




Three Superstitions and Their Origins

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[Walking](#)  under a ladder, breaking a mirror or spilling salt means bad luck in cultural lore. Where do such beliefs come from, and is there a remedy?

Superstitions are as old as mankind and often their origins cannot clearly be traced. Some have roots in the Christian faith, some even date back to the Romans.



[The Middle](#)  Ages seem to have been a period particularly prone to superstitions. There are of [course](#)  superstitions related to bad luck and those believed to bring good luck. Here are three examples of superstitions supposed to cause bad luck, and an explanation of their origins.

Walking under a ladder

Instinctively, we often avoid walking under a ladder, probably simply out of fear that it might collapse onto us or something might fall on our head. However, apart from common sense, there is another origin to the superstition that walking under a ladder brings bad luck.

A ladder leaning against a wall or an unfolded step ladder, forms a triangle which represents the Christian Trinity. Disturbing the form and invading the Holy Triangle is considered an act of the devil. People who do that are perceived as being possessed by the devil and need to be punished or destroyed. Small wonder that walking under a ladder is a symbol of bad luck. The remedy is easy: just don't do it!

Breaking a mirror

Breaking a mirror is considered a bad omen which will bring you seven years of bad luck. Before the use and invention of mirrors, [men](#)  had no other way of [looking](#)  at themselves than peering into the surface of clear water contained in lakes or ponds. If the surface was ruffled and the reflected image disturbed, it could mean that an intruder was approaching and trouble was near by.

After the use of polished metal or glass to serve as mirrors, the scratching of the surface or the breaking of glass became the omen for bad luck as it equally destroyed the reflected image and metaphorically, the person looking into the mirror. The seven year period dates from the Romans, who believed that the human body renews itself every seven years.


There is an equally superstitious remedy to a broken mirror: to deflect bad luck, bury the shards by moonlight in the ground.

Spilling salt

This superstition can be traced back to the Middle Ages. At that period in history, salt was a very valuable and expensive condiment and the waste of something like that would bring you bad luck. Another origin is thought to be derived from Judas spilling salt at the Last Supper. To avoid bad luck from having spilt salt, you are supposed to throw a pinch over your left shoulder. Again, this remedy has Christian origins and to do with the devil. You throw the salt into the devil's eye and by doing so, blind him and deflect the bad luck and bad health he had in store for you. It's the left shoulder and not the right, because the angels are sitting to the right hand of God and the seat of the devil, who is the fallen angel, was to His left.

Superstitions may be mocked or joked about, but the fact remains that to this day, they are still very much alive in many cultures of the world.

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