



♪ Very Superstitious: ♪

What Leviticus Teaches About Superstition

Superstition:

the belief that particular events happen in a way that cannot be explained by reason or science; the belief that particular events bring good or bad luck. (Oxford Dictionary)

Very superstitious, writings on the wall,
Very superstitious, ladders 'bout to fall,
Thirteen-months-old baby broke the lookin' glass
Seven years of bad luck, the good things in your past
When you believe in things that you don't understand,
Then you suffer,
Superstition ain't the way (**Superstition – Stevie Wonder**)

Source Text: **Leviticus 19: 23-37**

כג וכי־תבאו אֶל־הָאָרֶץ וּנְטַעְתֶּם פְּלִיעַץ מֵאֵל וְעֵרְלֹתֶם עֵרְלֹתוֹ אֶת־פְּרִי שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים יִהְיֶה לָכֶם עֵרְלִים לֹא יֵאָכֵל: כד ובשָׁנָה הַרְבִּיעֵת יִהְיֶה פְּלִי־פְרִי קֹדֶשׁ הַלְוִיִּם לַיהוָה: כה ובשָׁנָה הַחֲמִישִׁתַּת תֹּאכְלוּ אֶת־פְּרִי לְהוֹסִיף לָכֶם תְּבוּאָתוֹ אָנֹכִי יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: כו לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַל־הַדָּם לֹא תִנְחָשׁוּ וְלֹא תַעֲוֹנוּ: כז לֹא תִקְפוּ פִּאֵת רֵאשִׁיכֶם וְלֹא תִשְׁחִית אֶת פִּאֵת זַקְנְךָ: כח וְשָׂרֵט לְנֶפֶשׁ לֹא תִתְנוּ בְּבִשְׂרֹכֶם וּכְתַבְתָּ קַעֲקַע לֹא תִתְנוּ בְּכֶם אָנֹכִי יִהְיֶה: כט אֲל־תַּחַל אֶת־בִּתְּךָ לְהַזְנוֹתָהּ וְלֹא־תִזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ וּמִלֶּאֶה הָאָרֶץ זָמָּה: ל אֶת־שִׁבְתֵּי תִשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקְדָּשֵׁי תִירָאוּ אָנֹכִי יִהְיֶה: לא אֲל־תִּפְּנוּ אֶל־הָאֲבֹת וְאֶל־הַיְדֻעָנִים אֲל־תִּבְקָשׁוּ לְטַמְּאָהּ בְּהֶם אָנֹכִי יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

(23) When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. (24) In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before the Eternal; (25) and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit—that its yield to you may be increased: I the Eternal am your God. **(26) You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice divination or soothsaying.** (27) You shall not round off the side-growth on your head, or destroy the side-growth of your beard. (28) You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Eternal. (29) Do not degrade your daughter and make her a harlot, lest the

land fall into harlotry and the land be filled with depravity. (30) You shall keep My sabbaths and venerate My sanctuary: I am the LORD. **(31) Do not turn to ghosts and do not inquire of familiar spirits, to be defiled by them: I the LORD am your God.**

לא תאכלו על הדם YE SHALL NOT EAT ANYTHING WITH ITS BLOOD— This text is interpreted in many different ways in Treatise Sanhedrin 63a: It is taken as a prohibition of eating the flesh of the sacrifices before their blood has been sprinkled; and as a prohibition addressed to him who eats of the flesh of a non-consecrated animal (**חוליין**) before life has entirely left it; and many other interpretations are there given. (**Rashi**)

לא תנחשו YE SHALL NOT DIVINE — as do those who draw prognostications [prophecies] from the cry of a weasel or the twittering of birds (Sifra, Kedoshim, Chapter 6: 2; Sanhedrin 66a), or from the fact that the bread falls from his mouth or that a stag crosses his path (Sanhedrin 65b).

Mishneh Torah, Foreign Worship and Customs of the Nations 11:4

It is forbidden to practice enchantment as the idolaters do, even as it is said: "Nor shall ye use enchantment" (Ibid. 19.26). How is enchantment practiced? For instance, those who say: "Seeing that the bread fell out of my mouth", or, "my cane fell out of my hand I shall not go to-day to that place, for if I do go, my desire will not be fulfilled; seeing that a fox passed by my right hand I shall not leave my door step to-day, for if I do leave a false person will encounter me". Likewise those who hear the chirping of a bird say: "It will be so, but not so; it is good to do that thing and bad to do the other thing". So are those who say: "Kill this rooster, he crowed during the evening; kill that hen, she crows like a rooster". So, too, is one who sets certain signs for himself to regulate his actions, saying: "If such thing will come to pass I shall do that thing, but if it will not come to pass I shall not do it", even as Eliezer, Abraham's servant did. And so are all like practices of such things forbidden. And whosoever commits an act as a result of any one of such practices, is lashed.

ולא תעוננו YOU SHALL NOT PRACTICE SOOTHSAYING The verb is connected in meaning with "period" (**עונה**) and "hours"; thus a **מעונן** is one who says: "This or that day is auspicious for beginning a work, this or that hour is inauspicious for starting on a journey (Sanhedrin 66a). (**Rashi**)

...It was an Egyptian custom to offer sacrifices to demons; and if one has not dashed the blood against the Altar in the name of God, it is apparent that one is eating in the name of demons. For this reason, the commandment is juxtaposed to **Do not believe in omens**: The Egyptians used to eat on blood, and stray after the demons; the Canaanites used to believe in omens, and in propitious [favourable] times (as it is written [Deuteronomy 18:14])... Shapes, special rods, unusual events, and arbitrary movements have all been used as omens, as well as days of the year or hours of the day. (**Ibn Ezra**)

אל תפנו DO NOT TURN TO GHOSTS — This is a warning addressed to the necromancers and the charmers themselves (not to the people who consult these tricksters). The **בעל אוב**, the controller of the spirit **אוב**, as the necromancer is called (I Samuel 28:7), is identical with the **פיתום**; he is one who speaks out of his arm-pit; **ידעני** is one who puts a bone of an animal the name of which is **ידוע** into his mouth and the bone speaks (Sanhedrin 65b). (**Rashi**)

Sanhedrin 65b

The Sages taught: A necromancer is one who causes the voice of the dead to be heard speaking from between his joints or from his armpit. A sorcerer [*yideoni*] is one who places a bone of an animal called a *yadua* in his mouth, and the bone speaks on its own. The Gemara raises an objection from the verse: “And your voice shall be as a ghost out of the ground” (Isaiah 29:4). What, does the dead person not speak from the grave on his own? The Gemara answers: No, this is not so, as the dead person rises by sorcery and sits between the joints of the necromancer and speaks.

אָלֵהֶיָּדְעָנִים FAMILIAR SPIRITS or WIZARDS [Hebrew: *yidd'onim*], from “knowledge” [Hebrew: *da'at*]. They seek knowledge of the future. Certain empty-headed people have asserted that Scripture would not have forbidden charmers as a form of witchcraft if they were not true. I declare the exact opposite of their words: Scripture has forbidden only that which is false, but has not forbidden the truth. This is borne out by the prohibitions against idols and graven images. Were it not for my unwillingness to enter into a digression, I could elucidate definitive proofs against this practice. (**Ibn Ezra**)

I Samuel 28: 7-11

(7) Then Saul said to his courtiers, "Find me a woman who consults ghosts, so that I can go to her and inquire through her." And his courtiers told him that there was a woman in En-dor who consulted ghosts. (8) Saul disguised himself; he put on different clothes and set out with two men. They came to the woman by night, and he said, "Please divine for me by a ghost. Bring up for me the one I shall name to you." (9) But the woman answered him, "You know what Saul has done, how he has banned [the use of] ghosts and familiar spirits in the land. So why are you laying a trap for me, to get me killed?" (10) Saul swore to her by the LORD: "As the LORD lives, you won't get into trouble over this." (11) At that, the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He answered, "Bring up Samuel for me."

Ramban on Deuteronomy 18:12:1

The Torah states, For 'all' that do these things are an abomination unto the Eternal, but it does not say "for those that do 'all' these things..." because the Torah [in calling the practitioner an abomination] refers to most [but not all] of these practices. For the 'meonein' who divines by observing the clouds and the 'menahesh' who divines by means of the wings or chirping of birds are not abominable... because all human beings desire to know things that are not come upon them, and engage in what they consider to be pursuits of wisdom.

Scene from "Fiddler on the Roof"

Golde: Yente the matchmaker is coming! Maybe she's finally found a good match for you, Tzeitel. From my mouth to God's ears...

Tzeitel: But, Mama, the men she finds... The last one was so old. And he was bald! He had no hair.

Golde: A poor girl without a dowry can't be particular. If you want hair, marry a monkey.

Tzeitel: Even a poor girl has to look at her husband sometimes.

Golde: A husband is not to look at, a husband is to get.

Tzeitel: But, Mama, I'm not yet . I don't...

Golde: Shh! Do you have to boast about your age? (She spits three times.) You'll tempt the evil eye.