

A superstition is a widespread cultural behavior that is motivated by supernatural beliefs in fate, magic, luck, or spirituality and not any proven scientific theory or rigorous logic. Supernatural beliefs used to be much more prevalent in ages past when religion, not science, was the primary tool people used to explain and understand the world. However, many of the old superstitions survived the Scientific Revolution and are still practiced today. The meaning behind these was lost, so they are now mostly done as interesting and fun cultural traditions. There are many ways a superstition can begin. Most of the time, they are grounded in religious theory that is spread by holy books and priests and then adopted by the rest of the population. An example of this is the spilling of salt and the number 13. Both of these superstitions are considered to be omens of bad luck or misfortune because of their association with Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve Apostles who betrayed Jesus to the Romans. However, some superstitions take root for practical reasons instead of religious ones. The best example of this can be found in wedding ceremonies. For instance, grooms in arranged marriages were not allowed to see the bride before the wedding day; otherwise, they might have found her ugly and called off the wedding.Â Other superstitions start out because of various word plays. For example, the number 4 is considered unlucky in China because it sounds similar to the word "death". A similar situation is that of the number 17 in Italy. Anything associated with death frequently generated superstitions. The death of coal miners from Scotland and Northern England was announced by placing the dead man's shoes on a table. In medieval France, bakers would keep aside a loaf of bread for the town executioner, and mark it by turning the loaf upside down. More interestingly, superstitions were also used to discourage rude behaviors. The best examples of this are covering the mouth while yawning, lest the person loses their soul to the devil. Likewise, counting one's money at a gambling table was considered rude and disrespectful to other players and so it became its own superstition. Finally, there are also superstitions with unclear origins. These are usually the oldest, most ancient of superstitions that are so "sticky" they're still practiced thousands of years after people forgot the reason behind the superstition. A good example of this is knocking on wood, or the Evil Eye belief found throughout the Eastern Mediterranean region. At the end of the day, however, every superstition is different and

has its own origin story. Below, you can find 60 of the most interesting superstitions found throughout the world and how they came to be. This superstition originates from a tradition that paid tribute to the goddess Artemis and was thought to be auspicious. The ancient Greeks would bake round cakes that symbolized the moon, while the candles represented the stars of the night sky. After making a wish and then blowing out the candles, the smoke would carry the message all the way to the heavens. Kissing someone at the New Year is a common superstitious belief and is thought to have Old English or Germanic roots. It was thought that kissing someone would purify them of evil for the coming year, and so people would kiss each other as a way of warding off evil spirits. In modern times, it is believed that kissing someone at the New Year sets the tone of the relationship with that particular person for the remainder of the year. This superstition came about since people believed the devil could sneak into one's mouth if they didn't cover it. Alternatively, covering the mouth was necessary as a way to prevent your spirit from leaving the body. It's also just a polite thing to do, for multiple reasons. Most likely origin story is that saying "bless you" after sneezing became popular during the Middle Ages as a way to protect someone from the bubonic plague that was ravaging Europe at the time. Wedding rings are worn on the fourth finger of the left hand because of an ancient Roman belief that a vein from that finger goes directly to your heart, keeping your love symbol close to your heart and your marriage full of love. Halloween pumpkins were initially known as "jack-o'-lanterns", and were first used by the Irish as a way to protect their homes from the wandering soul of Stingy Jack. According to myth, Jack was so treacherous that his soul was denied entry into both Heaven and Hell, condemned to forever roam the Earth. Halloween evolved from the Irish Samhain festival. During that time, it was believed the threshold between the realm of the living and that of the dead was at its weakest. Thus, evil spirits, fairies, and ghouls would roam about, and wearing costumes was necessary to scare them off. Those who did not wear them risked being kidnapped and whisked away to the realm of the dead! The tradition of launching fireworks during New Year celebrations started in China during the 7th century. The bright lights and loud bangs were thought to scare away evil spirits and thus bring about a peaceful and prosperous year. According to Christian belief, red

symbolizes the blood of Jesus Christ, while green represents the evergreen tree, or renewal. However, the association of red and green with Christmas likely appeared first during pagan times, when blood on snow was thought to bring back the green plants after the winter.Â In other words, rituals involving blood sacrifice were performed to ensure spring would come back each year. In medieval English folklore, rheumatism and arthritis were said to be caused by little elves that shot people with tiny, invisible arrows called elf-shot.Â A very old superstition with unclear origins.Â One explanation is that the ancient Celts believed spirits and gods resided in trees, so knocking on wood was meant to invoke their protection. Another theory is that the sound of wood knocking was unpleasant to devils and could drive them away. Some Christian theologians even link it to Jesus Christ, since knocking on wood was supposed to invoke the powers of Christ's cross. In Chinese Feng Shui, the ringing of a windchime is said to protect a home from evil spirits. However, a wind chime that stops ringing is said to predict a period of bad luck ahead.Â A superstition that is still popular even today.Â The origin of this tradition likely came from a time when marriages were arranged and the future spouses had never seen each other. Thus, the groom was not allowed to see the bride in case they found her to be ugly and called off the wedding. This is also why brides used to wear veils to cover their faces. During a marriage ceremony, a bride was supposed to stay on the left, so that the groom's sword hand is free. On a similar note, a groom's "best man" is named such because he is the "best man with a sword". Both of these aspects come in handy if a rival suitor comes armed and demands the bride instead. Likewise, bridesmaids used to wear the exact same dress as the bride herself, mostly as a way to confuse any would-be evil spirits or suitors that came to harm her. Among European cultures, the superstition of 13 as an unlucky number is now famous. Among Germanic people, this belief likely first started from an old Norse tale where 12 Asgardian gods were holding a feast, but without inviting the trickster god Loki.Â Upset at this, Loki crashed the feast, offended all of the gods present, and even managed to kill Balder through his cunning trickery. Henceforth, 13 came to symbolize Loki and the trouble that he brings. A similar variation of this story exists in Christianity, where there were 13 people present at Jesus Christ's Last Supper. In this case, Judas is the 13th person that symbolically fulfills the

role of Loki, since he is the one that betrays Jesus to the Romans. The number 4 is considered unlucky among Chinese and other Asian cultures because when spoken it sounds similar to the word "death" in Mandarin and other languages. The origins of the crossing fingers superstition are still debated and uncertain; however, there are multiple theories. One is that crossing the fingers creates a cross sign, a powerful protection symbol even among pre-Christian pagans. In the case of Christianity, the symbolism of crossing one's fingers becomes much more obvious, since it resembles the cross of Christ and likewise functioned as a protection symbol. The act of clinking glasses with someone else before drinking originates from medieval times, when ale, beer, and wine could be easily poisoned. Because of this ever-present threat, a host would often pour some of their own drink into the glass of their guest as an assurance that poison was not present. However, if the guest trusted the host, they simply clinked their glass into the glass of the host as a sign of trust and that swapping drinks was not necessary. The black cat has long been considered a symbol of bad luck in European Christian culture, and there is even a church document from 1233 that more or less classifies black cats as incarnations of Satan. During the witch hunt craze, black cats became associated with witches and were thought to be their familiars. Thus, a black cat crossing your path often meant that a witch was near or that the cat had already jinxed you. It's important to note though that other cultures view black cats as being lucky, such as in Japan. Walking under a ladder is considered to bring bad luck, most likely because a wall and a ladder form a triangle, which represents the Holy Trinity in Christianity, and walking through it is blasphemous. It is also likely that this was a public safety superstition, since walking under a ladder runs the risk of having the ladder collapse on the passerby. Opening an umbrella inside the home is a bad luck superstition found in many cultures, although the origins are debated. The ancient Egyptians used umbrellas to shield themselves from the sun, and so it became associated with the sun god Ra. Thus, opening it indoors was a disrespect towards the supreme sun god that could curse the person or throw misfortune their way. Pre-Christian pagan Europeans believed that each house had guardian spirits that protected the home. Opening an umbrella inside, however, would disturb and annoy these spirits, thus bringing bad luck. The practice of holding one's breath while passing a cemetery is

connected to various beliefs surrounding death and spirits.Â Some cultures believe that breathing near a cemetery could allow spirits to enter your body.Â The practice could also relate to ancient taboos against â€œinhalingâ€• the air of such a place, considered to be filled with the essence of death and decay. Over time, this cautionary act has evolved into a common superstition. Middle names were invented as a form of spiritual protection, since cursing someone requires a witch or sorcerer to know the victimâ€™s full name. On a similar note, spirits could only possess someone if they knew your complete name.Â By keeping the middle name a secret or only used in formal and sacred ceremonies, individuals could protect themselves from malevolent forces.Â This is why, even today, many people are selective about who they share their middle name with. The idea that finding a penny brings good luck originates from ancient beliefs that metals had the power to protect against evil. In many cultures, metals, particularly iron and copper, were thought to ward off malevolent forces.Â A penny, being metal and bearing an official insignia, was considered a double symbol of protection and good fortune. This idea has evolved into the common saying, â€œFind a penny, pick it up; all day long, youâ€™ll have good luck.â€• According to this superstition, rocking an empty chair is an invitation for ghosts and spirits to come sit in it. In some American folklore, an empty rocking chair starting to rock on its own was considered a death omen.Â The superstition can be found predominantly in American and Northern European cultures. In European Christian folklore, spilling salt is considered an omen of bad luck because of its connection with Judas Iscariot, a disciple of Jesus who spilled salt during the Last Supper. The solution was to throw the spilled salt over the left shoulder, since medieval Christians believed the devil stood there waiting for an opportunity to strike. Whistling indoors is a bad omen in many Eastern European countries. In Russian and Slavic traditions, for example, whistling indoors is thought to call upon spirits or tempt fate.Â It is also seen as a frivolous activity that shows disrespect for the sanctity of the home.Â Over time, this has evolved into a more generalized superstition warning against the act. For example, some sailors refuse to whistle while at sea out of fear that they might awaken the turbulent sea. The belief in the luck-bringing power of a rabbitâ€™s foot originates from various cultural sources, including Celtic and African-American folklore. The Celts believed that rabbits, being

creatures that live underground, were close to the Earth and had a special connection to the spirit world. In African-American folklore, the rabbit's cleverness and ability to outwit its enemies were highly regarded. The "lucky" aspect is generally believed to be strongest in the left hind foot of a rabbit that is captured in a cemetery under a full moon. Some cultures believe that spitting can protect against evil and cast out evil spirits. For example, the ancient Greeks believed that spitting could act as a form of purifying oneself or an area. Similarly, there is a Jewish tradition to spit three times as a reaction to either good or evil events. It's also seen in some cultures as a way to "spit out" bad spirits or bad luck. Over time, this act has become a common method for averting evil or misfortune, such as spitting three times over someone's head to protect them. Many ancient cultures believed that stars were the souls of the dead or divine beings sending messages to Earth. A "shooting star," or meteor, was considered an especially potent omen or sign, as it was a star that was moving and changing. This rare celestial event was therefore considered an ideal time to make a wish. The Ekeko doll is part of Bolivian and Andean folklore and represents the god of abundance and prosperity. It is customary for people from Bolivia and surrounding areas to place this doll in the home filled with miniature representations of items one desires (like money, food, etc.) as offerings. The Ekeko doll is believed to bring prosperity and happiness to its owners. While it's not traditionally from Europe or North America, its popularity has spread, and it has become a symbol of good luck and prosperity globally. The dreamcatcher is a creation of the Ojibwe tribe, an Indian Native American culture. The dreamcatcher was traditionally used as a talisman to protect people, especially children, from nightmares and bad dreams. The Ojibwe people believed that dreamcatchers could catch all sorts of dreams; good dreams would go through the hole in the center and slide down the feathers to the sleeper, while bad dreams got caught in the web and perished when the first rays of the sun struck them. The Troll Cross is a bent piece of iron worn as an amulet, primarily in Sweden, to protect against trolls and other evil spirits. The Troll Cross combines the symbolism of the Norse othala rune with that of iron, a material thought to repel many malevolent beings in many European cultures. Flipping a bread loaf is an omen of bad luck in France, for religious and historical reasons. From a religious point of

view, bread is a powerful symbol in Christianity since it represents the body of Christ. Flipping a loaf of bread is thus a form of disrespect towards God. However, there is also a historical angle. During medieval times, bread bakers were often not able to make as much bread as the community demanded, so they would always save a loaf of bread for the executioner. They would mark the executioner's loaf of bread by turning it upside down. Thus, the upside bread loaf became associated with misfortune and death in France. The concept of the "Evil Eye" is widespread, especially in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures. It's the belief that envy or malice, even if unintentional, can bring bad luck or harm to the person who is the object of such negative feelings. Protective talismans, like the blue-and-white Nazar, are often used to ward off the evil eye. The belief likely has ancient roots, dating back to Greek antiquity, and is even mentioned in some religious texts. In Chinese culture, the color red is considered to be extremely auspicious and lucky. The origin for this superstitious belief isn't entirely clear, but there are multiple versions. One is that the founder and first emperor of the Han Dynasty was said to be the son of the Red Emperor. Thus, the color red came to represent power, authority, and privilege. Another explanation is that red is associated with the Sun and fire, both potent symbols of life. Regardless of the reason, the Chinese often use red during festivals, weddings, and other celebrations to bring good luck, happiness, and prosperity. The color is also thought to ward off evil spirits, which is why red lanterns, red envelopes, and red decorations are commonly seen during important events and holidays like the Lunar New Year. The superstition that horseshoes bring good luck is associated with Celtic and Western European traditions. The iron composition of the horseshoe was believed to ward off evil spirits, and its crescent shape was considered to be a symbol of fertility and good fortune. The superstition often specifies that the horseshoe must be hung with the open end facing upward to "catch" the luck. The belief in the luck-bringing power of a four-leaf clover has Irish Celtic origins. In Druidic traditions, the four-leaf clover was considered a powerful protective amulet. Each leaf is said to represent something: hope, faith, love, and luck. Finding one, which is a rare occurrence given that most clovers have only three leaves, is considered extremely lucky. The superstition that breaking a mirror brings seven years of bad luck originates

from Greek and Roman culture. This is because both Greeks and Romans considered a person's reflection (whether in water, metal or glass) represented their very soul, and that gods watched over a person through their reflection. To break a mirror thus became an omen of great misfortune, since the mirror broke the very reflection of one's soul. On a more positive note, the Romans believed this misfortune lasted only seven years, since that was the time it took for the body to completely renew itself. This tradition has its roots in ancient Norse mythology. According to legend, Frigg, the goddess of marriage and motherhood, declared mistletoe to be a symbol of love after her son Baldr was brought back to life. She vowed to kiss anyone who passed beneath it. The practice was later incorporated into Christmas celebrations, and it's now a common Western custom during the holiday season to kiss under a hanging sprig of mistletoe. A common superstition in Eastern Europe, particularly in Russia, can be called "ædon't go back". According to this superstition, going back home after starting a journey, such as returning to recover a forgotten item, is seen as a bad omen. The belief likely stems from the idea that hesitating or showing uncertainty could invite negative energies or bad luck. This superstition is commonly found in Western cultures, particularly in the United States. The idea is that walking on opposite sides of a pole or other upright structure will bring bad luck or cause a rift between the people involved by breaking their bonds. American biker culture contains a superstition called the "motorcycle bell" or "gremlin bell". This gremlin bell is attached to the bike and is believed to protect the rider from evil spirits or "gremlins" that could cause mechanical problems or bad luck on the road. The bell is usually given by a loved one and should hang low on the bike to be effective. One of the most bizarre modern superstitions is that of fan death, which is almost exclusively found in South Korea. According to this superstition, sleeping in a closed room with a running electric fan can somehow cause a person's death. This belief in fan death is so widespread, electric fans in South Korea have a timer that automatically turn off the fan after a certain interval. The explanation for this superstition is cultural, rather than scientific. Like many Asian countries, South Korean culture places a great deal of value on "saving face" and maintain a family's honor. As such, fan death became a euphemism for suicide, saving a family

the shame of admitting the true cause of death. This superstition became even more prevalent because of South Korea's high suicide rate. While it may seem like an inconvenience, many people believe that having a bird poop on you or your clothes is a sign of good luck. This superstition is common in various cultures, including Western ones. The unexpected nature of the event, coupled with its rarity, has led people to interpret it as a sign of good fortune, possibly as a "blessing in disguise."

A superstition among Ashkenazi Jews is that naming a newborn child after a deceased relative is safe, but giving them the name of a still-living relative is dangerous and potentially fatal. The most common explanation for this tradition is that two people with identical names can confuse the Angel of Death when it must take someone's life, meaning it runs the risk of taking the newborn's life instead of the older relative. This practice is common in some Latin American and Mediterranean cultures, where it's believed that an egg can absorb negative energy or illness. Rubbing an egg over a newborn is thought to protect the baby from "mal de ojo" (evil eye) or other harmful energies. After the ritual, the egg is usually broken to reveal the absorbed negativity. This is part of a broader set of rituals known as "limpias," or spiritual cleansings. This superstition is prevalent in various cultures and is thought to symbolize severing relationships or even cutting a person. To negate the bad luck, the recipient often gives a coin to the giver, essentially "buying" the knife and turning it into a transaction rather than a gift. This is supposed to neutralize the bad omen and maintain the relationship between the giver and the receiver. A popular belief in South America is that sweeping someone's feet with a broom will condemn them to never marry and live a life of being single. This superstition likely comes from the idea that a broom is used to sweep away negative energies or spirits, so sweeping someone's feet could remove their "path" to marriage or happiness. The superstition about "stepping on a crack will break your mother's back" primarily comes from Western culture, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. The superstition has roots in older beliefs about cracks representing a boundary between the realm of the living and that of the dead, and stepping on a crack invites a demon or negative energy to come out and harm your life. The superstition surrounding the number 666 is rooted in Christian biblical tradition. In the Book of

Revelation, 666 is referred to as the "Number of the Beast," often interpreted as representing Satan or evil. This number has since become synonymous with bad luck, evil, and ominous forebodings in Western culture. Various attempts have been made to understand or decode the number, but it largely remains a symbol of all things malevolent or unfortunate. In Italy, the number 17 is considered unlucky due to its representation in Roman numerals (XVII), which can be rearranged to spell "VIXI," a word that in Latin means "I have lived" but is a euphemism for "I am dead." Therefore, the number is associated with bad luck and mortality. You often find that buildings, including the Vatican, avoid having room number 17, and some airlines skip row 17 on their planes. The Nisse is a mythical creature in Norwegian folklore, resembling a small gnome or elf-like being that takes care of a household or barn and its inhabitants. However, they are also quick to mischief and even malevolence if disrespected or ignored. Traditionally, Norwegians leave out a bowl of porridge for the Nisse on Christmas Eve to keep in his good graces. The belief in Nisse reflects older pagan traditions that were integrated into Christian practices. The superstition that itching in the left or right hand predicts financial gain or loss is common in various cultures. Generally, an itch on the left hand is believed to mean that money is going out (or you'll pay for something), while an itch on the right hand means money coming in (or receiving money). The origins of this superstition are unclear. One hypothesis is that it is an ancient Celtic tradition, when people believed rubbing silver in one's itchy palms had the power to cure illnesses. Over time, this transformed into the belief that an itchy palm will bring about silver, and thus money. The Romans that conquered Gaul adopted this superstition, and from there on it spread throughout the rest of the Roman world. In Irish folklore, fairy forts, also known as ringforts or raths, are ancient circular earthworks believed to be portals or gateways to the realm of the fairies. They are treated with great respect and are often feared because disturbing them is thought to bring bad luck or invoke the wrath of the fairies. These beliefs are rooted in older Celtic traditions and have been integrated into Irish culture over the centuries. Many locals still caution against tampering with these sites, which are also considered of historical and archaeological importance. There have even been documented cases of planned highways that were diverted a few meters just so the

builders don't have to destroy a fairy mound. The superstition that placing shoes on a table is bad luck comes primarily from Scotland and the northern areas of England. The origin of this superstition is that this action mimics the placing of a miner's shoes on a table to signify his death. Another origin is that shoes are generally considered dirty and unfit for a place where food is consumed, which adds to the negative connotation. Violating this social norm is thought to bring bad luck or misfortune. Eastern European countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Romania have particular traditions when it comes to gifting flowers. If the person is still living, the number of flowers must be odd. On the contrary, flowers given at funerals, wakes, or placed on graves must be even. The explanation is that odd numbers are seen as incomplete, in the sense that one more flower is needed to complete the cycle. Thus, an odd number of flowers represents life, and that the person's life cycle is not yet complete. On the contrary, an even number of flowers means that a person's life cycle is now complete. Especially common in Germany and Austria is the superstition that celebrating a birthday before the actual date is considered bad luck. The superstition originates from the idea that each year of life is a cycle, and celebrating it before it's complete could invite misfortune. Another explanation is that evil spirits are more active during times of transition, so celebrating early may attract negative energies. This practice is rooted in Christian tradition and is especially common among Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians. The act of making the sign of the cross is believed to invoke divine protection and blessings. When passing a church, the gesture acknowledges the presence of the Holy Eucharist inside the church and serves as a brief moment of prayer or reflection. This is a way of showing reverence and seeking protection or guidance. Pointing a finger at someone is considered to be deeply rude and frowned upon in most cultures, and for this reason, children are taught not to do this from a very young age. In European cultures, the practice of finger pointing was also spiritually charged, since it was believed witches and sorcerers could curse a person by pointing their finger at them. A common gambling superstition, especially in the Western world, is that counting one's money or chips at the gambling table is a sign of arrogance and an invitation for bad luck or even a self-jinx. In theater circles, William Shakespeare's "Macbeth" is often referred to as the

â€œScottish playâ€• due to a superstition that saying the name â€œMacbethâ€• inside a theater will bring bad luck or disaster.Â This superstition is thought to originate from the playâ€™s dark themes involving witchcraft, murder, and betrayal, which were believed to invite negative energies or curses.Â Some also speculate that early performances of the play were plagued by accidents, further fueling beliefs in its cursed nature. References: Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked * Name* Email* Website Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

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