Possession
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A Case in Point; It had no Name so He Called it "The Thing"

Both of his legs shattered with a savage pain as he clutched his aching head. Tears streamed down his face as befell to the floor in torment. When the pain reached a zenith he thought he could not bear, it stopped as suddenly as it began. "The thing" had entered his body. Little Somanatha, age 13, was possessed.

With a seemingly joyful delight-breathing heavily-the being took up a pen and pad and began scribbling senseless instructions to the parents who readily obeyed for fear it might bring on the pain again. When it was done, the being ordered the boy's father to prostrate before him. Then, with a spasm, it was gone, leaving little Somanatha limp and feverish in his mother's arms.

"It told my father to throw all of our holy objects into the river," Somanatha related later. "It said that the Gods had no power. My father would ask: 'Who are you?' It would tell lies. Finally, it would say, 'I am your father.'"

While possession may often resemble mental illness, the two are not the same. Mental illness is the absence, imbalance or malfunction of one or more mental processes. Possession is a state in which a person is under the direct control of an external power or entity.

While mental illness may be handled through psychiatry and psychology, possession is approached through exorcism. Somanatha's story is a true one (although his name has been changed in this article).

Over an 18-year period of time, "the thing" developed a grip of ever-growing

strength and influence over every member of Somanatha's large family (including nine brothers and sisters) and virtually took up permanent residence in the family home. It was seen by Somanatha's father as an old and ugly hag, a six-year-old child and "a huge dark man with long stringy black hair."

The father made numerous attempts to rid the family of the unwanted guest, but time and again he was unsuccessful. Many Hindu purification pujas were performed; even similar services of other religions were engaged - all to no avail. In fact, matters got worse. It seemed that nothing would work.

However, the family came to know something very important about "the thing." It needed love and trust. It promised miracles to gain the family's receptive attention and then played upon their fear to hold them in control.

As Somanatha grew older, he became very religious and consciously set his will against the unseen creature. This act coupled with the family's general disenchantment with the entity's claims and promises, caused its power to wane considerably. Gradually, over the years, the intensity of the possession decreased.

The phenomenon of possession is known among civilized as well as primitive people. When the mind is open, passive and receptive, possession can take place. To the contrary, when the mind is a clear, firm and aggressive, possession is almost impossible.

In many shamanistic societies, priests consciously induce their own possession as a part of their religious rites by invoking a certain entity, than "getting themselves out of the way" so that entity may enter their body. Such a benign and voluntary possession is called a "walk-in" or a channeling.

During an exorcism, a priest attempts to drive the presiding spirit or spirits out or away from a person or a place through the use of ritual prayers, incantations and mantrams. He may or may not be successful. The forms of exorcism vary among the different religious traditions.

Somanatha's long-standing house guest and body snatcher finally left when an elaborate Hindu Vasu Shanti Puja (literally, "place-clearing") was performed at his father's home.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, a small six-inch Ganesha deity was to be installed under a tree outside the house to handle the karma that magnetized the possession in the first place, and Siva's Trisula was to be installed on a wall inside the house to handle the strong asuric force of the invading entity. But first the preparations had to be made.

A young man present at the event describes the proceedings: "At one corner of the property, a homa (fire pit) was constructed, surrounded with three pumpkins, 21 lemons, camphor, rice, kumkum, coconuts, coconut fronds and sanctified water.

"After a long and intense fire ceremony at the homa, burning coconut fronds were dragged around the house. At each of the three remaining comers of the property, a pumpkin and seven lemons were thrown to the asuras, and when the priest arrived back at the homa, a coconut was broken. Later, a Lord Ganesha deity and Siva's Trisula were installed, and the father began a long series of intense Ganesha pujas. Three days of piercing wind and rain followed as the devonic and asuric forces seemed to clash in battle. On the fourth day there was peace and silence."

"The thing," it seemed, was gone-at least for the time being.

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