

Tradition, Superstition or Simply OCD?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I'll start first by saying anyone who thinks this article is making light of living with OCD would be wrong. I'm fairly certain I'd be hard-pressed to find anyone more familiar with this condition (other than medical practitioners of course) than me. What's got me talking about it today is a series of 'random' events that sent me down the path of wondering where and how do traditions and superstitions get started? and my conclusion that many superstitions and even family traditions may well have originated as a result of chance, circumstance, or a pretty severe case of OCD.

Hear me out and tell me if you agree.

Hands up any of you readers who 'knock on wood' for good luck or to prevent bad luck from happening. Did you ever stop to wonder how that process got started? Is it only me that thinks someone with OCD once convinced themselves several centuries ago that they had to knock on wood seventeen times before they left the house and then, when fortune favoured their endeavours that day, attributed the results directly to the wood-knocking? Subsequently, we now have generations, not only of genetically pre-disposed people living with OCD, but also of wood-knockers fending off bad luck with every tap of a table or door! The reality, of course, is that the expression seems to link back to pagan times in a variety of cultures where evil spirits were thought to lurk in the woods. Knocking loudly on a tree trunk would prevent the spirits from hearing your words, particularly boastful ones. If you didn't knock, you might well be 'jinxed,' incurring bad luck. Growing up in a house with a lot of wood-knocking going on, it's no wonder I began to develop OCD tendencies at a tender age! As a teenager, I just thought I was kind of weird, but these days scientific studies have been done that prove knocking on wood alleviates our fear of bad luck in both a physical and psychological way? making us feel better. Since everyone likes to feel good, I believe this is an example of OCD turned superstition and it seems it'll be 'knocking around' for years to come.

What about throwing salt over one's shoulder when spilled? Where the heck did that one come from? Knowing that salt was such a valuable commodity in ancient times, one would have thought purposely throwing it away to be wasteful. Well, perhaps appropriately, spilling salt was considered bad luck (centuries ago) and it probably was because of its inherent value.

Somehow, however, that morphed into reversing any bad luck (and also warding off evil spirits) by throwing yet MORE salt, this second time doing so over your left shoulder in order to 'blind the devil' who clearly caused the spillage in the first place! It all sounds like superstition to me AND also, a waste of salt!

Research tells us this particular superstition also has roots in several faith and cultural traditions ranging from Christianity to Buddhism amongst others. In other words, it has been going on around the world for centuries. At this point in human history, I think anyone still throwing salt is simply repeating a ritual they watched their parents do, likely with very little thought as to its origins. So, does this mean it's now become a tradition?

There's more for your consideration. Have you ever stirred something with a knife in the absence of a spoon? Did strife ensue? Have you ever gifted someone a set of knives and taped a penny, a dime, or a loonie to the gift? Surely mayhem followed you if you forgot the basic rule that if you 'stir with a knife you stir up strife'? Perhaps you compounded all that negative energy? incurring yet more bad luck by gifting someone a knife (or set of knives) without adding money to ward off the potential of severing your relationship? Giving the gift of a sharp instrument symbolizes cutting ties? yet somehow money offsets the bad karma. Here I was thinking you couldn't buy happiness (or friends!)

We could talk about black cats, and Friday the 13th or going out the back door on New Year's Eve and coming in through the front door but walking under a ladder being considered bad luck is quite possibly the silliest of all. I have to ask you? is this something we even need to attach a story or a superstition to? I would think NOT walking under a ladder is self-evident, it's just dumb and dangerous to boot. You risk knocking the person OFF the ladder or the person ON the ladder might drop something on you. Either

scenario isn't good, so to me, this isn't about a silly superstition, tradition, OR having OCD ? it's just good, old-fashioned common sense!

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