

## PARAPSYCHOLOGY IN TURKEY

RESAT BAYER

I have been invited to this Conference to give a presentation regarding the history and development of scientific psychical research in Turkey and, more generally, in the Middle East. Although I know enough about the development of scientific psychical research in the Middle Eastern countries, I do not see myself entitled to speak here as a selected representative of all the countries of this section of the world. So, I will keep my survey within the bounds of the activities of my own country—Turkey.

As I am asked to give here the entire history of psychical research in Turkey from earliest days to the present time, I have to take a short glance over the history, and present some fabulous beliefs that may be considered psychical manifestations, but have certainly not been subjected to scientific research.

The Turks belong to the Turanian race which comprises the Manchus and Mongols of North China, the Finns and the Turks of Central Asia. The Turks lived in Central Asia periodically in many independent tribes and clans, and sometimes under feudal systems. Although Oguz is believed to have been the most powerful Khan of those distant times, he has a legendary personality rather than a real one. It is said that his mother, who was a princess, conceived him from a very bright light that descended from Heaven. This belief in his divinity was so deep that anyone after him who claimed the throne, in any Turkish state, had to be a descendant of Oguz Kahn. This rule prevailed from some thousands of years before Christ until the Turks had emigrated to Asia Minor, their present land. Even Osman Bey, who was just a warlord of the Seljukian Empire, had to prove, upon claiming the throne, that he was descended from Oguz Kahn. One night when he stayed as a guest of a certain Moslem Sheh, he had a dream. In this dream he saw a tree growing up from his own umbilicus and expanding to cover the whole world. This dream was interpreted by the Sheh to mean that descendants of Osman Bey would establish a very large empire that would influence the whole world.

The dream finally came true about the beginning of the seventeenth century, when Mohamet III ascended the throne.

During the rule of the Ottoman Empire (which took its name from Osman Bey), many emperors and sultans kept a band of astrologers in the palace. Some of the sultans were even inclined to decide all political and economic questions of the Empire according to the suggestions of those astrologers. In fact, about the end of the eighteenth century Mustafa III, noticing the wealth and power of Prussia, wrote to the king of that country asking him to send him three of his astrologers! As another example, there was the strong desire of Osman III, who lived about the end of the eighteenth century, to have a son who would become a very famous conqueror. He ordered his astrologers to tell him the best birth date and hour of this child so that he would become, without fail, a conqueror. After having made the necessary calculations, the astrologers suggested to the emperor the best time of conception for his purpose. After the necessary period had elapsed a boy was born but with a difference of two hours. The head astrologer, having noticed the error he made, at once changed the clock for fear of the emperor's rage. The newborn baby, who later became Selim III, developed into a good-natured man with great talents for music and poetry rather than the make-up of a conqueror. But he was raised in conformity with his father's desire; he, too, took himself to be a real conqueror, but those baseless beliefs brought him to a fatal end—he was assassinated.

I have kept myself so far within the bounds of a very short presentation about the inclination to psychic beliefs in Ottoman palace circles. If I dwell on the psychic beliefs among Turkish people and describe Dervish convents and cells where theosophy was greatly expanded and promoted while the main subject taught in universities was theology, I will not be able to keep my paper down to thirty minutes.

In summarizing we may say that in Turkey, as in many other countries, paranormal phenomena that seem to be inexplicable have occurred throughout the country for many centuries and have aroused curiosity in the population regarding the mystery of nature. Although it is not possible to state that curiosity has given way to scientific research, it is known that, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century, many private sittings have been held in home circles, with frequent endeavors to obtain messages from the world beyond through mediums, especially in cities such as Istanbul and others where there were many educated people.

Twenty years ago, in 1950, the eminent Dr. Bedri Ruhselman founded the first Turkish Metapsychical and Scientific Research So-

ciety in Istanbul, of which for many years I have been the General Secretary. This famous Turkish philosopher and Spiritualist is unfortunately unknown in Western countries because his many valuable works are in Turkish only.

I would like to emphasize here especially that, contrary to the practice of many other well-known Spiritualists of other, more civilized countries, Dr. Ruhselman never had any intention of explaining all the phenomena of Spiritualism, in his many works, within the framework of religious beliefs and institutions. I may say that Spiritualism in Turkey has never been kept within such a framework and thus it has found a way for free expansion. I believe then that Spiritualism in Turkey is far ahead and much more advanced than it is in many other countries. I have to add also that Turkey, not being restricted in this fashion, is ready and ripe for the parapsychological approach and progress.

Although Dr. Ruhselman was one of the most valuable codifiers of Spiritualism who elaborated a great deal on the works of the eminent Allan Kardec and brought many improvements to his famous book entitled *Le Livre des Esprits*, it is unfortunately impossible to present his endeavors as scientific activities, for they were all entirely based on messages apparently received from the world beyond with the help of various mediums.

We know that mediums may be honest people and that they may also be liars, charlatans and professionals with different aims, seeking different benefits, or innocent liars who give messages from their subconscious. We know also that Spiritualists who have acquired a reputation and fame only with the help of their controls, with whom they are in close cooperation, have avoided, so far, from fear, the use of methods that would distinguish real messages emanating from the world beyond from those futile prattlings and nonsense of their controls, though this would be easy to do.

In these circumstances Spiritualism which manifests its activities mostly in ordinary mediumship will never be accepted by universities and scientific research centers. Have we not to base our researches at least on something well known and studied to unveil the mystery of nature?

In this line of thought, and after many disappointments experienced in other countries and through exchange of letters with the world of Spiritualism, I have found it indispensable to steer our attention toward the scientific study of Spiritualism as a part of parapsychology and so I founded in 1963, in Istanbul, the first Turkish Society for Parapsychological Research. Since then I have, with the help of my

colleagues, concentrated our endeavors on two phases of parapsychology: First phase—the experimentation in extrasensory perception with the use of Zener cards for telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and with dice for psychokinesis. For the latter we designed and made our own apparatus. Second phase—the study and investigation of spontaneous cases and various paranormal happenings.

After many experiments in extrasensory perception, we have noticed that the scores obtained by chance could never be eliminated from such experiments with the use of Zener cards and dice. Thus a conclusive result, the usual requirement of science, will never be reached and maintained.

Although some of our percipients were successful in obtaining even 18 hits with 25 cards, we were never sure enough about the influence of chance in the ESP experiments. Though, considering the calculation of probability, it seemed to us almost impossible to obtain such a high score by chance only, the result thus obtained was still far from being considered scientific proof. Thus, we found that we had to determine the degree of the influence of chance in those experiments. We wanted to know what scores could be obtained by chance only. So I made a simple apparatus just to be convinced that such high scores could not be obtained by chance. But, unfortunately the result obtained was very unexpected. The apparatus I made is just a simple cubical wooden box having sides about 15 cm. wide. Inside, it is lined with a thick cloth to muffle the noise of 25 white spherical marbles which are shaken in it. The box has two openings, with shutters, large enough to let the marbles in and out. A channel just large and long enough to hold all 25 marbles together on a straight line, is attached to the box near one opening. The marbles bear the same designs as Zener cards, made with black Chinese ink, i.e., five circles, five crosses, five squares, and so on.

The experimenter shuffles the Zener cards and puts them aside. Then, he places the 25 marbles in the box and after shaking it a while lets the marbles run out from the opening into the attached channel. Thus, the experiment is ended. The experimenter makes up the ESP record sheet with the call made with 25 marbles and the Zener cards that had been shuffled and put aside.

It is necessary to emphasize here that after many thousands of repeated experiments, such notably high scores as 16, 17, 18 out of 25 cards have been obtained. The important point in those experiments is that no extrasensory perception was involved and the scores were obtained only by pure chance, for there was no concentration, and no

percipients, and the experimenter might sing or chatter with colleagues in the course of these manipulations.

In such circumstances, the vivid and very strong impressions which occur only in spontaneously manifested extrasensory perceptions such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, etc., cannot be experimentally obtained and successfully studied regardless of what efforts may be made and however serious and sincere the observers and percipients are.

Regarding our psychokinetic studies, I have to say that, again to eliminate the influence of chance, I substituted for the experiments with dice a very sensitive scale put under a glass cover. In such an experiment we think it will be easier for the subject to alter the equilibrium of the scale rather than to obtain the scores required from the dice when they are allowed to fall from the opening of a revolving box which occurs in many different and very complex positions and conditions. On the other hand, when the equilibrium of the scale is thus altered, the observers will be categorically sure that the subject really exercised a psychokinetic faculty and they will never be under any suspicion about the influence of chance which is not in question in such experiments.

In the time available I cannot give you more details about other apparatus made by myself and by my colleagues and which may be used both in psychokinetic studies and in spiritism, replacing the incomprehensible mediums who have to be, sooner or later, gently and kindly excluded from the sittings. I seize this opportunity to declare here that machines are more reliable and deserve more faith than do their inventors, for we may take them apart to see whether they conceal some defects or falsifications, whereas the mediums will always be able to keep and hide their secrets.

Regarding the second phase of parapsychological studies, I have to emphasize the researches and investigations of various spontaneous paranormal happenings made so far in Turkey.

Without stopping to mention various spontaneous cases such as apparitions, vivid telepathic impressions, and clairvoyant phenomena which have occurred in my country, I would like to present here a phenomenon called "Idéoplasthie" which we have studied carefully.

The subject who has this faculty is a middle-aged woman. I give you here an example from her many sittings, basing my report on the proceedings signed by all the participants. I had about thirty similar white square cards of the same size, cut in a print house. They were 8 cm. long on each side. The subject was in her normal state. I gave her the cards one by one asking her to imagine herself seeing on these

cards the picture of some object I was suggesting such as a hat, a ship, a car, a minaret, and so on, and also a written Turkish proverb. As she affirmed that she visualized on each card the object I suggested, I put on the back of the cards consecutive numbers from which we prepared a list presenting in front of each number the object suggested. After all cards passed one by one through the hands of the woman, I shuffled them very carefully and offered them again to her one by one asking her to give me the names of the objects she had already imagined and seen on those cards. She was 100% successful in giving the exact names of objects while the cards were still purely blank to all the observers. I have to emphasize here that when I returned the cards to her I was myself not then aware of what she had already visualized on them. It was only after she gave the name of each object that I examined the list to see whether she was correct or not. So, a telepathic transmission is not in question in that experiment. After the sitting was over I kept the cards and the list with me for about two weeks and I visited her again unexpectedly. Well, she was very successful and gave me all the names of the objects without the slightest hesitation or mistake.

Now, I would like to come to spontaneous cases suggestive of reincarnation which occur in abundance in my country. I will not linger on explanations about the general concepts among Spiritualists and among my parapsychologist colleagues in Turkey concerning reincarnation. We consider the subject quite differently and without the conceptions of metempsychosis and the law of karma.

When speaking about the investigations of spontaneous cases of reincarnation made so far in Turkey, I feel the sincere necessity to give here with great appreciation the name of my valuable and eminent friend, Professor Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia. He has concentrated for many years on the subject of reincarnation, and the great task he has undertaken is really international. Through the many investigations he has carried out so far in many parts of the world, he has been able to register more than one thousand cases suggestive of reincarnation, ninety of which are in my country. I have been his research assistant and interpreter for Turkey for more than ten years.

Although the classics of Spiritualism, especially French classics, are full of cases of reincarnation—especially put forward by the famous “Colonel de Rochas” among others—they are not at present acceptable to scientifically-minded researchers and to skeptics, for it is quite impossible to turn back and undertake investigations about the authenticity of those cases since the subjects concerned and witnesses have long ago passed to the world beyond. But the cases we have now in

hand are current cases whose subjects and witnesses are still alive. Those who will not be convinced after I relate some of those cases have only to come to Turkey and undertake personal investigations with subjects and witnesses at their disposal.

All these ninety cases we found in my country were located in the southern sections where people believe in reincarnation. They form a minority of Turkish compatriots of Arab origin who emigrated from Syria a century ago. I have often been asked why all those cases occur in the places where people have already a conception of reincarnation and why we do not meet such cases elsewhere. I think this question bears in itself the requisite reply: people who do not have any idea of reincarnation or have never heard about this concept would not pay any attention to the babbling of their children even though they chatter about a previous life giving some names and details. The parents would presumably consider these pretensions of the children as childish nonsense and thus the cases remain unknown. In the places where people have a conception of reincarnation or a belief in it the parents are at once alerted by the very first utterances of their children about previous lives.

In connection with these cases in southern sections of Turkey, another question has been put forward: Why do those alleged cases of reincarnation always have a connection with a life that ended with an act of murder, in conformity with the concept of the Arab minority in those cities? Really, if reincarnation is not a fancy but a reality as I do believe, it is not easy to consider that conception as being logical or having a sound explanation. Before I found the requisite reply, the very wise and very logical, but very simple, explanation was given by one of the witnesses we met during a visit to those sections with Professor Stevenson. This man said that everyone reincarnates, not only those who are killed, but those who are killed remember and those who die a natural death do not. Although this witness was not an educated man, his wise explanation was worthy enough to shed light upon the question. In fact it is easy to comprehend and to appreciate the very strong impression on the soul that murder would leave.

On the other hand, when we study many other cases of reincarnation so far reported and those which can be found in the classics of Spiritualism, we will of course notice that all reincarnates have brought from their previous lives at least some very important memories, if not a story of murder. For those who die a natural death, as their passing is normal and expected, especially in old age, they may not bring distinct memories to their next lives. But it might happen that they neverthe-

less bring to their present lives some misty and fugitive memories which may manifest in the "déjà vu" phenomenon.

Thus, most of the cases of reincarnation we met in those southern sections of Turkey had a previous life that ended with an act of murder. During our investigations they took off their garments to show us birthmarks which they claimed were at the very spots of knife stabs or bullets they had received on their previous bodies. When we consider that their previous bodies were long ago transformed to their original elements under the earth, it will not be easy to take those claims into consideration. But further studies I made on this point shed light upon this phenomenon.

It will be easier for those who have followed the publication of the Parapsychology Laboratory of Duke University in the United States, to appreciate the influence of mind or rather of spirit on matter. In that laboratory, among various and many experiments made to test extrasensory perception, it was established that some subjects had a psychokinetic faculty. In fact it has been determined that some subjects obtained the number of points desired on the faces of the dice when the dice were allowed to drop from a revolving box. Thus, we may say that mind or spirit may influence matter. Then, why not admit that the spirit might have a superior influence upon his own material body, especially when this spirit is totally concentrated on the fatal act of a stab which ended its corporeal life!

Let me give you an example of the influence of the spirit upon its own body. A patient who had been suffering from pain in his arm for a long time called on a physician. The latter, after having examined the patient, said to him that he could well free him from the pain by putting an active plaster on his arm but that he would then suffer from irritation for at least two weeks. This inconvenience having been accepted willingly by the patient, the physician, after having done what was necessary, asked him to come next day. The next day the patient came very happily for he had no pain in his arm. When the bandage was taken off, it was noticed that the arm was severely irritated as predicted by the physician. The most important fact of this example is that the physician had put on the arm a simple bandage wetted in pure water only.

After those explanations, I think that we have to accept that a spirit that has lost its corporeal body by an act of murder will be of course very much concerned with this unexpected event that has put an end to its life and, entirely concentrated on the murder, could unconsciously register on its new body, when it is in a stage of formation, all marks of the stabs its former body had received. It is absolutely



necessary to emphasize here that those birthmarks happened to appear in the very spots where the bodies of the previous personalities had received bullets or knife stabs that had caused their death.

I would not, of course, want you to think that what I am saying is based on a simple supposition or theories. It is based on facts determined after long and very difficult investigations made at the hospitals where the previous personalities died or at the law courts where we obtained legal reports. We are fortunately well provided with documents to prove this reality.