

Q&A: Red Strings

written by Yossi Katz
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Q: Good day! – I’ve just returned again from my offices in India and I have a question I’m hoping you can provide me an answer.

I noticed that most people I came across in India had a red string tied to their wrist and when I asked a few people on my team the significance they told me it was something in regards to their native religion.

This brings me to the most recent observation of the “red string.” – I remember reading once about a red string in Kabbalah and in fact a few years back there was some “commercial kabbala” fad that hollywood embraced and you’d see movie stars wearing a red string.

Do you know anything about this? I seem to remember there is reference to a red string in Judaism connected to the site of Rebecca’s holy site but I could be mistaken.

A:

A **roita bindel** – red string – was often “prescribed” by concerned Jewish mothers and grandmothers in Eastern Europe to ward off the evil eye. It is quite common to find people circumscribe the matriarch RACHEL’s tomb with red string (seven times) and to then use that string, as above.

Keep searching and may no harm befall you!

kol tuv.

Ozer Bergman

As per Wikipedia:

Some red string is brought from [Israel](#). Sometimes, the string has been wound in large quantities around the [tomb](#) of the Hebrew Biblical matriarch [Rachel](#), near [Bethlehem](#). It is considered to have great powers of “good fortune” and grant added divine protection to those who wear it. Most [rabbis](#) though do not encourage the practice of this “[segulah](#)”.

On the [Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem yeshiva](#) site, the “ask the rabbi” column says:

...There is no written mention in the [Torah](#), [Halachah](#) or [Kabbalah](#) about tying a red string around the wrist. However, it seems to be a custom that has been around for some time, and may be based on Torah or Kabbalistic ideas. If there is any validity to the custom, it would be considered a segulah or protective type of act...There are sources for such special properties of seguloth. The Torah states, “The Lord your God has chosen you to be His Am Segulah (treasured people) out of all the peoples upon the face of the earth” ([Deut.](#) 7:6). Why are the Jewish people called G-d’s segulah? [Rabbi Chaim of Voloshzin](#) says it’s on account of the Torah and mitzvoth that have a miraculous effect on them, enabling their prayers to be answered in a special way. In fact, the mitzvoth themselves are protective: [Charity](#) protects from natural death, sanctifying the new moon protects from unnatural death, the [succah](#) protects from exile, and so on.

Therefore a custom that is based on Torah ideas or mitzvoth may also have special segula properties on a smaller scale. Regarding the red string, the custom is to tie a long red thread around the burial site of Rachel, the wife of [Jacob](#).

Rachel selflessly agreed that her sister marry Jacob first to spare Leah shame and embarrassment. Later, Rachel willingly returned her soul to God on the lonely way to [Beit Lechem](#), in order to [pray](#) there for the desperate Jews that would pass by on their way to exile and captivity. Often, one acquires the red string when giving charity.

Perhaps for these reasons the red thread is considered a protective segula. It recalls the great merit of our matriarch Rachel, reminding us to emulate her [modest](#) ways of consideration, compassion, and selflessness for the benefit of others, while simultaneously giving charity to the poor and needy. It follows that this internal reflection that inspires good deeds, more than the string itself, would protect one from evil and harm. [\[1\]](#)

Similarly, Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky writes more critically on the [Aish HaTorah](#) site, pointing to the ambiguous origin and controversial nature of using the red string even among the ancient rabbis:

Firstly, there is absolutely no genuine kabbalistic source for wearing a red thread around one's wrist to ward off the "evil eye." While there exists such a practice amongst some devout Jews, it is not mentioned in any kabbalistic work. Yes, there is a fleeting mention in the Talmud about the practice of tying a bundle of herbs or gems and wearing them in order to ward off the "evil eye." No special color, nor Rachel, nor even thread are mentioned. Also, the comment is an offhand remark concerning laws of [Sabbath](#) observance.

One of the late great scholars, the Debreczyner Rav, mentions it as a practice he saw in his father's home, but his extensive search could not find a written source for the practice.

The good news is that there is a clear and early source that mentions tying a red string to ward off an "evil eye" and that

is in the [Tosefta](#), an early Talmudic work (Shabbat, ch. 7-8). The bad news is that it clearly states that tying a red string around oneself is severely prohibited. It is characterized as "Darchei Emori," a worthless, superstitious practice, close to idol-worship. [\[2\]](#)

Some [Orthodox Jews](#) who worry about the negative powers of the "evil eye" may have an old tradition to tie a small red-colored string near the bed of a baby in hopes of invoking God's mercy, and that no ill-harm should befall the child.