

## GOOD FORTUNE RESIDES IN SOME TRADITIONAL CHARMS

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Everyone could use a little extra luck these days. Too bad it's not as easy as carrying a rabbit's foot or picking a four-leaf clover. Or is it? For centuries, cultures across the globe have tried to unlock the secret of good fortune and have come up with all kinds of lucky charms.

"In times of uncertainty, especially now, people are always in search of something tangible that they can stake their luck on," said Kevin Kwan, co-author of *Luck: The Essential Guide*. "They're just physical manifestations about people's desire about luck."

But do they work? Richard Webster, author of *The Encyclopedia of Superstitions*, thinks it's all about the power of belief. Those who believe in a charm are more likely to expect good things and look for them to happen. And, he said, "even people who say they don't believe in them still sometimes carry them, 'just in case.'"

It can't hurt, right? Cross your fingers!

### HORSESHOE

If horseshoes are supposed to be lucky, then a riding stable ought to be one of the luckiest places in the world automatically, right?

Not so fast. There are rules to this sort of thing. For example, any horseshoe you hang is supposed to be found accidentally, and it works best when pointed up, said Donna Rothman, owner of Stonehaven Farms Equestrian in Temperance.

"The whole idea behind it is if you point it down the luck spills out," she explained. "You always point the open side up and that's supposed to keep the luck in the place or in the shoe."

The idea that a horseshoe can attract good luck and repel bad goes back ages, possibly to the days of horse worship or when iron was thought to have magical qualities, according to Mr. Webster's book.

Mrs. Rothman has a large horseshoe hanging over the door between her home and the barn connected to it. It was found during the construction of an outdoor riding arena on the property and has served her well so far.

"Since we've moved here, I would have to say overall we've had very good luck," she said. "I'm not a superstitious person, but if it works, do it."

### DREAM CATCHER

The idea of a dream catcher seems pretty gentle — it nabs nightmares while you sleep and only lets sweet dreams through. One tale about the origin of this Native American talisman, however, might shock you.

According to Barbara Crandell, co-chairman of the Native American Alliance of Ohio, it initially was made from a scalp stretcher. The story goes that a Chippewa mother with a fussy baby noticed one morning that after sleeping beneath a scalp stretcher with a spider web in the middle, the infant was happy, leading to the idea that it had carried away the child's bad dreams.



Houg Dhar with her Maneki Neko, lucky cats, an Asian good luck tradition. (THE BLADE/HERRAL LONG)

Nowadays, authentic dream catchers consist of a twig twisted into a circular shape that's filled with a webbing of string. Barbara Mann, northern director of the Native American Alliance of Ohio and an associate lecturer in English at the University of Toledo, gave one to her daughter to hang above the front of her bed. It also contains white feathers, beads, and a sprig of cedar.

"I didn't want her to have bad dreams," she said. "What you're doing is basically putting a sign in front of the negative spirits that this is a place they don't want to go."

## **HAMSA**

In some ways, looking for good luck is just another way of asking for a helping hand. The hamsa is kind of a literal response to that plea. Representing the protective hand of G-d, this amulet's name comes from a root meaning "five," referring to the number of fingers on a hand, according to *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*.

Meira Saks, of Sylvania Township, has collected more than a dozen hamsas over the years, most of them purchased in Israel. They hang on a window, come on necklaces, and even are attached to her keychain.

"I put this on my keychain kind of like a protector when I'm driving," said Mrs. Saks, whose husband, Rabbi Moshe Saks, is the spiritual leader at Congregation B'nai Israel. "My custom is when I travel, I either wear a hamsa or I take one with me."

Some designs include other symbols of good fortune, such as fish. Others have a representation of the evil eye, which they are supposed to ward off. Each reflects an artistry and symbolism that appeals to her.

"I like rituals and symbols and things that I can connect to," she said.

## **MANEKI NEKO**

Many pessimists like to focus on how unlucky cats of a certain color can be. One Japanese tradition, however, has a much more fortunate view of felines.

Statues of a cat raising its paw — a beckoning cat, or Maneki Neko in Japanese — are commonplace in Asian businesses and are thought to attract customers. Some people believe that a cat with its left paw raised will draw customers while one with its right paw up will bring money, said Mr. Kwan, the author.

Houng Dhar, owner of Asian Grocery on McCord Road, has two of the little fellows on the counter near her cash register, each holding a gold coin and lifting their left paws.

"Most of the Oriental stores you walk into you'll see some kind of lucky charm," said Mrs. Dhar, who was born in Cambodia.

Her stoer actually has several. In addition to the two beckoning cats, there are statues of a three-legged frog and two other figures that are bearers of good luck in different Asian cultures, she said. Business is pretty good, so Mrs. Dhar isn't going to worry about which may be responsible.

"If you believe it's good luck, it's good luck," she said.

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