

Charms and amulets

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

For thousands of years people have tried to bring good luck and avert bad luck from them and their property by employing charms, amulets, and talismans. A charm is a practice or expression believed to have magic power, similar to an incantation or a spell.¹ A talisman is an object bearing a sign or engraved character, and thought to act as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune.² Amulets were used to protect man, or his possessions, such as houses and cattle from the evil influences of witches, demons, and other mischievous powers, or to counteract misfortune and illness. The amulet is found both in the Orient and in the West, among tribes and nations down to the present day. Assyrians and Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, Jews and Christians, fostered this ancient superstition, and, in varying degrees, foster it today.³ Despite technical and scientific advancements, superstitions and amulets continue to pervade the Western society. Some of the amulets popular in the West are:

- **A horseshoe.** The most commonly encountered lucky charm in modern North America is the horseshoe and its representative models in the form of jewellery, wall hangings, and printed images. The use of worn-out horseshoes as magically protective amulets - especially hung above or next to doorways - originated in Europe, where one can still find them nailed onto houses, barns, and stables from Italy through Germany and up into Britain and Scandinavia.
- **The four-leaf clover.** The four-leaf clover is among the commonest of North American lucky emblems and is an especially frequent image on good luck coins, and good luck postcards.
- **The wishbone or "merry thought."** The wishbone is the third most popular American amulet, next only to the horseshoe and the four-leaf clover. It is a bone overlying the breastbone of fowl, as in a chicken, or turkey. It is the custom to save this bone intact when carving the bird at dinner and to dry it over the stove or by the fire until it is brittle. Once dry, it is given to two people, who pull it apart until it

¹"Charm." Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service.
(<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9125164>)

²"Talisman." Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service.
(<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9071049>)

³ Jewish Encyclopaedia, p. 546.

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cracks, each one making a wish while doing so. The person who gets the “long half” of the wishbone will have his or her wish “come true.” If the wishbone breaks evenly, both parties get their wishes.

- **The Rabbit’s Foot.**
- **Charm bracelets.**
- **Good Luck coins or ‘pocket pieces.’**
- **The Lucky or Smiling Buddha** commonly found in Oriental shops and restaurants.



The Crucifix. When blessed, it is considered an important sacramental.



Hebrew Amulets: Grape-Leaf Star of David pendant. One of its ancient uses was as a magical Kabbalistic symbol.

Charms and amulets in Pre-Islaamic Arabia

Arabian amulets (tameemah in Arabic) are made from pearls or bones that are worn on the necks of children or adults, or are hung up in houses or cars, in order to ward off evil – especially the evil eye – or to bring some benefits. The Arabs in the time of Prophet Muhammad used to wear arm bracelets, bangles, beaded necklaces, shells, and similar amulets to bring good luck or avert bad fortune.

Islaamic ruling on amulets

Allaah is the sole Lord and Ruler of the physical world. ‘Lord’ means He is the Creator and controls all affairs in the universe; the Kingdom of the heaven and the earth belongs exclusively to Him, and He owns them. He alone brought existence out of non-existence and it depends on Him for its conservation and continuance. His power is required at every moment to sustain all creatures. Angels, prophets, human beings, and the animal and plant kingdoms are under His control. Only Allaah knows what the future holds.

Faith in charms, amulets, and talismans contradict belief in Allaah’s Lordship by attributing the ability to bring good luck or avert bad fortune to these created things whereas only Allaah can bring good and avert harm. Consequently, the Prophet, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), opposed these superstitious practices and taught people to have firm belief in their Lord, rather than amulets, which cannot change what Allaah has destined and can bring no good fortune to anyone. Even though they are not capable of

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averting any harm, belief in amulets usually leads to idolatry over time. This can be seen among Catholics where the crucifix, statues, and medallions of saints are worn or kept for blessings and good fortune.

When people accepted Islaam in the time of the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), they carried with them their old faith in amulets. The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), strictly forbade them to adhere to such:

- The Messenger of Allaah, (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) said,
‘Spells (ruqyah), amulets and love-charms are shirk.’⁴

- The Messenger of Allaah (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) said,
“Whoever wears an amulet, may Allaah not fulfil his need, and whoever wears a sea-shell, may Allaah not give him peace.”⁵

- A group came to the Messenger of Allaah (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), to pledge their allegiance to him. He accepted the allegiance of nine of them. They said, “O Messenger of Allaah, you accepted the allegiance of nine but not of this one.” The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) said,
“He is wearing an amulet.”

The man put his hand in his shirt and took it off, then the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*) accepted his allegiance, saying,

‘Whoever wears an amulet has committed shirk.’⁶

The companions strictly abided by the prohibition set by the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), on amulets. They openly opposed such practices even among their family members. For example, Hudhayfah, one of the companions of the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), visited a sick man, and seeing a bracelet on the man’s upper arm, he pulled it off and broke it, then recited the verse,

[“Most of them who believe in Allaah, commit shirk.”]^{7 8}

On another occasion he touched the upper arm of a sick man and found a cord bracelet tied to it. The man told Hudhayfah that it contained a spell specially made for him, so Hudhayfah tore it off and said, ‘If you had died with it on, I would never have prayed over your funeral.’⁹

Once, ibn Mas’ood said, “I heard the Messenger of Allaah (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), say,

⁴ Ahmad, Aboo Daawood

⁵ Ahmad

⁶ Ahmad

⁷ Qur’aan [12:106]

⁸ Ibn Abee Haatim

⁹ Ibn Waki’

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‘Spells (ruqyah), amulets and love-charms are shirk.’

Zaynab, the wife of ibn Mas’ood said, “Why do you say this? By Allaah, my eye used to discharge and I kept going to so and so, the Jew, who put a spell on it (indicating a charm necklace) for me, and it (the eye) calmed down.” Ibn Mas’ood snatched it from her neck and broke it. ‘Surely, the family of Abdullah has no need for shirk,” he uttered... “That was just the work of the devil who was picking it with his hand, and when (the Jew) uttered the spell, he stopped. All you needed to do was to say as the Messenger of Allaah (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), used to say:

‘Adhib il-ba’s Rabb al-naas ishfi anta al-Shaafi laa shifaa’a illa shifaa’uka shifaa’an laa yughaadiru saqaman

“Remove the harm, O Lord of mankind, and heal, You are the Healer. There is no healing but Your healing, a healing which leaves no disease behind.”¹⁰

Wearing an amulet is shirk because, instead of relying upon Allaah, the heart becomes attached to the amulet, trusting that it will bring good luck and love, or avert bad fortune or disease.

Islaamic ruling on Qur’aanic charms and amulets

Some Muslims wear the Qur’aan as a good luck charm either by hanging it in their car, or on key chains, or wearing it on bracelets or necklaces. A miniature Qur’aan is worn in locket. ‘Allaah,’ ‘Bismillaah,’ ‘La ilaaha ill-allaah,’ or specific verses of the Qur’aan, sometimes written in small illegible script, are worn as pendants or locket are also used. Wearing them for decoration is obviously not shirk, but most people wear them for protection or blessings. Therefore, this practice of wearing the Qur’aan as a good luck charm should be discouraged for the following reasons:

- It may lead to wearing non-Qur’aanic amulets that are considered shirk by common people who cannot distinguish between the two.
- It is disrespectful to wear the Name or Word of Allaah in the toilet and it is not always possible for a person wearing Qur’aanic amulets to remove them every time they visit the toilet.
- The Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him*), himself did not wear such amulets or put them on his family members for protection or blessings, instead he cautioned against all forms of amulets.

¹⁰ Abou Daawood, Ibn Maajah