

## Real English Conversations: Itchy palms (superstitions)

### Introduction

Hi! Lori here, welcoming you to another episode of Real English conversations from Better at English dot com. In today's conversation, my English friend Michael and I talk about superstitions. You'll learn about the idiom "to have an itchy palm" as well as what superstition says means when you really do have an itchy palm. Are you superstitious? We wonder how many of our listeners believe in superstitions, so we've put a poll up on the website where you can tell us. You can find it at [www.betteratenglish.com](http://www.betteratenglish.com).

Thanks to everyone who voted in last week's poll about naked cats. I've just looked at the results. Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of you think that hairless cats are ugly. But 45% of you do say that I should still get one. Only 12% of you think that they're cute. Oh well, to be honest, my mind was made up before the poll; it's only Michael who needs to be convinced!

Right then, here comes this week's conversation!

### Conversation transcript

- Lori: Oh, I've got this itchy palm. It's totally itching. Doesn't that mean something when your palm itches?
- Michael: It means you have to wash your hands.
- Lori: No, really! Isn't it some **superstition**, something to do with money?
- Michael: Like some sort of **old wives' tale** or something about...?
- Lori: Yeah, that you're going to get money or something like that?
- Michael: Well, **off the top of my head** I don't know, but **the only thing for it** is to see what Google has to say.
- Lori: Yeah, consult the **Oracle**.
- Michael: Consult Google.
- Lori: The Oracle of Google. What does it mean?
- Michael: Give me a second...Itchy palm...Ah, OK! It's a desire for money, or greed, or wanting a bribe, apparently. Like a hotel **porter**, you know, "The porter has an itchy palm," he's expecting you to give a big **tip**. Or, you know, someone could be known for having an itchy palm; I guess that means they're known for being greedy.
- Lori: Oh, OK. But isn't that the idiom? Like if someone says "So-and-so has itchy palms"? What does it mean if your palm actually itches?
- Michael: Oh, OK, let me see. Let me move down the list and see what Google has to say.
- Lori: I hope it's getting money...
- Michael: Yeah, well actually, yeah, you're right...it says...apparently having an itchy palm is an indicator of fortune coming your way...
- Lori: Yes!
- Michael: Or something like that. Umm, OK, Oh, **hang on** a minute.
- Lori: Does it say anything about money? I could really use some...
- Michael: Well, yes...Oh, wait a minute! Which, which one of your hands is it, the left or the right hand?

Lori: What, does it make a difference?

Michael: Ah, yes, it makes a big difference actually.

Lori: It's the left one.

[long pause]

Michael: Ah.

Lori: Oh, that didn't sound good.

Michael: No, you're not going to like this. If you have an itchy right palm, apparently that means that you will *receive* money.

Lori: OK.

Michael: Do you want to hear this?

Lori: Oh no.

Michael: If you have an itchy left palm, it means you have to *give* money.

Lori: Oh no.

Michael: But wait a minute! Isn't it...? It's the time of year when you have to **do your taxes!** That's what it must mean, it's because you have to pay your taxes.

Lori: Yeah, I was just doing my taxes, just...in fact, I just finished them today.

Michael: OK.

Lori: Maybe that's what it is.

Michael: Maybe you'll be OK and you won't get some big **bill** in the post just for taxes.

Lori: Well, plus I'm expecting a bill because when I leave for my vacation in a couple of days, I'm going to take my computer in and finally get it fixed so it will stop **acting up**. And I can imagine that that's going to cost some money, so maybe that is is. Darn! I thought that I'd be getting some...winning the lottery or getting some unexpected **windfall**.

Michael: Yeah, well, we don't believe in any of that stuff anyway.

Lori: No, actually, yeah, that's true. But man, it really itches! It's driving me crazy!

Michael: OK, well, you go wash your hands, young lady!

Lori: OK.

### Final words

We hope you've enjoyed this episode of Real English Conversations. Michael and I will be interested to see how many of our listeners are superstitious, so hurry over to [betteratenglish.com](http://betteratenglish.com) and cast your vote.

Before signing off, I have to say thanks so much to everyone who has donated to support Better At English this week. Your continued support is what makes it possible for us to keep Better at English alive. If you get value from our podcasts, please consider making a donation. Every little bit helps! That's all for now, see you next time!

## Vocabulary notes

### **superstition**

A *superstition* is an unscientific belief about the nature of the world, usually related to ideas about magic or the supernatural. People who believe in *superstitions* are *superstitious*.

### **old wives' tale**

An *old wives' tale* is a piece of advice or information, usually about health, that people used to believe a long time ago but nowadays is known to be false.

### **off the top of my head**

If you say something *off the top of your head*, it means that you are using the knowledge you have in your memory. People usually say this when they are not sure they are correct.

### **Oracle**

An oracle is someone who knows a lot about a subject and can give good advice.

### **porter**

A *porter* is someone who helps you carry your bags in a hotel.

### **tip**

A *tip* (n.) is a small amount of money that you give to someone for performing a service for you. You might *tip* (v.) a server in a restaurant or a porter in a hotel.

### **hang on**

Informal for *wait*

### **do your taxes**

*Doing your taxes* means calculating your taxes and preparing the forms to submit to the tax agency.

### **bill**

A *bill* is a formal request for payment or money owed, often printed on paper.

### **acting up**

To *act up* means to behave badly or not work properly. Both people and objects can *act up*.

### **windfall**

A *windfall* is an unexpected amount of money that you win or receive.