Where do superstitions come from?

<http://allprofessionalenglish.blogspot.com/2020/03/where-do-superstitions-come-from.html>

**I Lead in. Answer the questions**:

1. Do you believe that some objects have magic powers?
2. Do you believe that some human actions can bring good or bad luck? What actions are believed to bring good luck? What actions can result in bad luck?
3. Do you know a person who is superstitious (believes in old ideas about magic, for example thinks that certain numbers are unlucky)?

**II Watch the video and tick (√) the superstitions from the list that the video mentions.**

1. *Friday the 13th*
2. *walking under a ladder*
3. *breaking a mirror*
4. *finding a horseshoe*
5. *opening an umbrella inside*
6. *knocking on wood*
7. *throwing salt over your shoulder*
8. *whistling inside*
9. *black cats*
10. *number 13*

**III Vocabulary focus. Match the words to the definitions**.

*origin; confidence; purpose; irrational; familiar; whistle; supernatural; spirit; folklore*

1. a ghost or supernatural being
2. not based on clear thinking
3. the reason you do something
4. a feeling of someone’s powers
5. make sounds by forcing your breath out between your lips or your teeth
6. the beginning of something
7. caused by forces that science cannot explain
8. easy to recognize because you saw it before
9. the traditional stories and culture of a group of people

**IV Vocabulary focus**. *Follow the link below***.** Focus on the words and expressions (study definitions), match the terms to their definitions, solve the crossword puzzle, complete the quiz, chase down the correct answer to earn, unscramble words and phrases (correct order of letters), type in words to fill in the blanks, test your knowledge of  vocabulary.

<https://www.studystack.com/flashcard-3207480>

**V Watch the video and match the superstitions to their origin**.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | the number thirteen | is associated with |  | the word for ‘death’ in Cantonese, Japanese, Korean |
|  | knocking on wood |  | the rules for people who work with theater scenery |
|  | the number 17 |  | the biblical Last Supper, where Jesus Christ dined with his twelve disciples |
|  | the number four |  | soldiers who could draw attention from an enemy sniper |
|  | whistling inside |  | the protection or blessing of the spirit that lived in the trees |
|  | lighting three cigarettes  from the same match |  | the Roman numeral XVII and the word *vixi*, meaning ‘my life had ended’ |
|  | wearing ‘lucky’ socks |  | having greater control over events and confidence |

**VI** Watch the video and fill in the gaps with the words from the list. There are some words you don’t need to use

*unlucky; death; protection; supernatural; wood; family; sense; forgot; countries; religion; arrested; headsets; whistle; hotels; folklore; irrational; associations; match; cultural; play; socks; remember; enemy; buildings; sports; spirits; fourteen; Supper; beliefs; thirteen*

Well, although they have no basis in science, many of these weirdly specific **1)\_\_\_\_\_\_** and practices do have equally weird and specific origins. Because they involve **2)\_\_\_\_\_\_** causes, it's no surprise that many superstitions are based in **3)\_\_\_\_\_\_**. For example, the number thirteen was associated with the biblical Last Supper, where Jesus Christ dined with his twelve disciples just before being **4)\_\_\_\_\_\_** and crucified. The resulting idea that having thirteen people at a table was bad luck eventually expanded into **5)\_\_\_\_\_\_** being an **6)\_\_\_\_\_\_** number in general. Now, this fear of the number thirteen, called triskaidekaphobia, is so common that many **7)\_\_\_\_\_\_** around the world skip the thirteenth floor, with the numbers going straight from twelve to fourteen. Of course, many people consider the story of the Last **8)\_\_\_\_\_\_** to be true but other superstitions come from religious traditions that few people believe in or even **9)\_\_\_\_\_\_**.

Knocking on wood is thought to come from the **10)\_\_\_\_\_\_** of the ancient Indo-Europeans or possibly people who predated them who believed that trees were home to various **11)\_\_\_\_\_\_**. Touching a tree would invoke the **12)\_\_\_\_\_\_** or blessing of the spirit within. And somehow, this tradition survived long after belief in these spirits had faded away.

Many superstitions common today in **13)\_\_\_\_\_\_** from Russia to Ireland are thought to be remnants of the pagan religions that Christianity replaced. But not all superstitions are religious. Some are just based on unfortunate coincidences and **14)\_\_\_\_\_\_**. For example, many Italians fear the number 17 because the Roman numeral XVII can be rearranged to form the word *vixi*, meaning ‘my life had ended’. Similarly, the word for the number four sounds almost identical to the word for ‘**15)\_\_\_\_\_\_**’ in Cantonese, as well as languages like Japanese and Korean that have borrowed Chinese numerals. And since the number one also sounds like the word for ‘must’, the number **16)\_\_\_\_\_\_** sounds like the phrase ‘must die’. That's a lot of numbers for elevators and international **17)\_\_\_\_\_\_** to avoid.

And believe it or not, some superstitions actually make **18)\_\_\_\_\_\_**, or at least they did until we **19)\_\_\_\_\_\_** their original purpose. For example, theater scenery used to consist of large painted backdrops, raised and lowered by stagehands who would **20)\_\_\_\_\_\_** to signal each other. Absentminded whistles from other people could cause an accident. But the taboo against whistling backstage still exists today, long after the stagehands started using radio **21)\_\_\_\_\_\_**. Along the same lines, lighting three cigarettes from the same match really could cause bad luck if you were a soldier in a foxhole where keeping a **22)\_\_\_\_\_\_** lit too long could draw attention from an **23)\_\_\_\_\_\_** sniper. Most smokers no longer have to worry about snipers, but the superstition lives on.

So why do people cling to these bits of forgotten religions, coincidences, and outdated advice? Aren't they being totally **24)\_\_\_\_\_\_**? Well, yes, but for many people, superstitions are based more on **25)\_\_\_\_\_\_** habit than conscious belief. After all, no one is born knowing to avoid walking under ladders or whistling indoors, but if you grow up being told by your **26)\_\_\_\_\_\_** to avoid these things, chances are they'll make you uncomfortable, even after you logically understand that nothing bad will happen. And since doing something like knocking on **27)\_\_\_\_\_\_** doesn't require much effort, following the superstition is often easier than consciously resisting it. Besides, superstitions often do seem to work. Maybe you remember hitting a home run while wearing your lucky **28)\_\_\_\_\_\_**. This is just our psychological bias at work. You're far less likely to remember all the times you struck out while wearing the same socks. But believing that they work could actually make you **29)\_\_\_\_\_\_** better by giving you the illusion of having greater control over events. So in situations where that confidence can make a difference, like **30)\_\_\_\_\_\_**, those crazy superstitions might not be so crazy after all.

**VII Watch the video and mark the sentences as True or False. Correct the false statements**.

1. The number thirteen was associated with the biblical Last Supper.
2. The idea that having twelve people at a table was bad luck expanded into twelve being an unlucky number in general.
3. There is a (psychological) condition that results from fear of the number thirteen.
4. Many buildings around the world don’t have the twelfth floor.
5. Knocking on metal comes from the folklore of the ancient Indo-Europeans
6. Ancient people touched a tree to get the protection of the spirit living in the tree.
7. Many superstitions are associated with the pagan religions.
8. Many Italians fear the number 15.
9. In Cantonese the word for the number four sounds like the word for ‘death’.
10. Whistling inside brings bad luck because it could cause an accident in theatres in the past.
11. Lighting three cigarettes from the same match really could cause good luck.
12. The superstition associated with cigarettes originated during the war.
13. Today a lot of smokers still worry about snipers, so the superstition lives on.
14. For many people, superstitions are based on conscious belief.
15. People in certain cultures are born knowing to avoid walking under ladders or whistling indoors.
16. Knocking on wood doesn't require much effort.
17. Following the superstition is often more difficult than consciously resisting it.
18. Superstitions never work because of psychological associations.
19. Sometimes superstitions can make athletes play better by giving the illusion of having greater control over events.

**VIII OVER TO YOU.**

**A)** Research superstitions common to your country or region. What are the origins of those superstitions?

**B)** Find information about one superstition common for an English-speaking country (but different from your country).

**C)** Give a brief (3 minutes) talk comparing and contrasting the superstitions you researched. Do you think that superstitions can really work or make the difference?