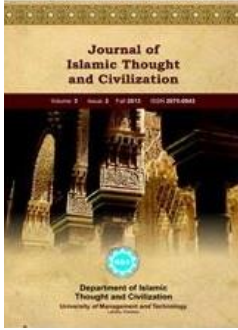


Volume 3, Issue 2



## Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

Volume 3, Issue 2, Fall 2013

ISSN: 2075-0943, eISSN: 2520-0313

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc>

Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.32>

Homepage: <https://www.umat.edu.pk/jitc/home.aspx>

Journal QR Code:



**Article:** **The Concept of the ‘Evil’ and the ‘Evil Eye’ in Islam and Islamic Faith-Healing Traditions**

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**Online Published:** Fall 2013

**Article DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.32.06>

**Article QR Code:**



Azher H. Qamar

**To cite this article:**

Qamar, Azhar Hameed. “The concept of the ‘Evil’ and the ‘Evil Eye’ in the Islam and Islamic faith-healing traditions”. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 3, no. 2 (2013): 44–53.

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A publication of the  
Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization  
School of Social Science and Humanities  
University of Management and Technology  
Lahore

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## The Concept of the 'Evil' and the 'Evil Eye' in Islam and Islamic Faith-Healing Traditions

Azher Hameed Qamar

### Abstract

*Evil is a power that may possess a human to commit sins. Evil is all negative, conflicting and opposing to the all positive 'good'. Religious descriptions of evil and good often relate it to the opposing forces led by the Devil and God respectively where human is weak and vulnerable. Arrogance and envy are two satanic traits that occupy human nature to deviate him from the 'good'. Islam describes a variety of evil acts that cause destruction, disobedience, tyranny and hopelessness in human societies. According to Islamic traditions, arrogance and envy are satanic obsessions. The evil eye is one of the evils triggered by envious self of the human under the influence of the Evil (Satan). Humans, under the obsession of this evil, may bring harm to their fellow men, intentionally or unintentionally. Since health and prosperity is valuable for survival, the evil eye can destroy them. Humans can overcome these obsessions only with the blessing of God and invoking their innate righteousness. Humans can protect themselves from the harmful and destructive effects of the evil eye, if they trust in God and seek His refuge. Islam emphasizes the Quran having healing and protective powers, and recommends following the Islamic traditions set by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and advised in Quran to gain protection and cure.*

**Keywords:** Evil, Evil Eye, Religion, Islam

### Introduction

The definition of 'evil' varies across cultures and religions but a general understanding of the concept 'evil' is "something/someone that brings harm". Synonyms of the word 'evil' in several dictionaries describe it as "wicked, malevolent, sinful, malicious, criminal, immoral, harmful, and damaging". 'Evil' as all negative gives meaning to the 'good' as all positive. Since health and prosperity are two valuable aspects of a peaceful human society, any harm or damage to these two aspects can bring disaster and despair. Religious beliefs hold a special place in societies where faith-healing is popular. The belief in the power of evil working and affecting the objects it falls on is universal and rooted in prehistoric times<sup>1</sup>. Religions that influence majority of the world population define evil and evil practices in their respective human-God, human-devil and God-devil relationships. Almost all religions have a consensus on the power of the evil that occupies humans to influence other creations. The 'evil eye' is one of the distinct forms of evil related to the belief that a glance may have powers to inflict injury, harm and even death upon whom it falls. Religion, as an important part of culture, describes the working of the evil eye, its effects and recommends preventive and curative measures. Islam is the second major religion of the world after Christianity. Islamic education and information is primarily based on the holy book Quran and *Sahi Ahadith*, an authentic record of the words and

deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW)<sup>2</sup>. To explain the Islamic perspective on the belief in the evil eye and recommended preventive and healing measures, I selected the most authentic collections of *ahadith* (Sahi Bukhari, Sahi Muslim, and Sunan Abu-Dawood) and famous Quran translation (The Noble Quran) and interpretation (Ibn Kathir). Since I used Arabic/ Urdu version of *ahadith* collection, for English translation, I used online source [www.sunnah.com](http://www.sunnah.com). To provide a better understanding of the content described in this section, I interviewed (telephonic interviews) three religious scholars from India and Pakistan about the evil eye and Islamic protection and healing. Authentic Islamic sources confirm the power of the evil eye that, initiated by Satan, may overcome human beings if not encountered by seeking protection of Almighty God. The fertility of the evil eye lies in the exploitation of human weaknesses (like jealousy, evil suspicions and greed) by Satan. Islamic traditions describe the harmful influences of the evil eye and recommended protection and cure.

### Discussion

Belief is "a state of mind that embodies trust and confidence in something"<sup>3</sup>. Human beings attain this state of mind from the belief systems to which they belong. The belief system guides them to understand the abstract and mysterious concepts related to their life in all aspects. Islam, as a belief system, describes the vulne-

rability of the human in his/her mortal surroundings, the power that evil (satan) exercises on him/her to bring harm, and the methods to seek Divine (God) protection. The evil targets health and prosperity to disturb peace and harmony and cultivate disbelief (in God). A believer, who is firm in his/her faith, invokes blessing of Almighty God to fight against the evil. The Quran describes the story of Prophet Ayyub (Job) (AS) who invoked God's blessing in these words;

And remember Our servant Job, when he called to his Lord, "Indeed, Satan has touched me with hardship (by ruining my health) and torment (by ruining my wealth)."<sup>4</sup>

Before discussing the evil eye belief in Islamic traditions, a description of evil' as depicted in Islamic sources of knowledge will explain the evil eye belief in Islam.

#### **The 'Evil', as depicted in Islamic Sources of Knowledge**

According to Miller<sup>5</sup>, The Quran gives 43 different terms for evil and sin. He specifically mentions seven words describing evil;

**Evil** – shame, vice and wickedness

**Darkness** – ignorance, failure to acknowledge the Almighty and turn to Him

**Wrong-doing** – wrong action resulting from unbelief and nonacceptance of God

**Error** – intentional, deliberate sins

**Offence** – wrong attitude to others and injustice

**Disobedience** – breaking God's command, being unrighteous

**Transgression** – breaking social laws, crossing limits set by God

The Quran describes several acts as evildoing; polytheism, unbelief, hypocrisy, and arrogance are the greatest ones. The actions that result in disobedience to God, cruelty, hatred, injustice, selfishness, greed, violence and disharmony in the society are evil acts<sup>6</sup>. Evil is a satanic plan that he uses to encourage human beings to do what Allah Almighty has forbidden. God declares Satan an open enemy of human-beings<sup>7</sup> and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) mentioned Satan too close to hold a human-being that he said, "Satan runs in the body of Adam's son (The Man) as his blood circulates in it"<sup>8</sup>. It means that Satan holds the power of the evil' that humans cannot overcome without seeking refuge from God Almighty and following His commandments. The

Quran comments several evil doings that Satan inspired humans to do, for example;

[*Shaitan* (Satan)] commands you only what is evil and *Fahsha* (sinful), and that you should say against Allah what you know not.<sup>9</sup>

Why do not the rabbis and the religious learned men forbid them from uttering sinful words and from eating illegal things? Evil indeed is that which they have been performing.<sup>10</sup>

Give full measure and weight in justice and reduce not the things that are due to the people, and do not commit mischief in the land, causing corruption.<sup>11</sup>

And come not near to the unlawful sexual intercourse. Verily, it is a *Fahishah* [i.e. anything that transgresses its limits (a great sin)], and an evil way (that leads one to Hell unless Allah forgives him).<sup>12</sup>

*Shaitan* (Satan) wants only to excite enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants (alcoholic drinks) and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah.<sup>13</sup>

Another important aspect of the power of evil in Islamic sources of knowledge is its limitation when compared to the power of good. Satan may provoke evil in many ways, but he does not hold powers to control natural phenomenon (usually named as natural evils); thus natural destructions (like floods, earthquakes, storms) are not natural evils controlled by an evil authority. The Quran describes these natural destructive powers controlled by God either as a test to mankind or a punishment for their wrong doings;

No calamity befalls, but with the Leave [i.e. decision and *Qadar* (Divine Preordainments)] of Allah.<sup>14</sup>

And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to *As-Sabirin* (the patient ones, etc.).<sup>15</sup>

And We tried them with good (blessings) and evil (calamities) in order that they might turn (to Allah's Obedience).<sup>16</sup>

Verily, We sent against them a violent storm of stones (which destroyed them all), except the family of Lout (Prophet Lot).<sup>17</sup>

And when they were seized with a violent earthquake, he (Moses) said: "O my Lord, if it had been Your Will, You could have destroyed them and me before; would You destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us? It is only Your Trial by which You lead astray whom You will, and keep guided whom You will."<sup>18</sup>

Islam considers Man weak and vulnerable against the power of the evil that Satan holds and practices to ex-

plot human weaknesses against God unless Man does not recognize God, the most powerful and seek His protection and forgiveness.<sup>19</sup> Man has divine knowledge of the good and evil, and a free will to choose between the two paths. This worldly life is a test of how Man practices his free will, either in obedience of the Creator or following the evil.

Verily, We have created man from *Nutfah* drops of mixed semen (discharge of man and woman), in order to try him, so We made him hearer, seer. Verily, We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful.<sup>20</sup>

And shown him the two ways (good and evil).<sup>21</sup>

He showed him what is wrong for him and what is right for him.<sup>22</sup>

There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, Man can distinguish between evil and good with his/her innate knowledge. In the story of Adam and Eve, The Quran describes arrogance and envy as two hostile evils. When God created Adam and asked the angels to prostrate to him, only Iblis refused because of his arrogance and envy. God declared him as Satan, the evil, the humiliated and disgraced one.

And surely, We created you (your father Adam) and then gave you shape (the noble shape of a human being); then We told the angels, "Prostrate yourselves to Adam", and they prostrated themselves, except Iblis (Satan), he refused to be of those who prostrated themselves. (Allah) said: "What prevented you (O Iblis) that you did not prostrate yourself, when I commanded you?" Iblis said: "I am better than him (Adam), You created me from fire, and him You created from clay." (Allah) said: "(O Iblis) get down from this (Paradise); it is not for you to be arrogant here. Get out, for you are of those humiliated and disgraced."<sup>24</sup>

Satan, in arrogance and jealousy, vowed to lead astray human beings from the right path and plant evil in their hearts and lives in every way.<sup>25</sup> He claimed that a majority of human beings will disobey God and follow the evil way. Then God declared Hell for those who will follow Satan and engage themselves in evil doings.

(Iblis) said: "Because You have sent me astray, surely I will sit in wait against them (human beings) on Your Straight Path. Then I will come to them from before them and behind them, from their right and from their left, and You will not find most of them as thankful ones (i.e. they will not be dutiful to You)." (Allah) said (to Iblis): "Get out from this (Paradise), disgraced and expelled. Whoever of

them (mankind) will follow you, then surely I will fill Hell with you all."<sup>26</sup>

Satan committed jealousy and arrogance. After being disgraced and cursed, he showed his intention to use these evils as powerful weapons against Man. He uses these weapons to spread distrust and insecurity among humans, consequently destroying peace and patience. Hence, jealousy and arrogance are those powerful satanic instincts that Satan uses to take revenge from Man for the loss of that exalted position that Man holds and Satan has lost.

### The 'Evil Eye'

The 'evil eye', one of the popular and common beliefs (like sorcery), is a distinct form of evil associated with the belief that a glance may have powers to inflict injury, harm and even death to those upon whom it falls. The immediate effects the evil eye may cause range from misfortune to serious diseases leading to death. Children, being weak and vulnerable, are at serious risk. Mothers, before and after childbirth, are also easy victims. Problems during pregnancy, infertility, abortion, birthmarks on the child, dried breasts are common effects supposedly caused by the evil eye.<sup>27</sup> The belief in the evil eye is a belief in the power of envy and jealousy that can mysteriously cause harm and destruction leading despair and hopelessness in Man. Similarities in the fear of the evil eye and presence of a particular word for this belief in many languages make the concept universal. The belief in the evil eye as a destructive power triggered by envy is prehistoric and widespread across cultures.<sup>28</sup>

### The 'Evil Eye' in Scriptures

Looking into major religions in the world, Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and Hinduism confirm the evil eye belief. In Hinduism, the evil eye (*Drishti* in Sanskrit) is rooted in jealousy and most of the harms are caused by it. Children (at birth and in puberty) are particularly vulnerable<sup>29</sup>. In one of the myths, the goddess *Parvati* (mother of elephant-headed god *Ganesha*), brought her new born son to god *Shani*, whose evil glance burnt the *Ganesha's* head and then god *Vishnu* replaced the burnt head with that of an elephant head<sup>30</sup>. Another tradition is that probably the Hindu belief in the evil eye has been derived from the third eye of god *Shiva* who can destroy the whole universe with a single glance.<sup>31</sup> There are hymns and charms in Vedas to get cure and protection against the evil eye. For example, "The evil eye of the hostile-minded, and the evil-doer I have approached. Do thou, O thousand-eyed one, watchfully destroy these! A re-

fuge art thou, O *gangida*.”<sup>32</sup>

In Abrahamic religions, there are references in earliest Jewish texts describing the evil eye (*ayin hara* in Hebrew) as a result of envy and jealousy. Ulmer, referring to rabbinic literature, describes evil eye as “a value concept in which a person’s ethical behaviour is concentrated. In other instances, the evil eye is a concept of power that enabled people to affect their surroundings.”<sup>33</sup> Rabbis describe good eye (*ayin tova*) belonging to a humble spirit and the evil eye (*ayin hara*) as an arrogant and envious spirit.<sup>34</sup> Two examples from the Jewish text verify this belief in Judaism. First, Sarah gives’ Hagar an *Ayin Hara*, causing her to miscarry her first pregnancy. Second, Yaakov warns his sons not to be seen together so as not to incur *Ayin Hara*.<sup>35</sup> The Bible describes ‘evil eye’ as one of the evils and dark side of human nature that occurs because of envy and corrupts a man.<sup>36</sup> Aquaro in his book ‘Death by Envy: The Evil Eye and Envy in the Christian Tradition’ quotes old and new testaments to explain the envy and the evil eye relationship.<sup>37</sup>

### The ‘Evil Eye’ Belief in Islamic Traditions

Before giving Islamic perspective on the evil eye, I shall give a brief note about the Islamic birth rituals that Muslim parents perform to keep the devil and evil away from the child. According to *hadith*, Satan tries to influence with his evil even before the fetus is conceived. Therefore, on the wedding night before establishing a relation with the wife, a Muslim should say;

“O Allah! Protect us from the mischief of Satan and keep Satan away from the children You grant us.”<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, when a child is born, Satan touches the child on both sides (except Jesus, the son of Mary. Satan failed to touch him).<sup>39</sup> Therefore, when a child is born, calling *Adhan* (Islamic call for prayer) in the ears of the newborn is the first birth ritual that is desirable to perform. The baby hears *Adhan*, the first words as a confirmation of *Tauheed* (oneness of God) and it keeps Satan away who tries to harm or influence the human since the beginning of life. Then *Aqiqah*, sacrifice of a goat in the name of Allah<sup>40</sup> and *Sadaqa* (charity) are two rituals that remove calamities and sufferings and an expression of thankfulness to Allah.

Islamic sources of knowledge reveal the evil eye is a reality. Islam considers envy and jealousy as satanic tactics that he uses to plant evil in the hearts of the people against each other. Later it stimulates the evil eye to cause harm. This is also evident from the Quran (as described earlier) that Satan himself was envious and jealous of Man (Adam) when God ordered angels

to prostrate to Adam.<sup>41</sup> When God expelled Satan disgracefully from paradise, Satan vowed to lead the human beings from the right path in all possible ways. Jealousy is the first sin that was committed in heaven and also the first one committed on earth. Iblis was jealous of Adam in heaven, and the latter’s son Qabil (Cane) was jealous of his brother Habil (Abel) on earth.<sup>42</sup> Hence, envy and jealousy are the satanic obsessions that overcome humans and *jinn* (supernatural creatures) and result in bringing harm to someone. Satan instigates human and *jinn* to make evil suggestions. Last two chapters of the Holy Quran (chapter 113 and 114) contain prayers for believers to seek refuge with God Almighty from all the evils that Satan instigates; the evil of envious ones and the evil whisperings of Satan.

Say: “I seek refuge with (Allah) the Lord of the daybreak, From the evil of what He has created; And from the evil of the darkening (night) as it comes with its darkness; (or the moon as it sets or goes away). And from the evil of the witchcrafts when they blow in the knots, and from the evil of the envier when he envies.” Say: “I seek refuge with (Allah) the Lord of mankind, The King of mankind, The Ilah (God) of mankind, from the evil of the whisperer (devil who whispers evil in the hearts of men) who withdraws (from his whispering in one’s heart after one remembers Allah),...who whispers in the breasts of mankind, Of jinns and men.”<sup>43</sup>

The Quran narrates the danger of being envious and jealous on different occasions. For example, jealousy was the cause of the first murder on earth. In the story of Habil and Qabil, Qabil because of jealousy, murdered Habil.<sup>44</sup> Another example is the story of Yousaf (Joseph). When Yousaf told his father Yaqoob (Jacob) about the dream he saw (the dream about his prophethood), Yaqoob forbade Yousaf to describe his dream to his brothers, so that Satan may not inspire them to get envious to harm Yousaf<sup>45</sup>. Similarly, when Yousaf invited his brothers to visit Egypt, Yaqoob advised them to enter one by one from different doors to the palace<sup>46</sup>. Yaqoob feared that the people might affect his eleven handsome and good-looking sons with the evil eye.<sup>47</sup> Another verse directly addresses to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) informing him about the evil eye that nonbelievers try to cast at him due to their extreme jealousy and hatred (Ibn Kathir, 2003);

“And verily, those who disbelieve would almost make you slip with their eyes through hatredness when they hear the Reminder (the Quran)”<sup>48</sup>

The Quran illustrates envy and jealousy as evils that

may overcome human beings be harmful for others. There are prayers in the Quran and *Ahadith* to seek refuge with Allah Almighty from the satanic tactics that attack the hearts of the people to corrupt them (e.g. evil whispers in the heart).

And if an evil whisper comes to you from *Shaitan* (Satan) then seek refuge with Allah.<sup>49</sup>

And say: "My Lord! I seek refuge with You from the whisperings (suggestions) of the *Shayatin* (devils).<sup>50</sup>

And if an evil whisper from *Shaitan* (Satan) tries to turn you away (O Muhammad) (from doing good, etc.), then seek refuge in Allah.<sup>51</sup>

A verse from the Quran<sup>52</sup> is a worldwide spoken Islamic phrase (i.e. *Masha Allah*) used to appreciate or praise anything or anyone. The Muslims believe that saying *Masha Allah* (whatever Allah wills, will come to pass) protects from the evil eye<sup>53</sup>. Other prayers, recommended by the Prophet (SAW) that Muslims should say while looking or touching someone/something for appreciation or praise are; "O Allah! Bless him" or "May Allah blesses him/it"<sup>54</sup>.

*Ahadith* strongly establish the concept of the evil eye as a reality. Different authentic books of *ahadith* prove it as an agreed reality in all Islamic schools of thought. Authentic *ahadith* confirm the effect of the evil eye as a fact<sup>55</sup>. Umm Salama reported that Allah's Messenger saw a girl whose face had black spots. He said, "She is under the effect of an evil eye; so treat her with a *ruqya* (incantation from Quran)."<sup>56</sup> *Ahadith* describe the severity of the evil eye so much that "if anything would precede the destiny it would be the influence of an evil eye."<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the evil eye can bring serious harm to anything or anyone. Generally, it attacks the health of the valuable living beings (for example, crops, domestic animals, human beings). Prophet Muhammad (SAW) advised specific prayers to seek refuge with Allah against the evil eye, and to do *ruqya* (incantation from the Quran) to cure the evil influences.

### Protection and Cure against the Evil Eye in Islam

Before Islam, Arabs used figures of animals, men and gods as amulets to protect themselves, but after converting to a monotheistic religion they abandoned this practice. In Islam, treatment of harmful influences of the evil eye is based on the concept of *Tauheed* (Monotheism – Oneness of God) and *Tawakkul* (trust in one God only). The Quran says;

And whosoever puts his trust in Allâh, then He will suffice him.<sup>58</sup>

Put your trust in Allah if you are believers indeed.<sup>59</sup> Allah (Alone) is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs (for us).<sup>60</sup> And to Allah belong the best names, so invoke Him by them<sup>61</sup>.

Therefore, following *Tauheed* and *Tawakkul*, Muslims believe that the book of God has ultimate protective and healing powers. The Quran says;

And when I am ill, it is He who cures me.<sup>62</sup> And We sent down of the Quran that which is healing and mercy for the believers<sup>63</sup>.

In addition to *Sadaqa* (giving charity or goat sacrificing), the prayers stated in Quran and *Ahadith* are used as incantation (*rukya*) or writing amulets (*tawiz*) for protection and cure against the evil eye. The most basic of all these treatments is to trust in one God and seek refuge with Him from all evils.

### Seeking Refuge with Allah

Seeking refuge with Allah is the most important aspect of Islamic traditions to fight against all evils. As evils come from Satan, possess powers over human and *jinn* (supernatural creatures), seeking refuge with Allah protects from the harmful influences of witchcraft, evil, eye etc., whether they are from human or *jinn*. This tradition also indicates that any prayer recited or practiced in any way to seek refuge with other than Allah Almighty (The One) is *Haram* (unlawful in Islam). Following are some of the prayers narrated in *Ahadith* that describe Islamic way of seeking refuge against evils.

The Prophet (SAW) used to seek refuge with Allah (declaring it deed of Abraham) for his grandsons Hassan and Hussain and prayed in these words: "O Allah! I seek Refuge with Your Perfect Words from every devil and from poisonous pests and from every evil, harmful, envious eye"<sup>64</sup>. When the Prophet (SAW) fell ill, Gabriel recited these verses. "In the name of Allah. He may cure you from all kinds of illness and safeguard you from the evil of a jealous one when he feels jealous and from the evil influence of eye."<sup>65</sup>

Seeking refuge with Allah gives a powerful feeling of security that acts like a psychological shield. The last two chapters of the Holy Quran (as mentioned earlier) are specific prayers to seek refuge with Allah against sickness, satanic obsession, witchcraft, envy and jealousy. Many *Ahadith* report these two chapters (known as *al-Mu'awwidhatayn*) as the best protection and cure.<sup>66</sup> These two chapters specifically describe the dangers of darkness of ignorance and evil, magic and witchcraft, and evil thoughts and desires that destroy.<sup>67</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) used to recite and do *rukya* with last three chapters of the Quran when he fell ill.

### Doing *Rukya* (protection and cure against the evil eye)

*Rukya* means to recite prayers (described in Quran and authentic *Ahadith*) as incantation. Many *Ahadith* report the use of incantation (*rukya*) for cure and protection against diseases, poison, and the evil eye. Ayesha (wife of the Holy Prophet (SAW) reported that Allah's Messenger commanded the use of incantation for curing the influence of an evil eye and Anas reported that Allah's Messenger granted him sanction to use incantation (as a cure) for the influence of the evil eye.<sup>68</sup> How to do *rukya*? Following hadith narrated by Ayesha describes *rukya* as an Islamic healing method;

Whenever Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) became sick, he would recite *Mu'awwidhat* (*Surat Al-Falaq* and *Surat An-Nas*) and then blow his breath over his body. When he became seriously ill, I used to recite (last two chapters from Quran) and rub his hands over his body hoping for its blessings.

Whenever the Prophet (SAW) went to bed every night, he used to cup his hands together and blow over it after reciting *Surat Al-Ikhlās*, *Surat Al-Falaq* and *Surat An-Nas* (last three chapters in Quran), and then rub his hands over whatever parts of his body he was able to rub, starting with his head, face and front of his body. He used to do that three times.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, recitation of certain verses from the Holy Quran and prayers mentioned in Sahi *Ahadith* and blowing it on the child, generally three times, is the most common and agreed upon Islamic healing method. *Rukya* can also be done on water, and the effected person can drink that water. As children are vulnerable, the parents should know this method and do it themselves. They can take the child to some religious teacher<sup>70</sup> or pious man to do *rukya*.<sup>71</sup>

### *Sadaqa* (something given as charity)

*Sadaqa* is a charity in the name of Allah. Money, goods, or even an animal can be slaughtered as *sadaqa*. It is believed that *Sadaqa* removes calamities and suffering.

*Sadaqa* is a charity in the name of Allah. *Sadaqa* is not obligatory (like *Zakat*, a religious obligatory tax on well-to-do Muslims), yet it is highly desirable according to Quran and Sunnah. Giving *sadaqa* for children and ourselves protects us from worldly sufferings and loss. Therefore, if there is any problem with the child

for any reason, parents should give *sadaqa*. *Sadaqa* is to give something (goods, food, clothes) in the name of Allah to needy or poor around you or to sacrifice an animal and divide meat among the poor people. Amount and object for *sadaqa* depends on what one can afford.<sup>72</sup>

*Sadaqa* is a valued virtue in Islam. It protects from the evil influences, sufferings, loss and calamities. Anyhow there are some traditional ways to give *sadaqa* that may be questioned if they are Islamic. Putting these questions to the scholars, they describe clearly the Islamic way to give *sadaqa*.<sup>73</sup>

**Q.** Some people feed the birds in the parks or on the roads or free the caged birds as an act of *sadaqa*. Is it Islamic?

**A.** To free the caged birds, it is a *sadqa* as you are letting the birds free in their natural environment where they belong. But so far to feed the birds as *sadaqa* is concerned; it is good only if you have not any human around you who is hungry or needy.

**Q.** Some people take *sadqa* money or other things to some shrine and distribute it to the poor. Is it good?

**A.** It depends on the intention. If they are giving *sadaqa* paying reverence to someone (saints, prophets, angels etc) other than Allah, it is strictly forbidden, as it is *shirk* (polytheism) contrary to *Tauheed* and *Tawakal*. Further, scholars mention three fundamental aspects of *sadaqa*;

- It is in the name of Allah.
- *Sadqa* is a charity that must be given to the needy and poor.
- *Sadqa* is given from the *halal* (Islamically legal) source of income.

In addition, praying to Allah for forgiveness is a virtue that wards off evils and protects the person from sin and loss.

### *Tawiz* (*Talisman* – Amulets)

Using *tawiz* (amulet) is another religious healing tradition to seek protection and cure against the evil eye. An amulet writer writes Quranic prayers on a piece of paper or a tablet to invoke divine powers. *Tawiz* or talisman (amulets) is a pouch (normally made of leather, cloth or some metal) containing prayers written on a piece of paper. This pouch is hanged in a string (usually black), and the effected person wears it around the neck or ties it on the arm. People using *tawiz*, believe that it has powers to protect and cure against diseases, sufferings and misfortunes. Although a group of the Muslim scholars does not agree with this healing tradition as Islamic, in the majority of Muslim world (for example Muslims of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh),

wearing *tawiz* is a common practice to seek protection against the evil, harm and destruction. There is a significant number of scholars who agree on using *tawiz* for protection and healing, but belief in *tawiz* as a source to invoke Allah's mercy and blessing is debated. In Islam, *tawiz* does not have powers in itself. Religious scholars have different opinions about writing and using a *tawiz* for protection or cure. There are two important points I will discuss here. First, the Islamic way of writing *tawiz* and second the difference of opinion regarding its use.

### An Islamic *Tawiz*

*Tawiz* must include verses from the Holy Quran and the prayers mentioned in authentic *Ahadith*. An Islamic healer can write a *tawiz* only in Arabic language. My discussion with religious scholars concludes that a *tawiz* is Islamic only if;

- It is written from the Quran and the prayers mentioned in authentic *Ahadith*.
- They are in Arabic only. (Some religious healers write Arabic *abjad*<sup>74</sup> numerals of the verses, scholars differ on using Arabic *abjad* instead verses)
- *Tawiz* should not consist of anything that is *Kufr* (disbelief) or *Shirk* (idolatry or polytheism).
- The user and the *tawiz* witer must believe that only Allah holds the powers to protect and cure. *Tawiz* is just a source to get Allah's blessing through prayers.
- *Tawiz* must be used with respect and honour as it contains verses from the Quran and *Ahadith*. Therefore, *tawiz* must not be hanged or tied on legs or feet, etc.

### Using *Tawiz*, Islamic or Not

The scholars have slightly different opinion about using *tawiz* but the common opinion is that use of an Islamic *Tawiz* is not *haram* (forbidden), although no authentic *hadith* confirms it as a practice done by Prophet Muhammad (SAW). There are oral traditions that describe some of the companions who used or advised the use of *tawiz*, but there are also *ahadith* that forbid wearing strings or amulets round the neck to ward off the evil eye<sup>75</sup>. Scholars commented on these *ahadith* and described forbidden *tawiz* or *rukya* that was not written or recited according to the Quran. Instead, Arabs adopted them as pre-Islamic traditions based on *Shirk*. The argument is convincing because in one of the *ahadith*, there is an assurance for paradise for those who do not practice *rukya*.<sup>76</sup> But (as mentioned earlier), Prophet Muhammad (SAW) practiced and advised *rukya* and according to a *hadith*,<sup>77</sup> he allowed *rukya*

provided that they did not contain the words of *Shirk*. It means, there were forms of *tawiz* or *rukya* that were not Islamic and some people adopted them as pre-Islamic tradition. For example, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) ordered to break the strings or necklace that the people used to hang around the camel's neck to ward off the evil eye<sup>78</sup>. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) prohibited all pre-Islamic traditions that were based on *Shirk*. He asked to seek refuge with Allah with the help of the Holy Quran while firmly believing in *Tauheed* and *Tawakal*.

After fulfilling the Islamic requirements for an Islamic *Tawiz*, the difference of opinion among scholars is regarding the preference of the Islamic protective and curative measures to ward off the evil eye. Scholars accept *rukya* and *sadaqa* as the most authentic way of protection and cure against diseases and evil influences. About using *tawiz*, one of the scholars said;

It is not *Sunnah* (sayings and life of Muhammad); therefore we should avoid it because if it might be something preferable then it would be in practice by the holy Prophet along with *rukya* and *sadaqa*. But as an Islamic *Tawiz* has Qura'nic verses, therefore is not *haram*. Anyhow hanging beads, wearing stones or other kind of amulets with a belief that they contain powers is *haram*.<sup>79</sup>

Other two scholars believe the Holy Prophet's (SAW) companions used or advised *tawiz*; therefore *tawiz* is also an effective cure and can be used along with *rukya* and *sadaqa*. *Tawiz* can be hanged around the neck or arm. Al-Jawziyah (2003) also reported some traditions that described the healing power of a *tawiz* when soaked in water to drink that water later. While *tawiz* with Quranic prayers is Islamic according to scholars, its use seems more traditional. People soak it in water (to drink or sprinkle around later), wrap it in leather or silver, hang it in blue or black thread or wear a metal amulet with Quranic verses written on it. Nevertheless, after Quranic incantation (*rukya*) and charity (*sadaqa*), Islamic amulet (*tawiz*) is a popular healing and protective method against evil eye practiced in Muslim societies.

Islamic faith healing purifies the soul and spiritually heals the body. They strengthen the firm trust in God and promote virtuous deeds (in the form of *sadaqa*) to counter the evil forces.



### Conclusion

Islamic philosophy about the evil describes all evils from Satan who after being cursed vowed to lead the evils in the world. On the other hand, Man who is born with weaknesses but God granted him/her with innate knowledge of good and evil to practice free will accordingly. Arrogance and jealousy are the diseases of the heart that spread like cancer when taken up by Satan. He exploits the human weaknesses and thus overcomes the human negative energies. Human-self (*Nafs*) is inclined to evil.<sup>80</sup> Man under the influence of evil forces deviates from his innate good and chooses the wrong path. The evil eye is a kind of negative energy that emits from the human envious self and may affect others harmfully. The universality of the evil eye belief and the way different religions and cultures constitute it, make it hard to declare it a mere superstition. Today, this belief may not be justified scientifically, but as all the religions believe in good and evil as two opposing powers, they also believe that 'mysterious' does exist and it is beyond human powers. Islam, in this respect, identifies human as a weak creature occupied with 'desires' but also the best of creation blessed with knowledge and wisdom to recognize Almighty God and win over the evil by turning to his Lord. To maintain peace in human societies, Islam discourages arrogance and envy and promotes humility and goodwill. The protective and curative tactics against the evil eye, as advised in Islamic traditions, indicates two fundamental components of the basic Islamic philosophy; first, *Tauheed*, i.e., none has the right to be worshipped but He (the One God), the Ever Living, the One Who sustains and protects all that exists<sup>81</sup> and second, *Tawakal*, i.e., Allah is sufficient, and when Allah helps, none can overcome.<sup>82</sup>

### References and Endnotes

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- <sup>4</sup> Al Qur'an, Şād, 38:41
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- <sup>7</sup> Al-Baqara, 2:208; Al-A'raf 7:22
- <sup>8</sup> Imam Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, Good Manners and Form (Al-Adab), Volume 8, Book 73, Number 238
- <sup>9</sup> al-Baqara, 2:169

- <sup>10</sup> al-Ma'idah, 5:63
- <sup>11</sup> Hud, 11:85
- <sup>12</sup> Al-Isra, 17:32
- <sup>13</sup> Al-Ma'idah, 05:91
- <sup>14</sup> At-Taghabun 64:11
- <sup>15</sup> al-Baqara, 02:155
- <sup>16</sup> al- 'Araf, 07:168
- <sup>17</sup> Al-Qamar, 54:34
- <sup>18</sup> Al-A'raf, 07:155
- <sup>19</sup> An-Nisa, 04:28
- <sup>20</sup> Al-Insan, 76:2-3
- <sup>21</sup> Al-Balad, 90:10
- <sup>22</sup> As-Shams, 91:8
- <sup>23</sup> Al-Baqarah, 2:256
- <sup>24</sup> Al-A'raf 07:11-13
- <sup>25</sup> Ibn Kathir, 2003, *Tafsir (Commentary on Quran) by Ismail bin Umar bin Kathir*, known as *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* is the most famous and most widely used explanation of the Holy Quran. I am using the abridged version of this *tafsir* translated by Safiur-Rahman Mubarakpuri and published by Darussalam Publishers, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
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- <sup>36</sup> Mathew 6:23 [online]  
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[online] <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Luk&c=11&v=1&t=KJV> ; James 3:16  
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- <sup>40</sup>*Sahih Bukhari*, “Sacrifice on Occasion of Birth”, Volume 7, Book 66, Number 380.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibn Kathir, Ismail ibn Umer. *Tafsir ibn Kathir*. Translated by Safi ur Rehman Al-Mubarakpuri. Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup>Al-falaq, 113 and Al-Nas 114
- <sup>44</sup>And (O Muhammad ) recite to them (the Jews) the story of the two sons of Adam [Habil (Abel) and Qabil (Cain)] in truth; when each offered a sacrifice (to Allah), it was accepted from the one but not from the other. The latter said to the former: “I will surely kill you.” The former said: “Verily, Allah accepts only from those who are Al-Muttaqun (the pious)”. (Al-Ma’idah, 5:27)
- <sup>45</sup>He (the father) said: “O my son! Relate not your vision to your brothers, lest they arrange a plot against you. Verily! Shaitan (Satan) is to man an open enemy!” (Yusuf, 12:5)
- <sup>46</sup>And he said: “O my sons! Do not enter by one gate, but enter by different gates, and I cannot avail you against Allah at all. Verily! The decision rests only with Allah. In Him, I put my trust and let all those that trust, put their trust in Him.” (Yusuf, 12:67)
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- <sup>48</sup>Al-Qalam, 68:51
- <sup>49</sup>Al-A’raf 7:200
- <sup>50</sup>Al-Mu’minun, 23:97
- <sup>51</sup>Fussilat,, 41:36
- <sup>52</sup>“That which Allah wills (will come to pass)! There is no power but with Allah” (Al-Kahf, 18:39)
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- <sup>58</sup>At-Talaq,, 65:3
- <sup>59</sup>Al-Ma’idah, 05:23
- <sup>60</sup>Al-i-Imran 03:173
- <sup>61</sup>Al-A’raf, 07:180
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