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A binding can be a magical form of restraint. Nick Measures/Moment Open/Getty Images

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In the course of your magical studies, you may at some point hear someone use the word "binding" in reference to a spell or working. Typically, a magical binding is simply a spell or working that restrains someone metaphysically, preventing them from doing something. It is often used to keep the individual from causing harm to themselves or

to others. Some popular methods of binding include, but are not limited to:

Use of [a poppet in the person's likeness](#), wrapped with string or cord

A [spell tablet](#), restricting the individual from performing harmful actions

A [candle inscribed](#) with the person's name on it

A [specific rune](#) charged with restraining the person

Binding should not be confused with [banishing](#), which is to send a person or thing away using magical methods.

### **Binding in Folk Magic**

[Granny Tackett over at Hoodoo Hill](#) practices a form of American Folk Magic (and if you haven't explored her website at all, you really should). She says, "Works that involve binding, banishing, cursing, & hexing scare off most people.

Many believe that the effects will come back on them instead or at the same time it begins to take effect on its intended victim ... if someone has harmed you or yours in a very ugly manner, such as stolen from you, raped, attacked, caused great physical harm or death, then hell yeah, have at it! Use that energy to send back upon them that which they've inflicted on you & yours (and others you may not even know). These types of people deserve all they can get, mundane and conjured."

It's also important to note that binding can be a positive act, depending on the intent involved. For instance, in a [handfasting ceremony](#), two people are bound together magically through the use of a symbolic cord.

## Binding in the Ancient World

Believe it or not, the idea of binding magic - despite it being a popular TV trope - really isn't that new. The ancient Greeks utilized this often enough that they had a word for it: *katadesmos*. When someone had done another person wrong, it was perfectly acceptable to [create a spell tablet or curse tablet](#) as part of a binding working. Our [About Ancient History Expert, NS Gill, says](#), "A famous instance of binding magic gone horribly wrong is when [Deianeira gave Hercules](#) the tunic soaked in poisoned centaur blood thinking it would keep her husband faithful to her. One type of binding magic is the binding spell or curse, written, rolled or folded, and sometimes pierced, and the other is the figurine, erotic or otherwise, that may also be pierced or twisted or bound."

Christopher Faraone is a professor of classics at the University of Chicago, and author of [Ancient Greek Love Magic](#) (Harvard University Press, 1999). He says that the [Greeks often invoked ghosts and spirits as part of their binding magic](#). "The magical paraphernalia of Apuleius' witch and Martina, who allegedly attacked Germanicus, included tablets inscribed with strange letters or the victim's name. Archaeologists have found hundreds of these. The Greeks called them "curses that bind tight," and the late Latin term for them meant "curses that fix or fasten someone." To make such a "binding spell" one would inscribe the victim's name and a formula on a lead tablet, fold it up, often pierce it with a nail, and then deposit it in a grave or a well or a fountain, placing it in the realm of ghosts or underworld divinities who might be asked to enforce the spell."

Some magical [traditions](#) have injunctions against manipulative magic, and binding would certainly fall into that category. However, many other belief systems have no such restriction. If you're unsure whether you should perform a binding spell, follow the guidelines of your tradition.

## Additional Resources