

Demonic possession

Demonic possession is where individuals are supposed to be [possessed](#) by malevolent [preternatural](#) beings, commonly referred to as [demons](#) or [devils](#). Symptoms of demonic possession commonly claimed by believers include erased [memories](#) or [personalities](#), [convulsions](#) (i.e. [epileptic seizures](#) or “fits”) and [fainting](#) as if one were dying. It is also worth noting that in most cases of supposed demonic possession, the individual displayed sporadic hand movements, as if playing a piano.^[1]

Demonic possession is not a recognized valid psychiatric or medical diagnosis.^[2] The [DSM-5](#) indicates that personality states of dissociative identity disorder may be interpreted as possession in some cultures, and instances of spirit possession are often related to traumatic experiences-suggesting that possession experiences may be caused by mental distress.^[3] Some have expressed concern that belief in demonic possession can limit access to health care for the mentally ill.^[4]

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Cultural origins^[edit]

Many cultures and [religions](#) contain some concept of demonic possession, but the details vary considerably. The oldest references to demonic possession are from the [Sumerians](#), who believed that all diseases of the body and mind were caused by "sickness demons" called [gidim](#) or *gid-dim*.

^[5] The [priests](#) who practised exorcisms in these nations were called *ashipu* (sorcerer) as opposed to an *asu* (physician) who applied bandages and [salves](#).^[6] Many [cuneiform clay tablets](#) contain prayers to certain gods asking for protection from demons, while others ask the gods to expel the demons that have invaded their bodies.

[Shamanic](#) cultures also believe in demon possession and shamans performing exorcisms. In these cultures, diseases are often attributed to the presence of a [vengeful spirit](#) (or loosely termed *demon*) in the body of the patient. These spirits are more often the spectres of animals or people wronged by the bearer, the exorcism rites usually consisting of respectful offerings or [sacrificial offerings](#).

Claims^[edit]

Oppressions and possessions of the devil are considered by many religions to be evidence of the existence of demonic entities or [evil spirits](#).^[further explanation needed] The term [oppression](#) is used when the demon acts externally against the person whom it besets, and possession when it acts internally, agitates them, excites their ill humor, makes them utter blasphemy, speak tongues they allegedly have never learned, reveals allegedly unknown secrets to them, and apparently inspires them with obscure knowledge of philosophy or theology.^[A 1]

Other claims include access to hidden knowledge and foreign languages ([xenoglossy](#)), drastic changes in vocal intonation and facial structure, the sudden appearance of injuries (scratches, bite marks) or [lesions](#), and [superhuman strength](#). Odd odors, lack of sensitivity to pain, and self-mutilation have also been reported.^[7] Unlike in [channeling](#), the subject has no control over the possessing entity and so it will persist until forced to leave the victim, usually through a form of [exorcism](#).

Additionally, there is a form of [monomania](#) called demonomania or demonopathy in which the person believes that he or she is possessed by one or more demons.^[8]

Christianity

Further information: [Exorcism in Christianity](#) and [Exorcism in the Catholic Church](#)

[Christianity](#) holds that possession derives from the [Devil](#), i.e. [Satan](#), or one of his lesser demons. In Christianity, Satan and his demons are actually [fallen angels](#).^[9] In modern medicine, it is now suspected that an underlying cause of what sometimes appears to be demonic possession is actually [anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis](#).^{[10][11]}

In the Christian Bible The Old Testament

The [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) says that there is only one apparent case of demonic possession in the Old Testament, of [King Saul](#), but it relies on an interpretation of the Hebrew word "rûah" as "evil spirit", an interpretation that is doubted by the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#).^[12] Others theologians such as Ángel Manuel Rodríguez say that [mediums](#) like the ones mentioned in [Book of Leviticus](#) 20:27 were possessed by demons.^[13]

New Testament

The New Testament mentions several episodes in which [Jesus drove out demons from persons](#). The 1902 work *Demonic possession in the New Testament* by Rev. [William Menzies Alexander](#) attempted to explain accounts of possession in the [Synoptic Gospels](#), outlining their historical, medical and theological aspects.^[14]

Catholicism

[Catholic exorcists](#) differentiate between "ordinary" Satanic/demonic activity or influence (mundane everyday *temptations*) and "extraordinary" Satanic/demonic activity, which can take six different forms, ranging from complete control by Satan or some demon(s) to voluntary submission.^[15]

1. Possession, in which Satan or some demon(s) takes full possession of a person's body without their knowledge or consent, so the victim is therefore morally blameless.
2. Obsession, which includes sudden attacks of irrationally obsessive thoughts, usually culminating in [suicidal ideation](#), and typically influences dreams.
3. [Oppression](#), in which there is no loss of consciousness or involuntary action, such as in the biblical [Book of Job](#) in which Job was tormented by a series of misfortunes in business, family, and health.
4. External physical pain caused by Satan or some demon(s).
5. Infestation, which affects houses, things, or animals; and
6. Subjection, in which a person voluntarily submits to Satan or some demon(s).

In *Hostage to the Devil*, [Malachi Martin](#) describes a type of demonic attack called "familiarization". He writes:

“ The possessing spirit in "familiarization" is seeking to "come and live with" the subject. If accepted, the spirit becomes the constant and continuously present companion of the possessed. The two "persons", the "[familiar](#)" and the "possessed", remain separate and distinct. The "possessed" is aware of his "familiar".^{[16][17]} ”

True demonic or satanic possession has been characterized since the [Middle Ages](#), in the [Roman Ritual](#), by the following four typical characteristics:^{[18][19][20]}

1. [Manifestation](#) of [superhuman strength](#).
2. [Speaking in tongues](#) or languages that the victim cannot know.
3. [Revelation](#) of [knowledge](#), distant or hidden, that the victim cannot know.
4. [Blasphemous](#) rage, obscene hand gestures, using [Profanity](#) and an [aversion](#) to holy symbols or [relics](#).

The Bible indicates that people can be possessed by demons but that the demons respond and submit to Jesus' authority:

“ In the [synagogue](#), there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 “Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” 35 “Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. 36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!” 37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area. (Luke 4:33-35 NIV)^[21] ”

It also indicates that demons can possess animals as in the [exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac](#):

“ When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from [the town](#). For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” 29 For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. 30 Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “[Legion](#),” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. 32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. 33 ”

When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into [the lake](#) and was drowned. (Luke 8:27-33 NIV)^[22]

Official [Catholic](#) doctrine affirms that demonic possession can occur as distinguished from [mental illness](#), but stresses that cases of mental illness should not be misdiagnosed as demonic influence. Catholic exorcisms can occur only under the authority of a [bishop](#) and in accordance with strict rules; a simple exorcism also occurs during [Baptism](#) ([CCC](#) 1673).

Since Jesus is reported (in the New Testament) to have encountered people who were demonized and to have driven the "evil spirits" out of these demoniacs, Saint [Hilary of Poitiers](#) of the 4th century asserted that demons entered the bodies of humans to use them as if they were theirs, and also proposed that the same could happen with animals.

Protestantism

The literal view of demonization is held by a number of Christian denominations. In [charismatic](#) Christianity, [deliverance ministries](#) are activities carried out by individuals or groups aimed at solving problems related to demons and spirits, especially possession of the body and soul, but not the spirit as ministries like [Ellel Ministries International](#),

Don Dickerman Ministries and [Neil T. Anderson](#) explicitly teach that a Christian can not have demons in their spirit because the Holy Spirit lives there, though they can have demons in their body or soul due to inner emotional wounds, sexual abuse, [satanic ritual abuse](#).^[23] This is usually known as partial possession or demonic infestation, as opposed to outside demonic oppression which does not reside in any of the 3 parts of a person: [body](#), [soul](#), [spirit](#).

The New Testament's description of people who had evil spirits includes a capacity for hidden knowledge (e.g., [future events](#), [innermost thoughts of the people around them](#)) (Acts 16:16) and great strength (Act 19:16), among others, and shows those with evil spirits can speak of Christ (Acts 19:16, Mark 3:11).

According to [theologians](#)^[citation needed], demonic assault can be involuntary^[15] and allowed by [God](#) to test a person, as seen in the Biblical figure [Job](#), who was tormented by Satan as part of God's test. Involuntary demonic assault, according to these theologians, cannot be denied because this would imply the negation of the cases mentioned

in the New Testament (12, some of them repeated in more than one [Gospel](#)). However, in the overwhelming majority of cases of alleged demonic possession in modern times, the victim can suffer due to any of a number of personal initiatives: [occult practices](#), [mortal sin](#), [loss of faith](#), or [psychological trauma](#), among others. Furthermore, Malachi Martin goes as far as to say "...no person can be Possessed without some degree of cooperation on his or her part," and "The effective cause of Possession is the voluntary collaboration of an individual, through his faculties of mind and will, with one or more of those bodiless, genderless creatures called demons."^[24]

In previous centuries, the Christian church offered suggestions on safeguarding one's home. Suggestions ranged from dousing a household with [holy water](#), placing wax and herbs on thresholds to "ward off witches occult," and avoiding certain areas of townships known to be frequented by witches and Devil worshippers after dark. ^{[25][26]}

[T. B. Joshua](#), a Nigerian pastor, has one of the most prominent 'deliverance' ministries, releasing hundreds of videos on YouTube and his Christian television station, [Emmanuel TV](#), purporting to show individuals being 'delivered' from apparent 'demonic possession'.

Islam

Various types of creatures, such as [jinn](#), [shayatin](#), ['afarit](#) and [ruh](#), found within [Islamic](#) culture, are often held to be responsible for demonic possession. Usually, [Iblis](#), the leader of evil spirits, only tempts humans into sin by following their lower [desires](#)

Even not directly attested in the [Quran](#), the notion of jinn possessing humans is widespread among Muslims and also accepted by most Islamic scholars. ^[29] There are various reasons given, why a jinn might seek to possess an individual, such as falling in love with them, taking revenge for hurting them or their relatives or other not defined reasons. ^{[30][31]} Since jinn are not necessarily evil, they are distinguished from cultural concepts of possession by devils/demons. ^[32] In return, the shayatin are apparently inherently evil. ^[33] To prevent such entities from doing further harm, an [exorcism](#) is required.

Judaism

[Antoine Augustin Calmet](#), a French Benedictine monk writing in the 18th century, commented that the Jews attributed the greater part of their maladies to the works of demons and were persuaded that demonic torments were a punishment for some crime either known or unrevealed. ^[A 2] He also states: ^[A 3]

Although the Jews were sufficiently credulous concerning the operations of the evil spirit, they at the same time believed that in general the demons who tormented certain persons were nothing else than the souls of some wretches, who, fearing to repair to the place destined for them, took possession of the body of some mortal whom they tormented and endeavored to deprive of life- Treatise on the Apparitions of Spirits and on Vampires or Revenants

Buddhism

In traditional Buddhism, four metaphorical forms of "māra" are given.^[34]

- *Kleśa-māra*, or Māra as the embodiment of all [unskillful emotions](#), such as greed, hate and delusion.(the Demons of delusions/defilement and unwholesome states)
- *Mṛtyu-māra*, or Māra as [death](#). (the Demons of the Lord of death)
- *Skandha-māra*, or Māra as [metaphor](#) for the entirety of conditioned existence.(the Demons of contaminated aggregates)
- *Devaputra-māra*, the [deva](#) of the sensuous realm, who tries to prevent Gautama Buddha from attaining liberation from the [cycle of rebirth](#) on the night of the Buddha's enlightenment.(the Demons of sons of deva Gods/desire and temptation)^[35]

And in the [Śūraṅgama Sūtra](#), 50 types of [skandha](#) related demons ([Fifty skandha-māras](#)) been mentioned that can possess practitioners. Also flying demons from Devaputra-[Mara](#) can confuse the practitioner, make them and their students believe they have achieved [Enlightenment](#), then mislead them to wrong doings, wrong teachings, dangers, crisis and even death.^[36]

In [Buddhism](#), a demon can either be a being suffering in the hell realm^[37] or it could be a delusion.^[38]

A practitioner will go to the local Buddhist healer for treatment. The healer will commonly take their pulse and urine while offering counsel - the aim being to divine the origins of the patient's suffering. In the case of possession they will also prescribe actions to appease the demon, like giving away food and clothing in its name.^[39] It is believed that the demon will depart to a different realm once this is done.^[37]

Medicine and psychology^[edit]

According to Augustine Calmet, several obsessions and possessions noted in the New Testament were simple maladies or fantastic fallacies which made it believed that such persons were possessed by the devil. The ignorance of the people maintained this prejudice, and their lack of contact with physicians and medicine served to strengthen such ideas.^[A 2]

Those who profess a belief in demonic possession have sometimes ascribed to possession the symptoms associated with physical or mental illnesses, such as [hysteria](#), [mania](#), [psychosis](#),^[40] [Tourette syndrome](#), [epilepsy](#),^[41] [schizophrenia](#),^[42] [conversion disorder](#) or [dissociative identity disorder](#).

It is also not uncommon to ascribe the experience of [sleep paralysis](#) to demonic possession, although it's not a physical or mental illness.^[44] The symptoms vary across cultures.^[45] Demonic possession is not a valid [psychiatric](#) or medical diagnosis recognized by either the [DSM-5](#) or the [ICD-10](#).^[2]

The DSM-5 indicates that personality states of dissociative identity disorder may be interpreted as possession in some cultures, and instances of spirit possession are often related to traumatic experiences--suggesting that possession experiences may be caused by mental distress.^[3] Some have expressed concern that belief in demonic possession can limit access to health care for the mentally ill.^[4]