

*Dr. Fazal Karim*

## **SCIENCE AND THE SUPERNATURAL**

'Science' has been derived from the latin word *SCIENTIA* which means knowledge. 'Science' can be defined in many ways such as, for example, it is a systematic knowledge of 'natural or physical phenomena' or of 'truth ascertained by observations, experiments and induction' or 'of the ordered arrangement of facts. Like art, religion or philosophy, it is also one of the major activities of the human mind, which can be understood only in relation to their past history. Today there are numerous branches of science and no one can grasp more than one branch during one's life time. Science has been regarded as a 'mood' and no man of science remains permanently in the same mood; that is, science is all the time progressing and developing, though slowly and steadily, and is never a static body of knowledge. Science has unfolded many mysteries of nature not understood by the primitive man. Today we are living in a wonder world of science and technology. Science has realized some of the earlier dreams and speculations of the primitive people such as to fly in the air like the birds or fly to the moon into certain realities by inventing supersonic aeroplanes or space rockets or capsules. In fact, most of the outstanding discoveries of the 20th century were earlier beyond the comprehension of the human mind. Science has been able to transmit sound accompanied by the images of the objects on the television screen to near or far-off distances. A time may come when science will be able to transmit a person physically to a far-off distance within the fraction of a second at the speed of light and so the concept of time and space is likely to vanish in the near or remote future. But still there are many more areas of human experience to be ascertained or understood by the scientific research and science has still to explore many phenomena of a mysterious nature. For example, science has examined each and every tissue of the human body and has overcome its various ailments and diseases but is silent about the soul or spirit of the body and about the survival after death and is

helpless in the prevention of old age, and then finally death. It may be said at present with certainty that science will not be able to solve all the mysteries of nature. It may be able to see the *relative unseen* but not the *absolute 'unseen'*. In this materialised and industrialised world of reason and hard facts things are regarded factual and scientific where logic is applicable and magic or supernatural where reasoning fails and logic is not applicable or where ascertainment by experiments is not possible. To a scientific mind rational and 'seen' is a fact and irrational and 'unseen' is the supernatural.

'Supernatural' means beyond the laws of nature; that is 'miraculous'. Supernaturalism is a belief in the existence of forces beyond the laws of nature. In simple words 'supernatural' is a convenient word for a huge area of human speculation about things believed to exist beyond the threshold of our ordinary day to day existence. According to Richard Cavendish, a leading authority on magic and witchcraft, the supernatural is the night sky of our minds, the shadow side of our mental day light of reason and hard facts. Like the night it contains mystery, beauty, enchantment and horror. It has a powerful attraction and almost all of us, in one way or the other, are involved in it. Supernaturalism, as said before, is a belief in an other-worldly 'REALITY' that in one way or another is found in all forms of religion. The supernatural also includes cases in which the normal order of nature appears to have been momentarily upset: miracles, for instance, or the appearance of an other-worldly being in visible form, a levitation, the ability to rise from the ground and hover above it unsupported, and so on.

But the supernatural also includes the operation of forces which are perfectly natural but whose workings are not generally understood. When men long ago saw lightning they thought it to be a manifestation of the supernatural and ascribed it to gods. We know that they were wrong in regarding it as non-natural, but right in observing its existence. In the ancient Egyptian religion or among the preliterate peoples the sun was an object of worship

because they did not understand it. But now we know scientifically the working of the sun.

### BLACK MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

Magic is also considered as a form of the supernatural. The magic is defined as the feigned art of influencing the course of natural events present or future by occult (mysterious or secret) means. Classical writers describe magic as the occult learning and practice. Magic is associated with witchcraft and black art. The word sorcery—that is, the spells or the illicit obtaining of predictions and the necromancy, the calling up of the dead for consultations—has also acquired similar meaning. Some anthropologists call it a pseudo-science. It is based on the assumption that words and actions, technically not related to a phenomenon can exert a physical effect. Magic is an irrational system of ideas and practices and cannot be replaced or substituted for modern sciences. Magic may not be capable of producing any effect or achieving the aims. It is classified into three categories: productive, protective and destructive. Productive magic is concerned with harvest. This form of magic simply creates confidence or stimulation in the workers to continue the activity or the struggle. Protective magic is supposed to protect from the dangers and evil spirits and cures an illness. This form of magic, in fact, may give the confidence necessary for the success or reassurance which will accelerate recovery from the danger or illness or disease. The destructive magic is supposed to be concerned with the disposition of an individual. All the three forms of magic described above create either confidence or terror among the people. For these reasons, magic has occupied an important place in most of the primitive societies and maintains a certain degree of its influence despite the challenges offered by science or modern conditions.

Witchcraft has been elaborated as the human exercise of alleged supernatural power for anti-social evil purposes, so called 'black magic'. We often talk about the modern age as the age of

materialism, reason, technical and scientific advance, but belief in witchcraft survives in modern technologically developed cultures and also remains a potent factor in most of the primitive societies. Modern science is not in a position to explain the methods used for the witchcraft; only myths and folklore describe the origin and methods of witchcraft. It is considered as the bad side of religion. Women, who perform witchcraft, are known as witches. Witches are associated with demons, night sensuality corpses and evils. They still horrify as well as delight the imagination and they still exist in almost all parts of the world. They are supposed to travel at supernatural speeds, often in localities where the dead are buried, to conduct evil and obscene sites, to prepare noxious agents, wearing masks or animal skins. In their activities, the witches violate the central values of the society, commit incests, murder near relatives, have sexual intercourses with the corpses. On these grounds witchcraft is considered as the most terrible of crimes. In England and the European continent many trials, as a result of public accusations, were held in the 17th century and many witches were burnt to death. Before the dawn of Islam in Saudi Arabia witches existed, as is clear from the following verses of the Holy Quran:

Say! I seek refuge  
with the lord of the Dawn  
from the mischief of those,  
who practise secret arts.  
(Sura Falaq, verses 1 to 4)

'Of those' refers to those (females) who used to practice secret art by blowing on knots. To blow on knots was a favourite form of witchcraft practiced by the perverted women. Such secret arts cause psychological terror and the modern science does not afford any explanation. Witchcraft is regarded as a fraudulent practice.

#### STRANGE POWERS OF THE HUMAN MIND

Let us review those experiments which the western psychologists have been carrying out for the last many years in

the parapsychological laboratories to understand the strange powers of the mind. Such scientific study is called psychical research where we study such occurrences as thought-transfer, foretelling the future, hauntings involving appearances of ghosts and movements of objects and messages through mediums from the spirits of those who have died. All such events are included in the class of paranormals and the subject is called parapsychology which includes experimental tests of extra-sensory perception often written in abbreviation as ESP. Extrasensory perception means perception which is the range of known sensory processes. Another word "PSI" has also been suggested to cover all types of paranormal conditions. In 1882, the Society for Psychical Research was founded in England and later on similar societies were founded in USA and in most of the European countries like Netherlands, France and Italy. Some of the experiments conducted in the parapsychological laboratories are briefly discussed here. Such experiments were carried out with the help of special type of 25 cards known as zener cards.

#### *PARANORMAL ABILITIES PRESENT IN CERTAIN PERSONS*

As said before, a special deck of 25 zener cards was used, where each card bears one symbol in the form of a cross, circle, star, wavy lines or a square and is used to give a probability of five correct guesses out of 25 as the symbols are turned up to view. All such experiments are based on guess work alone.

#### *TELEPATHY*

Telepathy means thought-transference from one mind to another. The procedure is that one person simply thinks of a random order of the five EPS cards, while another person tries to determine the ORDER on which the first person is concentrating. The simple test is that the sender or the agent concentrates on the face of one zener card at a time while the receiver or percipient attempts to think of the symbol and so on through the deck of cards. In these methods the sender and receiver are usually in the

same room. In a distance telepathy test participants are separated by several rooms or by a greater distance. Some tests were quite successful even if the separation extended to many miles. Sometimes, the test is conducted by guessing the card still face down and so on. Sometimes the test is conducted where the subject is asked to make 25 consecutive calls keeping the deck in front of him but not usually in the same room. Some tests are reported to be quite successful.

### *CLAIRVOYANCE AND PRECOGNITION.*

Clairvoyance is defined as the acquisition of information, not necessarily possessed by any other person, obtained independently of ordinary channels of perceiving or reasoning. Precognition is defined as supernormal knowledge of future events. Sometimes, it is difficult to differentiate between clairvoyance and precognition. Both tests are based on guess work where the subject is desired to identify or match each face down card in the shuffled deck with the proper symbol. A few tests are stated to be successful.

### *PSYCHOKINESIS*

It is called PK test where the subject attempts, by thinking or willing, to influence hand-cast or mechanically thrown dice. Another variation involves wishing thrown objects to land in specified areas. In other words the subject or the agent creates physical effects on the objects. But no experiment has been successful where the subject had the mind over the matter.

### SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH

No one escapes death and from the beginning men have hoped for, and believed in, a world beyond death. All the religions of the world are based on the conception of life after death. Mummification points to the belief in survival after death which goes back to the beginning of the human history and is also

suggested by neandethral burials more than fifty thousand years ago. The rise of spiritualism in the 19th century centred on the attempt to get in touch with the dead but psychical research has not been able to provide a concrete answer to this delicate question which is all the time haunting the parapsychologists and they are trying to get information through telepathy or clairvoyance and think that paranormal ability among persons suggests an alternative source of information apparently coming from spirits.

### SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF GHOSTS AND SPIRITS

This part of the psychic research is called Spontaneous Phenomena. It includes apparitions, ghosts or spirits of living or dead persons and also hauntings. Sometimes, we read in the newspapers about the persons possessed by ghosts or we read about a house being haunted where windows are stated to be broken or stones hurled on the residents and they are often frightened or psychologically terrified. Sometimes the residents are stated to have vacated the house and so on. Such hauntings characterised by noise and displacements are commonly called poltergeist hauntings. An inquiry made by the psychic researchers into the apparitions revealed that people were often mistaken and it seems likely that such phenomena resulted from emotional strains in the persons concerned and there is little reason for regarding them as spirits. It is further argued that instead of spirits such experiences are considered as hallucinatory, perceptual experiences which may originate from genuinely paranormal processes. Information regarding such phenomena is too little to base any scientific theory on it.

Mention has been made of jinns and spirits in the Holy Quran as well as in other holy books. Some people think that if such spirits exist in the form of waves these may be detected by some most sensitive devices in the near or remote future. Some are of the opinion that these spirits may be the creatures of some other planet and have the power to fly from one planet to the other at supernatural speeds and they may have the power to

distintegrate their bodies in the form of waves and then, when desired, may have the power to reintegrate such waves into a complete person but still remaining invisible. This may be true because the bodily constituents of jinns are different from those of men. These are all speculations, but the existence of jinns is undisputed among the Muslims all over the world and science may not be able to solve such mysteries of nature. All the previous tests conducted to test the strange powers of the mind in fact do not provide any satisfactory data which could be framed into some scientific theory and, until data becomes compelling, traditional or modern scientists are not going to accept purported evidence outside the established scientific mainstream. There are many objections raised against these experiments based on guess work because these are violating the basic rules of scientific methods. In the view of one eminent western philosopher, there will be no progress unless and until someone hits upon methods of inducing paranormal powers in ordinary persons and sustaining them thereafter at a high level for some considerable time. It is evident from this statement that no important contribution to the psychical research has been made by studying through scientific or natural devices.

I would like to close this discussion by producing translation of some verses of the Holy Quran.

He (alone) knows the unseen  
 Nor does He make anyone  
 Acquainted with His Mysteries  
 Except with His apostle  
 Whom He has chosen.  
 (Sura Jinn, verses 26, 27)

### THE ABSOLUTE UNSEEN

Religious teachers have explained the Quranic verses quoted above like this: Mystery or the unseen has two aspects: the relative unseen is so with reference to a particular person because



of the intervention of time, space or particular circumstances. For example, I cannot see today a particular building which I saw last year because it has since been pulled down or I cannot see in Lahore the London museum although anyone in London can see it. I cannot see the micro-organisms with the naked eye but I can see them through an optical microscope or, if not through the optical microscope, I can see them with the help of a powerful microscope like the electron microscope. Similarly, we cannot see certain stars in the bear but we can see them with the help of a telescope and so on. The Absolute Unseen, the absolute mystery or God's mystery is that which no creature can know or see except in so far as God reveals to him through his chosen apostles

The achievements of the prophets are characterised by numerous God-given miracles which ordinary mind may construe as the phenomena of the supernatural. There is a famous story about Hazrat Omer that once he was delivering a sermon in Masjid-i-Nabavi when suddenly during his speech he addressed his commander Saria to attend to the hill on his back (where enemies of Islam were hiding themselves). His commander Saria, it is stated, was fighting against those enemies of Islam in Iran at a distance of about three hundred miles. There are many more such examples in the history of Islam. Now, was it a phenomenon of telepathy or clairvoyance or precognition, or second sight? Many believe that there is a world of the supernatural with its own principles and codes and that the mystics (sufis), who always yearn for a union with God, possess second sight and can see the Absolute Unseen. However, Hazrat Omar's incidence should be a good source of information and incentive to the western parapsychologists to carry out their psychic research to understand the supernatural through the watch eyes of SCIENCE.

