

## **Understanding People's Everyday Rituals** *Habits and Choices - What Do They Really Represent?*

One of the most common and constant elements in our society today is superstition. Whether or not we make a constant effort to maintain ritual practices, it is very often that we find ourselves in the midst of a tradition or meaningful ritual that has degenerated into mere superstition. It is as common to see this happening in every day life with common occurrences such as sports events as it is with religious events and practices. In fact, the argument over whether or not religious rituals can become something as simple as superstition is one of the main Catholic criticisms of the Protestant religion. However, even we do not look at rituals in a strictly religious sense, it is still very easy to see the presence of superstition taking its place in everyday life. Also, it is important to realize that superstition and religion have a very direct connection. As Voltaire once wrote, "Superstition is to religion what astrology is to astronomy; the mad daughter of a wise mother". However, when we look at the personal superstitions, which affect us rather than the religious rituals, which hold an important place in our society, many questions come to mind. Mainly, we are led to speculate a bit on the fascination of people with superstitions and the hold that they seem to have over some people.

What exactly is it that leads seemingly ordinary people to adopt strange and often irrational rituals. We can see this easily by attending a simply sports game. The ritual of fans painting their faces or wearing shirts that bear the name and numbers of their favorite players has become something far more than a simple element of entertainment or even respect for a team and its players. However, perhaps an important first step towards understanding the role of superstitions in society is to understand what exactly a superstition is. In the most general terms possible, a superstition is a belief that specific behaviors, such as wearing the same shirt to every game, or always putting the same shoe on first, can influence events in the future. Along with this definition though, it is important to remember that the two events we attempt to draw a relationship between never have any form or causal connection. Even understanding what a superstition is, though, does not allow one to understand "why" it is done. In fact, an even better question than why deals with the hold that they have on some people.

Perhaps one of the clearest answers involves the overall uncertainty that we can find in life. Although we can always find people that will guarantee or promise us things, rarely do we have any certainty over most elements in life. Because of this, if we find that something appears to be making another event predictable, than it is only natural that we would go towards embracing that practice. It cannot be thought of as strange that most people support practices that seem to create a favorable outcome. The same, of course, is very true in reverse. If we come to believe, or, in the case of some superstitions, are taught, that an event creates bad luck, than we rush to avoid it. A large majority of behavior such as this, avoiding black cats or forbidden numbers, can be traced back to early parts of childhood. It is worth noting that we will likely never completely understand what compels some people to engage or avoid certain behavior, but we must also wonder as to power of some rituals and the hold that they have on many members of society. If we look at the number of devotees of religion who feel that they "must" attend ceremonies on certain days or feel that something "has" to be done, than it is easy to see that rituals and superstitions can take a very definite hold on our lives. It is important to remember that often we encounter people who are virtually paralyzed by their fears and superstitions. Although the idea of being paralyzed by superstition is not as common as the simple nature of having one, it is still a fairly routine event to see members of society who simply cannot act without performing their rituals, or are prevented from acting by superstitions. We need only witness those who truly believe that a broken mirror means seven years bad luck, or those who refuse to continue their journey should a black cat cross their path to understand that the issues of control and superstition are very real indeed.

While it is true that everyone must have something which gets them through life, and that every one of us has rituals and superstitions which we rely upon, it is important not to let our rituals, beliefs or superstitions gain too powerful a hold over us. In today's world of uncertainty, it is very often that we reach out towards that which we think might bring us luck or at least deliver us from some of the mysterious and often frightening elements of everyday life. In religion just as much as everyday events, we often turn to superstition to provide such a relief or even a type of security. Although this is not necessarily a bad thing, we must be careful that we always use a certain degree of common sense, refusing to let supernatural rituals or often erroneous and non-causal superstitions rule over our lives.

### **Superstitions - Do You Believe in Them?**

These are some of the superstitions I remember from my youth.

It's bad luck to walk under a ladder because back in the days of hangings the person being hung had to walk under the scaffold of a ladder to get to the hanging rope.

You need to say "God bless you" when someone sneezes because if the person sneezing is possessed by a demon then that demon will come out of them when they sneeze and if you don't say "God bless you" then that demon might possess you.

If you spill salt you must immediately toss some over your left shoulder to ward off bad luck or evil spirits.

If the first butterfly of the year you see is white, you'll have good luck all that year.

Don't kill a ladybug because they bring good luck to anyone they land on.

Always knock on wood when you talk about something bad, or else the devils in the wood will make that bad thing come to pass.

Don't rename a horse or you will have very bad luck.

Hold your breath and don't talk when passing a cemetery so the dead spirits don't hear you.

Don't break a mirror or you will have 7 years of bad luck.

Don't open an umbrella in the house or else someone you know will die.

If a bird flies into your house someone is going to die soon.

If your nose itches, that means someone is thinking about you.

Cover your mouth when you yawn so an evil spirit doesn't fly in.

Don't step on a crack or you'll break your mother's back.

If an eyelash falls out, make a wish before blowing it away and the wish will come true.

If you see cows laying down in the field, it is going to rain.

Spotting a red bird means you will be seeing someone soon that you haven't seen in a long time.

If the palm of your hand itches, you are going to get money from someone.

Never give someone a wallet as a gift without putting some money in it first, because if it's empty when you give it to them it will always stay empty.

Don't sit with your back to the door or evil will come into you.

Don't let a black cat cross your path because they bring evil with them.

If you see a dog eating grass, it's going to rain.

Always carry a rabbits foot or badgers foot and you will have good luck.

If a bee lands on your hand you will be coming into money soon.

If you stare into a mirror by candlelight you will see the spirit of a lost loved one.