

I am lucky to have a great family, friends, expensive things, and amazing opportunities. But as far as everyday situations, encountering luck is mild for me. Of course, I have those days when nothing seems to go right and unlucky events just keep occurring. And yes, I have those other days where I am overwhelmed with good happenings. I want to find out *why* we have good and bad days. Is it Mother Nature trying to balance things out? Is karma trying to tell us something? Do we make our own luck? Can we change it or make it better?

Luck is something that appears at random times in our lives, whether we hope for it or it comes when we least expect it. What does luck mean to you? Is it a lucky charm? A superstition? In everyday conversation, we wish it upon other people, but why? Why do we believe in this force that supposedly brings us good fortune? What *actually* gives us good fortune and how do we determine good luck from bad luck? There are many different ways we see and define luck and it may be different from each person. I will explore the definition of luck, its origins, and the different types. I will then apply it to my beliefs to discover how I personally perceive the role luck plays in my life.

Many people associate luck with the mystical and the fantastical. This includes various practices such as: fortunetelling, tarot card readings, and tealeaf readings. In learning about these methods, I have become engulfed in the idea of luck, compelling me to explore whether or not I can make myself luckier. Ultimately, I will attempt to answer the question, "What is luck?"

History of Luck

Early practices of luck started with Native American culture. The belief in luck developed thousands of years before the English settlers came to the United States. Some of the first beliefs in luck were Native American ideas around spirituality and nature. According to the book Luck: Understanding Luck and Improving the Odds, the Native Americans believed in the phrase, "luck is spirit; there is no separation." The word "medicine" to them meant mystery, influence, power, and sensibility (words which were also connected to the spiritual world). With that meaning, they combined the two, which brought people together in peace through medicine. They also had a "medicine man" which could be considered the doctor, or modernly a type of priest or holy man because he could interpret messages from nature and the spiritual world. One way the "medicine man" worked was to administer herbs in dreams. Members of the tribe would share their dreams and they eventually acquired names and positions from what happened in their dreams. When herbs or spiritual journeys induced the dreams, it was important that the medicine dreams have a good outcome, for that showed the luck for the future would also have a positive outcome. The tribes used chants, rituals, and songs to heal; they are still around today in Native American culture. Through the years, it has transformed into different practices and beliefs around the world.

Lucky numbers were also introduced in the early development of luck. The Sioux, Dakota, and Zuni tribes gave praise to the number four. Four is the nature of good luck because it represents four seasons and directions. The number four was ultimately the "power of the universe" and many good luck symbols originated from this number. Many of the Native Americans had good luck symbols and herbs for which they used for love and protection. Some of them included: raindrops, fuzzy weed, meadow rue, buffalo, and rainclouds. Today, there are charms, symbols, and dolls that represent good luck. The one quality that all of these symbols have in common, is that they all vaguely represent nature and spirit in their own unique ways.

Gambling was also widely popular for the early Native American tribes. Many games of chance were evolved and passed down through generations. There is one specific tribe, the

Algonquins, that had a tradition of gambling linked with games of the spirits. There is the idea that the spirits, in any gambling game, are playing with one's fate. When gambling, the spirits dictate the outcome of the game.

Near the 1600s, however, the Puritans had a very different method to produce luck. They sought very simplified lives and turned to the Bible to decide their fate. The term used is called "bibliomancy" and they used it by posing a question, then turning to a random page to a random word or phrase to answer it. Many religious leaders did not believe that this method was the right way to solving problems. The people would put their faith in the Bible, but in the wrong way. The religious leaders thought it was not right to put the scripture over themselves and their free will. However, despite their opinions, the Puritan culture continued to practice it and pass it down many generations.

Non-Puritans, however, still used games of chance even though some of it was banned. Betting on horses became popular because lotteries, fortune telling, cards, and dice were not allowed throughout the first thirteen colonies. These practices were blamed for causing problems to the colonies. "To investors and others of England, the prevalence of gambling suggested an atmosphere of idleness and vice¹." In other words, many people during the 1600s thought gambling was a negative pastime that caused problems in families throughout the colony. However, herbal magic, astrology readings, magic practices, and "fortune books" were used to get insight on luck. Even though these methods are a quite different approach to predicting luck, they still connected because of the spiritual intent behind them. For example, in gambling, the "spirits" are said to be with you and make your luck with fate. With the different types of fortunetelling, the spirits are with you in the same way, telling you what the future holds.

Luck and Psychology

However, there is a whole other unique way of thinking about luck and that is psychologically. Throughout my research, my questions about luck deepened. I wondered what kind of force decided who got good luck and who got bad luck. Then, I researched a ten-year study conducted by Dr. Richard Wiseman in 2000 on lucky vs. unlucky people. The whole study consisted of people who considered themselves lucky and those who considered themselves unlucky. The goal was to find why situations and events in these peoples' lives consistently worked out good and bad by conducting interviews and tracking journals of their daily lives. It turns out that the research showed lucky people consistently have "chance opportunities"; they make good decisions, they stick to their goals and have expectations, and they stay positive. The way people act upon given situations affects what kind of outcome they will receive. It was proven that the personalities of lucky versus unlucky people are somewhat different, and therefore affects their luck. For example, agreeable nature, consciousness, extroversion, neuroticism and openness was compared while interviewing the groups of people. Lucky and unlucky people are equal in the categories of agreeable nature and consciousness. However, in the remaining categories, the two groups scored very differently. The main difference is that lucky people are more likely to take chances and stay positive with given situations. They are more likely to get chance opportunities (such as a job interview or an invitation to an event) because of their outgoing personalities; they keep in touch with old friends and acquaintances. Unlucky people tend to shut out opportunities that are right in front of them because of their negative attitude and ongoing pity for themselves. One other trait is that unlucky people tend to focus on bad energy, so when something unlucky happens, they let it ruin their entire day,

¹ <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/97/03/Chapt2.html>

inviting more bad luck to occur. I found this entire study intriguing because I now know what I have been doing wrong on those days when nothing seems to go right. There is a greater force behind luck, but the first step is to find and make the luck myself. If that means staying in touch with my old friends, and being more positive, nothing could go wrong by experimenting with this idea.

I have been experimenting with practicing some of the advice I have been reading about in an effort to make my own luck happen. My number one goal was to try to stay positive and find “the silver lining” in all of the problematic situations I have faced lately. Positive thinking is one method to improve one’s luck, because when bad luck does strike, having a positive outlook brings good energy to the future. Overall, I feel more confident in myself and I feel like I can get through anything now because I am not putting all of my energy into being angry or sad about something I cannot change. Another method I tried was to meditate each day to think about events and how I can handle them in the best way possible. (I honestly think everyone should try these practices because, in my case, it definitely worked.) I finally got closure and found patience by employing these simple strategies. I cannot stress how happy I am now that I have done this. I used to be very negative sometimes and I pitied myself when no one else would. But I realize that doing that just makes me sad and causes me to over-think a situation so much that I end up overdoing everything to solve my problems. Being positive brings out the best in me and makes the environment I surround myself in much happier also. I do not really know if my luck as far as gambling and numbers is better, but I know that if I keep practicing meditation and positivity, only good things can come out of it.

What is my belief in luck? I think luck is all about the force and spirit that comes through a positive attitude towards life. I believe in all of the forms of luck. They all piece together the idea of spirit and nature. I believe in making my own luck and predicting my future through stars and cards. I live for both the mystical and psychological forms of luck. It is ultimately up to each person’s beliefs. I provided the facts and stories, now *you* must decide...what *is* luck to you?