

Lesson 5: The Hamsa

Appendix A

The Hamsa

Hamsa is a talisman, a charm against the evil eye.

	Jewish	Muslim
<p>The word <i>hamsa</i> - חמסה</p>	<p>Comes from the Hebrew word <i>hamesh (five)</i> which refers to the five fingers on the talisman</p>	<p>Comes from the Arabic word <i>hamsa (five)</i> which refers to the five fingers on the talisman</p>
<p>The five fingers</p>	<p>Represents the five books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)</p>	<p>Represents the Five Pillars of Islam. (faith, fasting, pilgrimage, prayer, and tax)</p>
<p>Other names</p>	<p>Sometimes it is called the "Hand of Miriam", who was Moses' sister</p>	<p>"Hand of Fatima", in honor of one of the daughters of the Prophet Mohammed.</p>
<p>An eye displayed in the palm of the hand.</p>	<p>The eye is thought to be a powerful talisman against the "evil eye" or <i>ayin hara</i> (עין הרע).</p> <p>The hand of God- "The Lord took Israel out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm"</p>	<p>Depictions of the hand, the eye or the number five in Arabic (and Berber) tradition are related to warding off the evil eye, as exemplified in the saying <i>khamsa fi ainek</i> ("five [fingers] in your eye")</p>
<p>Fish</p>	<p>Fish are thought to be immune to the evil eye and are also symbols of good luck</p>	
<p><i>Mazal</i></p>	<p>Going along with the luck theme, <i>mazal</i> or <i>mazel</i> (meaning "luck" in Hebrew) is a word that is sometimes inscribed on the amulet</p>	

It is also common to see the Hamsa depicted a Star of David, prayers for the traveler, the Shema, the blessing over the house, and the colors of red and blue, both of which are said to thwart the Evil Eye.



During the henna ceremony, when brides are decorated in the preparation for their wedding, brides may wear a hamsa around their neck to ward off the Evil Eye.



At the Mimouna, a North African Jewish celebration held after Passover, tables are laid with various symbols of luck and fertility, with an emphasis on the number "5", such as five pieces of gold jewelry or five beans arranged on a leaf of pastry.

The Jewish Connection: Tzedakah

When and why do we open our hands?

BIBLICAL TEXT:

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

If there be among you a needy man, one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy needy brother; but thou shalt surely **open thy hand** unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth.

כִּי-יְהִי בְךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאַחַד אַחֶיךָ, בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ, בְּאַרְצֶךָ, אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ--לֹא תִאֲמַץ אֶת-לִבְּךָ, וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת-יָדְךָ, מֵאֶחֶיךָ, הָאֶבְיוֹן. כִּי-פָתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת-יָדְךָ, לוֹ; וְהֶעֱבַט, תִּעְבִּיטְנוּ, דִּי מִחֲסָרוֹ, אֲשֶׁר יִחְסַר לוֹ.

Question: What does this text instruct us to do in the face of poverty in our community?

Answer:

Commentary 1:

*"And so, the Torah commands us, 'Do not harden your heart and do not close your **hand**' to the needy. If your heart hardens, your **hand** will close, and you will see that your fingers are of equal length and then you will say to him (the poor person)-Go out and work like me! But do the opposite, open your hand and then you will see that your fingers are short and tall, and this is how God created people, big and small, and this lives from that"*

(Likutey Aharon, Rabbi Yeshua Lalum 1901-1950)

על כן התורה מצווה "לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפץ את ידך", אם תקשה לך ידך תיסגר...".
שאז האצבעות שוות ואז תאמר לו לך תעבוד כמוני, אלא כי פתוח תפתח את ידך, ואז תראה
האצבעות שיש בניהן גדולים וקטנים, כך ברא הקב"ה בבני האדם גדולים וקטנים וזה חי
מזה".
רבי ישועה ללום, ליקוטי אהרן, דרשה י"ז

Questions

1) What is the meaning of 'Do not harden your heart and do not close your hand'?

2) How does Rabbi Lalum see the opening and closing of our hands?

3) What do our hands symbolize? What does "this lives from that" mean?

4) Meaning of My Hamsa

