

**Fish  
Lessons  
for  
Life**

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**Concealed &  
Blessed**



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## Preface

“The great Sage Rav would always sign his name by drawing a picture of a fish,” Bava Basra 161b. The reason has been explained because of Rav’s teaching in Bava Metzia 107b.

He explains the verse in Devarim 7:15, “Hashem will remove all illness...” This refers to an evil eye, the source of most illness...99% of deaths are due to this.

Thus, Rav followed the fish lesson we learn in Berachos 20a, “They are concealed in the water and thus they are protected from the evil eye.

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Water represents Torah and mitzvos...

## 1. Message in Reverse

We know that in Hebrew, a fish is spelled 'Daled' and 'Gimel,' 'Dag.' Why is it in reverse of the order of Aleph-Bais where we have these two letters in order - 'Gimel,' before 'Daled'?

The obvious Purim answer is 'it is turned around,' as illustrated by many Purim lessons. Why would Hashem create fish to have a name that is in reverse order of His Holy letters?

The answer teaches us the way Hashem created fish to exist serves to teach us many lessons. We live on dry land and breathe Hashem's air. We are unable to live for too long under water. Fish can only breathe in water. Thus R. Akiva, Berachos 61b, explained a Jew is like a fish who cannot leave the water. We must be immersed always in Torah and mitzvos in order to live properly and fulfill our full potential.

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We then study the deeper meaning of Aleph-Bais in Shabbos 104a and learn many fascinating lessons...

## 2. Dive in

Aleph-Binah means 'Study Torah.' The more we study, the more we will understand our purpose in this world and how to succeed at everything we do. Gimel and Daled stand for 'Gemol Dalim,' help the poor.

The reverse teaches us that the poor are actually helping us more than we help them. 'Dalim Gemol' – the poor help save us from 'Gehenom.' This is explained in Bava Basra 10a.

We know that Hashem loves the poor. Thus, He instructs us to help them. Why doesn't He give them all their needs directly? Because He also loves the rich and wants them to achieve their great mitzvah to help the poor.

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The Rambam explains this in Hilchos Megillah 2:17: "It is better to increase in giving gifts to the poor, for that is the greatest, most glorious form of joy... to bring joy to the poor, orphans, widows and converts. By doing so, we become like the 'Shechina' (Divine Presence), Who brings life to the needy."

### 3. Describing one's Mother

"When R. Yoseif would hear his mother's footsteps coming, he would say, 'I will rise, for the Shechina that is arriving.'" Kiddushin 31b, Avos 2:17.

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Now, he knew it was his mother, so what does his statement mean? The Gemara there explains earlier on 30b, "There are three partners in creating a person – The Holy One blessed is He, the father and the mother. When a person honors his parents, Hashem says, "I consider it as if I am living by them and they are honoring Me."

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The same word, 'Shechina' is used by helping the poor and by honoring one's mother, because a mother represents Hashem's Presence. She loves her child, helps to give him life and teaches him to be a loving individual.



#### **4. Multiply like Fish**

Yaakov Avinu in Bereishis 48:16 blesses his children to multiply in abundance, like fish. The Gemara Berachos 20a explains, "Just as fish live in the ocean covered with water, we should always stay out of the limelight, remain modest and incognito to avoid the evil eye."

This issue is so significant that we say a daily explicit prayer to Hashem in our morning blessings -

"May it be Your will to protect us today and every day from an evil eye."

This is one reason we avoid counting Jews directly, even to see if we have a minyan.

Why should a person's envy or ill will have any type of negative effect on another person? One explanation is that Hashem tests every person. Thus, one who is awarded extra blessing from Hashem is tested to see whether they allow their blessings to cause pain to others who may be less fortunate. One who flaunts their blessing may cause Hashem to reevaluate whether they are worthy to have it.

## 5. Keep a low Profile

- Step one is to keep a low profile...be modest and humble.
- Step two is to be completely immersed in Torah and mitzvos. Fish are not only hidden in water, they are also completely dependent on water to exist. We need to be fish-like, to completely depend on Hashem for every breath of life and all else.

There is no evil eye when we understand that we have nothing that is not from Hashem. We need to o--fish-ally rely on Hashem and thank Him for all of His bounty 100 times daily with all of our feelings of thanks and humility.

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"Hashem is good to all," is the way we say it in Ashrei.

## 6. Two Methods

We learn from the Gemara that there are two methods of avoiding the evil eye -

1 - To be like the great Yoseif Hatzadik who proclaimed, "It's not me, I have no power, it's all from Hashem."

He is also famous for always mentioning Hashem's name whenever he spoke. Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky Z.T.L. in his sefer lists about eighteen places in Chumash where we see Yoseif attributing everything to Hashem. R. Yaakov was known not to hide his age and longevity, nor the amount of his children and grandchildren. He explained that it is a mitzvah to publicize Hashem's miracles and goodness to all.

2- The second way fits into the famous verse from Micha, "Walk modestly with Hashem."

## 7. One more drop

The Medrash describes another precious fish lesson. A fish is always in water. When it rains, they are eager to accept a drop of fresh rainwater as if they never had any water.

So too, a Jew should always be immersed in Torah, and yet if they hear a new Torah insight, they should be so thirsty to drink this new insight because of its infinite value.

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There is a Gemara in Bava Metzia Daf 33 of a Sage who tore his garments in mourning when a Sage who had taught him one Halacha regarding how to open a door passed away. It was as if this Sage opened up a door for him in this world.

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The Maharal explains that all of the other wisdom in this world does not equal the value of even word of Torah!

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This concept is also used to explain the Gemara Chagiga 9b, that there is no comparison between one who reviews his Torah lesson 100 times and one who reviews 101 times. 101 is like the extra drop that surpasses all the rest.

## 8. Avoiding the Negative

“The evil eye...can change a person’s life...”  
Avos 2:11. Rebeinu Yonah explains, “A person’s thoughts can cause actions to occur...” When Yaakov Avinu told his children to go to shop for food in Egypt, Bereishis 42:5, he instructed them to split up so as not to enter all together to avoid an evil eye (Rashi).

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Even when Hashem gave us the Torah, the first Tablets were smashed and our Sages attribute part of the reason to the fact that they were given in a very public, fancy way.

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In Bava Metzia 84b, there was a plan to promote and elevate R. Elozer at a certain point. There was an objection that it may cause an evil eye, so they left things as before.

Thus, R. Elozer teaches in Sanhedrin 14a, “Always stay out of the light, remain humble and you will last.”

## 9. Eye Power

There is another secret of Yoseif's success. In Berachos 20a, the Gemara also says that it was because Yoseif guarded his eyes to avoid looking at what is not his that gave him the merit to be protected from evil-eye power!

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When we look back at Shabbos 104a, the Gemara says that '*Samuch Ayin*,' stands for support the poor. Thus when the Jews in Megillas Esther reaccepted the Torah, they went all out to turn themselves around and Hashem did the same for them, measure for measure.

Thus on Purim we continue to see the needs of the poor and to support them properly. When we turn around Hashem performs miracles for us also.

The Gemara Berachos 55b, teaches that every person can say, "I am a descendant of Yoseif who is not affected by the evil eye."

## 10. Thank and Praise Hashem

This is explained that we all became His descendants when He provided sustenance for our nation and saved us all. Thus by emulating His ways and accepting to be like Him, we are also protected from an evil eye.

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“Never forget Hashem... He is the One, the Only One Who gives us the energy to accomplish and achieve,” Devarim 8:11.

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One who teaches others Torah, it is as if he gave birth to them,” Sanhedrin 19b. Thus, when we learn to think and act like Yoseif, we are considered his children.

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May we learn to swim in the ocean of Torah and mitzvos to follow Hashem’s fish lessons and to learn from Yoseif to have Hashem’s name fluent in our mouths.