

# *Connections*

*by*

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*I dedicate this book to  
David Hoffmann*

*Again, my gratitude goes to my wife, Renate,  
to my daughter Nancy, and to my friend  
Diana McLeod, for their valued advice.  
All mistakes remaining are entirely mine.*

## *Preface*

One of the human desires is to make connections – we have problems seeing things in isolation. We connect most things we see or experience consciously or subconsciously to other things. Making connections explains most of our thoughts and actions. This characteristic is also the underlying origin of superstitions and omens. In this book, I explore some of the mysteries that result from making connections.

Even early astronomers liked to make connections between stars, and I have chosen two constellation parts, the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper, for the front cover of this book to illustrate this. The two front stars of the Big Dipper point to the far-handle star of the Little Dipper, namely Polaris, the present star that closely lines up with our north pole. Of course, making connections between stars merely serves to create objects to facilitate easier recognition of constellations, or partial constellations. Making connections between occurrences in the sky, like comets, eclipses, or positions of constellations, and events on Earth, as astrologers like to do, is more along the lines of serving superstitions (see the example on the back cover of this book).

Drawing lines between stars to create objects, or linking heavenly and earthly occurrences to explain behaviors, are not the only connections we make. We literally make connections between everything that happens around us, and these connections influence our behavior, either negatively or positively. If you

wish to analyze a person's, or a group's, behavior, analyze the connections that he/she or it, the group, makes. Thus, at least, you are able to determine, understand, and, perhaps, influence, where people are coming from.

If you do not remember much else, remember this: People make connections – right or wrong. Whatever your actions may be, people will make connections to them. Ask yourself, what connections will people make to what I do or say? If you do not like the answer, pay more attention to your actions.

Arthur O.R. Thormann  
Edmonton, February 2011

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## *Introduction*

This book explores how people make their connections, which lead to their conclusions. Although at first reflection making connections appears simple, this is not always the case. Our scientists, for example, are not able to make any appropriate connections to explain, or even define, life.

Many, if not most, mental connections are interwoven with imaginations, which have little, if any, basis in reality. In addition, many, if not most, people make their connections from their beliefs; however, most, if not all, of their beliefs may lack a scientific foundation; therefore, most, if not all, of people's connections may be as faulty as their beliefs and/or imaginations. The various chapters of this book examine more closely people's actions, beliefs, and imaginations.

Numerous beliefs have their origin in superstitions, fears, phobias, or other demons. Most superstitions, too, have their basis in fear: A black cat crossing one's path may create the fear that harm will follow. The initial chapters look closer at these fears and phobias, and although other chapters expand in different directions, including a chapter dealing with macroscale decisions, the general idea of fears, phobias, and imaginations prevails throughout the book. Nevertheless, the substantial progress the human race has made during the twentieth century is nothing if not short of phenomenal.

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In addition, I have decided to insert an appendix, pointing out why it may be useful for human beings to follow one of Jesus Christ's commands. I think the connections we can draw from it may be important to uphold the human race, presently bent on destroying itself.

Finally, a postscript points out that asking powerful questions brings about most of our progress in the world.

I hope you enjoy reading the book as much as I have enjoyed writing it. If you do, send me a line.



# 1

## *The Mystery of Superstition*

People developed superstitions by creating fallacious beliefs through subconscious connections, and then conveyed these beliefs to their children and grandchildren.

Eliminating superstitions is very difficult, even among educated people, but we can always try to demystify them. Western society, thankfully, has discarded many superstitions, but a number of them still survive in the West, two of these are fearful beliefs about Friday, and the number thirteen. Norsemen regarded Friday as a lucky day, but Christians regard it as an unlucky day, the day of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church still urges its members to set Friday apart for acts of self-denial. Christians also regard the number thirteen unlucky, because of Jesus's Last Supper with His Twelve Apostles, but when a Friday falls on the thirteenth day of the month, people regard it especially unlucky. Traditionally, sailors regard a voyage starting on the thirteenth unlucky, especially if it happens to be a Friday. Furthermore, many hotels do not assign the number thirteen to a floor or a room, even though it happens to be the thirteenth floor or room.

One of the main reasons for the difficulty to eliminate superstitions is the fact that we have many superstitions that we do not recognize as such. Almost every newspaper and magazine gives us horoscope predictions by some astrologer who professes to

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interpret the moon's, the stars' and/or the planets' influence on our destinies. Many people believe in the predictions of palms, tea leaves, tarots, Chinese fortune cookies, and crystal balls. Even more people cross their fingers, or knock on wood, to bring them luck or to ward off evil. Crossing one's heart is also supposed to achieve this. However, who would believe if a person refuses to see a doctor to get an ailment diagnosed, that this may have its basis of fear in some superstition? Similarly, when we suppress unpleasant thoughts, engage in self-blame, try to be unoffending and noncomplaining, give alms to the poor, and pray to God, subconsciously, we may well base these actions on some superstition.

Here are a few so-called harmless superstitions:

- making a wish during the observation of a falling star, or while blowing out birthday-cake candles;
- avoiding black cats crossing one's way;
- avoiding walking under ladders;
- assigning meanings to itchy palms;
- assigning meanings to dreams;
- assigning meanings to various numbers;
- collecting four-leaf clovers for luck;
- pocketing rabbit's feet for luck;
- attaching horse shoes over door frames for luck;
- wearing black clothing to a funeral;
- fearing ghosts (or the unknown);
- taking part in séances; and so on.

Many people consider such superstitions harmless; others disagree and feel that all superstitions cause some harm. One of the worst superstitions still

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surviving is the belief in witchcraft. God inadvertently implanted the belief in witchcraft in the human mind during the days of Moses, when He<sup>1</sup> gave the command, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”<sup>2</sup> Please note, however, that this command is in opposition to His sixth Commandment given to Moses, “Thou shalt not kill.”<sup>3</sup> If we take these conflicting commands literally, God would have caused untold confusion and grief over the millennia, especially the last millennium.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Let me apologize in the first chapter of this book for using the conventional masculine to describe God. I hereby acknowledge that it would be just as logical to use the feminine or neuter to describe God. Well, you might say, but the Bible tells us that God created man in His own image, as the early writers of the Bible tell us (Genesis 1:27); therefore, the masculine reference is appropriate. That sounds logical, but it is only partially true. Here is what God actually tells us: “Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness; and let *them*\* have dominion...over all the earth.” (Genesis 1:26). This means that either God had company during the creation of man, or His image represented a plurality: male, female, black, white, etc. In either case, the reference to God in the masculine would be wrong – discriminatory. Using the masculine is probably a chauvinistic tradition that started with the early writers of the Bible.

\* As an aside, God’s use of the pronoun “them” clearly affirms the inclusion of a woman in His reference to “man” as well as in His assignment of world dominion, which chauvinistic males tried to suppress for thousands of years, probably because of God’s subsequent order that the woman’s husband shall rule over her.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 22:18

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:13

<sup>4</sup> Here is my take on such conflicting commands: I neither believe that God recognized witchcraft, nor do I believe that God made mistakes; what I do believe is that God’s true commands given to Moses may have been lost in translation. It is quite possible what God really meant was to warn us not to let our minds be polluted by beliefs in witches, i.e., our minds should disallow witches to live.

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Prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, there was widespread popular belief that witchcraft existed. People saw witches, primarily women, as evil persons, who practiced black magic, but the Catholic Church officially taught that witches did not exist. It was a heresy to say they were real. According to the Wikipedia, “The Council of Paderborn in 785 explicitly outlawed the very belief in witches, and Charlemagne later confirmed the law. The Council of Frankfurt in 794, called by Charlemagne, was also explicit in condemning ‘the persecution of alleged witches and wizards’, calling the belief in witchcraft ‘superstitious’, and ordering the death penalty for those who presume to burn witches.” Then, in 1326 CE, the Catholic Church authorized the Inquisition to investigate witchcraft.

Nevertheless, Christians did not start serious witch-hunts until 1450. The Roman Catholic Church at that time created an imaginary, evil religion, i.e., Pagans who worshipped other gods and goddesses and sold their soul to Satan were evil witches. Religious leaders, who wanted to retain the omnipotent, all-loving deity, felt that they had to support the belief in witches and demons to explain the existence of evil in the world. Again, according to the Wikipedia, “In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII issued *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, a Papal bull authorizing two inquisitors, Kramer and Sprenger, to systemize the persecution of witches. As a result, the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum* was published in 1487, at the very end of the medieval period, ushering in the period of witch-

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hunts in Early Modern Europe, which would last for the following two centuries. To justify the killings, Christianity and its proxy secular institutions deemed witchcraft as being associated to wild Satanic ritual parties in which there was much dancing, orgy sex, and cannibalistic infanticide.”

Subsequently, witch-hunts ran rampant during the next two centuries. Wikipedia: “In Denmark, the burning of witches increased following the reformation of 1536. Christian IV of Denmark, in particular, encouraged this practice, and hundreds of people were convicted of witchcraft and burned.” From about 1550 to 1650, trials, and executions of witches reached a peak. Even though executions of witches ceased in 1610 in the Netherlands, another witch panic broke out during 1616 in Northern Spain; the Inquisition issued an edict of silence, but the King overturned it, and Spain allowed the burning of 300 accused witches.

In 1684, England executed the last witch; in 1745, France stopped executing witches, followed by Germany in 1775, Switzerland in 1782, and Poland in 1792. In the 1830s, the church ceased the execution of witches in South America. However, a few isolated, extralegal lynchings continued in Europe and North America right into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, some so-called Christians even now continue witch-hunts in a few areas of the world.

Presently, the worst examples of witch killings take place in Africa, although according to the Wikipedia, “A 2010 estimate places the number of

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women killed as witches in India at between 150 and 200 per year, or a total of 2,500 in the period of 1995 to 2009.” Furthermore, “In parts of Southern Africa, several hundred people have been killed in witch-hunts since 1990. Reports told us that in Kenya on 21 May 2008 a mob had burnt to death at least eleven people accused of witchcraft. In March 2009, Amnesty International reported that up to 1,000 people in the Gambia had been abducted by government-sponsored ‘witch doctors’ on charges of witchcraft, and taken to detention centers where they were forced to drink poisonous concoctions. On May 21, 2009, *The New York Times* reported that the alleged witch-hunting campaign had been sparked by Gambia’s President Yahya Jammeh.”

Saudi Arabia, too, still hunts witches. Wikipedia: “On February 16, 2008, a Saudi woman, Fawza Falih, was arrested and convicted of witchcraft, and now faces imminent beheading for sorcery, unless the King issues a rare pardon. On November 9, 2009, Lebanese TV presenter Ali Sibat (who was arrested in Medina in 2008) was sentenced to death on charges of witchcraft.”

All such actions are the result of superstition. Just how far-reaching superstition is, no one can fully appreciate. In general, any belief in the supernatural has a basis in superstition, which includes most religions. Bertrand Russell said:

“I do not think that the real reason why people accept religion has anything to do with argumentation. They accept religion on emotional

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grounds. One is often told that it is a very wrong thing to attack religion, because religion makes men virtuous. So I am told; I have not noticed it...Religion is based, I think, primarily on fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing – fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand in hand.”<sup>5</sup>

Does one type of superstition cause less harm than another type? Some people think so, but I would like to pass on a comment from *Superstition and Jewish Observance*, given by the Skeptical Jew, known only as MKR:

“One way to link the harm more closely to the belief is to take the line that superstitious beliefs are intrinsically harmful, regardless of their consequences. Superstition, one could argue – and indeed, I would argue – *is* the enslavement of the mind, and to undergo it is a harm whether one knows it or not. (A mind enslaved is impaired by that very bondage from recognizing its condition.) The distinction to be drawn is then not between harmless superstitions and harmful

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<sup>5</sup> From a lecture delivered by him on March 6, 1927, at Battersea Town Hall under the auspices of the South London Branch of the National Secular Society.

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ones, but only between less and more serious forms of mental bondage; perhaps also between ones that do not have harmful effects beyond themselves and ones that do.

So that leads me to the really difficult question: Is belief in God, or more specifically in a God who reveals himself through Torah, itself a superstition?"

Good question, Mr. MKR!



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