

Who or What Is in the Driving Seat of Your Mind?

Superstition, Divination, Demon or Jesus?

Reflections Grace, Sin and Transformation 29 November 2014

Matthew 4:1-11

Ephesians 6:12-18 (quoted)

I hail from Malabar, in Kerala, the south-western state of India. Kerala is described as "God's own country." As one online source puts it: "Nestled between the pristine waters of the Arabian Sea on the west and the lush Western Ghat mountains on the east, its intense network of rivers and lagoons, thick forests, exotic wildlife, tranquil stretches of emerald backwaters and a long shoreline of serene beaches make it a traveller's paradise. God's own country!" It is the only state in India that can claim a hundred per cent literacy rate. Kerala can also claim the distinction of being the place where Christianity began in India: the state was blessed with the arrival of St Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, at a place called Maliankara, perhaps in AD 52. Tradition has it that Thomas evangelised, preached and performed miracles there.

I would hasten to add that it is also a land of superstition, black magic and strange spiritual practices. Having lived in that part of the country for more than sixteen years, until I finished school, it would be hypocritical of me to claim that none of this affected me; it did, though I had placed my trust in Jesus Christ at a very early age. It came to a head when I reached Indore, in Madhya Pradesh, to pursue my college studies. I began to have strange experiences: the unseen presence of someone wherever I went, water taps turning on of their own accord, electric lights coming on when no one had switched them on, and so on. My brother informed my father, who was then holidaying in Kerala, of my predicament. The day my father — who had trained to be a Christian priest — came back, he listened carefully to all we had to say about our experience. I remember him going into a time of prayer, rebuking the "evil spirit" and commanding it to leave his children alone. He did not give us a sermon, if I remember rightly, but told us, in no uncertain terms, that no power is above the power of Jesus, and that if we have Jesus with us, nothing can harm us. That, perhaps, was the last of my experience with the supernatural. It was a simple lesson for us, but one I like to talk about, teach about and preach about, whenever I have the opportunity, and to put into practice in my own life.

We have two forces that direct our lives: mind and spirit, or "soul and spirit," if you like. Though the terms "mind" and "brain" are used interchangeably in general parlance, the two are not the same. Let me

quote from a paper published by Billi Gordon, Ph.D., a specialist on the subject, who wrote: "The brain is most often associated with the mind, but they are not the same. The brain is part of the body. The mind is part of the transcendent world of wisdom and thought. Although the brain is the organ most associated with consciousness, the brain does not completely contain the mind. The mind's intelligence permeates every human cell, extending into the environment and carrying with it the wisdom of the ancients, social journey and kinship. The brain only connects the body; the mind connects all things. Pain communicates with the brain; suffering speaks to the mind."

Our spirit, on the other hand, is far more transcendent and pure than our mind. The mind may suffer from impure thoughts. Because of the purity of the spirit within us, the Holy Spirit resides in our spiritual being. Our spirit cannot be corrupted by any evil force, since God and evil cannot occupy the same place. But that is not the case with our mind. Temptation originates in the mind, and if it overwhelms us, it sends inappropriate signals to the brain, and we tend to do evil things. Satan is the tempter. Matthew 4:1-11 gives us an explicit account of how Satan tried his utmost to tempt Jesus Christ. Two important facts emerge from this passage: first, that Satan tried to influence the mind of Jesus but did not attempt, or could not attempt, to "possess" Him; and second, that Satan used ordinary objects, human nature and everyday circumstance to tempt Jesus — stone and hunger, a fall to death and the fear of death, and bribery and wealth.

I am of the view that evil spirits cannot "possess" a person in a physical sense. The "possession" mentioned in the Gospels represents extreme instances in which evil has so prodigiously influenced the mind of the victim that the mind continuously rejects the caution and call of the Spirit. The mind then sends evil signals to the brain, which the brain executes as action. Such actions are irrational, and we conclude that the victim is "possessed," because the evil has so thoroughly corrupted the mind. In that sense, most of us are "possessed" to some degree or other. Satan uses seemingly innocent objects, responses and actions to tempt our minds, and if we fall for it, more temptation follows. Some resist quickly; others sink deeper and deeper into strange patterns of thought and unsuitable activity. Such behaviour can include seeking out fortune-tellers and practitioners of black magic and divination, all of whom take advantage of such people, until, somewhere along the way, they neglect and forget the Helper — God the Holy Spirit — who resides in their spiritual self.

It is incorrect to think, as the evil one constantly whispers in our ears, that Jesus was able to withstand temptation because of His divine nature. He withstood it in His human nature, just as He suffered and died a terrible death on the cross in His human nature, bearing all the sins and sufferings of the whole of humanity. Having experienced the

intensity of Satan's temptations, after His ascension He came to dwell within us as the Holy Spirit, a constant resident helping us through the perils of temptation of the mind.

One may ask why the Holy Spirit allows us to fall for the temptations that come our way. God has given man the freedom of choice, and the ability to discern good from bad; it is this ability that becomes impaired when the evil one succeeds in influencing our minds. Finally, if we are rooted in Christ and trust Him, knowing that no power is higher than His, we have Him in the driving seat of our minds, and Satan will depart from us for ever.

This is what Paul had to say to us on the subject:

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." — **Ephesians 6:12-18**

Amen.