

The Hand in Art: Hamsa Hand

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FIGURE 1: An artificial hamsa hand necklace with an eye (size, 10 × 20 mm).



FIGURE 2: An artificial hamsa hand necklace with 2 symmetrical thumbs. An eye is incorporated in the palm (size, 20 × 30 mm).

The hamsa hand is an open right hand with 5 digits. It is especially popular in the Middle East and North Africa. Its exact origin is unknown; however, its use predates Islam and Judaism in the Middle East. The hamsa hand is also known as khamasa (5 in Arabic), hamesh (5 in Hebrew), hamesh hand, and chamsa.^{1,2}

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Raising a hand with the palm showing and spread fingers may be used to stop offensives. The hamsa hand with spread digits may be interpreted to ward off aggressors and to blind evil. Hamsa digits may be closed together to bring good luck. The digits may point up or down. The palm of the hamsa hand may contain an eye to deflect malicious eyes (Fig. 1); a heart to offer peace, happiness, and prosperity; a hexagram; and the word Allah (God). It may be stylized with 2 symmetrical thumbs (Fig. 2).^{1,2}

In Islam, the hamsa hand is also known as the hand of Fatima Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed. The number 5 in Islam may be connected to the 5 pillars of Islam and the 5 daily



FIGURE 3: A silver, decorative hamsa hand with a heart engraved in the palm (size, 6 × 4 cm). The names of 2 holy Shiite persons are inscribed in and around the heart.

prayers. In Shiites, the number 5 may be connected to the 5 holy persons in the Prophet's family. Levantine Christians call it the hand of Mary. In Jewish faith, the hamsa hand is a symbol of the Hand of Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. The number 5 (hamesh in Hebrew) may represent the 5 books of the Torah for Jews. The image of the open right hand is seen in the Buddha's gesture of teaching and protection.^{1,2}



FIGURE 4: The logo of the International Federation of Societies for Surgery of Hand.

The hamsa hand may be used on necklaces, bracelets, and other jewelry items in belief of bringing to its wearer or owner happiness, luck, health, and good fortune (Fig. 3). It may be found in houses as sculptures, paintings, and other decorative elements.^{1,2}

The International Federation of Societies for Surgery of the Hand has adopted a sketch of an open right hand as its logo (Fig. 4) because it is a universal sign and, in all faiths, it is a sign of protection, blessing, health, happiness, and prosperity.

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