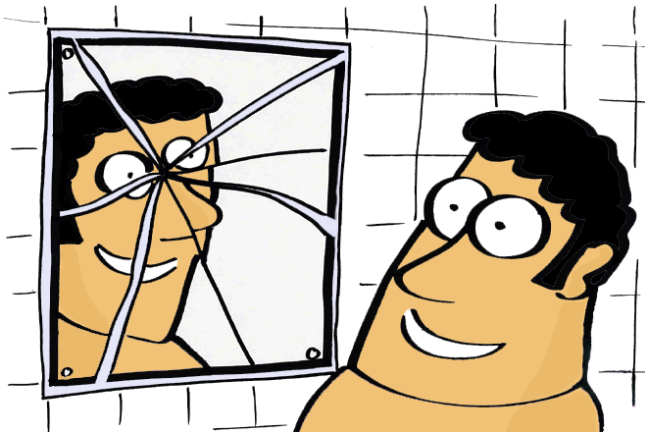


The Broken Mirror, the Black Cat, and Lots of Good Luck

by Chris Rose

Nikos was an ordinary man. Nothing particularly good ever happened to him, nothing particularly bad ever happened to him. He went through life accepting the mixture of good things and bad things that happen to everyone. He never looked for any explanation or reason about why things happened just the way they did.



One thing, however, that Nikos absolutely did not believe in was superstition. He had no time for superstition, no time at all. Nikos thought himself to be a very rational man, a man who did not believe that his good luck or bad luck was in any way changed by black cats, walking under ladders, spilling salt or opening umbrellas inside the house.

Nikos spent much of his time in the small taverna near where he lived. In the taverna he sat drinking coffee and talking to his friends. Sometimes his friends played dice or cards. Sometimes they played for money. Some of them made bets on horse races or football matches. But Nikos never did. He didn't know much about sport, so he didn't think he could predict the winners. And he absolutely didn't believe in chance or luck or superstition, like a lot of his friends did.

One morning Nikos woke up and walked into the bathroom. He started to shave, as he did every morning, but as he was shaving he noticed that the mirror on the bathroom wall wasn't quite straight. He tried to move it to one side, to make it straighter, but as soon as he touched it, the mirror fell off the wall and hit the floor with a huge crash. It broke into a thousand pieces. Nikos

knew that some people thought this was unlucky. "Seven years bad luck" they said, when a mirror broke. But Nikos wasn't superstitious. Nikos wasn't superstitious at all. He didn't care. He thought superstition was nonsense. He picked up the pieces of the mirror, put them in the bin, and finished shaving without a mirror.

After that he went into the kitchen to make himself a sandwich to take to work for his lunch. He cut two pieces of bread and put some cheese on them. Then he thought he needed some salt. When he picked up the salt jar, it fell from his hand and broke on the floor. Salt was everywhere. Some people, he knew, thought that this was also supposed to bring bad luck. But Nikos didn't care. He didn't believe in superstitions.

He left the house and went to work. On his way to work he saw a black cat running away from him. He didn't care. He wasn't superstitious. Some builders were working on a house on his street. There was a ladder across the pavement. Nikos thought about walking around the ladder, but he didn't care, he wasn't superstitious and didn't believe in superstitions, so he walked right underneath the ladder.

Even though Nikos wasn't superstitious, he thought that something bad was certain to happen to him today. He had broken a mirror, spilled some salt, walked under a ladder and seen a black cat running away from him. He told everybody at work what had happened. "Something bad will happen to you today!" they all said. But nothing bad happened to him. That evening, as usual, he went to the taverna. He told all his friends in the taverna that he had broken a mirror, spilled the salt, seen a black cat running away from him and then walked under a ladder. All his friends in the taverna moved away from him. "Something bad will happen to him", they all said, "and we don't want to be near him when it happens!".

But nothing bad happened to Nikos all evening. He sat there, as normal, and everything was normal. Nikos was waiting for something bad to happen to him. But it didn't.

“Nikos, come and play cards with us!” joked one of his friends. “I’m sure to win!” Nikos didn’t usually play cards, but tonight he decided to. His friend put a large amount of money on the table. His friend thought Nikos was going to lose. Nikos thought he was going to lose.

But it didn’t happen like that.

Nikos won. Then he played another game, and he won that one too. Then somebody asked him to play a game of dice, and Nikos won that as well. He won quite a lot of money. “Go on then Nikos” his friends shouted, “Use all the money you have won to buy some lottery tickets!” Nikos spent all the money he had won on lottery tickets. The draw for the lottery was the next day.

The next day after work Nikos went to the tavern again. Everybody was watching the draw for the lottery on TV. The first number came out, for the third prize. It was Nikos’ number. Then the second number, for the second prize. It was another of Nikos’ tickets. Then the first prize. It was Nikos’ number as well. He won all three of the big lottery prizes.

It was incredible. It seemed that all the things that people thought caused bad luck actually brought him good luck.

The next day Nikos bought a book about superstitions from all over the world. When he had read the book he decided to do everything that would bring him bad luck. He left empty bottles on the table. He asked his wife to cut his hair for him. He accepted a box of knives as a gift. He slept with his feet pointing towards the door. He sat on the corners of tables. He put a candle in front of the mirror. He always left his hat on the bed. He always left his wallet on the bed. He bought things in numbers of six, or thirteen. He crossed people on the stairs. He got on a boat and whistled. And with everything he did, he got luckier and luckier. He won the lottery again. He

won the games of dice in the tavern every evening. The things got crazier and crazier. He bought a black cat as a pet. He broke a few more mirrors, on purpose. He didn’t look people in the eye when they raised their glasses to him. He put loaves of bread upside down on the table. He spilled salt. He spilled olive oil. He spilled wine.

The more superstitious things he did, the luckier he became. He went in to the tavern and started to tell all his friends what he thought.

“You see!” he told them. “I was right all along! Superstition is nonsense! The more things I do to break ridiculous superstitions, the more lucky I am!”

“But Nikos” replied one of his friends, “Don’t you see that you are actually as superstitious as we are? You are so careful to break superstitions, and this brings you luck. But you are only lucky when you do these things. Your disbelief is actually a kind of belief!”

Nikos thought hard about what his friend said. He had to admit that it was true. He was so careful to break all the superstitions he could, that in some way he was actually observing those superstitions.

The next day, he stopped spilling salt, chasing away black cats, walking under ladders, putting up umbrellas in the house and breaking mirrors. He also stopped winning money on the lottery. He started to lose at games of cards or dice. He was a normal man again. Sometimes he was lucky, sometimes he wasn’t. He didn’t not believe in superstitions any more, but he didn’t believe in them either.

“Nikos”, said his friend to him, “It was your belief in yourself that made you lucky. It was your self-confidence that helped you, not superstitions.”

Nikos listened to his friend and thought that he was right. But, however rational he still believed himself to be, he always wondered what would have happened if he hadn’t broken that mirror...