



The Psychology of Demonization: Promoting Acceptance and Reducing Conflict

Nahi Alon, Haim Omer

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Throughout human history, the relationships of individuals and groups have been disrupted by what the authors sum up as "demonization," the attribution of basic destructive qualities to the other or to forces within the self. Demonization results in constant suspicion and blame, a systematic disregard of positive events, pressure to eradicate the putative negative persons or forces, and a growing readiness to engage in escalating conflict. Richly illustrated with 24 case stories, this book explores the psychological processes involved in demonization and their implications for the effort to effect change in relationships, psychotherapy, and beyond the office or clinic in the daily lives of families, organizations, and societies.

Recent popular psychology--the authors argue--has tended to encourage demonization. An appropriate alternative to this view is known as the "tragic view": Suffering is inevitable in life; negative outcomes are a result of a confluence of factors over which one has only a very limited control; there is no possibility of reading into the hidden "demonic" layers of the other's mind; the other's actions, like our own, are multiply motivated; escalation is a tragic development rather than the result of an evil "master plan"; and finally, skills for promoting acceptance and reducing escalation are necessary for diminishing interpersonal suffering. The authors describe and illustrate a series of these skills both for psychotherapy and for personal use. Finally, they lay out an approach to consolation and acceptance, the neglect of which they attribute to the dominance of demonic views.

The Psychology of Demonization: Promoting Acceptance and Reducing Conflict will be appreciated by all those professionally and personally concerned with the state of relationships.

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