If you've any doubt that religion is superstition, consider the current condition of the real-estate market, and what a certain portion of Americans are resorting to. They may believe that religious faith can move mountains, but can a small piece of cheap plastic move a house? Yes, a lot of people think so, provided that the plastic is a figurine of Saint Joseph. As of the beginning of 2009, shops that sell religious charms, books, and various holy chachkas, are reporting booming sales of tiny statuettes of Joseph - the actual father of Jesus Christ and the patron saint of home and house sellers - both to real estate agents and to homeowners.

The proprietor of a Saint Jude Shop in Pennsylvania happily announced:

We have over 5,000 items in our store, and you know what the No. 1 item is? The St. Joseph statue!

Real estate agents purchase up to a dozen at a time, she said, and estimates that she's sold 6,000 to 8,000 of them in the last year. A two-inch figure sells for as little as $1.39, while "Home-selling kits," which have more ornate figurines, a prayer card, and a short history, sell for $5.95 and up. Proper superstition calls for planting the two-inch statuette on the property for sale, head down, feet pointing toward heaven - of course, and face pointed toward the house. If Joe faces the driveway, you may only get an offer on your car, so be careful. You must say the novena, the prayer that accompanies the statue, for nine days, too. Most importantly, you have to remember where you planted it so you can dig it up after the house sells. Only a fool would fail to do that, as we all know. And by the way, condo owners can use a flower-pot for the interment, since this is heavy-duty, top-silly stuff.

So we have burial location, orientation, chants and invocations, and relocation - a proper set of magical procedures. Yep, that's certainly religious.

Religious charm stores aren't the only purveyors. These miracle dolls can be found at hardware stores and gift shops, as well. This is an equal-opportunity scam, for not only Roman Catholics fall for it. No, people of other blind faiths also come to buy the charm you use to sell your home. But beware: this magic isn't officially condoned by the Roman Catholic Church, a fact which might put a chill on the faithful.

Does it work? Oh yes, say those who subsequently sell the property. Oh yes, say those who are still waiting. So we have a win/win situation, right?

No, just another sad and depressing superstition that our species is still saddled with...

I'll offer my own - amateur - suggestions. Save the $1.39, investigate the market and price the property appropriately, do a neat fix-up if needed, pay special attention to the kitchen and garage, think about smart moves like offering to pay the potential buyers' closing costs, and be sure that basic maintenance has been tended to. Yes, I admit that this doesn't call for kneeling, chanting, burying plastic, or burning incense, but somehow I suspect that the "for sale" sign has a better chance of hitting the trash...

But I'm an atheist, so what do I know?