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## Reasons for Possession

Muslim scholars of the past recognized that some cases of apparent possession (i.e., madness/convulsions) were a result of biological imbalance. An example of this comes in the *hadeeth* reported by Ibn ‘Abbaas.

One day he said to his student, ‘Ataa ibn Abee Rabbaah, “Should I show you a woman from among the people of paradise?” ‘Ataa said, “Of course.” He said, “This black woman came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and said, ‘Verily I have falling fits (*usra‘u*) and I get uncovered. Pray to Allaah for me.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘If you wish, be patient and you will have paradise, or if you wish I can pray to Allaah to cure you.’ She said, ‘I will be patient,’ then she added, ‘but I become uncovered, so pray to Allaah for me that I not get uncovered.’ So he prayed for her.”<sup>[1]</sup>

In this regard Ibn al-Qayyim stated:

Fits of madness [or epileptic seizures] are of two types: fits resulting from evil, earthly spirits [i.e., the *jinn*] and fits resulting from bad humors.<sup>[2]</sup> Doctors have spoken about the causes and remedies of the latter. Leading scholars and intellectuals acknowledge the occurrence of spirit-possession and do not attempt to treat it. They recognize that its treatment requires that noble transcendent spirits counter, neutralize, and expel the evil spirits. Hippocrates himself spoke on the matter at length in some of his books, wherein he mentioned some remedies for epileptic fits and then said, “These [medicines] are beneficial in the case of fits due to humors and other biological causes. As for fits resulting from the effects of spirits, these remedies are of no use.” Only ignorant doctors and those pseudo-intellectuals who consider heresy a virtue deny spirit-possession and its effects on the body of the insane. They have no evidence for their denial except their ignorance of its occurrence. There is nothing in the field of medicine which rejects it, while the senses and experience of people worldwide confirm it. Their ascribing it to the preponderance of some humors is correct in some instances, but not in all.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Ibn al-Qayyim went on to describe the biological causes. He said:

Regarding madness due to humors (*akhlaat*), it is a sickness which partially prevents the limbs from feeling, moving and straightening out. It is caused by a viscous, sticky humor partly blocking pores inside the brain, resulting in a fractional inhibition of sensory influence and movement within it and within the limbs. Or it could be from other causes. For example, it could be from the trapping of a viscid odor in the outlets of the spirit, or from the rising of bad gases to the brain from some of the organs...causing the brain to contract in order to ward off the pain. This is followed by convulsions and twitching in all the limbs. The man is not able to remain upright but falls down, and froth usually appears in his mouth. This illness is considered among the periodical sicknesses relative to the [short] time frame of its painful occurrence. It is also considered among the chronic illnesses relative to the long period of its presence and the difficulty of curing those afflicted, especially beyond the age of twenty-five. It is an illness of brain matter, and such a form of epilepsy is persistent. As Hippocrates said, “Epilepsy remains in such persons until death.”<sup>[4]</sup>

With regard to the causes of spirit-possession, Ibn al-Qayyim said, “Evil spirits mostly gain control of those having little religious inclination and those whose hearts and tongues faith has deserted; those whose souls are desolate of the remembrance of Allaah and of the formulas for strengthening the faith. When evil spirits meet a man who is isolated, weaponless and naked, they are easily able to attack him and overcome him.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Ibn Taymeeyah suggested the following three circumstances to be the main reason why *jinn* may possess humans:

1. “The occasional possession of man by the *jinn* may be due to sensual desires on the part of the *jinn*...or even love, just as it may be among humans.”<sup>[6]</sup>
2. “Demonic possession sometimes also occurs as a result of horseplay, jest or plain evil on the part of the *jinn*, just as evil and mischief occurs among the humans for similar reasons.”<sup>[7]</sup>
3. “However, possession is most often a result of the *jinn* being angry because some wrong has been done to them. Thus, the *jinn* punish those who wronged them. For example, when humans accidentally harm them or hurt them by urinating on them, by pouring hot water on them, or by killing some of them, the *jinn* think that they have been intentionally harmed. Although humans may not realize what they have done, the *jinn* are by nature very ignorant, harsh and volatile in their behavior, so they may vengefully punish humans much more severely than they deserve.”<sup>[8]</sup>

Thus, in the view of Ibn Taymeeyah, possession may occur with relative frequency to practicing Muslims as well as to weak and non-practicing Muslims.

#### Notes:

[1] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 7, pp. 376-377, no 555 and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1365, no. 6245.

[2] Any fluid or semi-fluid substance in the body.

[3] *Zaad al-Ma'aad*, pp. 67-69.

[4] *At-Tibb an-Nabawee*, p. 55.

[5] *Zaad al-Ma'aad*, p. 69.

[6] *Ibn Taymeeyah's Essay on the Jinn*, p. 31.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[8] *Ibid.*, p.32.

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