

MEDUSA

and More

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Can snakes **HEAL** people? Are they **EVIL**? Do they attract **WEALTH**? Can they cause **RAIN** to fall?

Since ancient times, people have believed that snakes have special powers. Snakes have played a role in fables, myths, and religions around the world.

SNAKES AS HEALERS

The ancient Greeks saw snakes as healers. Asclepius, the Greek god of healing and medicine, carried a staff with a snake wrapped around it. This symbol of healing is called the Rod of Asclepius. Many medical groups use this symbol to promote medicine. Others use a symbol of a rod with two snakes topped by a pair of wings. This is the caduceus, or magic wand of the Greek god Hermes. Hermes was a messenger between the gods and humans, which is why he has wings. Hermes was also the patron of travelers. In olden days, doctors had to travel great distances by foot to visit their patients.

SNAKES AS MONSTERS AND EVIL

The Greeks also saw snakes as monsters. Have you heard the story of Medusa? She was a monster with a head full of poisonous snakes. She could turn a mortal man into stone simply by gazing into his eyes.

SNAKES AS A CIRCLE OF LIFE

The Ouroboros is a symbol showing a snake biting its tail. The symbol represents the circle of life. New things begin as old things end, like the seasons. Many ancient people, such as the Egyptians, used this symbol. The tomb of Tutankhamun, which goes back to 14th century b.c., has the Ouroboros symbol on it.

SNAKES AS WISDOM AND ETERNITY

In the Hindu religion, the god Shiva is the most powerful of all the gods. He wears a cobra around his neck. The cobra is called *naga*. It has three coils for the past, present, and future. The *naga* can denote wisdom and eternity. Many people across India worship the *naga*.



SNAKES MAKE RAIN FALL

Among Native American people, the Hopi hold a ceremony to bring the rain. Hopis call snakes their brothers, and they want snakes to carry their prayers to the rainmakers under the earth. The ceremony finishes with the Snake Dance. The dancers carry a snake in their mouth. Afterward, the priests gather and release the snakes so they can carry the prayers for rain to the rain gods.

SNAKES BRING WEALTH

The snake is one of the 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac. The Chinese believe that snakes bring wealth. Having a snake in the house is a good sign. It means that your family will be well fed. 

