

Zeeraan

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The word "zeeraan" comes from an Arabic root which means to visit. It is the plural of the word "zaar" meaning visitor. "Jinns" and zeeraan both play a large part in the lives of the people but there is one great difference between them and that is, that jinns are of the earth and are connected with the underworld and are objects of fear, but zeeraan are from heaven. In connection with both is used the expression "taht edh-dhoureh," meaning, "under compulsion." Any wish or order from a zaar or jinn is binding, and a person is "under compulsion" when he has received such an order or wish. Those who are "under compulsion" because of jinn are objects of commiseration, and are considered great sufferers; but because of this purgatorial suffering in this world they are sure of an immediate entrance into heaven. Zeeraan are not feared and are not considered a torment. Zeeraan come to both men and women; those that come to men are feminine and those that come to women are masculine. When the zeeraan come to a man and he is giving a feast for them he must wear at least one article of a woman's dress. When the women have their zeeraan visiting them they occasionally wear an article of man's dress but that is not the rule. It is said that one of the prominent men of the place is compelled by his zeeraan to put on, every Friday, all of a woman's dress, including her jewelry and hair decorations, especially the spicy green herb called "mashmoum," which is very definitely and necessarily part of a woman's toilet. When these visitors come there is one chief party who is called the zaar and he with his followers constitute the zeeraan. This chief has a name; those visiting the women are called Sheikh Abd el-Lateef, Sheikh Abd el-Kareem, Sheikh Abd el-Azeez, Bakheet, Shmaiter, and those visiting the women have feminine names such as, Sheikh eh, Lateefeh, Bakheeteh. The outward sign of being possessed by a zaar is the wearing of a signet ring, with the name of the zaar and of the person himself engraven on a red stone, and also the "shehadeh" or witness, "La illaha illa allah, wa Mohammed rasoul allah," there is no God but God and Mohammed is the prophet of God. Sometimes there are people who have the zeeraan but who are ashamed to be known as such, especially among the ruling class and the "four hundred." These wear a ring with the simple engraving, "En-nasru min allah wa fethun kareeb," the victory is from God and deliverance is near. This signet ring must receive a bath of blood before it becomes efficacious, and so a fowl must be killed and the stone soaked in the blood.

There are various groups of people who have zeeraan and each of these groups has its own head who exercises authority and who advises others. Such a one is called "abu ez-zeeraan, or "um ez-zeeraan," meaning, "the father or mother of the zeeraan." This denotes that such a one excels in the number of zeeraan that possess him and who is in close touch with the zeeraan. Sometimes they are also called "sheikh or sheikheh ez-zeeraan," but locally the term "abu" or "um"

is more common. Amongst the zeeraanists it is considered a great honor to be such an "abu" or, "um" and a great deal of deference is paid to them, and besides this it pays well financially. The word of an "abu" or "um" is final. The following illustration shows what trickery there is about it all and how willingly the people are duped. A certain woman died and her sister-in-law wished to have an article of dress of the deceased. But the sister-in-law's mother was doubtful whether it would be well for her daughter to wear the deceased woman's clothing and so decided to ask the "um ez-zeeraan" about it. Her answer to the mother was, that it would be unwise for the daughter to wear that piece of clothing, but that she, the "um," would take it and wear it for her, vicariously so to speak, and the mother uncom-



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plainly parted with the article. The Arabs and the negroes pay a great deal of attention to these zeeraan. The Baharanes believe in zeeraan but they are much more quiet about it, and if they have many gatherings for them it is kept quiet. There is one woman of this class, who are Shiahs, who is an "um," but investigations show only this one, while the Arabs and negroes have many.

It is very difficult to find out just how or when the presence of zeeraan is ascertained. In cases of sickness it seems that when there is some baffling illness, or some puzzling symptoms appear, the conclusion is that zeeraan have entered the sick person. Much more is heard of women who are possessed than men, and without doubt the explanation is that since Moslem women are such constant sufferers as a result of the license of Islam, there is much more occasion to consider them possessed by zeeraan. From the descriptions of various com-

plaints and the barbaric treatments given, it may quite safely be concluded that what, medically, would be diagnosed as delirium, or a paroxysm of pain, or stupor, or a faint, is here diagnosed as zeeraan.

Last winter a man died who was said to have zeeraan. According to the story of the family there was nothing at all the matter with him except the presence of zeeraan. But little by little it developed that two months previous to his final illness he had been hurt. Apparently he recovered from the first effects of the injuries he had received and so, in their minds, that accident had no connection with his later illness. When, during the last attack, his wife was urged to send for the doctor, her reply was, "This is something which a doctor can not cure, it is no sickness, just zeeraan, and there is no medicine for that, otherwise we would have cauterized him." The last day that the man lived the family apparently became frightened enough to cauterize him in spite of the zeeraan. He died about two hours later in great distress. The rule is that cauterizing is not resorted to until it is established that there are no zeeraan. A woman who was ill for some time with a bad leg was advised by helpful neighbors and friends to try the treatment for zeeraan, but she and her family persistently refused to accept that theory and so the leg was cauterized. She got well eventually and so disproved the statement of her friends.

Other outward manifestations that give rise to the belief that zeeraan are present are, moroseness which causes long spells of silence, hysteria, anger, excess of foolish talk and jesting and other abnormal actions. Not all people will have dealings with zeeraan or with those that are possessed with them, but the reasons for this vary greatly. One woman had been ill for seven years. She is very hysterical and very obstinate. Her suffering was very intense at times, and, in her hysteria, she abandoned all self control so that her people were often very perplexed how to take care of her. They decided that she had zeeraan but she herself refused to have them and has refused so obstinately ever since that she has won out and no one now says that she has them.

With some people it is fear of financial loss that causes them to refuse to have zeeraan, either for themselves or for any member of their family. The woman with the sore leg said: "No, the zeeraan never come to our family, we never have had them and never want them"; or another, "No, no, thank God, we have not got them in our family." Sometimes a man will divorce his wife because she has zeeraan, or if he learns that the girl or woman he was going to marry has them he will break his marriage agreement. And the reason in all these instances is a financial one. People possessed by zeeraan must give feasts at various times, and the women are prompted by their zeeraan to demand from their husbands new clothing, new jewelry, and new house furnishings, and if these are not forthcoming the zeeraan threaten that severe calamities will overtake them. So unless the husband is prepared to assume such burdens he very promptly rids himself of the cause, and families refuse to entertain the very idea of zeeraan because of the constant drain upon their time and strength and money.

There is still another class of people who refuse to have any dealings with zeeraan and zeeraanists, because they consider the whole system a disgrace and foolishness. One Arab bought a slave woman but very soon after the woman made some demand to appease her zeeraan. He at once resold her, refusing to have such a woman about, fearing that the other slaves would learn from her. A very prominent Moslem family in town have always refused to have any dealings with zeeraan and have strict orders in their household that no one must have them or associate with those that do. The order is, "Watch out, don't you dare to have zeeraan or go to those who do." As a general rule those who become possessed are young girls who are too inexperienced to contradict the statement of their elders, those who are excessively superstitious, those who desire and seek notoriety and excitement, those who are easily influenced and duped, and those who are simple and unbalanced. The presence of zeeraan seldom denotes great strength of character and independence of thought except in the leaders, and in them it is often a means to an end.

At first one is possessed by only a single zaar or a very few of them, but as these increase the possessor becomes an "um" or "abu." When some one is supposed to have zeeraan the "um" or "abu" is consulted and this oracle gives directions as to what must be done. Always there are feasts to be given by one who has a zaar or zeeraan, and to these feasts are invited, when for men, all those men who have zeeraan, and for a woman, all the women so possessed. Only those who belong to their society, or fraternity, are invited. When there is a feast word must be sent to all members, some of whom live in far distant villages. These must all be present, the penalty for non-appearance being to give a feast to all the zeeraan community. The negroes and the Arabs intermingle in these meetings but the Baharanes do not mingle with the others; the only outsiders they have with them are the negro musicians. Some members of the fraternity constitute the band and the instruments they play are the drum, tambourine and bagpipe. There are also a number of dancers. The members of this band are in the service of an "abu" or "um." Whenever there is a meeting of the zeeraanists the band plays during all the exercises which are carried out, the exception being the first time that a feast is given, by some one, to his zaar. The first "feast," as it is called, is of rice prepared with syrup. Besides this there is a tray full of all kinds of eatables such as peanuts, raisins, cakes, sweets of various kinds, melons, dates and fruits in season, nuts and so forth, the greater the variety the more acceptable the presentation. There must be at least about ten side dishes. Then there must be one dish into which is put the money for the "abu" or "um." The amount varies according to the wealth of the one who is giving the feast. For a first time the amount may be as high as twenty rupees or as little as six. This amount is increased considerably with each successive feast, and in addition those that play in the band and the dancers must also be paid.

When there is a meeting of a zeeraan association they gather in one large room in which incense is freely burned and which is consequently full of smoke. The person who is being visited by his zaar

and who is giving the feast at the zaar's command, is covered with a large cloth, and under this cloth are placed three incense burners filled with hot coals and incense, and until this incense is burned out of all of them the covering is not removed. This method is supposed to give special evidence of the presence of the zaar. Almost suffocated, and choking in this smoke, it is small wonder that the possessed one does show very lively symptoms of distress, which are considered evidences of the zaar's presence! After this expected and satisfactory evidence



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that the zaar is present the rice and the tray with food are brought in and he is asked whether he is satisfied, if all has been properly prepared, if there is any lack, and so on. Then the zaar will complain and say, "This is very little honor you are showing me; I expected a 'dhebeeh,' and all you have prepared for me is plain rice," "Dhebeeh" means roast mutton with rice and accompanying side dishes, such as gravies and stews. The answer to the zaar's peevish complaint is something like this, "O zaar, we have done all we could just now, we have no more money this year. You must have a little patience with us!" "Well, I will be patient, but when then will you give me a bigger feast?" "Next year," or "Two years from now," or "If the next diving season is a successful one," are the replies. Also at this time the zaar makes his request for new clothes, new jewelry, or new house furnishings.

The second feast that is given to one's zaar is like the first with the musicians as an additional attraction. While the band tom-toms, the rest of the visiting zeeraanists and the "um" get down on their knees and crawl towards the one possessed, making grunting noises as they do so. This is kept up for a long time until all are under the influence of the zeeraan and get communication from them.

The great feast ordered by the zeeraan is called "kabsh," meaning ram, and is so called because a sacrifice must be offered and this sacrifice is always a ram. The tray with all the side dishes is about the same as in the previous feasts, but the fee for the "abu" or "um" is very substantially increased. In pre-war days the fee was sometimes as much as five hundred rupees. The room for a "kabsh" is always a very large room. The meeting begins in the evening with a general dinner, but which is as a rule not an elaborate one. After the dinner the leader begins to chant, "La illaha illa allah wa Mohammed rasoul allah," all the others joining in chorus, and this exercise is kept up for about an hour, and all the while their bodies are swaying back and forth in rhythm to the chant. After this is ended the whole company get down on their knees and go through the crawling, grunting exercise which is kept up until they are exhausted. After a little rest the musicians begin their playing and do not stop until the next feature in the program, which is riding the ram by the party who is visited by the zaar. Sometimes this is done at midnight if, as they say, the zaar is not a very proud one, but if he considers himself very important this exercise takes place at dawn. The ram to be ridden is decorated with "mashmoum" and the rider is the one in whom the zaar is. The rider goes around the circle three or four times. This is seldom accomplished except with great cruelty to the poor beast, which is pulled and prodded in a most unmerciful way, and it is a mercy that it is killed later for it is usually injured in this exercise.

After this first riding the company all take some rest until an hour or two after daybreak when the second riding takes place, in the same way as the first. Immediately after this the ram is killed. This is done by the "abu" or "um" as the case may be, assisted by the zaar, as the possessed one is called, and a third party. The head of the ram is held over a large tray or dish, for not a drop of blood must be spilled or wasted. When the beast is killed, a glass is filled with the blood and into it is put some saffron and some sugar and the zaar drinks while the blood is warm. Three or four others of the company then strip the zaar and give him the "blood bath." The zaar is then dressed and put to sleep for an hour and after that is bathed to remove the blood and dressed in new clothes and new ornaments or decorations. In the meantime the sacrifice has been preparing. As with the blood so with the body; not a hair or bone or any of the entrails must be spilled or thrown away. The entrails and feet are boiled separately, but the skin, turned inside out and tied, is cooked with the rest of the body including the head. When all is cooked, a portion is brought to each table (the table is a large mat spread on the floor), and all the rest of the food is placed around the central dish. A stick, which has been bathed in the blood of the animal, is placed before the zaar. When all is in readiness, the leader asks the zaar,

"Is everything here that you want? Are all the bones here of your sacrifice? Tell us now if there is anything amiss and don't say later that this or that was not done right and that therefore you will take revenge on us by bringing upon us some accident." The zaar is commanded to answer and if he does not he is beaten with the bloody stick until he does. Usually the answer is that all is well but promises are exacted that in the future a similar feast shall be made in his honor.

Generally zeeraan content themselves with ordering feasts and other material pleasures, but occasionally they show a more cruel and capricious nature. A Bedouin woman in the hospital who was nursing a sick daughter suddenly departed very early one morning. When the daughter was questioned about the matter she said that the zeeraan had come to her mother during the night and told her that unless she left the hospital at daybreak to go to Refaa' (about eight miles away), they would slaughter her. The woman left at once. Another very sick woman in the hospital was removed, very suddenly, by her relatives, in spite of all the entreaties of the hospital workers. The relatives said that the girl had zeeraan and no doubt this sudden action was at their direction. Later it was learned that the girl died before she reached her home.

There does not seem to be the least desire or effort on the part of those possessed to be freed from their zeeraan. This, perhaps, is due to the fact that it provides them with a great deal of fun and excitement, and gives them distinction and authority which otherwise they would not have. One very good explanation in reference to all these beliefs and practices comes from a woman who is an inquirer. She said, "If a person wants to believe in these things and opens the heart and mind to them their influence and control is sure to follow, just as when one hears about Christ and opens the heart to His power, evil must go out." It is another way of saying, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." The subject of zeeraan occupies a large part in the lives of the people and it is only the Gospel of Christ that can cast out these demons.

