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Religious possession as a subject of psychological analysis: problem statement

The article considers features of the possession concept interpretations in the context of the most authoritative world religions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism), interrelation of a religious explanation and scientific grounds of the possession phenomenon. We consider the concept of possession from the point of view of psychiatry and analyze the subject in psychology.

Keywords: Islam; Christianity; Judaism; the Koran; the Bible; possession; exorcism; demons; djinns.

The concept of possession is an essential component in the context of the historical analysis of the most various spiritual practices.

Being the largest religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism cause the main interest.

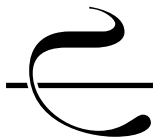
There is also a scientific attempt of this phenomenon explanation within the framework of mental disorders (schizophrenia, central nervous system disorders, etc.).

From the point of view of medicine the etiology of schizophrenia is still not clear. It is only known that such people have a rich inner world, subtler psyche; they are capable to feel keener and deeper than others, quite often possess supernatural abilities. For this reason they lose their mental equilibrium easier. As a result, they become defenseless before the power of darkness which penetrates the victim without hindrance [5].

For example, neurosis, which is known over a period of some centuries, doesn't become clearer in a theoretical aspect and more curable in practice. Patients' recovery doesn't occur more often than it was many years ago [6].

Though at the moment the possession concept is treated within the framework of psychiatry, within the psychological framework this concept is also widely used as from the point of view of psychology there is an analysis of this concept. However the analysis of possession in psychology is carried out in the context of various world religions.

In Islam they say that when a person is in a stress condition, it is necessary to read ayahs and Hadiths. It is also possible to take plant medicines. When a person is in a stress condition, he/she is weak in spirit and mind, so, becomes an easy "prey" for sects, criminal and other negative powers [7].



Al-Qaradawi said, "Statements about demonic possession of a human being are absurd". A well-known Muslim scientist Yusuf al-Qaradawi doesn't see the bases to trust the stories about possession of a human being by djinns (demons). He told about it, answering a question of a televiewer when appeared live on television at Al Jazeera TV channel. The televiewer asked, "Is it true that djinns take possession of a person, get into them and put words into their mouth?"

Al-Qaradawi said, "I don't find it reliable, but I only see that the Koran denies it. Allah, the most High and Great, says, "We have honored sons of Adam... Allah made the man the lord on the Earth, the servant of God and the vicar. Could the Most High, having subordinated the Earth to a human being, having made the man his vicar, at the same time subordinate the man to djinns, having given them a possibility to take possession of the man, get into him/her and put words into his/her mouth? It is absurdity".

From the Koran we know that a human being can control djinns; these are abilities of Solomon (Suleiman). God gave him djinns from "builders" to "divers" and "others, connected with fetters" to keep in submission. "They created beautiful building, sculptures, bowls similar to basins, and motionless caldrons ..." etc.

As of the possibility of someone (from djinns) to control a person, the Koran reports what the greatest shaitan will say at the great inquest, "I had no power over you. I called you, and you obeyed me ..." That is I have no power over you, with the exception of "instigation" ("... who instigates in people's breast"). I called you for a sin, and you have answered [2].

The practice of exorcism exists in all monotheist religions. In spite of the fact that generally religions condemn the person's contacts with demons, it doesn't prevent demons from entering the body of the victim chosen by them. And, as practice shows, these cases are frequent. Such serious mental maladies, as schizophrenia, for example, are connected with invisible infernal essences' entering.

In Islam, as well as in Christianity, belief in kind God Creator is inseparably linked with belief in the Devil and demons of hell. In Islam the votaries of Allah practise a so-called rukya, i.e. driving out demons by means of the Koran. Savage ideas of the other world, which inhabitants enter people, creating malicious affairs, are spread everywhere. From here there is an exorcism practice in Islam – majnun.

The so-called "folk beliefs" explain various mental disorders by that spirits (djinn) allegedly hit a person and then enter his/her body. By the way, in the Koran there is a clear idea of division of djinns into two categories: infidels (kapyr-djinn) and Muslims. Only infidel djinns harm people and if a person becomes daly, i.e. mentally diseased, it means that kapyr-djinns, who are constantly near, tormenting the wretched person, entered him/her. In order to return the person into a normal state, it is necessary to drive away kapyr-djinns and Muslim djinns, being at the disposal of khodjas, can do it. They fight against infidel djinns and win a victory over them [5].

The Bible gives some examples of people possessed with demons or being under their influence. In certain cases, described in verses, possession led to physical



illnesses, expressed in loss of the power of speech, epileptic symptoms, blindness and so forth. In other cases it induced a person to bad deeds (Judas is the main example).

Thus, there are many possible symptoms of possession with demons. These can be physical disorders which it is impossible to explain by real physiological problems; personality changes, such as deep depression or unrepresentative aggression, supernatural force, neglect of decency or “normal” social behavior, and also, probably, knowledge of the things that a human being can’t know in a natural way. It is important to pay attention that almost all, or probably all, these characteristics can have other explanations, it is necessary therefore to be extremely careful in definition of a person in depression or a demon-possessed epileptic. On the other hand, all of us perceive satanic interference on people’s life insufficiently seriously.

Concerning interference of demons in life of Christians, the Apostle Peter is an illustration of the fact that the believer can be under the Devil’s influence. Some consider as the possessed Christians being under strong demonic influence, but in the Sacred Writings there are no examples that a believer was possessed by a demon. The majority of theologians agree that Christian can’t be possessed since the Holy Spirit is in him/her.

Satan and his evil ghosts can’t do something to someone, until they obtain permission from the Lord. In this case Satan, believing that embodies own intentions, actually executes God’s good plans (even in the case with the treachery of Judas). Some people attach unhealthy charm to occult and demonic rituals, but it doesn’t correspond to right brains and the Bible [8].

From the point of view of Islam, the sacred Koran is the best cure for all troubles and disasters.

The latest and the most perfect religion, Islam, explained to Muslims how they should behave in various life situations.

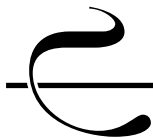
The Prophet Muhammad himself practiced it and was a model for Muslims at all stages of his life, since the period of “Muhammad – orphan” till the period “Muhammad – head of the state”. A strict divine law is to submit to him and to follow him. “So take that the envoy granted to you, and avoid that he prohibited you” (sura “Al-Hashr”, ayah 7).

“Tell (Muhammad), if you love Allah, follow me, (and then) Allah will love you” (sura “Aal-e-Imran”, ayah 31).

In Islam the great attention is also paid to witchcraft and fortunetelling as to a sinful act. A witchcraft doctrine existence is the truth about which it is told in ayahs and Hadithats. But since witchcraft harms belief in monotheism, destroys moral and Islam principles, it is forbidden to learn, be trained and be engaged in witchcraft.

The sacred Koran is the best cure for all troubles and disasters. The Koran can treat for witchcraft, possession by djinns, heart and corporal disease. Sincerity and knowledge of a way of treatment by the Koran is necessary for this purpose.

Allah, the most High and Great, says, “Say, it is for those (i.e. the Koran) who have believed, – guide for a direct way and (means) of (spiritual) healing” (sura “Fussilat”,



ayah 44). "We send down the Koran as healing and favor for believers" (sura "Al-Isra", ayah 82). The Prophet says, "The Koran is the best cure for diseases", "The Koran and honey are your healings of illnesses".

The patient should believe that by means of the ayahs of the Koran and dua (prayers) which were said by the Prophet, Allah will help and cure him/her. And also he/she should know that the Koran and supplications are just a way; it is Allah who gives healing.

Abdullah bin Mas'ud whispered something to the possessed by djinn and the patient recovered. The Prophet asked, "What did you say?" He told that read the end of sura "Muminun" ("The Believers"). The Prophet said, "If someone with sincere conviction (belief) reads these suras facing the mountain, it will cleave in two".

The other way is writing of talismans (sabab). It is permitted to write a talisman, meeting known conditions of Islam for writing and carrying of talismans. The words written on the talisman (sabab) should be taken from the Koran or from Hadiths. It is impossible to write unclear phrases. It is necessary to write on a clean sheet of paper in pure ink. It is necessary to know precisely that the sabab is written sincerely. And the one who wrote and the one to whom it is written should remember that sabab is just a way, it is Allah who treats [3].

All religions recognize existence of evil spirits. In Judaism they call demons as mazikim (evil spirit). They are bodiless, but possess the ability to take the shape of a human being. Nevertheless they can be recognized by hoofs on feet. However, there are demons preferring cock legs.

There are female and male demons, and the fallen angel Asmodeus "directs" them.

Concerning demons' nature there are some supposition. One of them is that they were created by witchcraft of Asmodeus. According to another Adam and Eve brought demons into the world.

If Borukh Gorin is to be trusted, the number of demons grows constantly. Gorin explains that demons are eternal, they don't die, their quantity increases constantly.

Certainly, there are another ways to put self beyond the reach of demons. For dwelling protection the Jews fix a mezuzah to doorposts; it is a capsule with words of a prayer written on parchment. Near a bed it is recommended to put a bowl with water so that in the morning, being awakened and without leaving the bed, to wash finger-tips from night evil spirits.

Exorcism (religious practice of ritual driving out of the devil) is characteristic not for all directions of Judaism. Borukh Gorin explained that the Hasidim don't conjure demons for a long time as they consider that Rabbi Ba'al Shem Tov exorcised them from the face of the earth two hundred years ago. But the Sephardim do conjure.

According to Gorin, people considering to be possessed by demons address to the synagogue but, as a rule, it is connected with psychophysical diseases, and they need a doctor, not a rabbi.

Orthodox believers also recognize the existence of demons. But it is considered that initially they were created as kind ones, but became proud and perverted their moral nature, became spiteful beings. Demons are invisible as infrared rays.



Professor Osipov opposes exorcism, which is called as reading out (exorcism) in the orthodox tradition.

Prayers for driving out demons appeared in the IV century, and the corresponding order of services was made in the XVII century by Peter Mogila, Metropolitan of Kiev, on the basis of Catholic sources.

But, as Osipov says, the Russian Orthodox Church never used this order of services. Alexey Osipov worries very much about prevalence of exorcism in some temples. He considers exorcism as a type charm; it is a matter of self-importance, disinclination to see own spiritual wretchedness by those priests who are engaged in it.

Driving out demons is a miracle; it was made by the Savior, apostles, saint people, who received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now it is realized by certain priests who do not have a blessing from a bishop without which a priest has no right to execute any religious rite.

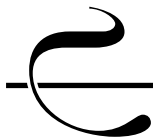
Modern exorcists' references to blessing from a confessor are undisguised self-justification as without blessing from a bishop any religious rite, and especially exorcism (as an exclusive case, not entering into usual duties of a priest), turns into an anti-canonical sinful act, having baneful consequences for both an exorcist, and patients. Professor Osipov thinks so.

According to Alexey Osipov, even St. Sergius of Radonezh, when he had an experience of work with the demon-possessed, didn't carry out exorcism, but brought together monks for a collective prayer, and they prayed for healing of the patient.

Professor Osipov pays attention to one more important circumstance: Christ and saints drove out demons only when the Lord pointed to certain persons, but not in large numbers as it happens today, bringing together a huge number of people to temples on exorcism. Osipov considers that people who think that they are possessed by demons should consult a doctor and not let themselves get away with the stories about curse and witchcraft. But if a demon has really entered the body, one shouldn't go for exorcism, but lead the Christian life.

The official position of the Moscow patriarchy isn't so unequivocal, as the point of view of Professor Osipov. As the communication service head, priest Mikhail Prokopenko, told, there is no consensus concerning the order of services at exorcism among the pastors of Church. Father Mikhail noted that, unfortunately, many people consider the order of services at exorcism as a certain magic ritual which allows to get rid of a real or imaginary devilish possession, without the full-blown church life. He also reported that at the diocesan government a believer can specify whether a bishop is informed that one or another priest practices the order of services of exorcism, and whether there is a blessing to it.

According to the Islamic doctrine, Allah created angels, people and djinns. Djinns were created from fire. As the head of the department of science of the Council of Muf-tis of Russia, the Sheikh Fareed Asadullin, says, djinns believed that should be above people according to their position. As a result djinns were divided into believers and non-believers. Non-believers are demons led by the devil Iblis, the fallen angel who



has come to grips with the Most High. Djinnns can take the shape of a human being and will exist till the end of the world. Non-believing djinnns try to seduce the faithful in every possible way, to distract them from a prayer, to force to forget own duty to the Most High. They influence souls.

Evil spirits live in ruins, desert places and in baths where people wash away their sins. But they can enter the body of a person. The Sheikh Fareed Asadullin says that the Muslim can read azan to struggle against them; this is an appeal to a prayer.

Azan sounds force Satan to abandon the believer. Also Islamic theologians recommend to the Muslims, who feel discomfort and consider that an evil spirit have entered, to read ayah Al-Kursi and sura Annas.

Mussulmans have their amulets – rukya. These are leather sacks with texts of ayahs and suras [4].

The process of driving out demons is called exorcism or purification. This process is a rather dangerous ritual, but sometimes its carrying out is inevitable. In any case this ritual should be carried out only by professionals in order to avoid negative consequences. But, before speaking about driving out demons, it is necessary to mention demons' entering the body. There is an opinion that a demon can enter the body of a person who hells around, the sinner or the faithless. Practice shows that it is not so at all. Commissions of sins, racketing are a demon's influence. But this is not terrible; changes in a person's behavior are terrible. Quite often people can't explain why they acted in that way. Everyone knows the phrase: "It's the devil's work". It appeared not for one's health. In ancient times a person's negative actions were explained by demon's getting into a person. Any person can become a victim. That is why there exist amulets, talismans and other things used for personal protection from evil. Demons' entering is a rather fast and unapparent process. Demons take possession of a person and start to do bad things. Thus, the number of criminals and sinners increases.

More often the demon-possessed don't undertake any actions to get rid of a demon's influence. It is already the business of family and friends to reveal what actually happens to a person and to try to help. Today driving out of evil spirits is a rather widespread procedure. There are experts who perform the work qualitatively. It not a hopeless case and the earlier one addresses to an expert, the more chances a person has for returning to former, normal life. Sharp changes in a person's behavior we often explain by evil curse existence. But it is not always so. The most terrible is that a person can commit terrible crimes during distraction. They have maniacal tendencies, aggression, unwillingness to change own behavior and misunderstanding of people around. A demon, entering a person's body, doesn't pay any attention to his/her body. People can mutilate themselves and others easily. But the fact that there is a solution to this problem calms. It is very important to address for the help to a right person since it is necessary not only to exorcise demons, but also not to let them enter another person. Probably, demons' entering will become the greatest problem of mankind with the lapse of time. Nevertheless, it is possible to win a victory over the powers of darkness, if to struggle against them correctly [1].



Considering the possession phenomenon from a position of three religions, it is obvious that there is nearly one explanation of this phenomenon in all religions.

All religions recognize existence of evil spirit. In Islam they are divided into bad and good, believers and non-believer. In Judaism spirits are divided into male and female. In Christianity it is considered that initially they were created as good, but became proud and perverted their moral nature, became malicious beings.

In Islamic religion there is a supposition that a person can control djinns since djinns are made to help people.

In all three religions it is absolutely common that a person is possessed by evil spirits in a condition of psychological debilitation (stress, depression). By all means mental disorder involves a person's possession by a spirit which is accompanied by manifestations of physical illnesses, uncharacteristic aggression, deep depression.

Possession treatment is possible only by means of the writings from sacred books: the Koran, the Bible, the Torah. And almost the main condition of successful treatment is the patient's confidence in possibility of releasing from evil spirits by reading of sacred prayers. This is common for all three religions and it is of interest for psychology.

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