

Cultural Beliefs About Possession

[For background, this was a talk given by me, Jeffrey Rich, as part of my participation in Betsy Bergstrom's Compassionate Teacher Training class #1 during our 2nd residential meeting in March, 2014 at Still Meadow in Clackamas, OR]

Who are the Possessing Spirits, and Under What Circumstances Do Various Cultures Report That They Possess People?

Lets take a look at some of the beliefs surrounding possession that are reported in other cultures and see what these cultures believe is possible when possession happens. This enables us to normalize this phenomenon for us, to enlarge our own perception filters and understandings, and to be open to seeing more clearly in our own practices.

That which is seen cannot be un-seen, so it's a good exercise to take a look through sets of perception filters other than our own :-)

Some guidelines for this portion of our trip:

"If someone is, in his own cultural milieu, generally considered to be in a state of spirit possession, then he (or she) is possessed." Lewis, p.40

"The lack of explicit concern with the inner mechanism of possession is, in fact, a general feature of a great many cultures where the doctrine of possession is stressed." Lewis, p. 42

Also note that what other cultures may report here as "possession", we as shamanic practitioners can understand to be a form of controlled or uncontrolled mediumship, or as a form of shamanic practice. I view these as reports of circumstances under which other consciousnesses can occupy a human body, and this allows me to expand my ideas of what's possible, and to be open to seeing new things.

Also note that the spirits are sometimes labeled, "evil", but when we delve into the accounts, they are usually just misplaced, unhappy, lost, etc.

-Jeffrey Rich, March 2014

Possession through the lens of Religions

Christianity

- possessed by the Holy Spirit -- "Slain in the Spirit", or Demons: catholic exorcism.

It is interesting to note that these stories may read differently than we remember hearing them originally:

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- In the Mark account, **the possessing spirits beg Jesus** to be sent into a herd of nearby pigs. Jesus does not cast them out. **"He gave them permission**, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs."
- In the Luke version **"they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss"** Luke 8:31
- In the Matthew version, the beings say, "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us **before the appointed time?**" ... **"The demons begged Jesus**, 'if you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.'" Matthew 8:29-31
- "Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him." 1 Samuel 16:23
- "The next day an evil[a] spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice." 1 Samuel 18:10

I find these passages to be particularly interesting. The Spirits beg Jesus not to send them into the Abyss, which implies that there are other places that they *could* go. I'm intrigued by the phrase, "before the appointed time", also. Also that Jesus does not actually cast them out, but *gives them permission to leave*.

Judaism

Judaism is a rich trove of information and belief about possession by deceased human spirit, or dybbuk, and this has been written about since the 1500s. The word comes from the Hebrew words for "adhere" or "cling". Dybbuks are said to be able to possess anything, even a blade of grass, but that humans are first choice hosts. An "ibbur" is a spirit belonging to a righteous ancestor or righteous spirit who possesses in order to help the host. A "maggid" is the sometime name for a spirit who is lingering to serve as a guide to the living.

Dybbuk - from Wikipedia: "In Jewish mythology, a dybbuk (Yiddish: דיבוק, from Hebrew adhere or cling) is a malicious possessing spirit believed to be the dislocated soul of a dead person. It supposedly leaves the host body once it has accomplished its goal, sometimes after being helped."

[this next long series of quotations comes from the [about.com](#) article on Dybbuks - since it says so much about the attitudes towards them, I felt it important to quote large portions of it. Also, see my own personal experience of this below.]

"According to Jewish folklore, a dybbuk is a ghost or disturbed soul that possesses the body of a living being. In early biblical and Talmudic accounts they are called "ruchim," which means "spirits" in Hebrew. During the 16th century spirits became known as "dybbuks," which means "clinging spirit" in Yiddish.

There are numerous stories about dybbuks in Jewish folklore, each with its own take on the characteristics of a dybbuk. As a result, the specifics of what a dybbuk is, how it is created, etc, vary. This article highlights characteristics that are common to many (though not all) of the stories told about dybbuks.

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What Is a Dybbuk?

In many stories a dybbuk is portrayed as a disembodied spirit. It is the soul of someone who has died but **is unable to move on for one of many reasons**. In stories that assume there is an afterlife where the wicked are punished, the dybbuk will **sometimes be described as a sinner who is seeking refuge from the punishments of the afterlife**. A variation on this theme deals with a soul that has suffered "karet," which means that it has been cut off from God because of evil deeds the person did during their life. Yet **other tales portray dybbuks as spirits that have unfinished business among the living**.

Many stories about dybbuks maintain that because spirits are housed inside bodies, wandering spirits must possess a living thing. In some cases this can be a blade of grass or an animal, though frequently a person is the dybbuk's preferred choice. The people most often portrayed as being susceptible to possession are women and those living in homes with neglected mezuzot. The stories interpret the neglected mezuzah as an indication that the people in the home are not very spiritual. **In some cases a spirit that hasn't left this world is not called a dybbuk**.

If the spirit was a righteous person who is lingering to serve as a guide to the living, the spirit is called a "maggid." If the spirit belonged to a righteous ancestor, it is called an "ibbur." **The difference between a dybbuk, maggid and ibbur is really in how the spirit acts in the story**.

How to Get Rid of a Dybbuk

There are probably as many different ways to exorcise a dybbuk as there are stories about them. The ultimate goal of an exorcism is to release the body of the possessed person and to release the dybbuk from its wanderings. In most stories, a pious man must perform the exorcism. Sometimes he will be assisted by a maggid (beneficent spirit) or an angel. In some stories the ritual must be performed in the presence of a minyan (a group of ten Jewish adults, usually all male) or at a synagogue. (Or both)

Often the first step in the exorcism is interviewing the dybbuk. The purpose of this is to determine why the spirit has not moved on. This information will help the person performing the ritual to convince the dybbuk to leave. It is also important to discover the dybbuk's name because, according to Jewish folklore, knowing the name of an otherworldly being allows a knowledgeable person to command it. In many stories, dybbuks are more than happy to share their woes with anyone who will listen. After the interview, the steps in exorcising a dybbuk vary greatly from story to story.

According to author Howard Chajes, a combination of adjurations and various props are common. For instance, in one example the exorcist may hold an empty flask and a white candle. He will then recite a formulaic adjuration commanding the spirit to reveal its name (if it hasn't done so already). A second adjuration commands the dybbuk to leave the person and fill the flask, whereupon the flask will glow red.

After traveling between Jewish shtetls (villages) in Russia and the Ukraine, playwright S. Ansky took what he had learned about dybbuk folklore and wrote a play titled "The Dybbuk." Written in 1914, the play was eventually turned into a Yiddish-language film in 1937, with some variations to the storyline. In the film, two men promise that their unborn children will marry. Years later,

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one father forgets his promise and betroths his daughter to the son of a wealthy man. Eventually the friend's son comes along and falls in love with the daughter. When he learns that they can never marry, he invokes mystical forces that kill him and his spirit becomes a dybbuk that possesses the bride-to-be." [from the about.Judaism.com article about Dybbuks]

Ibbur - from Wikipedia: "Ibbur (Hebrew: עיבור, "pregnancy" or "impregnation" or "incubation"), is one of the transmigration forms of the soul and has similarities with Gilgul neshamot. Ibbur is always good or positive, while dybbuk (Yiddish: דיבוק), is negative. Ibbur is the most positive form of possession, and the most complicated. It happens when a righteous soul decides to occupy a living person's body for a time, and joins, or spiritually "impregnates" the existing soul. Ibbur is always temporary, and the living person may or may not know that it has taken place. Often the living person has graciously given consent for the Ibbur. The reason for Ibbur is always benevolent—the departed soul wishes to complete an important task, to fulfil a promise, or to perform a Mitzva (a religious duty) that can only be accomplished in the flesh. In Lurianic Kabbalah, Ibbur occurs when an incomplete soul which cannot achieve tikun is completed by the addition of the soul of a tzadik, or spiritual master. Luria believed this to be possible even whilst the possessor was still alive."

It's really interesting to note here that in both the cases of Judaism and Christianity, the possessing spirits seem to be wanting to avoid something that they consider worse than their current state: either being sent into the Abyss, or being judged and found wanting after their 'evil' deeds in the present life. If you have this unappealing alternative as your only choice, wouldn't you want to try and stave off the 'inevitable' and find a refuge in a living body, too?

"In the course of its wanderings, the afflicted soul searches desperately for a body it could call its own, some unassuming person whom it could possess. And when such an individual is finally found, the soul is dovek (cleaving) to that person, often taking full possession of the other person's faculties. Such a soul is called a dybbuk." [Winkler 1981, p. 21]

"The kabbalah also recognizes yet another form of soul-possession which borders somewhat on gilgul, and that is the reincarnation of a rejected soul in an inanimate object such as a rock (domen), or in a vegetative object such as a plant (tzomeach), or in a higher form of animal such as a bird or beast (chayyah). Having neglected all opportunities for perfection while alive, the soul must now suffer the frustration of being unable to seek such opportunities nor to take advantage of them for a specific period of time. Inside a rock, it is completely at the mercy of circumstances unless someone deserving comes along and sits on it or uses it for some worthwhile purpose, thereby elevating its existence to a higher plane. ... It must be understood, however, that when a soul transmigrates within the subhuman planes of life (i.e. domen, tomeach, and chayyah), it does not manifest itself through total possession or reincarnation, but is rather compelled to 'ride' passively with the victim, confined all the time as if in a prison." [Winkler 1981, pp. 21-22]

"Finally, there is a rather harmless form of 'possession' treat in the kabbalah known as sod ha-ibbur, which literally connotes a form of 'impregnation.' The possessed person is completely unaware of the visiting soul, in most cases, and remains in full control of his faculties in much the same way a pregnant woman maintains her own personality control in spite of the presence of someone else inside her.

In some instances, sod ha-ibbur is a cooperative cleavage of a righteous soul to that of a living person for one of two primary reasons: to aid the living person in achieving soul-perfection, or,

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to repair a degree of soul-imperfection in the sod ha-ibbur itself, through the righteous deed of the living person in which it 'resides.' Unlike ordinary instances of possession, the riding soul does not experience the pains of the possessed and maintains its own independence throughout the period of its cleavage. The duration of its stay depends upon the deeds of the possessed. If the purpose of the possession is obliterated, i.e. the possessed decides on his own volition to act wrongly, the possessing soul will then depart immediately, having no further reason to stay. On the other hand, if the sod ha-ibbur were that of a 'wicked' soul, it would, in the latter instance, compound the wicked activities of its host." [Winkler 1981, p. 23]

"'Ghosts', therefore, are souls of departed ones, who, for whatever reason, continue to sojourn within the physical world, although with out a means of participating in that world. At times, a wandering soul may become so desperate that it would 'possess' the body of another. Usually, but not exclusively, a ghost will attempt possession if the reason for its wandering is to effect a reparation of wrongs committed in its previous life. In other instances, one may become possessed by a righteous soul, which had not necessarily been wandering, but was rather dispatched from the heavens for an important purpose. In either event, this phenomenon is commonly known as 'Dybbuk' or 'Gilgul'." [Winkler 1981, p. 50]

Islam

- Jinns, ready to spring on the unsuspecting

Buddhism

possession by Demons, but also this: "There was once a very malevolent technique that enabled one to replace and suppress another individual within their own body, but thankfully it's extinct." ~<http://www.dharmawheel.net/viewtopic.php?f=66&t=10322>

Haitian Voodoo

- Deity, Loa displaces the gros Bon ange of the practitioner ~Lewis, p41

Polynesian islands

there is a saying that we are a "God box", which implies the idea that that box can contain other things as well.

"They also talked with the spirits. Kahuna Kūpaʻiulu of Maui in 1867 described a counter-sorcery ritual to heal someone ill due to hoʻopiʻopiʻo, another's evil thoughts. He said a kapa (cloth) was shaken. Prayers were said. Then, "If the evil spirit suddenly appears (puoho) and possesses the patient, then he or she can be immediately saved by the conversation between the practitioner and that spirit.

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Along with ancestors and gods, spirits are part of the family of Hawaiians. "There are many kinds of spirits that help for good and many that aid in evil. Some lie and deceive, and some are truthful ... It is a wonderful thing how the spirits ('uhane) of the dead and the 'angels' (anela) of the 'aumākuā can possess living persons. Nothing is impossible to god-spirits, akua." [Wikipedia: Hawaiian Religion]

Maori

"To disregard the rules of tapu was an offence to the gods. Those concerned forfeited divine protection and were therefore exposed to supernatural evils.

The most common manifestations of this evil were disaster, demonic possession or death. These consequences could also apply to family members, lands and tribes." [NewZealand.com]

"Sometimes, when a person was nearing death, beyond hope of further living, a procedure known as Tuku Wairua was traditionally performed by a Maori priest who helped the spirit leave the body so that the spirit would not become restless and wander. In modern times, a relative familiar with the procedure may perform a Tuku Wairua; however priests may still be called to give the dying person a holy blessing. Many Maori people believe that the spirits of the gods and the dead are watching the living. For this reason, Maori families will traditionally hold unveiling services and blessings of gravestones of those who have been gone for a year or longer as a way of remembering and paying respects to those who have died." [Wikipedia: Ghosts and Spirits in Maori Culture]

Involuntary Possession

Dybbuks are, of course, in this category.

Kundalini syndrome of constellation of physical symptoms as possible evidence of possession (don't remember where I read this one, sorry -JR)

"As elsewhere in Islam, Somalis believe that anthropomorphic Jinns lurk in every dark and empty corner, poised ready to strike capriciously and without warning at the unsuspected passerby. These malevolent sprites are although to be consumed by envy and greed ..." Lewis, p. 66

Energetic Resonance of Thoughts/Feelings of Possessee and Possessor as Enabling Factor

"... a soul that yearns to actualize a particular feeling can sometimes magnetically draw toward itself the disembodied soul of another who, in his lifetime, did indeed actualize that feeling. (see commentary of R. Yaakov Lorberbaum of Lisa (1760-1832) on Ecclesiastes, 8:14" [Winkler, 1982, p. 8]

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"As is written in the Zohar: 'The souls of the wicked become the demonic spirits of the world.' And as the Zohar states elsewhere: 'The cleaving of [impure] spirits occurs only to those who desire to cleave unto them.'" [Winkler, 1982, p. 9]

Possession by Thoughtforms Created by Our Own Actions

"... in addition, there are the subversive angels [we would say, 'thoughtforms'] created by the actions of men, by the objectification of malevolence: the evil thought, the hate-inspired wish, the wicked deed. For besides its visibly destructive consequences, every act of malice or evil creates an abstract gnostic being, who is, a bad angel, an angel belonging to the plane of evil corresponding to the state of mind that brought it into being. ... A person can be so immersed in his evil thoughts and deeds, that he can become 'possessed' by his own actions and their spiritual manifestations." [Winkler, 1982, p. 8]

Possession by Ancestors, Lonely Spirits with "No Affinity" or With No Family to Pay Them Homage

"A second class of discontented ghost may be seen in the muenbotoke, spirits of no affinity. These are the ghosts of those who have died with no surviving descendants to accord them the nourishing worship they require, who die childless and without kinsmen or lost and friendless in the course of a journey. They are therefore rootless, wandering, starved, desperate of hope for rest and peace. In their misery they will attack any passing stranger whose condition, through sickness or weakness, lays them open to spiritual possession." [Blacker, p. 48]

"Likewise Mr. Mizoguchi, an old man who had undergone a severe regime of austerities near Mt. Miwa, including the aforementioned diet of pine needles near Kurama, was able to see the shapes of malignant possessing spirits. A man had once come to him, he told me in 1963, who had suffered from epilepsy for twenty-one years. On reciting the Heart Sutra and the Kannon Sutra there appeared before his eyes the forms of two unhappy ancestors of the man. One had been drowned, the other burnt to death in a mountain fire. Neither had been able to achieve rest. Both had therefore taken up their lodging, for want of another dwelling-place, in the body of their descendant. Mr. Mizoguchi performed the necessary requiem mass, which brought the evil and unhappy spirits to their proper state of tranquility. The patient from that moment had no more epileptic fits." [Blacker, p. 236]

Possession by Illness-Causing Pathological Spirits

Evenk Tungus believe in illness-causing pathological spirits - [Lewis, et. al.]

Bori of Hausa speaking North Africa: believe in a plethora of pathological spirits, each of which causes a specific condition. [Lewis. p.73]

15thc Italy St Vitus' dance considered demonic possession worthy of exorcism

Ghost Sickness - "adherence" of ghost, Berreman, [Lewis, p. 75] also found in Native American, Polynesian, East Asia, Himalayan Hindu cultures

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"Ghosts might also cause sickness or even invade the body of ordinary people, to be driven out through strong medicines." [Wikipedia: Ghosts in Polynesian Culture]

Malicious Possession by Witch or Evil Shaman

Evenk Tungus will send spirits to bother and possess those that have offended, such as in cases when their lands have been overrun by outsiders, [Lewis].

"If a snake-owner in Saniku happens to quarrel with anyone, Yanagita informs us, he is believed to say to the snake, 'All these years I have been feeding you, so it is a time you did me a good turn in exchange. Go at once to so-and-so's house and make things as unpleasant for him as you can.' The snake then sallies forth and possesses one or more members of the marked family. In this part of Shikoku the principal symptom of snake possession is a sudden and unbearable pain in the joints, similar to acute rheumatism." [Blacker, p. 57]

Propitiation of Possessing Spirits Instead Of Exorcism or Depossession

Zar ceremony in Ethiopia and Egypt - spirit is believed to cause illness, but is not expelled. Rather, the kodia has mastered her own spirits and seeks to help the afflicted come to terms with her own. [Lewis, also firsthand blog descriptions; see references]

Zar of Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt - spirit possession can happen any time and brings sickness, illness, misfortune. A Zar ceremony is mounted which involves feasting and dancing, and is led by a Kodia, a woman who has mastered her own possessing spirits and who can communicate with the possessing spirits of the client, not for purposes of expelling them, but for purposes of propitiation, to come to terms with one's possessing spirits.

*** Funny Zar story about man whose wife pays 50 pounds for Zar ceremony, then husband who pawns her jewelry and sewing machine for a ceremony next day [Lewis]

"Other peoples spirits" who don't belong, or who don't know our ways [Lewis, p.78]

Qarina - succubus - Islam in the Sudan; Qarina can possess a person, but they must not ever marry, lest the succubus harm them. [Lewis]

Inuit

"the greatest peril of life lies in the fact that human food consists entirely of souls. All the creatures which we have to kill and eat, all those that we have to strike down and destroy to make clothes for ourselves, have souls, as we have, souls that do not perish with the body and which therefore must be propitiated lest they revenge themselves on us for taking away their bodies." also, winter game (seals, etc.) and summer game (fish) must not be intermingled unless special precautions are taken. Sort of an inuit Kosher. ... transgression normally affects not merely the individual culprit but also neighbors and kin in his camp. [Lewis p.147]

As Shamanic Calling

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"What so often begins as a hostile spirit intrusion, may be later evaluated as the first sign of grace in the assumption of the shamanistic calling." [Lewis, p.50]

Tungus - *"the shaman's vocation is normally announced by an initially uncontrolled state of possession: a traumatic experience associated with hysteroid, ecstatic behavior."* [Lewis, p. 48]

Bali - many of the temple mediums are recruited following an illness which is reinterpreted as a benign inspiration. [Lewis, p. 60]

Possession by the Living or By An "Emanation" of the Living

Muslim Somali Nomads - *"...one person is believed to possess another -- so that the possessing agency is in some sense an emanation of a living person."* [Lewis, P. 42].

"Thus if a girl who has been jilted by a boy she loved and who privately undertook to marry her exhibits symptoms of extreme lassitude, withdrawal, or even more distinct signs of physical illness, her condition is likely to be attributed to possession by the object of her affections. Here, as in all other cases of Somali possession, the victim is described as having been 'entered.' (Although in this case it is strictly the personality of her former lover which is supposed to have 'seized' her, rather than a free spirit entity ...)" [Lewis, p. 65]

"It seems, moreover, that at least in the case referred to in one of these accounts, the possessing spirit is regarded as that of a living person, since it is stated that in the street where a witch lives choreographic possession not seldom occurs." [Oesterreich, p. 352]

"The girl in question, aged eighteen years, believed herself to be 'bewitched' by a hunter's boy of her acquaintance, and in a part of her fits (in which, however, she retained full consciousness), the latter spoke through her mouth" [Oesterreich, p. 27]

Also, there are two fascinating stories about possession/obsession of a person by an emanation of the mother/mother's personality in the "Possession by Family Members" section of the book "Multiple Man" by Adam Crabtree. If you can get a copy, it's very worth the read:

"In looking back over his journals Art developed a different view of what was happening to him. He had always thought of the voice as an unacceptable negative aspect of his personality that would speak the nasty thoughts that he could not himself own up to. Though he had long ago associated the critical attitude of the voice with his mother's personality, he believed he had incorporated this aspect of her into his unconscious mind. Now, as he reread his journals, he found references to his mother's 'long arm' reaching over the miles from her home in Detroit to maintain her hold upon him and to feeling that we was literally 'possessed' by her, that she was an entity in him, exercising a direct influence upon his thoughts." [Crabtree, p. 257]

"She said she felt the heaviness in her chest represented her mother so burdened, so unhappy with her own life. Colleen referred again to her mother's uncanny ability to know everything that was happening in her life, and felt that she was actually with her, present in [her] chest. Colleen believed she could sense all of her mother's thoughts and feelings, and describe them for her." [Crabtree, pp. 267-268]

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By Non-Human Spirits

"Possession by a large number of animals is known. That produced by foxes is the most frequent, but there is also possession by cats, badgers, dogs, monkeys, and snakes, as well, of course, as by non-animal spirits. The various kinds of possession are not equally frequent in different parts of Japan; sometimes one, sometimes another predominates." [Oesterreich, p. 225]

"According to Balz, Japanese possession is characterized by the fact that it is not produced by human or demonic spirit but by an animal one. In Eastern Asia various animals are accused of entering into man: the tiger, the cat, the dog, but especially the fox. This last was originally the symbol of a divinity, but supplanted it long since and became an object of veneration. ... In Indo-China it is the ox which, according to Marie, takes the place of the fox; in Niam-Niam the boa-constrictor." [Oesterreich, p. 226]

Japan - Kitsunetsuki (狐憑き or 狐 sometimes 付き; also written kitsune-tsuki) literally means the state of being possessed by a fox. The victim is always a young woman, whom the fox enters beneath her fingernails or through her breasts.

In some cases, the victims' facial expressions are said to change in such a way that they resemble those of a fox. Japanese tradition holds that fox possession can cause illiterate victims to temporarily gain the ability to read.[26] Though foxes in folklore can possess a person of their own will, Kitsunetsuki is often attributed to the malign intents of hereditary fox employers, or tsukimono-suji.[27]

Folklorist Lafcadio Hearn describes the condition in the first volume of his Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan:

Strange is the madness of those into whom demon foxes enter. Sometimes they run naked shouting through the streets. Sometimes they lie down and froth at the mouth, and yelp as a fox yelps. And on some part of the body of the possessed a moving lump appears under the skin, which seems to have a life of its own. Prick it with a needle, and it glides instantly to another place. By no grasp can it be so tightly compressed by a strong hand that it will not slip from under the fingers. Possessed folk are also said to speak and write languages of which they were totally ignorant prior to possession. They eat only what foxes are believed to like — tofu, aburagé, azukimeshi, etc. — and they eat a great deal, alleging that not they, but the possessing foxes, are hungry.[28] [Wikipedia entry]

"First, the creature may enter the body of the sufferer through its own volition. Its motive may be urami, malice. It possesses its victim in revenge for some slight; killing one of its cubs, for example, or startling it out of an afternoon nap are reasons frequently alleged. Another motive may be greed or desire. The creature wants something which it cannot obtain in its ordinary shape. It may want a meal of red rice or fried bean curd, delicacies irresistible to foxes, but which they are unlikely to come across in their usual form. Or it may want a little shrine set up to it and worship paid to it every day, and can make this wish known only through a human mouth. I have spent several mornings listening to exorcisms of possessed patients in Buddhist temples of the Nichiren sect, and have been astonished at the way in which time and again the same motives are alleged by one possessing creature after another." [Blacker, p. 52]

"Belief in the possession of animals also exists, however. It is related of Hilarion that he once cured a possessed camel. ... Also in the New Testament the devil once passed into a herd of swine." [Oesterreich, p. 124, footnote]

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"... by sorcery they put the intelligence of three men into the dog. He barked twice but spoke every third word." [Norse Saga of Hakon the Good, chap. 12 quoted in "A Source-Book of Seid: The Corpus of Old Icelandic Texts Dealing with Seid and Related Words", p. 5.]

Possession by Land Spirits

Mafia island off Tanzania - the Pokomo are subject to possession by 'land spirits' which come of their own volition or are sent by a witch, someone with 'power over the spirits' [Lewis]

There is a parallel phenomenon among higher-status women: they are possessed by sea-spirits which come from Arabia. These women speak Arabic when possessed. [Lewis]

Fiji - Water Baby Cult, forest and water spirits [Lewis, p. 102]

Voluntary Possession (what our circle would see as forms of mediumship, volitional or un-volitional, conscious or unconscious)

Useful Possession

Possession as incarnation [Lewis, p. 44], incarnating Jesus, avatars, etc

Saora tribesmen of Orissa India believe that soul is temporarily expelled and the [possessing/ Helping] spirit takes its place in his heart or Adams apple. [Lewis, p41]

Yaruro Indians of Venezuela - *"during shamanic journey they leave behind a mere husk of personality."* [Lewis, p. 41]

Akawaio Caribs of British Guiana - the shaman's *"body is possessed by helping spirits. ... his body, which is left behind as an empty receptacle, is filled by various forest spirits. It is these which no possess is body and speak through it. ... [they] Also believe that shamans body can be occupied with several ghost or spirits as well as his own."* [Lewis p.41]

Tungus - *"it is in fact by his power over the spirits which he incarnates that the shaman is able to treat and control afflictions caused by pathogenic spirits."* [Lewis]

"These 'mastered' spirits can thus be applied to fight off, or overcome, other hostile spirits which have not yet been rendered harmless by human incarnation. With the aid of the tamed spirits, the clan shaman can divine and treat such sickness and affliction as does strike his kinsmen. The shaman is thus in a sense a hostage to the spirits, and Shirokogoroff lays particular stress on the strenuous and demanding character of his calling." [Lewis, p. 45]

"The shamans body is a placing or receptacle for the spirits. It is in fact by his power over the spirits which he incarnate's that the shaman is able to treat and control afflictions caused by pathogenic spirits in others." [Lewis, p.45]

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the shaman and his helping spirits "possess each other" - [Lewis]

The Arctic Tungus - *"The Arctic Tungus believe that each man has two or three souls. The first soul may leave the body causing unconsciousness, but nothing more serious. Prolonged absence of the second soul, however, leads to death; and after death this soul goes to the world of the dead. The third soul remains with the body until it has decomposed and then leaves the body to live on with the dead man's relatives."* [Lewis, p. 41]

Norse

- Berserkers - "bear-shirt"; voluntary possession by wild animal for purposes of superiority in combat
- Seidr - voluntary possession for purposes of divination, healing, creating beneficial change for the community, i.e. calling the fish into the harbor
- Being a Spirit's "horse" and all that that implies, being led, being controlled, being a beast of burden, power/intellect differential. West Africa. (Hausa-speaking peoples), asatru, horsing the gods.

Greek oracle at Delphi was mounted by the god Apollo who rode on her neck. [Lewis]

Dionysus - the God was invited to possess the folk for revelry

Slain in the Holy Spirit - invitation to the Divinity to possess a person to perform miracles, healings - Quakers and Shakers and modern-day Holy Rollers give uncontrolled physical shaking, twitching, etc., as sign of being entered and occupied by the Holy Spirit

Macha Oromo (Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya) - shamans incarnate "refractions" of God, **Waka**. *"inspired by these powers, the shamans hear confessions of guilt at wrongs committed, and receive sacrifices and votive offerings for the spirits."* and give judgments. [Lewis, p. 136]

Haiti, Voudoun - "when a loa spirit moves into the head of an individual it does so by first displacing his gros bon Ange, one of the two souls which each person carries in himself." [Lewis, p. 41]

For purposes of propitiation- The Nayar of Malabar do this. Low-caste officiant becomes possessed and then the masters propitiate these spirits; the purpose is for divination, for healing, for messages [Lewis, p. 103]

Ancestor Possession Societies

Possession, "incarnation" of ancestors, is desirable to maintain order, judge disputes, maintain health and fertility, and to guide descendants

Korekore Shona of the Zambesi Valley central Africa - *shamans who are mainly men, incarnate ancestor spirits of the long dead, and these spirits are believed to control the rainfall and fertility in particular tracts of country. ... misfortunes are interpreted as consequences of breaches of the moral order ... they also fall under the authority of their local guardian spirit ... every Korekore is*

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directly bound by descent to his own ancestor spirits which will also figure as guardian spirits in some provinces but not in others. {so they have to balance these two relationships} ... [Lewis, pp. 122-123]

Tonga - "These central spirits are often derived from the souls of "big men" who in their own lifetime, have played a significant role a points of political influence ... they possess men and enable them to act as prophetic diviners, mediators, rain-makers, and community leaders in their turn. ... they direct a cult which is essentially concerned with public morality, fertility, and prosperity and which, in a sense, celebrates success since it is the spirits of the successful who in turn inspire those who succeed in subsequent generations." [Lewis, p. 128]

Kaffa people of SW Ethiopia - lineage segments are usually led by a male shaman who acts as a medium (possessed by) for the spirits of his patrilineal ancestors. In this capacity he functions as a diviner, diagnosing the causes of sickness and misfortune within his group in terms of ancestral wrath incurred by its members when they sin. The ancestors ... are concerned primarily with the maintenance of lineage morality and with the solidarity and cohesion of their groups. A man inherits his father's spirit (his eqo), being selected from a group of brothers by the spirit. ... when a line gets large and splits off (for conservation of local natural resources), a new elder is possessed by a spirit in the appropriate manner." [Lewis, pp. 129-130]

Both Desirable and Undesirable Possession

Zulu and Pondo of Southern Africa, "married women succumb to possession by male ancestor spirits. ... repeated possession by these spirits leads the wives concerned to assume the roles of diviners, diagnosing and treating witchcraft afflictions in others". [Lewis, p. 112]

Hindu - Himalayan blacksmith possessed by deity, performed miracles and was himself venerated as a living god (see Gerald Berreman). [Lewis, p. 102]

http://archive.org/stream/hindusofhimalaya00inberr/hindusofhimalaya00inberr_djvu.txt:

*See the section titled "The Supernatural" in Chapter 5 - The Religious Context, p. 80
These quotes are not cited by page, and are roughly in order they appear in the text.*

Sirkanda people (from Gerald Berreman's thesis) - possession can be good, bad, or neutral. Good: possession by deity as in blacksmith's case. Neutral - possession by 'household spirit' that can happen to anyone when drumming, and undesirable, as in possession by ghost, which they call an "adherence"

"One god, Memendia, possesses people unexpectedly and then calls for music to dance by. A God's presence is indicated by the behavior of the one he possesses - especially by trembling, rolling of the eyes or fixed staring, insensitivity to touch or pain, incomprehensible speech, and generally uncontrolled behavior. Once a god is present, he is honored with incense, gestures of devotion, and so on.

Such possession is described by a phrase meaning that a god has "come to the head" of his devotee. It is never harmful to the one possessed, and the deity leaves voluntarily. In face, the

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possessed person is said to be immune to pain or lasting harm inflicted while he or she is possessed. Gods do harm individuals, but not as a result of possession. A god who is angry will possess his victims only briefly in order to tell them what they must do to appease his anger and to relieve themselves of his punishment.

Harmful possession, described as "adherence" of a ghost. It occurs unexpectedly. Usually it can be terminated only by strenuous exorcism by a specialist. Ghosts are not worshipped. ... Ghost possessions usually follow severe stress on the individual. Calamity, frightening illness, the death of a friend or a relative, interpersonal strife, and physical exhaustion immediately preceded such cases of possession in Sirkanda.

At village-wide worship, individuals often become possessed by village gods, just as they do by household gods in household worship. Generally the person whom a particular god will possess is known as the traditional vehicle through which that god dances and, more rarely, talks.

Anyone may be possessed by a household deity attracted by the drumming of pujaris during worship of a household god. Such possession results in the deity's dancing in the worshiper's body, and sometimes in his speaking through the worshiper. No one knows who will be possessed, by possession is expected to result from the activities of the pujaris on these occasions.

A shaman voluntarily induces his personal familiar spirit to possess him and speak through him to his clients. He does this by chanting certain phrases, playing a drum, and performing other acts pleasing to the spirit. When the spirit leaves it does so without ill effects. Its good will is maintained by the shaman's worship.

Village gods are worshipped outdoors, usually at the dancing ground adjacent to the pandavas' temple, but sometimes near devi's temple. At that time any village god or gods may possess individual villagers. Household gods do not possess people on these occasions. In contrast to the nature of possession by household gods, there is on particular individual whom each village god usually possesses. Most often village gods utilize the state of possession merely to dance, but they may speak if they wish to.

After the god has danced his fill, usually on the last night of the kaltrata, he may leave or may choose to speak. If the latter, the dancer becomes immobile, speaks unintelligibly ("it sounds like English," asserted one informant), and then begins to answer questions put to him. This stage is simply called "questioning." The god tells the cause of his anger and the action necessary by the victimized household to appease that anger. Usually he demands a goat or other sacrifice, but sometimes he asks for a more elaborate puja. The god also gives advice, solves dilemmas, and issues warnings and ultimatums. When he is through, he so states, the drums of the pujaris beat briefly, the god departs, and the session is over. The possessed person shows no aftereffects and does not remember the period of possession, although I noted that some showed a remarkable ability to recall the number and subject matter of photographs taken during possession.

The worst of the ghosts come to people and enter their bodies because they are miserable disembodied souls seeking a body in which to dwell. Others are jealous of human beings, or merely cantankerous. However, possession by ghost differs from that by a god or ancestor. The term for ghost possession is bhut lag gea ("ghost has adhered") or chat

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patana ("to cause torment as evidenced by trembling"), as contrasted to "sir a gea" ("has come to a head") for possession by a god. Ghost possession is qualitatively different from possession by a god. Once a ghost has "caught hold" it will usually not leave unless forced out by exorcism. During the time it is in possession, it causes illness, unusual behavior, and even death. Insensitivity to pain is the usual diagnostic symptom of possession by a ghost. Other afflictions are: eyes rolled back, fever, inability to talk coherently, melancholia, some sensory disability or aphasia, catatonic adherence to a particular posture, illness, barrenness, or a repeated stillbirths. Sometimes these afflictions may prove incurable because the ghost cannot be exorcised. Inexplicable sudden death is often attributed to ghosts. The very fact of possession by a ghost is harmful to the one possessed. A god, in contrast, ... possesses only to dance or to speak [or to heal?]. He does so temporarily without harm to the one possessed, and he leaves voluntarily. " [Berreman]

Anecdotal Examples From My own Practice And From Other Practitioners

My Helping Spirits have shown me that there can be a Land Spirit or Guardian who can use people like a lens, or like a telescope, (think: Skype) to see into the world and find out things. The Spirits don't exactly describe this as a possession, but more like using the humans as a tool of inspection and possibly safety. The journeys I have done on this seem to indicate that the being could be depossessed from the land in this way and through these people, but that it is easier to work with them directly to find out what they need. This "lensing" effect is more pronounced (in the case that I was shown) when the human being is closer to the land in question. There's definitely a connection here that the land spirits are using when this is being done. There may be a curse-like energy or component that enables this. Betsy tells a story of a sea-being like this who connected with multiple women for this purpose during sexual intercourse. The person thus affected got extremely anxious being too far from the water. The man who connected these women was a votive for, dedicated himself to, this sea-being in order to get what he wanted, and this was an unfortunate side-effect. I believe that this "lensing" effect happens to some of us when we are near ancestral lands, or landscapes for which we have a natural affinity - I just think it's easier for those Beings to gain access to our faculties if we're a good fit for the Being.

Multi-located beings, Multi-threaded beings - beings who are connected to and overshadowing more than one person at a time.

ETs, UFO abductions might have an off-world, ET component. ET constructs have been found by me and by other practitioners in clients.

Betsy also tells the story of a friend of hers who was possessed by a being who wanted to paint through her. This being painted and painted and painted, eventually rendering the woman physically injured, although with far more skill than she had begun with. Then the being left her when it could no longer paint through this woman.

Possession by cluster or group Being - the biblical story of the man from Gadara who was possessed with a Being who said, "My name is Legion: for we are many" Mark 5:9, Luke 8:30, Matthew 8:28-34 speaking with one collective voice.

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My Own Personal Experience

In my own experience, a spirit was once possessing me who perfectly fitted the description of the Dybbuk in the about.judaism.com article: the spirit presented in my mind's eye as a very apologetic older Jewish man who had found me and become attached when I was a very young child. As far as he said, he just couldn't seem to get away. During the de possession in one of Betsy's classes in Rochester New York (hosted by Cecile!), the being was reluctant to go and asked that a minyan be called (ten Jewish men - in spirit - helped along by the living human backups and the person doing the actual de possession triad in class with me as client). There was a recitation of the lineage of Solomon, calling of the sephiroth, and lots of blowing of the shofar in my mind's experience.

Since Dybbuk lore is very old and has a very established field around it as well as much writing and stories about it, this tells me that what the spirit *believes* s/he needs, s/he needs. The minyan idea shows up strongly in the lore, so this being may have believed that he needed this in order to *give himself permission* to begin his Good crossing. Growing up Jewish this man may have heard these stories, and his journey may have been shaped by them. I knew nothing of it at the time, and was sort of floored and also delighted when I read about this.

Rabbi Gershon Winkler says about helping a Dybbuk to cross:

"The Jewish exorcism ritual is performed by a rabbi who has mastered practical Kabbalah. The ceremony involves a quorum of 10 people who gather in a circle around the possessed person. The group recites Psalm 91 three times, and the rabbi blows the shofar -- a ram's horn. Rabbi Winkler has performed four exorcisms in his life so far. He said, "We blow the ram's horn in a certain way, with certain notes, in effect to shatter the body, so to speak. So that the soul who is possessing will be shaken loose. After it has been shaken loose, we can begin to communicate with it and ask it what it is here for. We can pray for it and do a ceremony for it to enable it to feel safe and finished so that it can leave the person's body."

The point of the exorcism is to heal the person being possessed and the spirit doing the possessing. This is a stark contrast to the Catholic exorcism that is intended to drive away the offending spirit or demon. Winkler said, "We don't drive anything out of anybody. What we want to do is to heal the soul that's possessing and heal the person. It's all about healing -- we do the ceremony on behalf of both people."

[http://www.ghostvillage.com/legends/2003/legends32_11292003.shtml]

The narrative of this particular personal de possession really stuck with me, and absolutely illustrated many things about the teaching, namely: there was no fault, and the Being's belief system figured prominently into the requirements of his comfort during the de possession. He really just wasn't going to go until he knew that it was going to be both Good and Right. The narrative in my head included the realization that he had known for years where he was, but couldn't figure out a way to leave in a graceful way without harming me. He was also aware that his mere presence affected me, and so he did his best to be quiet and to stay to himself so as not to activate me in any way.

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Summary of Some of These Themes

- Desirable - ancestral guidance, healing, revelry: possession by Dionysus; to confer magical ability, divination, healing: i.e. Seidr
- Auspicious - Messenger, marker of shamanic calling ('Arctic Hysteria' among Tungus)
- necessary-but-also-dangerous - Mongolian Tungus (healing, keeping 'untamed' spirits at bay), Haitian Voudou
- Undesirable - possession by pathological spirits which causes illness and which prey especially on the weak and on the oppressed
- Divine, upper world, ecstatic, inspirational possession
- Ordinary, Middle World, troublesome
- Peripheral in origin - not related to culture: as pathological spirit causes of illness, misfortune
- Central - integral to culture - ancestor spirits and spirits of lineage, guardian spirits of place, spirits that the local shaman has 'tamed'
- Voluntary v. Involuntary v. malicious, sent by ill-disposed shaman Lewis, P. 110
- Voluntary
- Involuntary: chance possession by damaging, pathological spirits, or by spirits whom the person has offended (Inuit)
- Malicious: Evenk Tungus send their 'tamed' spirits after others as revenge, to cause illness, ill-will
- Simultaneous admiration and fear/revulsion by outsiders, i.e. those not possessed
- By the living - Somali girl jilted can be 'entered' by the one she loves who has jilted her (extreme attachment?)

A Summary of the Beliefs About Possession Encountered in Anthropological Descriptions of World Cultures

- spirit possession can be viewed as an ordinary part of life
- spirit possession can be desired (Gods, Dionysus, Ancestors)
- spirit possession can be undesirable (pathological spirits)
- spirit possessions can be the causes of illness, behavior change, death
- spirit possessions can be the causes of miraculous healing, can leave miraculous ecstatic stigmata, confer new abilities
- slain in the spirit
- conferring healing abilities
- conferring good fortune (Sirkanda blacksmith, ex.)
- divination abilities (Seidr, ex)
- rain-making (ancestral possession)
- fertility management for ancestral land
- speaking different languages
- spirit possession can be beneficial, as when a shaman's spirit helps incarnate to watch over her body while she is journeying
- spirit possession can be temporary, as by the gods or by messenger ancestors, or for ceremonial purposes: being danced
- spirit possession can be difficult to remove, "ghost sickness", needing the intervention of a depossession expert, an "adherence" (Himalaya Hindus, Polynesia, Native America (Dine), SE Asia)
- spirit possession can be accidental
- spirit possession can be intentional, maliciously

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- spirit possession can be propitiated and lived with, 'taming' the spirit, or providing it with food, clothing, ceremony, status, in order to reduce the negative effects
- spirit possession can be expected as a matter of course - being possessed by a household god (Hindus of the Himalayas)
- spirit possession can be habitual - sometimes the same guardian spirit has favorite people to possess
- in a community, there can be simultaneous reverence and fear toward those who become possessed, or toward whom those who are temporarily voluntarily possessed
- spirit possession can be a call to the profession of being a shaman
- spirit possession can be a kind of retribution from the spirits if protocols are not followed properly or reverently (Inuit, Ancestors)
- spirit possession can happen in a community-governing capacity
- when the ancestors are upset over a violation of the established moral code
- voluntarily possessed shamans judging contentious cases via the ancestors
- spirit possession can be easy and without effect (Sirkanda)
- spirit possession can be difficult and with harm, sometimes lasting harm (Sirkanda, others)
- spirit possession can be just because the deity wants to "check in" or just dance (Sirkanda), Dionysus
- spirit possession can be initiatory, as in a call to the shamanic profession (Bali, temple mediums)

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Wikipedia articles and search terms to help you on your way

- Dybbuk - "adhering" or "clinging soul" in Judaism - always negative

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- Ibbur - one of the transmigration forms of the soul - always good or positive "the most positive form of possession, and the most complicated" [Wikipedia article: Ibbur]
- Spirit Possession
- Kitsunetsuke
- Ghost Sickness
- Ghosts in Polynesian Culture
- Ghosts and Spirits in Maori Culture
- Hawaiian Religion