

Ruqya in Islam - a brief outline.

Introduction - what is *ruqya*?

Ruqya is the practice of reciting Qur'ānic verses and supplications for the sake of seeking a cure.¹ Allāh in reality is the One who provides the cure for all illnesses. There is no benefit except through Him. But in the same manner Allāh Almighty can provide relief via (i) a doctor (ii) certain foods and medicine, He can also provide the cure via the means of religious words.

It is abundantly clear that performing *ruqya* is proven from the sacred texts, whether it is done (i) via the means of a relic (ii) via blowing after recitation (iii) via an amulet (*ta'wīz*) that contains religious words.

Ruqya via the means of a relic

*Umm Salama (may Allāh be pleased with her) possessed some blessed hairs of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). When people were ill or affected by the evil eye, then they would come to her with water in a basin. She would then dip the hairs of the Prophet in the water. They would then drink this water or bathe from it as a means of cure.²

Ruqya via the means of blowing after recitation

*Uthmān ibn Abī al-Ās (may Allāh be pleased with him) informed the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) that he suffered from body pains. He was told to place his hands on the affected part, recite *bismillāh* three times and then to recite the following seven times:

أَعُوذُ بِعِزَّةِ اللَّهِ وَقُدْرَتِهِ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا أَجِدُ وَأُحَاذِرُ

As a result of this *ruqya*, he was cured of his pains.³

*The Mother of the Faithful Ā'isha (may Allāh be pleased with her) reports that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) would recite Sūrah al-Falaq and Sūrah al-Nās upon himself and then blow upon his blessed body (by blowing on his hand, then wiping them on his face and body).⁴

*In a beautiful report narrated by Imām al-Bukhārī in his *Sahih*, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (may Allāh be pleased with him) reported:

¹ *Mirqāt al-Mafātīh Sharh Mishkāt al-Masābīh*, Mulla Alī Qārī. VIII: 356, Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2007.

² *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Book of Clothes, hadīth no. 5446.

³ *Ziā al-Qur'ān*, Pīr Muhammad Karam Shāh al-Azharī. I: 21, Ziā al-Qur'ān Publications, Lahore, 1995.

⁴ *Mirqāt al-Mafātīh*, VIII: 357.

'While we were on one of our journeys, we dismounted at a place where a slave girl came and said, 'The chief of this tribe has been stung by a scorpion and our men are not present; is there anyone among you who can treat him (by reciting something)?' One of our men went along with her though we did not think that he knew any such treatment. But he treated the chief by reciting something, and the sick man recovered whereupon he gave him thirty sheep and gave us milk to drink (as a reward). When he returned, we asked our friend, 'Did you know how to treat with the recitation of something?' He said, 'No, but I treated him only with the recitation of the Mother of the Book (i.e. Sūrah al-Fātiha).' We said, 'Do not say anything (about it) till we reach and ask the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him).' So when we reached al-Madīna, we mentioned that to the Prophet (in order to know whether the sheep which we had taken were lawful to take or not). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said, 'How did he come to know that al-Fātiha could be used for treatment? Distribute your reward and assign for me one share thereof as well.'⁵

We learn from this story that it is permissible to recite Sūrah Fātiha as a form of treatment on a sick person; this is the reason why the Sūrah is also called *Sūrah Ruqya* and *Sūrah Shifā*.⁶

Ruqya via the means of an amulet (ta'wiz)

As for placing religious words in amulets to wear around the neck, this too is sunna. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) prescribed the following *du'ā* at night for insomnia:

أَعُوذُ بِكَلِمَاتِ التَّامَّةِ مِنْ غَضَبِهِ وَعِقَابِهِ وَشَرِّ عِبَادِهِ وَمِنْ هَمَزَاتِ الشَّيَاطِينِ وَأَنْ يَحْضُرُونِ

I seek refuge in the perfect words of Allāh from His anger, and from His punishment, and from the evil of His slaves, and from the whispering of the Shaytān and from their presence.

The Companion Abd Allāh ibn Umar (may Allāh be pleased with him) taught these words to his children. While they were still young, he would write it down and put it in a *ta'wiz* (amulet) for them to wear around their necks.⁷ The actions of the Companions are sunna.

Did Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) outlaw ruqya?

There are prophetic reports to be found that suggest that *ruqya* was prohibited in early Islam. Other reports suggest that *ruqya* is a form of *shirk*.

Despite the existence of such reports, the scholars assert that *ruqya* is still permissible:

* It was forbidden in early Islam, because the Prophet (peace be upon him) was worried that owing to the close proximity to the time of Ignorance (Jāhiliyya), Muslims might use their

⁵ *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*. Book of illnesses, Chapter: ruqya via the Opening of the Book, hadīth no. 5382.

⁶ *Nazm al-Durar*, Allāma Baqā'ī, I: 19-20. Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmī Publications, Cairo, 1413.

⁷ *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, Chapter of supplications, hadīth no. 3451. See also, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd* (hadīth no. 3395), *Muwatta Mālik* (hadīth no. 1496) and *Musnad Ahmad*, (Musnad of the prolific reporters from the Companions, the Musnad of Abd Allāh ibn Umar, hadīth no. 6681).

words and practices for the *ruqya*. When he was certain they would only use Islamic words, he allowed it.⁸ In other words, the prohibition was abrogated.

* *Ruqya* is prohibited when the person practicing it does so believing that the amulet itself is providing cure, not Allāh. The cure ultimately is from Him and Muslims should never forget this fact. The report of Imam Muslim confirms this where the Prophet said, 'There is nothing wrong with *ruqya* when there is no *shirk* involved.'⁹ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī summarised the matter well when he wrote:

The scholars have agreed upon the permissibility of *ruqya* when three conditions are fulfilled (i) that it is done with the words of Allāh, with His names or with His attributes (ii) that it is done in Arabic, or in something that is readily understood (iii) that the people believe that that *ruqya* itself does not have effect *per se*, rather it is thanks to Allāh.¹⁰

Conclusion

A handful of Muslims have suggested that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) never supported the practice of *ruqya*, that he spoke against it and invited his Companions to abandon it. Such an opinion is misleading and inaccurate. To decree *ruqya* as 'totally forbidden in Islam' or to compare it to black magic is nothing short of scandalous. Sorcery, magic and witchcraft are all forbidden in Islam. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) clearly differentiated between *ruqya* and magic, and decreed the latter as a major sin.

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) spoke highly of cupping, honey and black seed as forms of medicine. In exactly the same manner, he informed us that there is relief to be found in certain supplications, Qur'ānic verses and prophetic words, which is precisely what *ruqya* is. He said, 'Adhere to two cures; honey and the Qur'ān.'¹¹

On a final note, it should be remembered that *ruqya* is no substitute for Salāh. Sometimes, Muslims give utmost importance to *ruqya* as a means of relief yet do not perform the daily prayers. The spiritual is only achieved via the ritual.

Dr. Hafiz Ather Hussain al-Azhari
@hafiz_ather

BA Principles of Theology, al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt.

MA Arabic and Islamic Studies, Dar al-Ulum Muhammadia Ghawsia, Bhera, Pakistan.

BA Political Science, MPhil Theology & PhD Theology, University of Birmingham.

⁸ *Mirqāt al-Mafātīh*, VIII: 356.

⁹ *Mirqāt al-Mafātīh*, VIII: 359.

¹⁰ *Fath al-Bārī Sharh Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, Hāfiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī. X: 220, Dār al-Hadīth, Cairo, 2004.

¹¹ *Mirqāt al-Mafātīh*, VIII: 387.