

No Bad Luck This Friday Unless You Think it Will Happen

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Have you watched the movie Friday the 13th? Scary, isn't it? Well, perhaps not quite as scary as the infamous Rebecca Black song, "Friday" – but close enough. If you are one of those who carries around a rabbit's foot and strokes it all day long for good luck or makes a wish after blowing away a fallen eyelash – then you are probably in the midst of bolting your doors, turning on all the lights and hiding under the comforting warmth of your comforter. Tomorrow just so happens to be Friday the 13th and if you have friggatriskaidekaphobia – it's simply not a day to be trifled with.

Frigga what you say? And yes, attempting to say it can just as well be as terrifying as its definition. The Friggatriskaidekaphobia phenomenon is a fear of Friday the 13th – a commonly held superstition that has been around for centuries, whichever part of the world you may be in. In Bollywood for example (the Mumbai based Indian film industry), producers hesitate to release movies on Friday the 13th because they fear it is bad luck and their movies might fail to do well at the box office. The stock market slows down on Friday the 13th and people also postpone travel and do not conduct major financial deals and transactions.

But what causes someone to fear a day and a date?

Thomas Gilovich, who chairs the Department of Psychology at Cornell University, seems to think that people fear Friday the 13th because they tend to associate it with bad things or events in their life. "The mind is an associative system and if anything bad happens to you on Friday the 13th, the two will be forever associated in your mind and all those uneventful days in which the 13th fell on a Friday will be ignored," says Gilovich who also mentions that psychology can help us understand how superstitions work and why people do certain things and act in a particular manner.

The Stress Management Center and Phobia Institute in North Carolina believes that 17 to 21 million people suffer from a fear of Friday the 13th. Gilovich states that there is no evidence or validity to superstitions and bad luck surrounding Friday the 13th. "People hold a number of beliefs without understanding the basis behind them or where they came from," says Gilovich who also highlights the example of architects and interior designers who will not label the 13th floor of a building.

Daniel Wegner, a psychology professor at Harvard University, has been studying the human tendency to see causal connections, especially where they do not exist, for the last few years. "Our minds cause our actions and other things that happen in the world. It seems that we often believe we are powerful causal agents just because we happen to think of something before it happens!" says Wegner who specializes in apparent mental causation.

Wegner also uses sports to highlight his theory that people who think about certain things before they happen can cause them to believe they were the active force that caused them to happen. "This is why sports fans fear going to the refrigerator because then their team might lose on TV. If they're not

actively rooting for their team and thinking good thoughts, maybe they will be the ones who tip the balance towards the loss. Or at least, feel that they did.”

So is all this just some medieval mumbo jumbo or something more? Fact or folklore? Paranormal or paranoia? You be the judge.