage reads: "And let them grow as fish into many in the midst of the earth." This quote is taken from Jacob's blessing over his son Joseph before his (Jacob's) death. Rabbi Jose interprets this to mean that, because fish dwell underneath the water, the evil eye cannot hurt them. Therefore, because the children of Joseph are like fish, the evil eye will cause them no harm. Amulets with these biblical quotations engraved on their faces have become common in defending against the evil eye as a result of this teaching

from the Talmud.

To support the claim that the seed of Joseph is immune from the harm of an evil eye, Baba Metzia 84a and 84b teaches us that the vain Rabbi Jochanan b. Zakkai would sit at the entrance of a <u>mikveh</u>. He would allow the exiting women to gaze upon his legendary physical beauty, hoping that their sons would become as beautiful and scholarly as he. Some would ask him if he was afraid of the evil eye; most likely because he aroused great envy from those he encountered. Rabbi Jochanan declared that he did not fear an evil eye because he was descended from the seed of Joseph. He continued to sit by the doors of the <u>mikveh</u>.

In Berachot 20a, the story of Rabbi Jochanan's beauty is repeated. The story is accompanied by the statement that the evil eye has no dominion over the eye which did not feast on what did not belong to it. (ואב"א עין שלא רצתה לזון ממה שאינו שלו אין עין הרע שולטת בו). This referred to Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39. Though again the Talmud teaches that the seed of Joseph is immune to the evil eye, this time it tells us that it is because of Joseph's righteous deed. It is through this means of interpreting the Hebrew Bible that the Rabbis ascribed a presence of the evil eye concept in the Holy Scriptures.

There are many cases in the Talmud where the text refers to the evil eye in words which shed light on the ways that the Jews have consequently perceived it throughout the centuries. Such passages teach us about the remedies prescribed by the Sages, as well as other ways to avoid it. The Talmud also

teaches us how such a malevolent force functions in the world and the many customs involved with adherence to this belief. We shall now briefly see how the Talmud addresses the notion of the evil eye in these ways.

Baba Batra 141a speaks of an argument between some rabbis concerning one's offspring. These rabbis discuss which gender might be preferable to the parents. R. Chisda said that if a daughter is born first it is a good omen for subsequent offspring. Some of those who agreed with Chisda said that a daughter is the preferred gender for a first child because she could help raise her younger brothers. Others said that it was because the evil eye has no power over a girl who is the first issue of her parents. Because the Rabbis viewed the birth of a son as more blessed than the birth of a daughter, they felt that envious mothers may cast the evil eye upon a mother and her first-born son. The mitzvah of "be fruitful and multiply" is fulfilled when one set of parents gives birth to both males and females. Therefore, although a male is the preferred gender, according to the Rabbis, a daughter is necessary and should be born first to prevent an evil eye from striking.

In Baba Metzia 30a, we are taught that one should not leave anything on one's bed in order to prevent a guest from coming in and burning it with an evil eye. Here we see that even guests should be suspected of carrying the evil eye. While it is among the greatest of all mitzvot to entertain guests, one should be aware that a visitor may bear an evil eye. We learn, in various places, from our tradition that

one should be kind to strangers and guests because one may never know if that person may be an angel in disguise (as was the case with Abraham and the three visitors in Genesis 18). Yet one should also be wary of malicious intents of those who visit. It is interesting to note that the Aramaic word for eye (עין) is used in this Gemara (the term for "evil eye" in Aramaic is עין בישא). There was such a fear and widespread knowledge of an evil eye during the era in which the Talmud was composed that to call this phenomenon the "eye" was to make it understood that this referred to the "evil eye."

In Taanit 8b we learn, from the School of Ishmael, that only those things not controlled by the evil eye may receive blessing. Pesachim 50b perpetuates this teaching by saying that one who deals in "cane and jars" will never receive a blessing on these goods because such products are heavy in bulk and the evil eye has control over them.

In rabbinic literature, events of the past are sometimes reinterpreted to include the presence or threat of an evil eye. Sanhedrin 93a informs us that both Rabbi Eliezer and Rab taught the the evil eye claimed the lives of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah after they emerged from the fiery furnace. It is often biblical events, as we shall see in other rabbinic sources, which are reinterpreted to include the presence of an evil eye.

As we already know, many customs derive from the evil eye as portrayed in the Talmud. One customarily refrains from standing over a neighbor's field when his crops are ready

for harvest. Baba Metzia 107 tells us that one should respect this practice, lest an evil, envious, eye be inadvertently cast by the one who is standing in the field.

Shabbat 67a explains a custom which is most interesting. This passage teaches what one should do if a tree mysteriously loses its fruits or leaves Accordingly, one should paint it red and load it with stones (האומרי והטוענו אילן שישיר פירותיו סיקרו (וטוענו אבנים) בסיקרא). While the Talmud acknowledges that this is a superstitious act, we are told that such a response is necessary in order to expunge the evil eye which has apparently been thrust upon the tree. The stones fortify the ailing tree; making it stronger and increasing the odds for its ultimate survival. The red paint advertises the tree's frailty, and should prompt those who notice it to utter a prayer on its behalf. Such a prayer, the Talmud admits, should remove the curse of the evil eye. It has been shown that the root סקר, meaning to "paint red", is the same root used to denote a "glance."

The above example is the most profound of all superstitious practices involving the evil eye as portrayed in the Talmud. It would be difficult to deny that the Talmud, in this case, is reducing prayer to the level of superstitious practice. The ritual of prayer, in my opinion, is deeply rooted in superstitious practice. Many forms of worship may very well have been instituted out of a fear of both known and unknown threats to Jewish communities.

One theorist, Michael Kearney, asserted that the folk belief of the evil eye developed as a paranoid response within

many communities.[10] Ernesto De Martino said that "the evil eye is the consequence of everyday insecurities, of the enormous power of negativity, of the absence of available methods to criticize society..."[11] In light of this, it is interesting to note that three of the Rabbis believed to have possessed the evil eye lived concurrently in the post-Temple era. Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, and Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai were all early Tannaim of the first or second generation. Perhaps the fact that they were so close, in time, to the destruction of the Second Temple was one reason for their fabled powers. There may have been a natural need to cling to symbols of power after such a catastrophe. All three of these rabbis were noted for being bitter foes of the Romans. In fact, when Rabbi Simeon emerged from the cave, causing destruction with his evil eye, he was returning from an exile as a result of the harsh rule of Roman Emperor Hadrian. It is the human experience, even today, to embrace those who symbolize power in times of crisis. Another possibility is that these rabbis wielded so much power and influence that they were perceived to possess superhuman traits. It is the most influential of our revered Sages who were recorded as having accomplished some of the most amazing and unbelievable feats in Jewish tradition.

Furthermore, in keeping with Kearney's view, we must remember that the people in these rabbis' generations had also witnessed the destruction of the Second Jewish Commonwealth and widespread oppression at the hands of the Romans. A society which was understandably paranoid (they had every right to

be), would pay more attention to the folk belief of the evil eye. Likewise, Jews in Medieval Europe were fearful of the evil eye. As a result of the oppression, virtually all of the talmudic views of the evil eye persisted into the Middle Ages. In modern day America, we can observe very little fear of the evil eye in Jewish communities. One reason for this is that fear of persecution is virtually non-existent. Western Judaism may also have lost its fear of the evil eye due to the rise of emancipation and rational thinking as a result of the enlightenment. Abraham Geiger, an early (second generation) European reformer, rejected some rituals which he felt derived from superstitious beliefs.

In light of these theories of Kearney and De Martino, it may be concluded that ritual is a powerful way to defend against an evil eye. More specifically, prayer is an appropriate antidote to the evil eye. It may have developed as a non-violent way to fight against all the malevolent forces, both real and imagined. Hebrew prayers such as Birkat Haminim and Av Harachamim are specific examples of such prayers. It is clear that prayer is a way to control the supernatural, including God. Many of these prayers had originated in the wake of the destruction of the second Temple and the rise of Pharisaism. This, of course, coincided with the talmudic period and the establishment of many customs associated with the phenomenon of the evil eye.

Jewish literary genres, from that time, above and beyond the Talmud, did not ignore the threat of the evil eye. Midrashic literature paid heed to this phenomenon, often attributing

biblical actions to fear of the evil eye. One such example occurs in Bereshit Rabbah 91:2 which comments on the biblical verse from from Genesis 42:1. It is here, in Genesis, where Jacob sends his sons from Canaan into Egypt in order to procure food rations on account of the famine. The verse in Genesis reads: "He (Jacob) said to his sons: 'Why should you make yourselves visible?'" The text from Bereshit Rabbah addresses this by teaching us that Jacob admonished them, saying: "Do not enter, all of you, through one gate on account of the (evil) eye" (אל תהיו כולכם נכנסים שוה אפי' הע"ין). There was apparently such a fear of the evil eye at the time of the writing of Bereshit Rabbah (it was written some time after 70 C.E. but the exact date is unknown) that Jews, most likely, did not customarily travel in large groups together.

Another type of Jewish literature likewise contained material concerning the evil eye. Targum, the Aramaic interpretation of the Bible, also attributed actions to biblical figures based on fear of the evil eye. Targum Jonathan on Genesis 42:5 reinterprets the biblical verse which reads: "And the sons of Israel were among those who came to obtain food rations, for the famine was (extended into) the Land of Cannaan." The Targum teaches us that Jacob's sons spread out and each went his own way in looking for food, lest the evil eye be cast upon all at one time.

By the end of the talmudic period, the notion of the evil eye had been established in Jewish communities wherever they existed. By the dawn of the Middle Ages, fear of the evil eye was so ingrained in the minds and hearts of the Jewish

People that they scrupulously followed the prescriptions of the Talmud concerning the evil eye. Much of the Jewish actions and reactions to this phenomenon at that time can be traced back to the pages of the Talmud but, nevertheless, Jews began to add to the multitude of prescriptions which were talmudically established. We shall soon see just how they did this and what changes they made.

Within Jewish communities in the Middle Ages, it was believed that anybody could potentially cast the evil eye. Rabbis and artisans; paupers and aristocrats; men and women. All were suspect. The Jews themselves were considered dangerous by their Gentile neighbors. The Medieval era was a particularly harsh period for the Jewish People. What made matters worse was the brutal treatment received by European Jews as a result of non-Jewish suspicion that Jews possessed the evil eye. In Germany, Jews were referred to by the term Judenblick which means "Jew's glance." Canon Law 49, a product of the Council of Elvira, prohibited Jews from from standing at the fertile fields of Christians for fear that they would destroy the crops with an evil glance.[12]

Not only were such anti-Jewish laws legislated as a precaution against perceived threats. Isolated actions against the Jewish People occurred. In 1189, Jews were banned from the coronation of Richard the Lion-Hearted out of fear that an evil eye cast by a Jew would bring harm to the throne of England.[13]

Jewish lifestyles likewise perpetuated the belief that the Children of Israel were carriers of the evil eye. Plagues

which persistently struck European communities were often avoided by Jews in the Middle Ages. Scrupulous hygienic practices often helped Jews avoid dreaded diseases. Such immunity from illness led many to suspect the Jews of casting an evil eye upon those who were plagued by disease.

In spite of the many restrictions placed on Jews by Medieval Christian communities, there was a great deal of interdependence between Jews and Gentiles. Many Jewish superstitious practices were borrowed by Christians, and vice versa. One such example appears to be the superstitious practice of knocking on wood. The origins of such a custom are widely accepted as Christian. Such a practice of rapping wood is most likely connected to the wooden cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified. This practice was later adopted by Jews for the purpose of avoiding the evil eye.

Jewish literature of the Middle Ages certainly addressed the issue of the evil eye. One example may be found within the works of Rashi, the celebrated biblical and talmudic commentator, in commenting on Numbers 12:1. Here Rashi asserts that the text refers to Tzipporah (the wife of Moses) as a Cushite woman because of her beauty. Such a name change, Rashi implies, is intended to minimize her beauty so that the evil eye has no dominion over her.

In spite of what seems to have been a widespread acceptance of this folk belief in Medieval Jewish texts and lifestyles, Maimonides, the great Medieval philosopher and physician, wrote that such superstitious beliefs are repugnant to Jewish tradition. Maimonides called these practices "fraudulent"

and "idolatrous."[14] Such a folk belief, he wrote, was a tool for the leaders of yore in controlling the masses.

Several practices which were widespread among the Jews of Medieval Europe have endured throughout the ages and are still practiced by Jews today. Many of these practices originated from folk practices pertaining to the evil eye. Yet many Jews do not realize that, in fact, these rituals and customs were rooted in superstitious beliefs. The following descriptions of some of these practices represent but a few of a multitude of such customs.

The practice of spitting is a common antidote against the evil eye. Mothers commonly wipe saliva on the foreheads of their children or spit on the floor three times to avert the evil eye. Spitting is a popular practice amongst Jews of Eastern European descent, and originated as an antidote because saliva was considered to be a potent life fluid. Folk belief teaches that the evil eye is obliterated by such fluid.

Similarly, blood is considered to be a good defense against an evil eye. Traditional Jewish sources prescribe red ribbon or red string as good luck charms. We have also seen that red paint may be used to deflect the evil eye. One reason for this may be because red is the color of blood as some have suggested. One must be careful with this conjecture, however, because the practice amongst Sephardic Jews is to utilize blue string for this purpose. Furthermore, there is very little evidence in Jewish literature to support the contention that these red charms are so colored as a representation of blood. The purpose for painting a tree red,

for example, is to remind one to pray for the tree. It is not necessarily, in and of itself, a cure for the evil eye. Nevertheless, red is still universally used today in objects intended as defenses against an evil eye.

Other Jewish customs include a father walking his son to school on his first day. Because young children are highly susceptible to an evil eye, the father shields his son with a jacket as they walk together. This guarantees that no harm will befall his son.

It is a widespread custom for Jews to refrain from celebrating double weddings and other simchot in which more than one person is being honored at a time. Such a joyous event is liable to provoke an evil eye. Similalry, family members do not follow one another in blessing the Torah.[15]

Simple human words are often used in deflecting the evil eye. When counting children, Eastern European Jews have often taken this census of sorts by saying "not one, not two, not three..." to confound the evil eye.[16] A phrase known to many American-born Jews is kein ayin hara; meaning "no evil eye." Such a phrase is often accompanied by the gesture of spitting upon the ground.

One custom which has endured for hundreds of years, and is practiced in Reform congregations as well as more traditionally oriented synagogues, is for those with living parents to leave the sanctuary during the Yizkor service. The reason which is commonly given today for such a practice is that one who has nobody for whom to say Yizkor may distract those who do. Some also say that there is no reason for one

who is not remembering a loved one to attend. This practice originated, however, out of belief that those who were remembering a parent or a loved one may cast the evil eye upon one who has never been bereaved. Such an envious glance may bring harm to the one who is not remembering a loved one; causing calamity to fall upon this person's family.[17] This is an example of a custom which originated from the folk belief of the evil eye, yet its purpose has been reinterpreted today.

In Eastern Europe, a Havdalah candle has been used to exorcise evil spirits such as the evil eye. A parent, usually the mother, lights the candle and blows the smoke into the child's mouth.[18] This custom was borrowed from Christian neighbors who used candles and incense to expunge evil spirits.[19] Perhaps this custom also hearkens back to the Temple when incense was used on Yom Kippur by the High Priest before walking into the Holy of Holies. In this case the exorcism is performed by one's mother; the parent who typically passes on such superstitious practices to offspring.

In Jewish communities, especially in Eastern Europe, superstitious practices related to the evil eye have been transmitted to the children through the mother. This may be because the fathers were too busy with their studies to be occupied with the perpetuation of such beliefs. Furthermore, as principal care provider for the children, it was important for the mother to teach her children how to prevent such a malady.

As we have seen, the notion of an evil eye is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. Such an adherence has endured

for at least two thousand years. Nevertheless, the age of Enlightenment has brought a close to widespread acceptance of the evil eye in Jewish culture. It is only minimally feared among American Jews, and those who do believe in an evil eye are very much a product of Eastern Europe. Rationalism, coupled with a greater knowledge of medicine and science, has induced more sensible judgment and less superstition. We can pinpoint disease and we have more knowledge of the causes of natural disasters. These factors are largely responsible for the decline of the evil eye among Jewish communities around the globe.

CHAPTER IV

AMULETS AND ANTIDOTES

The universal adherence to the notion of an evil eye is accompanied by an equally widespread belief that amulets may be employed to avoid its dire effects. In virtually all cultures and regions, one can find the wide-reaching use of jewelry and other charms among the people. Though the intentions of those who wear such ornaments today may not be to ward off evil spirits, the use of jewelry developed from the need to employ amulets in such a manner. The good luck charm, such as the horseshoe, rabbit's foot, or charm bracelet, as we already know, derived from superstitious practices.

The terms "amulet" and "talisman" are often used interchangeably. There seems to be very little difference between these two charms in the way we view them. Originally, however, there was a profound dissimilarity between the two. The word talisman means "to make marks" and one must be made under the direction of stars in order to be considered bona fide.[1] Furthermore, a talisman is created for just one purpose; performing the one function for which it was made.[2] The amulet, on the other hand, is not created according to the position of the stars. Its purpose is more general. According to one expert, "the amulet is supposed to exercise its protective powers on behalf of the individual or thing continually."[3] Though these charms date back to prehistoric times, the amulet, as we know it, originated in early civilized cultures. The Babylonians and Egyptians were the first among civilized people to employ amulets. They consequently passed such use on to Greek and Roman cultures before they were widely accepted among virtually all existing societies.

The common cliche which tells us that we should "fight fire with fire" is descriptive of the amulets which are used to defend against an evil eye. In many cultures it is the eye of a god, placed boldly on the face of an amulet, which is utilized to dispel evil spirits.[4] Other symbols, connected to a deity, are commonly used as well. In Egypt, for example, the human hand is often used to counteract forces of evil. An amulet known as the Hand of Fatimah is a favorite among the people of Egypt. Fatimah, the wife of the prophet Mohammed, is perceived to have possessed a magical hand. Today it is commonly worn around the neck. This amulet, in the shape of a hand, is often designed with a ceramic eye just below the fingers. Such an eye signifies that "this holy hand repulses your evil eye and this eye returns your evil curse."[5] The general purpose of many amulets which are intended to repel the evil eye is to deflect the evil glance back upon the one who is staring. Therefore, mirrors have often been used for amulets. The sense that the pupil of the eye is the seat of the soul, and that an evil eye emanates from the pupil, perpetuates the use of such amulets. As evil exits the eye through the pupil, so too may it be deflected back through it. Likewise, some societies have adhered to the belief that the power of the amulet lies not in its ability to deflect an evil eye, but rather to attract it so that it does not actually strike the one who holds the charm.

Among the most common types of amulets is one that is in written form. It is this kind, clearly written on parchment, which is placed inside a case. It is the written word that

is believed to hold the power; not the case. The encasement usually consists of leather, but metal holders are fairly common as well. Arabs often keep their Korans in pouches adorned with jewels. Today, Arabs and Persians carry pieces of paper containing a short verse from the Koran, a short prayer, or a mystical name.[6] This style is similar to many amulets which are carried by Jews from whom the Arabs and Persians borrowed this custom.

One of the most interesting of all religious beliefs is that of the third eye; an adherence which pervades the major Eastern philosophies. As we already know, this eye is said to be situated on one's forehead; located between the eyes. Buddhist philosophy teaches that this eye represents spiritual wisdom. The deity known as Shiva is said to possess a third eye which is capable of destroying the whole universe at one time. This eye is also endowed with the power to save the earth from eternal darkness and, according to legend, did so long ago. Those who adhere to the Hindu philosophy believe that Shiva employed his powers ages ago in order to turn his rival, Kama, into ashes. Along with the many functions of this third eye is the perception that it is the third eye chiseled upon the forehead of an idol which bestows power upon it. It is not until this eye is placed upon the head of the statue that Hindus and Buddhists begin to worship it.[7]

Though the composition of amulets varies between cultures, some standard forms do exist. Roots from common herbs have long been employed as amulets as well as metal objects, various grains bound in leather, and inscriptions on paper or parchment,

as we know. Precious stones and limbs of animals have likewise been utilized as amulets. Such charms are commonly worn around the neck, although this is not always the case.

As we know, red is the color commonly used in defending against the forces of evil. Though most likely not actually associated with blood, Pearl Binder claims that the color red is "lucky throughout Asia because it is thought to be life granting."[8] The Romans commonly wore coral around their necks for they too believed in the power of red. During the Middle Ages, this same source tells us, a fingernail, a toenail, or a lock of hair was taken from an ailing person and wrapped in a red cloth. This cloth was subsequently buried; and as a result, some believed, cured the person from whatever ailed him or her. During this same period, a garment bearing a red thread was the sign of a witch, and witches in Ireland were said to have worn red hats which enabled them to fly.[9]

Amulets have long been a part of Jewish culture. The use of protective jewelry dates back to the biblical era and seems to have been adopted from the Israelites' neighbors. The notion that the utterance of a certain name at a certain time would prompt the appearance of an angel or a demon was applied to the use of amulets.[10] Jews believed that, conversely, the proper type of amulet would detract an evil spirit. Though the English word "amulet" is derived from an unknown Latin root,[11] the word for amulet in talmudic literature is קמיע which means to "bind." The name of God is commonly inscribed upon amulets worn by Jews, and it is often accompanied by biblical verses intended to deflect the evil eye. We shall

now spend some time discussing biblical passages which describe the use of amulets and the role that such charms plays in the Hebrew Bible.

Though the widespread use of amulets among the Israelites is recorded in the Bible within many passages, such use was viewed with disdain by other parts of Jewish biblical literature, as we shall see. Nevertheless, one scholar has observed that it is "quite clear that many of the magical practices which are made known to us by the Hebrew Bible were of very great antiquity, and were winked at by the lawgivers and prophets because it was impossible to put an end to them."[12]

One noted passage in Jewish biblical literature which condemns the use of amulets is found in Genesis 35. It is here where Jacob charges his household after God tells him to build an altar at Beth El. Before he constructs this place of worship, Jacob requests the idols of his kin as well as all of their earrings. Jacob disposes of these objects by burying them under soil nearby. Here the use of amulets is recorded in biblical literature as is the alleged association of such charms with idolatry.

A similar passage, associating the use of amulets with idolatry, is found in the notorious narrative of the Israelites' transgressions in regard to the Golden Calf. In Exodus 32:2, the High Priest Aaron requests the gold jewelry worn by the Israelites so that he can create this idol. He commands the men to remove all of the jewelry from their wives and children. According to one source, such an action is not merely equating the possession of amulet with idolatry, it likewise teaches

that only the "weak" (women and children) wear amulets.[13]

Isaiah 3:18-20 similarly describes the idolatry of Judah and Jerusalem and the charm that the inhabitants of these lands wore. Verse twenty of this chapter refers to פְּתִי הַנֶּפֶשׁ which one translation renders "talismans." This same verse also refers to קְמִיעַ which commonly means charm. This time the same translation renders it "amulets."[14]

Whereas the Torah and the Prophets condemn the use of charms, equating this practice with idolatry, so too the Writings deplore the wearing of amulets. Psalms 73:6 says "therefore pride is wrapped around their necks; violence enwraps them like a cloak" (לָכֵן גַּאֲוָתָה יְעָטְּפֵמוֹ חָמָס יִלְבָּשׁוּ עֲלֵימוֹ). In this passage, violence or utter lawlessness clings to them like an amulet. Such lawlessness, or חָמָס, may also include idolatry.

In spite of the Bible's stern warnings against the possession of amulets and charms, many examples of such use exist in biblical literature. We know that Babylonians and Egyptians were the first civilized societies to don amulets. The Hebrews most likely borrowed the custom of wearing amulets from these cultures.[15] Perceived as abominable and idolatrous, the Bible is replete with warnings against behaviors that might be associated with such heathen people. Nevertheless, the power of amulets was so strongly perceived by their neighbors, that the Hebrews integrated the use of such jewelry into their lifestyles. There are many cases where the Bible mentions the existence of such ornaments without condemning their use or equating them with idolatry. So widespread was

this practice, that even animals were known to have worn such charms (see Judges 8:26).

Not only is the Hebrew Bible filled with examples of Israelites bearing amulets, many inscriptions which commonly appear on amulets worn by Jews derive from biblical literature. One example that we already know of is Genesis 49:22 which has been interpreted by the rabbis as proving that those who have come from the seed of Joseph are immune to the effects of an evil eye. This, however, is only one example of many biblical inscriptions found on Jewish amulets which are still worn by many today.

The sense of God as One who guards the Children of Israel is conveyed by many biblical passages found on Hebrew amulets. The Hebrew word for "guard" or "keep" (from the root שמר) commonly appears on amulets worn by Jews. On many amulets which bear the inscription from Genesis 49:22, there are some extra-biblical words following the passage. Such words tell us that "The Lord is the Guardian of Israel" (יהוה שומר ישראל). In fact, the word שב, which frequently appears on amulets such as the <u>mezuzah</u> (the use of the <u>mezuzah</u> as an amulet will be described in detail later in this chapter), is an abbreviation of sorts. The word שב stands for שומר דלתות ישראל which means "Guardian of the doors of Israel."

The words from Psalms 91:11 are frequently found on the faces of amulets. This verse tells us that "God will command His angels to guard you (לשמרך) everywhere that you go." This is a passage often cited in order to diminish the threat of an evil eye.

Psalms 16:8, which also commonly appears on ornaments intended to divert the evil eye, brings to mind the omnipotence of God; another common biblical notion found on amulets. This verse says: "I always place God before me; He is at my right hand; I shall not be shaken" (שִׁוִּיתִי יְהוָה לְנֶגְדִּי תָּמִיד כִּי מִימִינִי בַּל-אֶמּוֹט). The sense that God forever protects to Children of Israel is perpetuated by this verse on the amulet.

References to the eye are commonly found on Israelite amulets. As we know, in many cultures, the eye is frequently found on an amulet intended to defend against an evil eye. On Hebrew amulets such an image may appear in words. Genesis 6:8, which may be found on amulets worn by Jews reads "Noah found favor in the eyes of God" (וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה).

The Torah has often been a symbol of strength and optimism for the Jewish People. We therefore find words from Deuteronomy 33:4 on Hebrew amulets. The inscription reminds us that "Moses charges us with (the words of) the Torah, the legacy of the Congregation of Jacob" (תּוֹרָה צִוָּה-לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה מוֹרָשָׁה קְהִלַּת יַעֲקֹב). By appearing on amulets, the passage may be interpreted to mean that the Jews were chosen by God to receive the Torah. God will therefore protect the Children of Israel from all harm as the words of this Teaching promise. Such potential harm includes any evil spirits that this amulet may repel.

The fish is a design which commonly appears, cross-culturally, on many amulets.[6] The fish, which lays many eggs at one time, is a symbol of fertility. While Hebrew amulets do not always display a fish on its face, biblical verses which suggest fruitfulness often appear. One such verse is

found in Genesis 26:12 which reads: "And Isaac sowed in that very land, reaping in that very year one hundred gates and God blessed him." (וַיִּזְרַע יִצְחָק בָּאָרֶץ הַהִוא וַיִּמְצָא בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִוא מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ יְהוָה). This reference to reaping and sowing suggests the quality of fertility which such an amulet might protect from the evil eye.

Finally, it is one biblical passage in particular which deserves a bit of explanation. The Priestly Blessing, which is found in Numbers 6:24-27, appears on many Hebrew amulets which serve to divert an evil eye. These verses, appearing in Jewish liturgical works, are used to bestow blessing upon the Community of Israel. In traditional circles, it is one is of priestly descent who is designated to recite this blessing. The blessing in English is as follows: "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the face of the Lord be made to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His face upon you and grant you peace" (יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחֻנֶּךָּ יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיָשֵׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם). The verse concludes with the words: "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel and I will bless them" (וְשָׂמוּ אֶת-שְׁמִי עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֵם). It is this last verse which, most likely, earned it its place upon amulets worn by Jews. To place the name of God upon oneself may be interpreted to mean that amulets are perfectly kosher, so to speak, though this is certainly not the intention of this passage.

Before beginning our discussion concerning the treatment of amulets in talmudic literature, we shall take a closer look at the Priestly Blessing and some possible connections

that it may have to combating the evil eye above and beyond its utilization on amulets. Much of the evidence we have concerning the role of the priest among the Jewish People is somewhat shrouded in superstition or even mysticism. The urim and tummim, stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel and which lay within the garments of a priest, are described by some as amulets.[17] What purpose these amulets served is not clear. I cannot reject the possibility that some practices of the priests, including the great pains they take in avoiding contact with corpses (lest a dead body defile them), and burning incense in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, may very well be rooted in superstitious practice.

Customs surrounding the recitation of the Priestly Blessing lead me to believe that there is a great deal of superstition connected to this benediction. Its appearance on amulets may indicate that this blessing held great mystical power for the Jews of yore. While the words of Numbers 6:27 may largely be responsible for its inclusion on these charms, ritual surrounding its use, and appearing in Jewish liturgy, may likewise be a factor. When bestowing this blessing upon the congregation, the one who is of priestly descent raises his hands. As in other cultures, the hand in Jewish tradition is a potent agent in the fight against evil spirits. In a sense, then, the one who is bestowing the blessing is thought to repel the evil eye away from the congregation. While this blessing is being uttered, the members of the congregation divert their eyes. Because the priest was such a valued member of the community, and received special rights along with the

obligation to serve the Temple (this obligation was not a burden, rather it was a blessing), he might be fearful of a look of envy emanating from members of the congregation who may cast an evil eye upon him.

While a great deal of our information concerning the use of amulets in Jewish circles derives from the Hebrew Bible, talmudic literature is filled with even more relevant information which helps us to understand better the use of, and perception of, amulets in the culture of the Jews. The Mishnah views the amulet as a charm with curative powers.[18] This is a prime example of the leniency with which the Rabbis approached the issue of the legitimacy of amulets. As we shall see, the Rabbis legislated laws concerning the use of amulets and did not condemn the use of such amulets as vigorously as do some parts of the Hebrew Bible.

The talmudic word for amulet, as we know, is קמיע which means to "bind." We also encounter the phrase אבן טובה, meaning "precious stone", to denote a charm with magical powers. So important were amulets to Jews at this time, that the Talmud legislated the process of creating an amulet in detail. According to Shabbat 61a and 61b, an amulet is to be approved only when it has been successful in aiding three people. Laws were also talmudically prescribed concerning one who is permitted to create amulets. A man who has created three original and successful amulets for three people, to ward off or cure three entirely different afflictions, was considered to be a kosher producer of amulets. Thus, a kosher amulet created by a "certified" scribe was a precious commodity and could be worn

on Shabbat. Amulets that did not meet the requirements of kashrut could still be used by Jews but were forbidden to be worn on the Sabbath. According to this passage, such amulets did not enjoy the same high status as did tefillin.

In Baba Batra 16b, Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai relates a midrash of sorts which tells the story of Abraham and a precious stone (אבן טוב) which he wore around his neck. This stone brought about a quick cure to any ailing person who gazed upon it. When Abraham died, the story continues, God suspended the amulet from the sun. Abaye was of the opinion that this story illustrates the common adage which says that as the day progresses, the illness becomes lighter. Thus a reason for the perceived phenomenon that a sick person's discomfort wanes as the day advances is proposed by the Talmud. The doctors that I asked, however, informed me that the condition of an ill person more commonly deteriorates as the evening sets in. There is no known reason for this mysterious pathology. Nevertheless, the Talmud attempts to explain a strange phenomenon through somewhat superstitious means.

Adherence to the belief that amulets held mysterious curative power for Jews, and that these charms could be employed to ward off an evil eye, persisted into the Middle Ages. The widespread acceptance of amulets among many Medieval Jewish thinkers did not enjoy the same status as it did among the masses. In his monumental work, The Guide for the Perplexed, Maimonides, in 1:61, warns against the utilization of amulets to perform magical feats. Maimonides claims that those who write amulets as a profession are in "error", and those who

adhere to a belief that these charms work wonders are not "rational." The inscription of God's name on an amulet does not render it holy, Maimonides claims, only the tetragrammaton is worthy of such distinction. Maimonides shares his feelings with Sefer Chasidim which was written at roughly the same time as the Guide. It is in Sefer Chasidim where we read: "Do not wear an amulet as a charm against evil, but put your implicit trust in God alone."[19] Maimonides was no doubt frustrated with the blind faith with which his people adhered to the belief in the power of amulets, and some of his writings reflected these feelings which he apparently shared with the author of the passage in Sefer Chasidim.

In spite of these teachings, those Jews who lived in the Middle Ages continued to practice what their folk belief dictated to them. In fact, such later works as the Shulchan Aruch (via the commentaries of Rabbi Moses b. Israel Isserles) permitted the use of amulets. As the Jews shared other superstitions and folk beliefs with their Christian neighbors, they likewise wore similar forms of amulets. Red coral was a popular type of amulet hung around the necks of both Medieval Jews and Christians (as it was for the Romans as well).

We have thus far surveyed many types of amulets. As we know from above, there was a great deal of interdependence and sharing of amulets between societies which dwelt side by side. There were some amulets, however, which were somewhat unique to the Jewish People. Although the general concepts may have been static among various cultures, the Jews possessed amulets with features specific to their culture and religious

beliefs.

According to the Tosefta (Shabbat 4:5), one should protect a horse by tying the tail of a fox around its head so that it rests between the horse's eyes. While neighbors of the Jews protected their animals with amulets, this particular one seems to be unique to the Jews.

Of course, virtually all biblical verses appearing on amulets were unique to the Jewish People. I have found no evidence in my research indicating that Christian neighbors shared these amulets bearing the same biblical inscriptions as the ones belonging to Jews (though that is not to say that this may have been the case in some areas). Nevertheless, Sefer Raziel, a Medieval mystical text, states that each of the three verses found in Exodus 14:19-21 bear high mystical importance because each verse contains seventy two letters. This corresponds to the seventy two letters contained in the mystical name of God which Sefer Raziel expounds. These verses were commonly written on parchment in the Middle Ages and placed carefully inside an amulet to "insure" that no harm would befall the one who wore it.

According to one scholar renowned for his work in the area of magic and superstition in the Jewish tradition, Jews have long kept but two types of amulets; those that are written and those which are tangible objects.[20] This scholar, Joshua Trachtenberg, further identified four features common to virtually all amulets embraced by the Jewish People.[21] The first element isolated by Trachtenberg is that amulets worn by Jews overwhelmingly contain the name of God. This, as we

have seen, is one reason for Maimonides' strenuous objections to the use of amulets. The second characteristic which Trachtenberg identified, is that the amulets of Jewish people often contain "biblical expressions of God's attributes." The third quality, according to this scholar, is that such amulets are intricately detailed. Finally, Trachtenberg wrote that the name of the person to whom the amulet belonged, along with the name of the bearer's mother, was contained on the amulet.

Perhaps the most celebrated of all amulets embraced by Jews are ritual objects known to all. Fringes worn on the corners of one's garment (known as tzitzit), a mezuzah which one affixes to the doorpost, and tefillin, the phylacteries worn around the arm and the head all originated as, or at some point enjoyed the status of, charms. Through a somewhat long evolution they grew to be used solely as sacred ritual objects; losing their superstitious qualities in more recent generations.

Though the Rabbis expressed lenient opinions concerning Jewish use of amulets, they viewed such objects as mezuzah and tefillin as being on a level more holy than what they called קמיע or לחש סגולה. In fact, the Rabbis vigorously opposed the use of the mezuzah as an amulet. So successful were the Rabbis in this endeavor, that it was not until the Middle Ages when the mezuzah became an object tantamount to an amulet. At the end of the Geonic period, the mezuzah began to lose its spiritual qualities in favor of superstitious attributes.[22] During this time, some works of mainstream Jewish

literature gave their stamp of approval on the use of the mezuzah as an amulet. Because the mezuzah had lost its qualities as a religious object, many Christians in Medieval Europe placed mezuzot on their doorposts.[23]

As an amulet, the mezuzah met three of the four criteria listed by Trachtenberg. The mezuzah contained the name of God on its face, biblical expressions written on parchment were contained inside the encasement, and many of these mezuzot, were carefully detailed. I uncovered no evidence, however, indicating that the owner's names nor the name of the owner's mother were commonly placed on the mezuzah. At the time when the use of the mezuzah changed into that of an amulet, inscribing the name of God on its face became common-place. In no way was such an act forbidden by Jewish law.

As interesting as one may find the evolution of the mezuzah to be, the development of tefillin as an amulet is even more fascinating. In discussing such a development, some passages from the Hebrew Bible must be cited. According to the Jewish tradition, we can trace the mitzvah of wearing phylacteries (as well as the mitzvah of mezuzah) back to Deuteronomy 6 where we find the keriat shema which also appears prominently in Jewish liturgy. Deuteronomy 6:6-8 teaches us the following: "And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart. Teach them to your children and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you are away; when you lie down and when you rise up. Bind them for a sign on your hand and let them be symbols between your eyes" (דברים ו:ו-ח

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-לְבָבֶךָ: וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם

בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ וּקְשַׁרְתָּם
לְאוֹת עַל-יָדֶךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ). The word in Hebrew which is used for "symbols" in the passage is טֹטָפֹת. This refers to <u>tefillin</u> as it is called in the Bible.

A parallel passage found in Proverbs is significantly linked to what we find in Deuteronomy 6 and lends support to the notion that phylacteries were, at one time, prominently displayed as amulets. Proverbs 6:20-22 reads as follows: "Keep the commandments of your father, my son, and do not blot out the teaching of your mother. Bind them upon your heart forever (and) bind them on your throat. It will lead you when you walk, when you lie down it will watch over you, and when you get up it will converse with you" (נְצֹר בְּנִי מִצְוַת אָבִיךָ וְאַל-תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ
קָשְׁרֵם עַל-לִבְּךָ תָמִיד עָנְדֵם עַל-גַּרְגְּרֹתֶךָ בְּהִתְהַלֶּכְךָ
תַּנְחֶה אֹתָךְ בְּשָׁכְבְּךָ תִּשְׁמֹר עָלֶיךָ וַהֲקִיצוֹתָ הִיא תְשִׂיחֶךָ). Some of the similarities between these two passages are striking. Another passage similarly found in Proverbs likewise warrants attention. Proverbs 4:20-23 tells us: "Listen to my words, my son; lend an ear to my speech. Do not let them leave your sight; keep them within your heart (some would say "mind"). For they are life to those who find them; healing for his entire flesh. Most of all guard your heart (or "mind"); for from it emanates life" (בְּנִי לִדְבָרַי הַקְשִׁיבָה לַאֲמָרַי הַט-אָזְנֶךָ
אַל-יַלִּיזוּ מֵעֵינֶיךָ שָׁמְרֵם בְּתוֹךְ לְבָבֶךָ כִּי-חַיִּים הֵם לְמֹצְאֵיהֶם
וּלְכָל-בְּשָׂרוֹ מַרְפֵּא).

The link between these passages is apparent. The parent, who is obligated to teach its offspring Torah, explains the urgency of the matter; to know Torah is imperative; to keep

the words of God's teachings with oneself at all times is necessary because the words of Torah sustain. One way to keep these words with oneself at all times is to wear them upon the body. As Deuteronomy 6 instructs, and as Proverbs 6 reiterates, they shall be kept upon one's heart and somewhere on the head.

We further see from the above texts, that parental love, like an amulet, may protect. God who is a parental figure, and protector, has given us the gift of Torah; words which may protect if kept upon the heart or near the brain. Tefillin are worn traditionally on the arm (so that it is closest to the heart) and between the eyes. Originally, tefillin were worn by men only on the arm and not only in the morning as is the custom today. Before the Middle Ages, tefillin were worn all day, as were amulets. Tefillin, like many other amulets, may not be worn on Shabbat, according to Rabbinic legislation. When wearing tefillin, one is careful to move the phylacteries which rest upon the head, closer to the upper forehead. This may be in response to the growing awareness that cultures which were perceived as heathen taught that the third eye is located between one's eyes. Furthermore, like amulets of yore, tefillin consist of parchment with (biblical) inscriptions wrapped in leather. These words allowed one to defend against evil spirits because the words of Torah are thought to be protecting. This is why biblical inscriptions often appear on amulets worn by Jews. Like amulets, tefillin must be created by men who are bound by explicit laws governing their work. The number seven is universally connected to amulets.[24] When

one puts on phylacteries, the person wraps it seven times around the arm. One also checks the kashrut of tefillin every seven years.

While the talmudic Rabbis frowned upon the use of tefillin to ward off evil spirits, other sources granted permission, either implicitly or explicitly, for their superstitious use. According to the Targum for Song of Songs, mezuzot and tefillin may be used as amulets. Later Geonic legislation made it legal to use such objects to divert the powers of evil demons.[25] It thus became halachah, as they interpreted it.

As we already know, however, Medieval sources, including Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed, and Sefer Chasidim, explicitly condemn the use of ritual object as charms. At roughly the same time, in the thirteenth century, tefillin grew to be used solely for religious purposes.[26] The rituals attributed to the wearing of phylacteries became standardized, and many of their links to superstitious practice disappeared at that time. Nevertheless, the use of tefillin as amulets is deeply rooted in superstition and folk belief.

It appears as if tzitzit is similarly rooted in superstitious practice. While not much has been written on the subject, it is widely known that Jews of yore placed some faith upon their fringes as detractors of evil. It is widely known that the fancy lettering in the Torah contains fringes on the end of many words so that the already strong word of God is fortified by the presence of these small additions.

As superstition in Jewish communities has waned, as a result of the Emancipation and the subsequent proliferation

of rational thought, the status of such ritual objects as charms is but a distant memory. Those superstitions which linger from ancient days involve practices which do not include such objects. Nevertheless, a significant amount of everyday Jewish religious practice hearkens back to a time when our ancestors held fast to many ideas of a superstitious nature.

CHAPTER V

MORE REMEDIES AND ANTIDOTES

Thus far I have described many types of remedies and cures for an evil eye. Antidotes are so central to this universal folk belief that it is impossible to discuss them without also mentioning the scores of remedies which accompany such a belief. The purpose of many of these cures and remedies is to help heal young children from maladies caused by an evil eye. As we know, children are most profoundly affected by the malevolent glance of another, according to this folk belief. Some say, as previously cited, that a child needs extra protection because at such a young age the proper personality traits used to ward off an evil eye have not yet developed. Yet as we shall see, it is other people who are equally susceptible to the strike of an evil eye. For these people, in some cases, special remedies have been prescribed to exorcise or divert the evil eye.

In order to understand fully the precise ways in which certain remedies are believed to work, it is important to comprehend the pathology of the evil eye. Evil demons of all types are believed to run rampant at night. Though one would not classify an evil eye as a nocturnal force, the power of the eye has been perceived to be stronger at night. Such a notion hearkens back to ancient times when the powers contained within the sun and the moon were believed to be polar in nature. To those who dwelled in the Mediterranean Basin thousands of years ago, the sun was known as the "Eye of the Day" while the moon was called the "Eye of the Night."[1] The role of each of these two orbs was that of protector. As long as the sun rose in the day and the moon was radiant by night, no harm

could be perpetrated by evil demons. It was on nights when the moon was hidden by clouds, people of ancient cultures believed, when evil demons would stalk civilized villages. The protective power of the moon was arrested by the blanket of the clouds. As a result, many of the exorcisms of evil spirits were conducted at night. This fear that evil spirits lurked in the shadows at night persisted into the Middle Ages. Still today we see, depicted in cartoons and through other media of communication and entertainment, a belief that imagined malevolent forces such as ghosts and goblins run wild at night.

Many defenses against the evil eye involve the organ of vision. One is cautioned not to touch one's eyes with unclean hands. Because impure places and objects breed evil spirits, some believe, one should wash his or her hands before making contact with a human eye. Jewish folk belief includes such a notion. It has been taught that special evil spirits known as שֵׁדִים live upon the impure hands of Jews.[2] That is why Jews are are commanded to ritually purify their hands at seven different times. One such time is in the morning, just after rising, because the evil demons which may have wreaked havoc during the night might still be clinging to one's hands. Because the pupil was universally perceived to be the open window to the soul, evil spirits, it was believed, could enter the body through the eye.

We shall now see several different types of remedies and agents which aid in obliterating the evil eye. Many of these remedies and defenses are cross-culturally accepted. Some of those commonly practiced by Jews are borrowed from

other peoples while others are unique to Jews. Whenever possible, such manifestations of interdependence between cultures and societies will be discussed.

In many Eastern countries, as we know, superstitious people place objects, which are intended to fight against an evil eye, between their eyes as a response to a belief that an invisible third eye is situated on the forehead. In India, in addition to the forehead dot which adorns the heads of women, sandal paste is commonly placed between the eyes.[3] Though no reason is provided for such a deterrent, the evil eye would most likely stick to the paste, avoiding internal entry. Likewise, as we know from Jewish tradition, objects have been commonly placed between the eyes of animals to avoid the evil eye. Good looking children, too, may receive a small amount of ashes on the forehead. This will mar the beauty of the youngster thus detracting the evil eye.[4] This custom is not limited to Jewish culture. In Central Italy, where farming is a major source of income for many Italians, red ribbons are placed conspicuously between the eyes of valuable oxen.[5] Such a custom has been bequeathed to subsequent generations, making its way into American society. Dogs and cats commonly wear ribbons when on display at shows. This custom originated in response to the fear that such beautiful animals would attract the malevolent gazes of those who envied their beauty. Ironically, such ribbons adorn the heads and bodies of cats and dogs today in order to accentuate their beauty.[6]

In Italy and India, similarly, houses are erected with

amenities which serve the purpose of averting an evil eye. Many houses in Italy bear red window sills designed to drive away demons who are said to be particularly attracted to one's home.[7] Indian houses are built with charms complementing their design.[8] It is interesting to note that many houses owned by Jews have been known to bear red marks prominently on the doorpost as a means to detract evil spirits, including the Angel of Death. In this case, the red color does, indeed, represent blood from the sacrifice of an animal.[9]

In Ethiopia, where it is believed that an evil eye may be cast upon food products, feasts are not uncommon. At such gatherings, however, great pains are taken to avoid the inequitable distribution of food. Everyone in attendance is given an equal amount of food, lest a malevolent eye be cast by one who feels cheated.[10]

Words, both written and oral, are effective agents in quelling evil spirits. As we have seen, written amulets and phrases such as kein ayin hara are used by Jews to deflect the evil eye. We have also seen that written amulets often include the name of God. Thus is the case with oral deterrents against an evil eye in both Jewish and non-Jewish cultures.

In Italy, when one feels that he or she has been struck by the evil eye, an X is carved into the bark of a tree or upon the face of a wall followed by the words "I believe in God all-powerful."[11] Similarly, one who compliments an infant or a young child, in Italy, but does not add the words "God bless you" is suspected of directing an evil eye at the youngster.[12]

For the Children of Israel, compliments are rarely directed at a young child. Praise, the Jews have long believed, is usually accompanied by envy. Thus one who lavishes kind words upon an infant is often suspected of harboring an evil eye. If such flattery cannot be avoided, certain formulas and phrases exist to counter the potential harmful effects of such complimentary words.

As is the case in cultures such as those found in China and India, words may be applied to confound evil spirits. So too for the Jewish People. For example, a Jewish child who is pleasing to the eye is often called "ugly" so as to confuse an evil eye. As we have seen earlier, it is also a custom to change the name of a young child who is believed susceptible to an envious glance. The purpose here is likewise to confuse an evil eye which may be intent on striking a beautiful child. It is similarly customary for a Jew to confuse an evil eye by uttering words in a backward fashion. For example, in Germany the evil eye is referred to as "git oyg" (meaning "good eye"), in order to inhibit an evil eye from striking.[13]

Other superstitious practices connected to a Jewish adherence to the notion of an evil eye include one which is designed to divert a possible malevolent glance from a spouse. In this case, a husband or a wife lifts his or her hand (as we know the hand is a powerful way to deflect an evil eye) while uttering the word "hamesh".[14] Meaning "five", to signify the power of one's fingers, the word "hamesh", accompanied by a raised hand, is intended to frighten an evil eye with the threat of destruction by the hand of the one who is defending

against it.

While one who is young is especially susceptible to an evil eye, the malevolent glance of another may easily be cast upon an older person out of envy for the individual's longevity. Jewish people, therefore, do not reveal their ages freely. Nor does the Jew reveal his or her exact date of birth. If one chooses to admit one's age, it is usually accompanied by the phrase "until 120" (the age of Moses at his death). This is intended to exhibit strength of will in order to disinterest an evil eye. Such a custom is commonly practiced today by Jews all over the world.

Chants and formulas have been known to Jews since the days of the Rabbis. Oaths designed to divert an evil eye were permitted on the Sabbath.[15] The Kabbalists subsequently instituted prayers expressly written for the purpose of warding off an evil eye.[16] Most often, these chants were accompanied by specific actions. It is forbidden to make a blessing without an accompanying action. Such a custom has been established so that a blessing should not be uttered in vain. This is also the case with words which are intended to ward off an evil eye. In some cases these actions have been formally established. One such example may be found in an action generally known as a "fig". Explained in the Talmud, in Berachot 55b, the "fig" is described as the act of placing one's left thumb into the closed fist of the right hand while simultaneously putting one's right thumb into the closed fist of the left hand. This is a sign of strength an fertility. Such a manual gesture is thought to visually resemble the act of sexual

intercourse. According to one source, a slight variation is to place one's thumbs in the opposite hands so that the thumbs protrude between the first and second fingers.[17] To complement the physical part of this action, one must loudly claim that he or she is descended from the seed of Joseph. The original purpose of such an act, according to this passage from the Talmud, was to avoid one's own evil eye as one journeyed into a new village. By one's own evil eye, the Talmud means one's own sexual desires. That is why, most likely, such an antidote involves gestures with a sexual connotation. Today, however, this symbol is universally recognized by the Jew and has a more far-reaching, all-inclusive, purpose for avoiding the evil eye.

The above example from the Talmud specifically describes an action which one takes to excise his or her own evil eye. Other customs involving oaths and other uttered defenses against an evil eye are not rooted in Jewish legal texts. One such practice involves the use of a kerchief worn by a baby feared to have contracted a disease as a result of contact with an evil eye.[18] This kerchief is brought to a sorcerer who places this piece of cloth to his mouth and chants the appropriate words. This kerchief (a baby's cap was sometimes used) was then placed on the child's head or neck. This act was repeated on three consecutive days.

As we know, saliva, a strong life fluid, was commonly used to expunge the evil eye. A Jewish mother commonly licks the forehead of the afflicted child twice, followed by expectorating one time and repeating a chant. This custom

was borrowed from Polish Christians.[19] The practice of spitting, however, was begun by Greeks and Romans and was subsequently passed on to other cultures including Jews and Chrisitians.

It has long been the way of Jews to refrain from taking vows. So great is the necessity to avoid such promises that the Yom Kippur liturgy (Kol Nidre) allows for the dissolution of vows. Such a custom of refraining from oaths originated in fear that an evil eye may befall the one making the promise. Curses are also discouraged by Jewish tradition, lest an evil spirit catch wind of such a curse and cause the uttered evil to befall a person.[20] In spite of this teaching, Jews continue to pronounce curses and take oaths in an attempt to exorcise an evil eye.

The Jewish war against evil spirits has included many antidotes which involve the use of saliva and the act of spitting. We have seen one specific example a short while ago. However, a couple more practices of this type, which merit discussion, exist. One student of the evil eye, who has researched cures and remedies for this malevolent spirit, has written that "when a mother fears her child may be under the power of the evil eye, she licks or kisses the child's forehead three times, spitting after each time."[21] This saliva, she concludes, exorcises the evil eye.

Another practice intended to excise an evil eye which includes the use of saliva, is the act of spitting three times on one's fingertips followed by a quick gesture made with one's hands.[22] It is likewise a Jewish custom to spit behind one who is thought to possess an evil eye.[23] Such an act is

usually performed surreptitiously.[24]

Salt and dirt are also commonly used to exorcise evil spirits such as the evil eye. One such custom dictates that salt should be rotated around the head of a child and then thrown in each corner of the room with the remainder being hurled over the threshold.[25] A different practice, this time including the use of dirt, involves the placing of a child's garment on hot coals along with incense and dust which has been gathered from all four corners of the room.[26] Dirt is collected from all corners because, as we know, dirt is a prime breeding place for evil spirits and, if such dirt is gathered from all corners, the source of the evil eye will most likely be burnt on the hot coals.

The rite of exorcism explained above warrants a special look. Like salt and dirt, coals have commonly been used by Jews to expunge evil spirits. In earlier times, at the <u>havdalah</u> service, spices used in the service were brought in on smoldering coals.[27] Such a custom of using coals to exorcise evil spirits, I feel, may have some connection to the service which separates the Sabbath from the rest of the week. Other rites of exorcism which involve various ritual objects used at the <u>havdalah</u> service prevail in Jewish practice. As we saw before, the <u>havdalah</u> candle is used to exorcise evil spirits. Wine, another <u>havdalah</u> symbol, is likewise used in ridding Jewish children of afflictions thought to be caused by an evil eye. A piece of the child's clothing is immersed in wine and is then wiped on his or her face to remove the effects of the evil eye.[28] It is no accident that these three symbols are used in destroying

evil spirits, considering the fact that some objects employed in Jewish exorcism are called "l'havdil" ("opposite") amulets;[29] the same root used in the word "havdalah". The effect of such objects of exorcism is to render the subject free of evil spirits. That is, to place the subject in a state that is opposite to the one in which he or she was initially. The purpose of the havdalah service is to separate the sacred from the profane. With exorcism, one attempts to achieve the same end; separating the profane spirits from sacred human life.

Other ritual objects known to Jews are used in expunging the evil eye. In some communities, Passover matzoh (together with salt) is used to rid young children of evil spirits. The salt and matzoh are placed in the child's pockets to help ward off the evil eye.[30]

Finally, certain rites of passage involve extra caution, lest the evil eye appear in order to turn joy into sorrow. At times of happiness, Jews widely believe, the evil eye lurks in the shadows; waiting for the perfect time to wreak havoc. One such example is the rite of marriage. To counter any potential harm from an evil eye, children are sometimes excluded from a wedding service.[31] Because children likewise attract an evil eye, the chance of the newly married couple being struck increases with the presence of children. Furthermore, because such evil spirits bear great envy for the groom on his wedding night, he is made to walk backwards so that the evil eye will be confused and leave the presence of the happy couple.[32]

Such examples of precautions taken at Jewish life cycle events are numerous. In fact, many rites of passage are shrouded in superstitious practice and owe many elements of their development to Semitic folk beliefs. The next chapter will briefly survey such practices and examine the ways in which superstitious practice has effected their development.

CHAPTER VI

THE EVIL EYE AND LIFE CYCLE EVENTS

There exists a strong correlation between superstitious beliefs and practices, and Jewish life cycle events. Adopted from neighboring cultures long ago, many ancient practices shape the way in which we approach numerous Jewish rites of passage today. Julian Morgenstern, a former president of the Hebrew Union College, wrote a noted book entitled Rites of Birth, Marriage, Death and Kindred Occasions Among the Semites. Because his book is most authoritative on its subject matter, a brief explanation of it contents is warranted in this thesis. Many aspects of the belief in an evil eye have found their way into rites of birth, marriage, and death in the Jewish tradition.

The ritual practices associated with birth in the Jewish religion are strongly linked with superstitious belief. The number seven has been closely related to such rites of passage in all Semitic cultures. In the Moslem Berber tribe of Morocco, a father is not permitted to be in contact with a new born son or daughter, lest the evil eye strike his family.[1] Such evil spirits dwell within the house of a new-born baby for seven days. On the eighth day, it is believed, these evil spirits depart, allowing festivities related to the blessed event to commence. This custom is similar to that of the Jews whose practice it is to circumcise all healthy males on their eighth day of life. In a widespread Semitic rite known as Akikah, a sacrifice is presented on behalf of a male infant with the blood of the slaughtered animal being placed on the forehead.[2] Such a ritual is similar the Jewish practice of placing saliva, like blood a life fluid, on the foreheads

of young children suspected of having attracted an evil eye. During the Akikah rite, the hair of the infant is cut as is the foreskin of a Jewish child at his Brit Milah.[3]

Many other similarities exist between Semitic life cycle events of birth, and Jewish life cycle events as practiced today. In Semitic tribes which inhabit Mecca and Djidda, the faces of infant males are adorned with three marks carved into their cheeks to protect them against an evil eye.[4] This is not unlike circumcision, as it is a symbol in the flesh of the child. Furthermore, the three incisions on the child's face are similar to the Jewish custom of spitting three times on the child's forehead.

Many other practices which are designed to ward off evil spirits after the birth of children in Semitic cultures exist; too many to discuss here. Nevertheless, some of these practices parallel the Jewish rite of passage as we have just seen. I hesitate to conclude that the act of circumcision was derived from the belief that such a symbol in the flesh of a male, or the blood that flows as a result, is intended to ward off an evil eye (though one should not necessarily reject out of hand this possibility). Because circumcision is established in biblical literature, and because there exists no strong evidence in the Hebrew Bible indicating that the Israelites adhered to a belief in the evil eye, I am cautious in concluding that there is a connection.

The number seven is connected not only to Semitic customs relating to birth; similar links to the number seven exist in marriage rites as well. As we know from Jewish tradition,