

Beyond Twelve Gates by Rabbi Ze'ev Smason
Parshas Metzora April 4, 2014

Welcome to Beyond Twelve Gates

Many superstitions stem from the same human trait that causes some people to believe in monsters and ghosts: When our brains can't explain something, we make stuff up. Some common superstitions have practical or interesting origins.

- Don't walk under that ladder! Frankly, this superstition is pretty practical. Who wants to be responsible for stumbling and knocking a carpenter off his perch?
- Black cats crossing your path. Americans collectively keep more than 81 million cats as pets. So why keep a black cat out of your path? Most likely, this superstition arises from old beliefs in witches which were often said to take the form of domestic animals like cats.
- A rabbit's foot will bring you luck. Talismans and amulets are a time-honored way of fending off evil; consider the garlic that is supposed to keep vampires at bay. Rabbit feet as talismans may hark back to early Celtic tribes in Britain. Regardless, a rabbit's foot certainly isn't good luck for rabbits!
- Careful with that mirror. According to folklore, breaking a mirror is a surefire way to doom yourself to seven years of bad luck. The superstition seems to arise from the belief that mirrors don't just reflect your image; they hold bits of your soul.

John Milton said, "Luck is the residue of design." While it is often difficult (if not impossible) to know why things happen, a solidly-founded belief in G-d will lead to the inescapable conclusion that there is no such thing as luck, chance, coincidence or superstition.

Parshas Metzora Leviticus 14:1 - 15:33

Parshas Metzora discusses the purification process for the metzora. A metzora was a person afflicted with *tzara'as* - a skin or hair abnormality caused by certain spiritual illnesses. After the Kohen declares him to be pure, the metzora completes a ritual procedure using two birds, spring water in an earthen vessel, cedar wood, a scarlet thread and a bundle of hyssop. He is then allowed to enter the camp, but he must dwell outside of his tent for seven days. His impurity is now only contagious through direct contact, being considered a primary source of uncleanness. Before entering the camp, the metzora's entire body is shaved. After a seven-day wait, the person is shaved a second time, and on the eighth day, brings three animals and an oil offering to the Temple. With this, the purification process is completed.

The Torah offers an alternative for one who lacks the finances to participate in the prescribed offerings. The laws dealing with blemishes that appear on a house are detailed. The parsha concludes with other forms of contamination and their appropriate purification processes.

Rabbinic Ruminations

It may have been the greatest shot in televised sports -- with credit due in large part to a rat. In Game 6 of the 1975 World Series, Boston catcher Carlton Fisk hit a long fly ball down the right field line. The enduring image of Fisk, jumping up and down, waving his arms, trying to coax his hit to stay fair as he made his way to first base, is considered by many to be one of baseball's greatest moments. The ball did stay fair for a home run, giving the Red Sox a 7-6 win and forcing a seventh and deciding game of the Fall Classic. The colorful close-up of Carlton Fisk is considered the birth of "the reaction shot", where television cameras began to focus on the players and emotional moments as they unfolded.

How did the classic "Fisk moment" come about? NBC cameraman Lou Gerad was at ground level inside the left field scoreboard at the base of the wall, Fenway Park's famed Green Monster. He had Fisk framed in his lens when the pitch arrived. But instead of following the ball, Gerard kept his camera on Fisk because he was distracted by a rat circling him. The camera man said to his producer, Harry Coyle, "Hey, Harry, there's a rat right here next to me and it's moving closer!" So when Fisk swung, the cameraman stayed with Fisk at the plate and got the whole bit -- Fisk frantically trying to wave the ball

fair and then the home run trot. "Give that rat credit," Lou Gerard said, "not me, for what may have been the greatest shot in televised sports."

Sometimes we encounter problems like that rat. We have no idea how they will be resolved, but because of them, we may see G-d work in a way we never would have without the problems.. It is important to train oneself to look positively upon life's situations. Often what appears as 'bad' or 'negative' ends up being a blessing. What can we do to look at challenging situations in a positive light? A Hebrew expression, *gam zu l'tova*, means 'this too is for the best.' When things don't seem to be going your way, say *gam zu l'tova*. At times, the problems of life turn out to be the sweetest blessings of all.

Quote of the Week

If you want to win a man to your cause, you must first convince him you are his friend -- **Abraham Lincoln**

Joke of the Week

We had a power outage at our house this morning and my PC, laptop, TV, DVD, iPad, cordless phones & my new surround sound music system were all shut down.

Then I discovered that my iPhone battery was flat and to top it off, it was raining outside, so I couldn't play golf. I went into the kitchen to make coffee and then I remembered that this also needs power, so I sat and talked with my wife for a while.

She seems like a nice person.