

Luck
presented by the Allen Avenue UU Worship Committee
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Images of Luck

by Elizabeth Forest

Lady Luck

(You sexy Goddess, you)

Ensnared at the gambling table,

Fair haired, svelte, and spangly

in slitted white dress with silver-gold sandals.

you embody the dominant culture fantasy of femininity

blow a kiss:

kiss the dice

with your sparkle and shine.

Leprechauns next,

and Piskies and Nissen and Pukwudgies too;

The 'Little People' from so many cultures

all popping out from behind the wall, the barn, the tree

hiding their treasures

from our ungainly notice

until they determine

what kind of luck we deserve

or might be quick enough to catch!

Lucky numbers--

Choose your favorite!

Caution though:

what's lucky for some is unlucky for others.

Many westerner tend to mistrust the number 13,

others embrace it.

In East Asia, 13 is just another number;

There, it is 8 that shines with fortune

and four that is avoided;

it's character too close to that of 'death.'

And there's an ark-ful of animals luck stories.

In the East your animal year describes your temperament--
 Birth rates go down in the snake years,
 up in the tiger and dragon years.
 the 4 pillars of culture are animals who represent particular important qualities.
 Goldfish? Lucky almost everywhere.
 Dung beetles and crickets,
 dolphins and elephants, fortunate all.
 Bats? a mixed bag. Lucky in the East, demonized to the West.

Black cats?
 Vilified in the West for 400 years, yet
 Egyptians revered dark fur especially
 And the Japanese believe them to be lucky, sailors also, the world over.

Finally there are plants,
 stones,
 bones,
 heavenly objects
 in fact, just about **anything** can take on luck or 'unluck' to humans' eyes.

Could it be that luck we attribute to these beings really comes from somewhere
 else?
 Look around you.
 Do you see luck in your neighbors' eyes?
 Whose light are they reflecting?

Thoughts on Luck

by Marge Kleibacker

As a child, I learned some superstitions that causes bad luck; don't open an
 umbrella inside, don't let a black cat cross your path, don't break a mirror and
 don't walk under a ladder. For good luck: cross your fingers; carry a rabbit's foot;
 or if you are Catholic, cross yourself. I don't consider myself superstitious but for
 some reason, perhaps cultural, I feel a little apprehensive when Friday falls on
 the 13th of a month.

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What do other people think? I wondered. To find out, I googled 'luck' and found a variety of responses. The first I agreed with, luck is "success or failure apparently brought by chance rather than through one's own actions." Chance is a force that causes good or bad things to happen, it has no moral convictions. Definitions varied from the Roman belief that luck was associated with the goddess Fortuna to Carl Jung's view that luck was a meaningful coincidence.

Once on a walk, in the dim light before the sun rose, I saw several dollar bills rolled up lying on the sidewalk. I picked them up; they totaled twenty dollars. I thought they could have belonged to anyone as there were no clues to identify their owner. I pocketed them, thinking it's a lucky day for me but for the other person, it's an unlucky day.

The person, because of gravity, lost the money after an unnoticed misplacement of it in a pocket or purse. I don't believe a deity or something like a deity decide to reward me anymore than I believe that said deity caused the person to lose it as a punishment. Natural laws are consistent for all types of beings.

Sometime I find forgotten money in a pocket of a jacket that I have not worn for several months. I am happy and call it good luck because good luck to me is a word for something good that has happened.

Chance Encounters in Life

by John Paynter

All my life I have struggled to understand the notion of luck and chance.

Why do things happen the way they do? Why do good things happen to bad people and why do bad things happen to good people? Why do red lights happen when I'm running late? Why does beautiful weather come when I have to work inside? Why do I encounter a long-lost friend in a checkout line? Why am I so lucky to have a warm house to live in and have enough to eat every day?

As a boy, I learned a lot about luck because of a few games I played. Here is one: baseball.

Yes, this little ball is about 3" in diameter. The bat is only about 2 ¾". So, when the bat hits the ball, a difference of 1/8" higher or lower or hitting the lace or smooth area can mean the difference between a ground ball or fly, a base hit or an out. A puff of wind can change the flight of the ball. A sleepy fielder or distracted umpire can mean you get on base. And, the one thing about baseball is that the smallest play, ball, strike, safe, out or error can change the outcome of the whole game, just the way the seemingly smallest thing that happens, the smallest bit of luck, can change the course of one's day or even a whole life.

Another game taught me the importance of luck: cribbage.

Yes, card games are fraught with luck of the draw. But cribbage especially combines luck of cards drawn with one's skill how to use them in the game. And again, the seemingly smallest bit of luck or the smallest mistake can mean either winning or losing the game, just like life!

So the point of all this is games are practice for real life...Every day we are given a basket full of luck, the small and large, good and bad things that happen by chance.

We learn from experience and develop skill on how to use and deal with these chance happenings. We can practice for real life by playing games.

When I was an impressionable child, I believed in superstition around the notion of luck and chance. A rabbit's foot was supposed to be good luck but what about the poor rabbit? Finding a heads up penny is good luck but what about the person who lost it? And 4 leaf clovers; what's that about?

On the bad luck side there is walking under a ladder, stepping on sidewalk cracks, Friday the 13th. And black cats! I like cats, even black ones! If you spill salt you better toss some over your shoulder or else! I remember being told by my older sister that to hold my breath while passing a cemetery or I would be the next person to die! And some of those cemeteries were pretty big! This stuff was burned into my child mind and I still think of it every day...The notion of 'fate' or predestined luck is deeply engrained in our culture and religions.

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Weather forecasters will often say, "I am keeping my fingers crossed for good weather this weekend." or "Hopefully, this storm will blow out to sea." Are they scientists or fortune tellers?

One of my pilot friends likes to sing "With a Little Bit Of Luck" as he applies full throttle for takeoff...Lindbergh was called 'Lucky Lindy'. Yes he was a brave man and he had a great airplane but a lot of good luck when one considers the weather and prevailing wind.

Most of our Presidents like to say "May God bless the United States of America.". Well that's another request for good luck or 'blessings', right?

What about the notion of 'fate' or predestined luck? Are things that happen a coincidence or fate? Can we change our fate or luck through prayer? These are the mysteries that keep me wondering... Can we influence future chance or luck happenings in our lives?

Every day we have a basket full of luck, the small and large, good and bad things that happen by chance. But the good seems to outweigh the bad. What we need to do is take advantage and build with the good luck and heal from the bad and learn how to avoid the bad luck in the future as best we can.

So, I am lucky to be here with you all. Keep the faith everyone. Oh, and blessed be.

Divine Intervention

by John Howard

I overheard some school teachers on the ferry boat the other day use the term "divine intervention" in light conversation. When a term like that escapes the bounds of theology and gains currency in everyday use you know that it touches on something universal. I think it describes that aspect of luck the feels designed for us personally, like the phrase "somebody up there likes me." Sometimes things just seem to line up in our favor, and don't we all love it when that happens!

But is it real? For me, the jury is still out on this. Some of my friends believe there is something about the power of positive thinking that goes beyond just being prepared to take advantage of fortuitous opportunities. I've had one or two uncanny experiences myself which seem to suggest a supernatural, or at least mysterious aspect of good fortune.

Applying the same thinking to bad luck, however, reveals the weakness of this theory, and its danger. Everything in me rebels against the notion that certain bad things "were meant to be", that they happen for a reason – other than direct cause and effect of course, such as suffering the consequences of a bad choice. God's Problem by Bart Ehrman: "The reality is that most suffering is not positive, does not have a silver lining, is not good for the body or soul, and leads to wretched and miserable, not positive, outcomes."

It's excellent to find wisdom or strength in adversity, but I do not go the extra step to imagine the adversity was sent to me for that purpose.

Sometimes bad luck seems like a familiar rut. "Why does this always happen to me?" we cry. At its worst this is a kind of persecution delusion hinting at a fundamental feeling of worthlessness and impotence, often accompanied by rage and antisocial behavior. But then is belief in good fortune any less delusional? Granted that people with a positive attitude are more attractive, both theories – persecution and special dispensation – require some sort of supernatural agent and some idea of a big plan out there.

For me, there is no plan, no judgment, and no last chance; rather there is generosity, abundance, infinite possibility, a universe that seems ready to collaborate and eager for my contribution toward new creative expression. In this sense, yes, I embrace divine intervention. I see it as a daily collaboration with random chance where God and I are equal players. My advice is to notice and celebrate happy coincidences, learn from mistakes but avoid assigning meaning to chance misfortune. Forgive yourself and others and affirm your life and the people that are in it, "as if" this was the life you were meant to have and these are the people you were meant to share it with.

What I Do For Luck

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by Anna Benoit

Is there a force that causes things to happen, especially good things that can be influenced by my behavior or thoughts?

Pie, pennies, salt, airplanes - I kiss my index and middle fingers and plant that kiss on the exterior of the airplanes skin as I enter - birthday candles, and pie wishes, that require eating the pie backwards and wishing on the point. Pennies, only pick them up when they are heads up, otherwise turn them over for the next person who comes along. Many of these rituals I learned from other girls growing up. Except for the airplane thing, which I invented myself.

When I worked as a social worker at local medical center I would often pause before entering the room and send out a good intention or prayer that my meeting with a bedbound ill stranger would go well. If our meeting went well, I felt lucky and if not, unlucky.

I've learned to cheer "Unlucky" at a soccer game when our team's striker misses the goal.

Sometimes I feel if it's very difficult to get in touch with somebody, that there is some force that's blocking me from doing so or that I should just let it alone. When playing bridge (something that I've started to do over the last few months) I hope that I'll be lucky and get good cards, or I'll be lucky that the cards will fall a certain way. So, I pick my cards up last, in an effort to increase my luck. Sounds crazy right? My rational mind tells me this has nothing to do with luck, rather simple statistics and that any expertise I develop in learning to play a better bridge game. That doesn't speak to the positive feeling that I get when I've done well as opposed to negative feelings when I've not. It's easier to talk about bridge than other aspects of life, and it's clearer.

Some people, and to be honest I have said this or agreed with someone when they pronounce "everything happens for a reason." But does it? What does that have to do with luck, with karma or chi?

I have been in the position more than once of saying, "We don't know why bad things happen to good people." In my work as a hospital social worker, I've seen people struggle with this question after a bad diagnosis and understood their anguish when, head in hands, they ask, "Why me!"

Furthermore, really horrible things happen to powerless people. Surely this can't happen for any good reason. People are exploited, injured even killed when they are "unlucky" enough to be born into poverty.

Is it possible to affect the outcome of a situation? Does wishing for something ever help?

Whether or not we can have an effect on the future, I am comforted by the idea of simply living. Both heartache and bliss are potentials, and I have known both. I like to try to remain in the present and believe free will is available at every moment in every opportunity. I can then accept what cannot be changed; (like the other guy), change the things that I need to change (sometimes me), and work on gaining the wisdom to know the difference.

Wheel of Fortune

by Molly Brewer

Folk tales and fairy stories are full of protagonists that leave their childhood homes, carrying only their clothes and maybe a little bundle of supplies. Very often, that protagonist's goal is the same, no matter the source: "To go out and seek their fortune."

So much is made of fortune: it can be a synonym for luck—our theme for the day—but also for wealth, or fate. In the ritual practices of early human civilizations, there was much faith placed in the art of divination, also called augury or fortune telling. Many such practices and folk traditions still persist today. From dowsing to palmistry to numerology, there seems to be no end of supernatural options for discerning our own personalized fate.

My favorite of these is reading tarot cards. I use them often in my own spiritual practice, and studying the system is a longtime hobby of mine. The idea of a

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bejeweled, bewitching woman who ominously foretells the future with the help of her deck of cards is a popular one, but my own card readings don't often have that kind of mysterious cachet. The Death card rarely means death, but rather a significant transition afoot. The Lovers card isn't hinting that I should ditch my husband for a tall, dark stranger. The images are merely symbolic archetypes that can help me look at problems through a new lens, and I focus on what the symbols mean for me at that moment in my life. And yet, it's hard not to get a little superstitious. If I draw a card that indicates a sudden disaster on a day when I have to travel, I worry a little bit that it's an ill omen. As humans do, I want the signs around me to point to a narrative like a book, and more than anything else, I want them to confirm that I'm making the right choices.

Whatever our feelings on fortune telling, we have to concede at the end of the day that it's essentially a kind of metaphysical preventative measure, like a weather forecast. We can try to tip the odds in our favor by performing this ritual or saying that prayer, but in the end there's always something that can't be predicted. Even the tarot contains an easy out for this "x factor". There's a card in there called the Wheel of Fortune, evoking the language of the medieval manuscript *Carmina Burana*, which talks about fate as a "whirling wheel". Up and down we go as the wheel spins; our good luck is only transitory, or so the *Carmina* insists. When I pull the Wheel of Fortune card, representing the element of unknown, uncontrollable chance, it almost feels like the Powers That Be are throwing in the towel, saying "I give up, kid. It's up to fate now." The Wheel of Fortune card can be frustrating and noncommittal, but apparently even a deck of cards knows when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em.

The idea of luck, to me, always comes back to what in our lives we can and can't control. We can be model citizens, virtuously getting our daily 30 minutes of exercise, avoiding refined sugar and investing our money wisely. But in looking at the language we use to frame these choices, making it a matter of virtue, we see the cultural bias toward thinking of luck as an indicator of morality and personal responsibility. In a world full of admonishments about how to wisely grow our material wealth and the ingrained idea that poverty is a moral failing and not one of chance, doesn't it seem strange that this word, fortune, links money inherently with good luck? It's almost as if there might be an element of chance at work!

Personally, the next time I try to go out and seek my fortune like a fairy tale heroine, I'm planning to keep a weather eye out. You never know when that wheel might start turning again, or where you'll end up when it's stopped.

Pass it On

by Rick Kimball

Earlier this spring I saw some lucky bamboo plants on sale at Shaws. I liked their looks so I bought one, then headed home. In our driveway, a piece of our car fell off. On the garage step, a bag of groceries split apart and spilled its contents over the floor. In the kitchen, I switched on a light that flickered and went dead. I put the plant down and glared at it. I felt bamboozled.

Tirrell and I used to have a lucky shamrock plant. The cat ate it. And then got sick. Very sick.

All of which proves that you can't buy good luck. It has to come out of nowhere. Otherwise it isn't luck. It's something you bought, or maybe made. Judge whatever it is as you would judge a so-called miracle. If you can explain it, then it has a known cause, so it's not a miracle. And it's not good luck, either. Which is fine with me because I'm suspicious of good luck. The world is a collection of opposites, and everything balances out. Good luck today means watch out for tomorrow – something's going to get you.

Two months ago I found 20-dollar bill on the sidewalk. As I drove off, fear clutched my heart, so I stopped at the next corner and handed the bill to the old guy with the sign saying he was down on his luck. I answered his thanks with a pretend smile, then drove away filled with guilt for not warning him to rush away and hide out before the bad luck gremlin caught him.

I am endowed with parking karma. I find parking spaces where nobody else can, at unlikely times and places. This good luck makes me nuts, and I have been diagnosed with PKT, or parking karma trauma. I even find spaces out here in our own parking lot when everybody else thinks it is full. God help me.

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I remember travelling through a heavy rain on Commercial Street and turning into an unlikely empty spot in front of LeRoux Kitchen, where Tirrell and I were headed. Somehow, nobody else had seen it. Or maybe it hadn't been there when they drove by ahead of me. Had it opened up just for us? Was this good luck crashing down on me? Alarmed by visions of coming disaster, I tried to back out, but Tirrell wouldn't let me.

I soon calmed down because I knew that when we finally drove away, my good luck would pass on to somebody else in desperate need of a place to park, and I would be safe again.

That was when I suddenly realized the whole secret of handling good luck. Pass it on fast, to somebody else, pass it on whatever it is, a \$20 bill, a parking space, pass it on ASAP, before the tables turn on you. If we all pass our good luck on to somebody else as fast as we can, bad luck can never catch up with anybody, and the whole world will be a wonderfully happy, even utopian, place.

Well, I sense the destructive presence of doubt in the room. At least a few of you are thinking that surely some selfish villain – not you, and not any UU, of course - will muck the system up by trying to hold onto his or her own good luck. But I say to give my theory a try. Pass your good luck on as fast as you can and trust others to do the same so we can see where we get.

And by the way, if anybody wants a lucky bamboo plant, see me after the service.

Closing Words

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your side. And may good fortune find you frequently. Blessed be.