

A BEING OVER- SHADOWED

The de-possession of unwelcome spirits

Robyn Fell talks to
de-possession
practitioner
BETSY BERGSTROM

the work and watched them make changes in previously intractable seeming places in their lives.

One client with a life long weight problem released several suffering beings in a session - the next time we met she said that she'd not felt hungry for several days. 'Five less mouths to feed' was her summation of the situation, as she slowly began to lose weight.

By this time I was anxious to learn more and applied to go on the advanced de-possession course Betsy was running this spring in Oregon in the US. I was keen to share with others what felt for me to be a missing link within my own shamanic practice, so whilst over there, during six amazing days sitting in circle with shamanic therapists from across America, I found time to ask her the following questions...

Robyn: Is there a difference between demonic possession and 'everyday' possession by earthbound spirits? How can you distinguish between them?

Betsy: Possession is a rather natural occurrence. Like other natural occurrences, it is more common than people are really aware of. The average view of possession is that it either doesn't exist at all or it is the sort of possession that is pictured in films like 'The Exorcist', which is a representation of what would be

As a shamanic practitioner, a while ago, I received a call from a woman suffering from what seemed like an acute possession state, several male spirits taking over her mouth and also, unless strongly resisted, her body and behaviour too.

Having no experience of de-possession, beyond conventional shamanic extraction work, I journeyed to my spirit helpers to ask for their help. I followed their directions and did the work, only to find that although the earth-bound spirits left the client when she was in my house and with me, they, as she put it 'were waiting on the chimney pot' and as soon as she left 'hopped right back in'.

Synchronistically to working with this woman, there appeared in Sacred Hoop a series of articles on de-possession, and Initially my interest was piqued by the relationship drawn between possession states and Multiple

Personality Disorder. I had worked with several clients who disassociated and I was interested to discover if there might be a shamanic method of guiding them back to themselves, rather than using the more unpredictable, distressing and often lengthy processes found in psychotherapy.

In the spirit of enquiry I emailed the author of the articles, Mary Courtis, with the question and from that email a long and detailed correspondence ensued, through which I was introduced to the heart centred de-possession work of Betsy Bergstrom.

Unable to find anyone close by trained to do this specific branch of shamanic work, I was taught to do it under Mary's email tutelage and guidance, and with the ever present expertise and support of my spirit guides and helpers.

Once introduced to the concept, I tentatively began to introduce some of my clients to

called 'demonic' possession. Most possession is by much more benign beings, who more or less 'overshadow' rather than fully possess a person.

In order to understand about possession, we need to go back farther and look at life and the dying process. When we are dying, we are going through a process of letting go. We are letting go of our lives, of the people and things that are meaningful to us as well as our bodies themselves.

Robyn: So what would happen in a 'healthy' death; one where the person let go easily?

Betsy: In a good or successful death, the person who is dying will have had a number of things in place that may have helped them to undergo a graceful transition. They would have said goodbye to their loved ones. They would have their worldly wills and living wills already in place. They would have a cosmology or belief system about what happens at the time of death and afterwards, so that they would be facing death with a comforting understanding of what will be transpiring.

In a shamanic perspective, the body is on loan to us from the earth and is composed of the elements of earth, water, fire, air and space. During the dying process, the elements that are a part of our physical selves dissolve, resulting in the death of the physical body and allowing the consciousness, soul and mind to become freed from the physical self. In a good dying transition, the soul is then helped by compassionate beings to cross into the light.

Robyn: Does this crossing happen easily for people?

Betsy: Well, it may take place immediately or may take some time to occur. Family members often report visitations of deceased loved ones, with messages letting loved ones know they are all right shortly after the time of death.

Sometimes, this transition is not always easy and successful. Not everyone is fortunate enough to know when they are dying in order to face it with peace and equanimity. Quite a number of people die suddenly or in such a way that they are unaware of death when it comes. Some people die feeling very attached to people or objects or to life itself. Some people have a great fear of where they

are going at the time of death too, because of religious beliefs. Sometimes, the grieving family of a deceased person will not really let the person go. Attachment and confusion can result in a person becoming a ghost or earth-bound. An earth-bound person can stay an unattached ghost or can find itself attracted to the light or life force of a living person.

Possession happens to a living person when the earth-bound deceased attaches to the energetic field of the living. What the deceased person gains from this is light, energy, a place to be or a place that is familiar feeling or comforting. Many possessing spirits are humans who have become lost in the transition process at the time of death and simply don't make it out of the earth-plane. Most have no desire to possess a living human; it simply happens. Many possessing spirits have no understanding of their situation, often not realising that they are dead.

Robyn: Are there places where earthbound spirits are more likely to congregate?

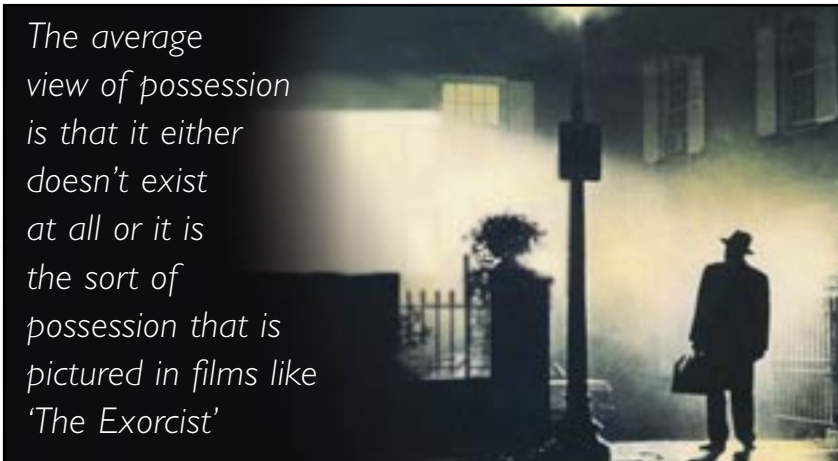
Betsy: Often places where death in significant numbers, or traumatic deaths have occurred. Battle sites and accident sites can have discarnate souls clustered and also may have a sort of 'recording' of the traumatic events that occurred there. Sensative people often experience some of the events that are recorded when they visit places such as these.

These sites may have lingering suffering beings who are aware that they are dead. They may find themselves magnetised to the living and 'attachments' can occur in these settings.

Robyn: So what happens in these sort of situations?

Betsy: When possession occurs, the effect on the living person may vary greatly. Often, the feeling is one of being what I call 'overshadowed'. The emotional state of the deceased, as well as their fears, predilections, vices, desires and even bodily locations of illness, injury or trauma may be transferred to the living host.

The average view of possession is that it either doesn't exist at all or it is the sort of possession that is pictured in films like 'The Exorcist'



In most cases of possession that I have encountered, the possessing spirit wasn't trying to possess a person, so much as they were trying to get their own needs and desires met.

The nature of possession, which may include a sort of fusing of two people with only one body between them, is such that likely neither person will really do well with the situation. A possessing spirit may be able to experience some of what the living host is feeling, ingesting or doing, but it will always be muffled and unsatisfactory. Addictions, of all sorts, can be driven by possessing spirits. The possessing spirit may push harder to get their desires met, even driving the host to death, but never truly satisfying their desires because of the inherent piggy-backing nature of the connection.

After working with literally hundreds of cases of possession, I have seen very little of it to be 'demonic' possession. By far, the average case of possession is by human beings who were unsuccessful in transitioning from the earth plane and who more or less fell into a situation of possessing another.

The average possession or overshadowing can result in illness, anger, fear, depression, mood swings, voices in the head, experiencing what seems like a past life, nightmares and sexual stimulation.

Robyn: So what about so called 'demonic' possession?

Betsy: Demonic possession is quite rare in proportion and can, of course, be quite severe. All the same sort of symptoms can be there, as well as a strong energy or 'aura' of what can best be

described of as 'evil' presence. When possession is caused by demonic beings and influences, the possession is often purposeful and phenomenal.

Possession, by either humans or demonic beings, causes the life force of the host to be drained, sometimes quite seriously. In demonic possession, the weaker the living person becomes, the more influential or apparent the demonic being becomes. This is also true for human possession, but will be markedly less extreme or evil.

Robyn: Where do these concepts come from?

Betsy: The concept of de-possession and possession has been around for as long as there has been recorded history. Most cultures began as shamanic societies and were aware of spirits and deities. They were concerned with what happens after death, both in terms of the soul or consciousness of the individual and for the safety of the living. Voluntary and involuntary possession were recognised and in some cases incorporated into religious practices. Methods for casting out or banishing spirits of the dead were necessary, and ranged from physical violence to the use of spells, incantations and prayers.

Robyn: How did you come to practice these things?

Betsy: I was taught by my Scottish grandmother to be aware that there were many more kinds of beings in the world than only those we could see. She grew up speaking gaelic and had been taught that our family had the 'second sight' or the ability to see beyond the 'veil'.

It became clear pretty quickly that I was aware of the earthbound spirits of the dead, both as ghosts and as attached to the living. I was able to see the correlation between

rapid mood shifts and illness in people and the beings who were with them. Learning to do something to help the people who were being possessed quickly became of great importance to me. I was also aware that the spirits of the dead were aware of me being aware of them. I, myself, had the experience of discarnate people attaching to me, hoping that I could help them. I had to learn to help them in self-defence.

Robyn: Why do you think this work is important?

Betsy: I observe that possession is more widespread than we might like to believe. Most possession is by dead people who haven't yet crossed over. Western culture in modern times has largely forgotten the role of the 'psychopomp'. We used to have many more rituals and observances around death than we do now. One of these was helping souls at the time of death.

A psychopomp is a person who conducts souls to an appropriate place after the time of death. There used to be people who provided society with that service, insuring that souls made it to safety and that the populations of family and friends were safe from the possibility of possession, hauntings or possession illness.

Spiritual illnesses often have a component of possession involved. It's as though we have a backlog of souls that are earth-bound and who through no fault of their own, become attached to the living. With the sheer numbers of humans and the loss of spiritual awareness, it has become a problem.

Robyn: Where and how does it fit within your shamanic practice?

Betsy: I have been practicing shamanism and other forms of alternative healing and energy medicine for over 20 years. After I began practicing soul retrieval, I noticed that sometimes after the retrieval that the client would become agitated. I began to see that the

agitation was often a product of the returning soul parts interacting with the presence of a possessing spirit.

Things would become quite activated for the client. When the being was cleared, the soul parts were able to integrate and the client would feel marvelous. I feel that compassionate de-possession and indeed, the unraveling of curses, both self inflicted and coming from others is a much overlooked part of Middleworld work in shamanism. It seems to be much more understood in indigenous cultures.

Robyn: You say de-possession is Middleworld work and it gets overlooked. Why is this?

Betsy: De-possession is an important part of any type of shamanic healing including core shamanism as taught by Michael Harner. Because of the wide range of possibilities inherent in possession, in the past, it was generally taught to advanced students. Journeys to the Upper and Lower world are generally safe, because of the nature of those realms. The same cannot be said for the Middleworld.

There are both dark and sublime things in the Middleworld, and so it is necessary to be cautious while travelling there. Yet, this is where we live and sleep, so I think we need to know about who is here living along with us.

I feel it is important for a serious shamanic practitioner to be trained in compassionate de-possession methods, because possession is fairly common and will come up in a person's healing practice. Being able to recognise it will help a client enormously, even if the practitioner decides to refer the client on to someone more skilled in this work at that point.

Robyn: What would you say was the difference between extraction - as taught in core shamanism - and de-possession?

Betsy: Personally I make a strong distinction between

Old graveyard
in South Uist,
off the West
coast of
Scotland



extraction and de-possession. Extraction is the removal, by various means, of intrusive energies that are not conscious and do not have a soul. Intrusions can overshadow us because of the content of their energy, but it is not true possession.

Possession is when there is a being with consciousness and a soul that is attached to a living person.

Robyn: What would you say was the difference between de-possession and exorcism?

Betsy: The distinction that I make is that de-possession is compassionate and non-adversarial. It seeks to restore balance and healing in a win-win manner for both the client and for the possessing spirit - who is seen as a 'suffering being' too, one separated from the light.

The client's experience is much more gentle, because the possessing spirit is helped to cross in a compassionate way. It tends to be more permanent.

Exorcism is adversarial. It involves banishing or casting out of the possessing spirit, and whether the spirit is (or was) human or not, it is seen as demonic. The desire is not to help a spirit cross to the light, but to cast the spirit into hell. Exorcism is fear based.

Robyn: What are the potential problems created by possession? How might it manifest symptomatically?

Betsy: Possession illness can include being overshadowed by someone else's emotions, desires and fears. It can be a part of both mental illness and physical illness, and can include symptoms such as voices in the head, energy blocks in the body, foggy thinking, addictions, sexual stimulation, general negativity and energetic phenomena. Sometimes a person may be treated for the 'suffering spirit's' problems, which generally means the medications are not very effective.

It can be a real problem in relationships if the possessing spirit is uncomfortable with the intimacy of the host's relationship with a partner. For instance, a woman could be possessed by a man, who then becomes uncomfortable with the woman's male partner, causing her to back away from the relationship.

Robyn: Is there a way to differentiate between everyday and overwhelming possession?

Betsy: What becomes key here is the strength factor, both in a host person and possessing spirit.

If the possessing spirit is very strong, it can become overwhelming pretty quickly for a host. Possession causes a person to lose their energy and etheric essence. That is one of the main points of possession. The beings need energy. So eventually, as a person becomes drained by the being or fatigued by events in their own life, the possessing spirit can gain more control.

I have seen this repeatedly when people have debilitating illness that may be at least partially caused by possession. As they weaken, the spirit's power and presence strengthens. Some people are very strong and could have possessing spirits that only manifest as energy blockages. Energetically weaker people, or mediumistic people could be impacted relatively quickly. It can be a slow change for the worse or it can be instantaneous.

Robyn: What is the extent of possession states in modern day Western societies?

Betsy: I personally feel it is pretty widespread. We have lost our practices, rituals and cosmologies about death. I think we are way behind in the practice of psychopomping the dead population of beings who don't cross because of confusion or attachments or fear. Dead people often seem to confuse the light of a living person with the great light.

Robyn: What sort of conditions can be helped through de-possession, what sort of changes can be brought about by it?

Betsy: Possession illness can cause physical symptoms, emotional blockages, phobias, devitalisation, mental illness, memory loss, identity confusion, gender confusion and addictions.

Compassionate de-possession can clear away the beings who may be causes of some of these illnesses. The method of compassionate de-possession also helps the possessed person to become truly aware of the light, of the angelic beings and compassionate spirits and of the truly loving and sublime experience that can be ours at the time of death as they witness the aid and crossing of the 'suffering being'.

Robyn: Are there ways that shamanic practitioners or others working in the caring professions might be vulnerable to uninvited hitchhikers, and are there ways of protecting against it?

Betsy: Healers can be open and exposed to the suffering beings that maybe around their clients, this just goes with the territory. Some practitioners have a habit of connecting energetically with their clients, which can make a transference of suffering beings from client to practitioner more likely under some conditions.

Usually, those conditions would include fatigue or lowered energy - in other words, a smaller, less vibrant energetic field (aura) in the practitioner. A less aura does just naturally open a practitioner to more beings or even intrusions and make them less resistant to picking something up from a client.

Not working when overtired, or learning ways to recover when your energies wane, becomes very important considerations for practitioners who deal with spiritual or possession illness.

Betsy Bergstrom is a full time shamanic practitioner and a graduate of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. She has worked in the field of alternative health for 20 years and specialises in de-possession work. Of her Sandra Ingerman writes, 'Betsy is the one I would train with in de-possession. I think she is a brilliant teacher' www.betsybergstrom.com

Robyn Fell BA Hons has an advanced diploma in shamanic therapy and is a full time shamanic practitioner. She maintains a small private practice in the Yorkshire Dales, as well as teaching and creating sacred ceremonial objects. www.robynfell.co.uk and www.robynfellartefacts.co.uk robynfell@yahoo.co.uk Tel: (01729) 824 693

Betsy Bergstrom will be teaching an introduction to compassionate heart centred de-possession in the UK in Sept 2008. Contact: Robyn Fell (see above) form more information and booking details.