

Good Luck

Bad Luck

Good Type

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A Book About Typography and Superstition

By

Ermelin Valerio

“I have always considered myself superstitious, however I don't believe that running into a black cat is bad luck”

Superstition

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

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Why do people cross their fingers for luck?

WITCHES, GHOSTS, AND OTHER SUPERNATURAL GHOULS WERE VERY REAL TO PEOPLE LIVING IN THE 16TH CENTURY. Illnesses and bad luck were blamed on these evil forces. Faith in the power of the Christian cross, therefore, was strong. A cough, a sneeze, or even a mention of a cold (thought to be a sign of the plague) was reason enough to cross yourself. The proper way to make the sign of the cross involves four steps — touch the forehead, heart, left shoulder, then right shoulder with your right hand.

When a suspected witch crossed your path, you could make a shortcut by crossing your index and second finger or the index fingers of both hands. This would provide protection and ward off the evil influence. Just like in Dracula movies, it was believed the power of the cross or any religious talisman would combat the forces of darkness. People also wore crosses or carried their Bibles in case they happened upon a nefarious being. A clove of garlic worn around the neck was ammunition against werewolves and bad spirits, and both peasants and nobles attached bells known as “bezants” to their garments, hoping the sound would scare away evil spirits.

Though many of these beliefs have slowly died, the gestures they inspired have lived on. Let's face it, in today's scary world, we need all the luck we can get. If crossing your fingers, carrying a rabbit's foot, hanging a horseshoe, or rubbing a lucky penny helps you through the day, more power to you!

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Another theory concerning the placing of horseshoes above doorways is to ward off Faeries (the Celtic kind); the theory being that Faeries are repelled by iron and as horseshoes were an easily available source of iron, they could be nailed above a door to prevent any unwanted, otherworldly guests. One can see how the custom, as people began to forget the stories concerning the Fair Folk, eventually morphed into a simple good luck charm. It is also possible that the Romans, when arriving in Celtic countries, came across horseshoes nailed above doors and simply borrowed the concept of horseshoes as good luck charms, failing to understand the background of the Celtic custom, and made their use more widespread.

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Touch Wood

"Touch wood" or "knock on wood" is a popular saying to reverse any bad luck that might come your way, due to a recent action you have taken or comment you have made. The superstition is that if someone remarks about something not wished for, or something that has not happened lately, they should immediately touch or knock on wood to avoid the fulfillment of bad luck, or the event not desired. Touching wood after boasting of one's good fortune, or exemption from bad luck, was thought necessary to keep the streak of good luck intact. Still, today, people are likely to touch wood immediately after answering a question in the negative, such as "no, I have not been sick lately."

Touching wood is also practiced after an activity or event that has gone excessively well. As an example, if you give a good presentation you should touch wood afterwards to continue the success you are experiencing. People will often go to great lengths to find a piece of wood to touch after one of the events described above have occurred. They believe that if they do not touch wood, the fates will wreak vengeance upon them.

Touching wood is also a superstition practiced to ensure safety and good fortune at the start of a day or activity. Athletes and actors are among two of the professions that practice this superstition to increase the good luck they will have in their upcoming game or show.

Touching iron used to be popular as well when iron was more prevalent and thought to hold magical properties. The origin of the use of wood is thought to be associated with the cross that Jesus was crucified upon. Smaller crucifix pendants were made and worn as good luck charms, often made from wood. Wood then began to be associated with safety, magic and good fortune.



Black Cats

Historically, black cats were symbolically associated with witchcraft and evil. In Hebrew and Babylonian folklore, cats are compared to serpents, coiled on a hearth. In the Middle Ages, Germanic peoples and the Normans associated the black cat with “bad luck”. To some, they were an omen of impending death. On roads, a black cat crossing one’s path was considered a signal of danger ahead.

Since the 1880s, the color black has been associated with anarchism. The black cat, in an alert, fighting stance was later adopted as an anarchist symbol. More specifically, the black cat is associated with anarcho-syndicalism, a branch of anarchism that focuses on workers’ rights. Anarchists, Situationists and Revolutionary Industrial Unionists (such as the IWW) believe that wildcat strikes could be the spark for revolution.

In the 1930s, the Wiccan religious tradition emerged. Since much of Wicca is reconstructed from supposed witchcraft practices, the black cat was adopted as a Wiccan symbol.

The archaic associations of black cats with bad luck or evil once appeared frequently in North American popular culture, but are no longer widely held. In the early years of television, several stations located on “unlucky” channel 13 made sport of the association by using black cats as mascots. Contrarily in the UK black cats are the most well known sign of good luck and have always been so. By some human beings, black cats are seen as desirable pets.

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R A B B I T ' S F O O T



Rabbits and hares were considered very lucky animals as they were associated with spring and the return of flowers and other plants. Spring was also a time of fertility and so rabbits were considered good luck to be seen running through the fields. To see a rabbit running through your yard meant that it would be a good year to have children or that your garden would be especially fertile this year. The manner in which rabbits run gave birth to the superstition about rabbit's feet. Apparently their unusual stride makes the back feet touch the ground ahead of their front feet and so the back feet were considered especially lucky.

For luck to had, however, the original owner must give their rabbit's foot away and it would be the receiver of the gift that would also be the recipient of the good fortune. If the owner kept the foot for himself, he would be visited by bad luck. If the recipient of the rabbit's foot lost his lucky charm he would also be visited with bad luck.

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Mirrors

Breaking a mirror can even make a skeptic shudder for a brief moment! The superstition is an old one and has managed to keep its strength over the years. In fact, many superstitions exist for mirrors but the particular beliefs centering around broken mirrors are the most common today.

Mirrors are thought to have two supernatural abilities:

1. They bring bad luck
2. They help tell the future

Before mirrors came along, any reflective surface was considered to be magical and redited with the ability to look into the future. In ancient mythology we can often find the gods and goddesses, as well as mere mortals, looking into the still water to catch a glimpse of their fate. The power of reflective surfaces to captivate and deceive are also featured strongly in such myths as Narcissus and Snow White. Reflective surfaces like shiny metals and mirrors were also used to receive messages from the gods.

Queen Elizabeth's court magician and well-known alchemist, John Dee, used a mirror for scrying. He has been credited with prophesying the plot to kill King James in 1605.

Because mirrors were thought to hold the key to the future, to break one was to shatter your own future. One of the techniques devised to reverse the bad luck was to bury all the pieces deep within the earth. Another superstition for breaking a mirror was that shortly thereafter a family member.

SPIDERS

Apparently the superstition surrounding spiders dates back to Egyptian times when spiders were associated with riches. Charms were made in the form of spiders, much like the more common scarab, and carried on a person throughout the day and night. It was the hope that by doing this, money and good fortune would arrive their way in the near future.

In the Middle Ages, spiders were also considered lucky. People would trap spiders inside walnut shells and then make a necklace with silk out of them. The purpose of this was to protect against illness. Another primitive medical cure associated with spiders was to capture one in a box or bag and wait until it died. When it finally died the spider was thought to also take your disease or illness along with it.

It is considered very bad luck to kill a spider. Considering

the many, many people who have killed spiders it certainly doesn't make the future bright, according to folklore! No matter how scary and ugly they are, however, having one in your home was considered good luck as the spider would

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protect the house and family from any misfortune.

To have a spider living in your home meant that happiness would be yours so long as the spider remained. A spider dangling from the ceiling meant that money was coming your way and the small, red spiders, no matter what they were doing or where you found them, also meant inancial reward. Seeing a spider outside was also considered lucky.

A spider in the morning is a sign of sorrow;
A spider at noon brings worry for tomorrow;
A spider in the afternoon is a sign of a gift;
But a spider in the evening will all hopes life.

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