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Partial Possession

Mediumship

In occultism the medium is a person reputedly able to make contact with the world of spirits, especially in a state of trance. Disembodied voices speak directly or indirectly through the medium, and materialization of a disembodied spirit may take place.^[1] The practice of communicating with incarnate spirits is ancient and widespread. Although those involved claim to be in contact with the spirit of dead humans, from an Islâmic point of view, they could only be involved with the *jinn*. Authentic cases of mediumship would be interpreted as the voluntary acceptance of spirit-possession by the *jinn*. From the Islâmic point of view this remains the only possible explanation. When human spirits enter the world of the *barzakh* after they are removed from their bodies, they cannot return to this world, communicate with the living, or have an affect upon any events taking place.^[2]

Ibn Taymeeyah spoke about this phenomenon nearly nine hundred years ago, saying, “The *jinn* usually communicate by either visions or voices with those seeking information among the idol-worshippers, Christians, Jews and heretical Muslims driven astray by the devils....The devils will often respond while take the form of the one besought, whether dead or alive....This frequently happens to Christians who call upon those whom they edify, whether dead or alive....It also occurs to heretical Muslims who call upon the dead or those not present, and the devils take the form of one called upon.”^[3] Elsewhere he said, “And among them (i.e., disbelievers, pagans, magicians, etc.) are those who believe that when someone dies he can return and communicate with them, pay their debts, retrieve their lost items, and advise them. Images of those who die come to them [doing these things], but they are actually devils taking their forms.”^[4] He also said, “And among them are those upon whom the devils descend and speak using their tongues about things which they (i.e., the mediums) do not know or things which they do not understand. Sometimes they may reveal what is in the hearts [and minds] of those present or they speak in different languages and voices, similar to the way that a *jinn* speaks using the tongues of the possessed.”^[5]

Possession of Objects

Jinn may penetrate and control animate or inanimate objects in order to harm humans or to mislead them. An example of the possibility of *jinn*-induced harm could be deduced from the Prophet’s instructions concerning lamps. Ibn ‘Abbaas quoted him as saying, “*When you go to sleep, put out your lamps, because Satan may guide something like this (rat) to that (lamp) and cause you to be burned.*”^[6] Evidence for the demonic possession of objects to purposely misguide humans may be extracted from the Qur’ânic account of Prophet Moses and the golden calf:

“And in his absence Moses’ people made out of their ornaments the statue of a calf which mooed. Could they not see that it neither spoke to them nor showed them the way? They took it for worship and they were wrong.” Qur’aan, 7:148

“Then Moses returned to his people in a state of anger and sorrow. He said, ‘O my people, did your Lord not make you a good promise? Did the promise seem to you too long in coming? Or did you wish that your Lord’s punishment would fall upon you, so your broke your promise to me?’ They said, ‘We did not break our promise to you by our choice. We were forced to carry the weight of the people’s ornaments, which we threw into the fire, as suggested by as-Saamiree.’^[7] Then he extracted for them the statue of a calf which mooed, so they said, ‘This is your god and the god of Moses, but he forgot.’ Could they not see that it could not answer them and that it was neither able to harm them nor do good to them?” Qur’aan, 20:86-89

The mooing of the idol could have been caused by a *jinn* entering it. Concerning the phenomenon of demonic possession of animate and inanimate objects, Ibn Taymeeyah wrote, “I know people whom the plants greet and inform them of their beneficial ingredients; however, it is, in fact, Satan who has entered the plants and spoke to them. I also know of others to whom stones and trees speak, saying, ‘Congratulations, O saint of Allaah.’...I am acquainted with yet others who have gone bird-hunting and the sparrows addressed them, saying, ‘Take me so that the poor may eat me.’ Such are the cases of evil *jinn* possessing birds in the same way that they possess humans and talk through them.”^[8] He further wrote, “The *jinn* also enter idols, speak to those who worship idols and fulfill some of their needs.”^[9]

Demonic Visions

According to Islâmic beliefs, one of the ways by which the devils lead humans astray is to appear to them in images which reinforce their false beliefs. They become visible as apparitions or visions. In his thirty-six volume compendium of Islâmic rulings called *Majmoo' al-Fataawaa*, Ibn Taymeeyah stated:

The devils may appear to those who worship them in forms which humans mistakenly identify as heavenly spirits...*Jinn* may also make humans hear the voice of those whom they call upon who are far away. Such cases are frequent among idolaters, Christians, Jews and ignorant Muslims who seek refuge in those whom they consider holy. When some devotees call upon their spiritual masters for help, saying "O my lord So-and-so," the *jinn* will address them in the voice of their masters... The devils will often respond while taking the form of the one besought, whether dead or alive, even if he is unaware of those who call upon him. Those committing idolatry in this fashion believe that the person beseeched has actually replied, when, in fact, it is the *jinn* replying. This frequently happens to Christians who call upon those whom they edify, whether dead or alive, like George or other holy figures.^[10] It also occurs to heretical Muslims who call upon the dead or those not present, and the devils take the form of one called upon even without him realizing it. I know of many cases where this has occurred. Although those beseeching them for help saw their images and were convinced that it was the actual person, the people called upon have told me that they were not aware of this. More than one person has mentioned that they called upon me in times of distress, each telling a different story about how I responded. When I told them that I never answered any of them nor did I know that they were calling upon me, some said that it must have been an angel. I told them that angels do not benefit those committing idolatry and that it was actually a devil trying to further misguide them. Sometimes the *jinn* will even take the form of those admired and stand at 'Arafaat,^[11] and those who believe well of him will think that he actually stood in 'Arafaat.^[12]

Notes:

[1] *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 7, p. 1008.

[2] *'Aalam al-Jinn wa ash-Shayaateen*, p. 103.

[3] *Majmoo' al-Fataawaa*, vol. 19, pp. 46-47. See also *Ibn Taymeeyah's Essay on the Jinn*, pp. 43-45.

[4] Quoted in *'Aalam al-Jinn wa ash-Shayaateen*, p. 102 from Ibn Taymeeyah's *Jaami' ar-Rasaa'il*, pp. 194-195.

[5] *Al-Furqaan Bayna Awliyaa' ar-Rahmaan wa Awliyaa' ash-Shaytaan*, p. 14.

[6] Collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 3, p. 1147, no. 5227) and authenticated in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 3, p. 985, no. 4369.

[7] As-Saamiree, identified by at-Tabaree and some other exegetes as the Samaritan, is the Qur'ânic name given to the man who seduced the Israelites to idol-worship. The story not only absolves Aaron of blame (leveled at him in the Biblical accounts) and points out how Satan sometimes leads believers astray, but, if at-Tabaree's identification is correct, it also gives the reason for the pariah status of the Samaritans among the other Jews, namely by way of punishment. See *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp. 501-502.

[8] *Al-Furqaan Bayna Awliyaa' ar-Rahmaan wa Awliyaa' ash-Shaytaan*, p. 87.

[9] *Majmoo' al-Fataawaa*, vol. 19, p. 41.

[10] Divine grace (salvation) is felt to be especially potent in places visited by Jesus Christ or saints or Mary; where they have appeared in visions. Major pilgrimage centers include Lourdes where visions of the Virgin Mary were first seen in 1858 and where healing has been occurring since that time. (*Dictionary of Religions*, p. 254.)

[11] A plain 12 miles from Makkah where pilgrims performing hajj gather on the 9th Dhul-Hijjah (the 12th month of the lunar calendar), perform the midday and afternoon prayers, listen to the sermon and busy themselves in personal prayers until sunset. See *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 44.

[12] *Majmoo' al-Fataawaa*, vol. 19, pp. 41 and 45.

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