Myths and Superstitions Around Solar Eclipses

*Solar eclipses have caused fear, inspired curiosity, and have been associated with myths, legends, and superstitions throughout history. Even today, an eclipse of the Sun is considered a bad omen in many cultures.*

Ancient Explanation for Solar Eclipse

Ancient cultures tried to understand why the Sun temporarily vanished from the sky, so they came up with various reasons for what caused a solar eclipse.

In many cultures, the legends surrounding solar eclipses involve mythical figures eating or stealing the Sun. Others interpreted the event as a sign of angry or quarreling gods.

Hungry Demons, Thieving Dogs

In Vietnam, people believed that a solar eclipse was caused by a giant frog devouring the Sun, while Norse cultures blamed wolves for eating the Sun.

In ancient China, a celestial dragon was thought to lunch on the Sun, causing a solar eclipse. In fact, the Chinese word of an eclipse, *chih* or *shih*, means *to eat*.

According to ancient Hindu mythology, the deity *Rahu* is beheaded by the gods for capturing and drinking *Amrita*, the gods' nectar. Rahu's head flies off into the sky and swallows the Sun causing an eclipse.

Korean folklore offers another ancient explanation for solar eclipses. It suggests that solar eclipses happen because mythical dogs are trying to steal the Sun.

Traditionally, people in many cultures get together to bang pots and pans and make loud noises during a solar eclipse. It is thought that making a noise scares the demon causing the eclipse away.

Native American Solar Eclipse Myths and Legends

The Pomo, an indigenous group of people who live in the northwestern United States, tell a story of a bear who started a fight with the Sun and took a bite out of it. In fact, the Pomo name for a solar eclipse is *Sun got bit by a bear*.

After taking a bite of the Sun and resolving their conflict, the bear, as the story goes, went on to meet the Moon and take a bite out of the Moon as well, causing a lunar eclipse. This story may have been their way of explaining why a solar eclipse happens about around 2 weeks before or after a lunar eclipse.

Angry Sun

The ancient Greeks believed that a solar eclipse was a sign of angry gods and that it was the beginning of disasters and destruction.

The Tewa tribe from New Mexico in the United States believed that a solar eclipse signaled an angry Sun who had left the skies to go to his house in the underworld.

Quarreling Sun and Moon

According to Inuit folklore, the Sun goddess *Malina* walked away after a fight with the Moon god *Anningan*. A solar eclipse happened when *Anningan* managed to catch up with his sister.

The Batammaliba, who live in Benin and Togo, used a solar eclipse as a teaching moment. According to their legends, an eclipse of the Sun meant that the Sun and the Moon were fighting and that the only way to stop them from hurting each other was for people on Earth to resolve all conflicts with each other.

Modern Day Sun Superstitions

Fear of solar eclipses still exists today. Many people around the world still see eclipses as evil omens that bring death, destruction, and disasters.

A popular misconception is that solar eclipses can be a danger to pregnant women and their unborn children. In many cultures, young children and pregnant women are asked to stay indoors during a solar eclipse.

In many parts of India, people fast during a solar eclipse due to the belief that any food cooked while an eclipse happens will be poisonous and unpure.

Not all superstitions surrounding solar eclipses are about doom. In Italy, for example, it is believed that flowers planted during a solar eclipse are brighter and more colorful than flowers planted any other time of the year.

No Scientific Basis

Scientists and astronomers around the world have debunked any such claims. There is no scientific evidence that solar eclipses can affect human behavior, health, or the environment. Scientists, however, do emphasize that anyone watching a solar eclipse must protect their eyes.

Source: <https://www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/solar-eclipse-myths.html>