

Jinn الجن

By Abu Atallah

Introduction

In the Arab world there are varying degrees of emphasis on Jinn and demonic activities. The greatest emphasis seems to be in Morocco, the Gulf and Yemen. But the subject is very much alive, even in the most western and cultured Arab countries such as Tunisia. When you confront educated people on the subject they are embarrassed and ashamed. But even the most educated are committed to varying views of the Jinn and demonic activities. It is assumed as one of those taboo things that you do not talk about in public. In my years of living in the Arab world, I have seen many examples of this. This series of articles is an attempt to answer the question often put to me, "What does Islam say about the Jinn?" I will present the formal views of the Qur'an and the Hadith and will then briefly mention how belief in the Jinn is manifested in everyday life.

Orthodox Islam furnishes a great deal of light on the subject. But the dividing line between Folk and Orthodox Islam on this subject is very thin. Others have written to show the occultic nature of Islam. Although you may draw something of that from these articles, that is not my primary intention. My first goal is to show the relationship between Formal and Folk Islam on the subject. Secondly, and more importantly, I want to explore why Jinn play such a great part in a Muslim's life. What are they afraid of? What are some of their basic felt needs?

Definition of terms

1. **Jinn الجن** : from ijtinan, "becoming concealed, hidden." But this etymology is very difficult, and derivation as loan-word from genius is not quite excluded. The Jinn also used to be deities in old Arabia (see the Mo'allaqat, i.e. Pre-Islamic poetry). The singular is Jinni; Jann is used synonymously with Jinn.

2. **Al-Shaitan الشيطان**: is the chief of the evil spirits. The Qur'an says that Shaitan is made of fire. In religious thought Al-Shaitan is the power that opposes God in the hearts of men.

3. **Iblis إبليس** : is used as the personal name of the devil. Iblis was the main character in the story of Adam and Eve.

4. **Ghul غول** : for the ancient Arabs the ghul was a peculiarly bestial, diabolic and hostile variety of the marids, the Jinn which allured men from their path by assuming different forms, then fell upon them unawares to destroy and devour them.

5. **'ifrit عفریت** : according to the usual explanation, is one who overcomes his antagonist and rolls him in the dust. The 'ifrit are therefore powerful in a hostile, evil and crafty sense. In Modern Egypt the term is used of the ghost of a murdered man, or one who has died a violent death. The dictionary defines the 'Ifrit as "Shaitan, Satan, every proud and rebellious one among Jinn, men and animals." I

remember when my older brothers wanted to scare me they would say, "Watch out for the 'ifrit in the dark." Both Ghul and 'ifrit are classes of Jinn.

Jinn in Pre-Islamic Arabia

Jinn in pre-Islamic Arabia were the dryads and demons of the desert, the side of nature still unsubdued and hostile to man, while by the time of Mohammed they were viewed more as vague, impersonal gods. The Meccans asserted a kinship (*Nasab* نسب) between The Jinn and Allah (Sura 37:158), worshipped them (34:41), made them partners of Allah (6:100), made offerings to them (6:128) and sought aid of them (122:6). Also the words *Jinoun* جنون (craziness) and *Majnoun* مجنون (crazy person) signify being touched by the Jinn. (7:184), (81:22-24). The Ancient Arabs also believed that Jinn change shapes and forms and that many of them live in abandoned places, dark valleys, and graveyards. If an Arab happens to be in an area where the Jinn are presumed to be, they implore their help or their leaders' help. (Sura 72:6). It is interesting that the Jinn was a very popular subject in pre-Islamic poetry. The Arabs also believed that each poet had a Shaitan that gave him the verses of poetry.

Jinn in Islam

[In Qur'an & Sunnah (Hadith)]

One of the basic beliefs of Islam is *Al-Ghaib* الغيب, or belief in the invisible world (2:1-3). Both Angels and Jinn fall in this category. In formal or official

Islam the existence of the Jinn is completely accepted, even to this day, and the implications of this are worked out in detail. Their legal status in all respects was discussed and fixed, and the possible relations between them and mankind, such as in marriage and property, were examined. Some of the Mu'tazilis, however, ventured to doubt their existence and constructed different theories of their nature and influence on material things.

To Muslims the Jinn are airy or fiery bodies, intelligent, imperceptible, capable of appearing under different forms and of carrying out heavy labors. They were created of smokeless flame (Sura 105:15), while mankind and angels, the other two classes of intelligent beings, were created of clay and light. They can be saved; Mohammed was sent to them as well as to mankind. Some will enter the Garden and some will be cast into fire. Their relation to *Iblis*, *Al-Shaitan*, and the *shiiteen* is not clear. In Sura 58:50, Iblis is said to be of the Jinn, but Sura 2:34 implies that he is of the angels. In consequence there is much confusion, and many legends and hypotheses have grown up.

A. Their Existence in the Qur'an

The Qur'an contains 33 references to the Jinn as singular and 26 as plural. Iblis is mentioned 17 times, ifrit one time, and Shaitan 65 times. There is a whole chapter [sura] that is named Sura Al-Jinn. The following are clear examples of Jinn in the Qur'an:

51:56 *I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me.* (Yusuf Ali) I

created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me. (Pickthall)

46:29 *Behold, We turned towards thee a company of jinns (quietly) listening to the Qur'an: when they stood in the presence thereof, they said, "Listen in silence!" When the (reading) was finished, they returned to their people, to warn (them of their sins). (Yusuf Ali)*

And when We inclined toward thee (Muhammad) certain of the jinn, who wished to hear the Qur'an and, when they were in its presence, said: Give ear! and, when it was finished, turned back to their people, warning. (Pickthall)

72:1 *Say: It has been revealed to me that a company of jinns listened (to the Qur'an). They said, 'We have really heard a wonderful Recital!' (Yusuf Ali)*

6:130 *O ye assembly of the jinn and humankind! Came there not unto you messengers of your own who recounted unto you My tokens and warned you of the meeting of this your Day? They will say: We testify against ourselves. And the life of the world beguiled them. And they testify against themselves that they were disbelievers. (Pickthall)*

7:179 *Many are the Jinns and men we have made for Hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle,- nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning). (Yusuf Ali)*

Already have We urged unto hell many of the jinn and humankind, having hearts wherewith they understand not, and having eyes wherewith they see not, and having ears wherewith they hear not.

These are as the cattle—nay, but they are worse! These are the neglectful. (Pickthall)

27:17 *And before Solomon were marshalled his hosts,- of Jinns and men and birds, and they were all kept in order and ranks. (Yusuf Ali)*

And there were gathered together unto Solomon his armies of the jinn and humankind, and of the birds, and they were set in battle order. (Pickthall)

B. Their Creation from Fire

15:27 is a clear Qur'anic reference to the creation of Jinn from fire.

And the Jinn race, We had created before, from the fire of a scorching wind. (Yusuf Ali). And the jinn did We create aforetime of essential fire. (Pickthall)

Sahih Muslim 0903—*Dawud reported from Amir who said: I asked Alqamah if Ibn Mas'ud were present with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) on the night of the Jinn (the night when the Holy Prophet met them). ... He (the Holy Prophet) said: There came to me a petitioner on behalf of the Jinn and I went with him and recited the Qur'an to them. He (the narrator) said: He then went with him and showed us their tracks and the traces of their embers. This Hadith implies that the Jinn were created from fire because of the traces of embers.*

Muslim scholars have differed on whether the origin of Iblis is the same as the Jinn. Some early scholars, such as Zamakhshari, Ibn Taimiya, Yusuf Ali, and Ibn Katheir, took the view that Iblis is from the Jinn. Later scholars such as Alwasi, Ibn 'Ashour and Shan-

qiti also agreed with this view. They used the following verse in the Qur'an as their evidence:

Behold! We said to the angels, "Bow down to Adam": They bowed down except Iblis. He was one of the Jinns, and he broke the Command of his Lord. Will ye then take him and his progeny as protectors rather than Me? And they are enemies to you! Evil would be the exchange for the wrong-doers! 18:50 (Yusuf Ali)

They also used Sahih Muslim 7134 from the Hadith:

Allah's Apostle (PBUH) said: The Angels were born out of light and the Jinns were born out of the spark of fire and Adam was born as he has been defined (in the Qur'an) for you (i.e. he is fashioned out of clay). They argue that angels never disobey God and are created from light.

Others like Tabari, Ibn Abas, Ibn Jarier and Qitadah claimed that Iblis is an angel and that some angels were created from light and others from fire. They also maintain that linguistically the word Jinn was used of Angels as well as Jinns.

C. Their Gender

55:56: *In them will be (Maidens), chaste, restraining their glances, whom no man or Jinn before them has touched. (Yusuf Ali) Therein are those of modest gaze, whom neither man nor jinni will have touched before them. (Pickthall) We find that the maidens have not been touch by Jinn. This implies male Jinn.*

Also 72: 6 : *True, there were persons (men) among mankind who took shelter with persons (men) among the Jinns, but*

they increased them in folly. The mention here of male Jinn implies that there are also female Jinn. Sahih al-Bukhari 5.206 states clearly that there are female Jinn.

The Qur'an also refers to male and female descendants among the Jinn

Behold! We said to the angels, "Bow down to Adam": They bowed down except Iblis. He was one of the Jinns, and he broke the Command of his Lord. Will ye then take him and his progeny as protectors rather than Me? And they are enemies to you! Evil would be the exchange for the wrong-doers! 18:50 Taking Iblis and his progeny as protector implies that Jinns have sexual interaction resulting in offspring. Muslims argue that the existence of males and females necessitates offspring.

D. Their Habitats

Abu Dawud 0006—*The Apostle of Allah (PBUH) said: These privies are frequented by the jinns and devils. So when anyone amongst you goes there, he should say: "I seek refuge in Allah from male and female devils."*

Sahih Al-Bukhari 4:516, from AbuHurayrah—*The Prophet (PBUH) said, "If anyone of you rises from sleep and performs the ablution, he should wash his nose by putting water in it and then blowing it out thrice, because Satan has strayed in the upper part of his nose all the night.*

Sahih Al-Bukhari 7:527, from Jabir ibn Abdullah—*Allah's Apostle (PBUH) said, "When night falls (or when it is evening), stop your children from going*

out, for the devils are abroad at that time. But when an hour of the night has passed, release them and close the doors and mention Allah's Name, for Satan does not open a closed door. Tie the mouth of your waterskin and mention Allah's Name; cover your containers and utensils and mention Allah's Name. Cover them even by placing something across it, and extinguish your lamps.

Sahih Muslim 5006, from Jabir ibn Abdullah—Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: When a person enters his house and mentions the name of Allah at the time of entering it and while eating the food, Satan says (addressing himself): You have no place to spend the night and no evening meal; but when he enters without mentioning the name of Allah, Satan says: You have found a place to spend the night and an evening meal.

Sahih Muslim 2597, from Abdullah ibn Amr—When the Apostle of Allah (PBUH) was travelling and night came on, he said: O earth, my Lord and your Lord is Allah; I seek refuge in Allah from your evil, the evil of what you contain, the evil of what has been created in you, and the evil of what creeps upon you; I seek refuge in Allah from lions, from large black snakes, from other snakes, from scorpions, from the evil of jinn which inhabit a settlement, and from a parent and his offspring.

Sahih Muslim 5236, from AbuSa'id al-Khudri—The Apostle of Allah (PBUH) said: Some snakes are jinn; so when anyone sees one of them in his house, he should give it a warning three times. If it returns (after that), he should kill it, for it is a devil. (See also Abu Dawud, 5236)

Sahih Muslim 1101, from Abu-Umamah—Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: Straighten your rows, stand shoulder to shoulder, stand close to the end of your brothers, and close up the intervening spaces, for Satan penetrates what is between them as does a black kid (meaning the young of the goat). Transmitted by Ahmad

Al-Muwatta' of Imam Malik 54.13.33, from AbuSa'id al-Khudri—AbuSa'id mawla of Hisham ibn Zuhrah said, "I went to AbuSa'id al-Khudri and found him praying. I sat to wait for him until he finished the prayer. I heard a movement under a bed in his room, and it was a snake. I stood up to kill it, and AbuSa'id gestured to me to sit. When he was finished he pointed to a room in the house and said, 'Do you see this room?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'There was a young boy in it who had just got married. He went out with the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, to al-Khandaq, (the ditch which the Muslims dug in the 5th year of the Hijrah to defend Madinah against the Quraysh and their allies.) When he was there, the youth came and asked his permission, saying, 'Messenger of Allah, give me permission to return to my family.' The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, gave him permission and said, 'Take your weapons with you, for I fear the Banu Qurayzah tribe. They may harm you.' The youth went to his family and found his wife standing between the two doors. He lifted his spear to stab her as jealousy had been aroused in him. She said, 'Don't be hasty until you go in

and see what is in your house." He entered and found a snake coiled up on his bed. He transfixed it with his spear and then went out with it and pitched it into the house. The snake stirred on the end of the spear and the youth fell dead. No one knew which of them died first, the snake or the youth. That was mentioned to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and he said, "There are jinn in Madinah who have become Muslim. When you see one of them, call out to it for three days. If it appears after that, then kill it, for it is a shaytan."

E. Times when They are Most Active

Sahih Bukhari 4:533—The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Cover your utensils and tie your waterskins, and close your doors and keep your children close to you at night, as the Jinns spread out at such time and snatch things away. When you go to bed, put out your lights, for the mischief-doer (i.e. the rat) may drag away the wick of the candle and burn the dweller of the house." Ata said, "The devils." (instead of the Jinn).

Sahih Bukhari 7:527, from Jabir ibn Abdullah—Allah's Apostle (PBUH) said, "When night falls (or when it is evening), stop your children from going out, for the devils are abroad at that time. But when an hour of the night has passed, release them and close the doors and mention Allah's Name, for Satan does not open a closed door. Tie the mouth of your waterskin and mention Allah's Name; cover your containers and utensils and mention Allah's Name. Cover them

even by placing something across it, and extinguish your lamps."

Mishkat Al Masabih 1960—Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "When the first night of Ramadan comes, the devils and the rebellious jinn are chained, the gates of Hell are locked and not one of them is opened; the gates of Paradise are opened and not one of them is locked; and a crier calls, 'You who desire what is good, come forward, and you who desire evil, refrain.' Some are freed from Hell by Allah, and that happens every night."

F. Their Food

Sahih Al-Bukhari 1:583 (See also Sahih Al-Bukhari 5:200)—The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Bring me stones in order to clean my private parts, and do not bring any bones or animal dung." Abu-Hurayrah went on: "So I brought some stones, carrying them in the corner of my robe till I put them by his side and went away. When he finished, I walked with him and asked, 'What about the bone and the animal dung?' He said, 'They are of the food of jinns. The delegate of jinns of (the city of) Nasibin came to me—and how nice those jinns were—and asked me for the remains of the human food. I invoked Allah for them that they would never pass by a bone or animal dung but find food on them.'"

Abu Dawud 0039—A deputation of the jinn came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said: O Muhammad, forbid your community to cleanse themselves with a bone or dung or charcoal, for in them Allah has provided sustenance for us. So the Prophet (PBUH) forbade them to do so.

Sahih Muslim 0903, from Ibn

Mas'ud—*They (the Jinn) asked him (the Holy Prophet) about their provision and he said: Every bone on which the name of Allah is recited is your provision. The time it falls in your hand it shall be covered with flesh, and the dung of (the camels) is fodder for your animals. The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: Don't perform istinja with these (things) for these are the food of your brothers (Jinn).*

Sahih Muslim 5006, from Jabir ibn

Abdullah—*Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: When a person enters his house and mentions the name of Allah at the time of entering it and while eating the food, Satan says (addressing himself): You have no place to spend the night and no evening meal; but when he enters without mentioning the name of Allah, the Satan says: You have found a place to spend the night and evening meal. This hadith has been narrated on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdullah through the same chain of transmitters but with a slight variation of wording.*

G. Their Mortality

In the day when He will gather them together (He will say): O ye assembly of the jinn! Many of humankind did ye seduce. And their adherents among humankind will say: Our Lord! We enjoyed one another, but now we have arrived at the appointed term which Thou appointedst for us. He will say: Fire is your home. Abide therein for ever, save him whom Allah willeth (to deliver). Lo! thy Lord is Wise, Aware.6:128 (Pickthall)

And We have destined for them intimate companions (of like nature), who made alluring to them what was before them and behind them; and the sentence among the previous generations of Jinns and men, who have passed away, is proved against them; for they are utterly lost. 41:25 (Yusuf Ali)

Sahih Al-Bukhari 9.480—*The Prophet (PBUH) used to say, "I seek refuge (with YOU) by Your Izzah (power). None has the right to be worshipped but You Who does not die while the Jinns and the human beings die."*