

ORIGINS

URBAN LEGENDS: SUPERSTITIONS



**BROKEN
MIRRORS**

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INTRODUCTION

The sound of glass breaking is not a happy one. A valuable item might be broken. There might be a mess. You might get cut when you clean it up. When the glass is from a mirror, people get even more uneasy. There is a superstition that anyone who breaks a mirror will have seven years of bad luck.

This superstition is very old. It dates back to a time before mirrors were even made of glass. Ancient people studied their reflections in ponds or lakes. They wanted to view their fate. They thought that the reflection was an echo of a person's soul. At times, the reflection got **distorted** by the wind or a wave. People took this as a sign of evil to come.

If we break a mirror, will we have bad luck? Is there a quick way to undo it? Or do we really have to wait seven years?

distorted: something that has twisted out of its normal shape

DID YOU KNOW?

Most mirrors are made by coating a piece of glass with a metal such as chrome or aluminum.



Is a twisted reflection a sign that one's soul is twisted, too?

BEST RECORDED SIGHTING

The fear of broken mirrors is found all over the world. Yet stories that show seven years of bad luck following a broken mirror are hard to find.

At least one story about a broken mirror ends well. In China, a tale is told about Princess Lechang and her husband, Xu Deyan. When their palace was taken over by a rival ruler, they had to flee. Before they left, the couple broke a mirror in half. They each took one of the halves with them. It was a symbol of their union. If they got separated, they would meet in the capital's market place on a certain day.

The fall of the palace caused **chaos** in the city. The couple lost track of one another. Princess Lechang was taken as the wife of one of the new rulers. On the appointed day, she sent a servant to the market place with her half of the mirror. Xu Deyan went to the market place, too. He found the servant and his wife's mirror. He was sad to learn of her fate. He wrote a love poem on her half of the mirror. Lechang's new husband found her crying over it. He was struck by the symbolism of the mirror and by Lechang's deep love. He let her go back to her husband.

DID YOU KNOW?

An American folk tradition says a girl should look into a mirror on Halloween. She will see the face of her true love behind her.

chaos: a state of complete confusion or disorder



Some folk stories and rituals tell of the power of mirrors to bring two people together.

TIMELINE

Superstitions about mirrors have grown throughout human history.



3000–1000 BC

The Egyptians make mirrors out of silver, gold, brass, or bronze. The mirrors are thought to have special powers.



3000–1000 BC

The ancient Greeks practice catoptromancy, in which people look into shallow bowls filled with water to predict their futures.



15th Century

Glass mirrors are first made in Venice, Italy. They are very expensive.

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