

## Full Length Paper

# Psychological and Sociological Aspects of Mysticism

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**Mystical behavior has some companions. We cannot deny the place of *superstitions, myths, and legends* in our daily lives. Who can assert that Noah and his ark would not take the place of Gaia of 2300 years past 2500 years from now? How would those from other cultures consider the blue beads, used against the evil eye that we, in Turkey, have around our houses and offices? We can observe mystical behaviors of even scientists whom we can define as rationalist individuals. If we approach the issue from *Abraham Maslow's* observation, we can say that most of those who are spiritually healthy and successful rely on *mystical* beliefs and behaviors. Thus, this phenomenon deliberately ignored by some scientists is scrutinized in this paper, examining the psychological and sociological depths of those elements that can be termed *mystical* using Güleç's framework and a wider literature review to understand how they have become indispensable for societies.**

**Keywords:** Superstition; Ritual; Myths; Legends; Mysticism; Perennialism; Syncretic Spiritualism; New Age; Neo-paganism.

## INTRODUCTION

It is believed that the word "Mystical" originated from the word "mystery", meaning "with closed eyes" in ancient Greek, also interpreted as "unexplainable", as it refers to the supernatural (Love: 11). Although it predominantly conveys meanings such as having supernatural experiences, going into trance, or meditating, we have to concede that the word also pertains to the presuppositions, faiths, paranormalities, cultural myths, and superstitions that lead to these actions. Since, as an example, for somebody who visits a 17-meter long tomb in Beykoz [Istanbul] that is "rumored" to belong to the prophet Yusha, the underlying cause of the mystical experience that she would have is a legend. This is a certain belief in a supernatural being 17 meters in height, which cannot be explained even with the scientific knowledge we have today. Thus, it might be necessary to examine the term "mystical" with its components stated above. Nevertheless, our focus will be on the actual experience itself, that is, we would generally highlight the "mystical experience".

Two main categories generally come to mind when talking about mysticism:

Religious Mysticism

Extra-religious (natural, independent) Mysticism.

While the former refers to a kind of mysticism that takes all of its references from religion and its practice, the latter is about the experiences of an individual due to her belief in her own spiritual power or the power of the universe, even though she may not subscribe to any religious creed. Walter T. Stace, talks about a third group in his comprehensive study of this

issue. These are the “contemporary mystics” who believe in the power of mystic experience, regardless of whether it comes from religious sources or not (Stace: 38). Rumi, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Ibn Arabi, Ramakrishna, can be given as examples of the first group of mystics. Mystics like Plotinus, J. A. Symonds, R.M. Bucke, and Edward Carpenter are examples of mystics that are in the second group (Stace: 37). There are many contemporary mystics related to both categories, but it is difficult to showcase a specific name, though, since the boundary between mysticism and the adoption of extra-religious creeds is murky. Nevertheless, there are several contemporary mystics who do not rule out either perspective, when their general discourses are considered. These can be seen to be the individuals who have internalized practices like Reiki or Meditation, while maintaining a similar close proximity to such beliefs as a “godly power” or “the cosmic power of the universe”.

The discourses and behaviors that have been developed over the course of history, transferred from generation to generation, changing and being recreated continuously thus overcoming ensuing difficulties. Supernatural mystical beliefs, events, and speculations that cannot be explained by positive sciences today are observed in practically all of these discourses and behaviors. These speculations are driven by ancient beliefs and one can say that they are almost encoded in the social genes. The number of people who, for example, try to get out of bed from their right side or those who step out of their houses with the right, as opposed to left step is in the order of millions, due to these codifications created through historical and cultural processes.

## **OTHER CONCEPTUAL ALLIES of MYSTICISM**

Two concepts frequently mentioned together with Mysticism are Spiritualism and Spirituality. Spiritualism, derived from *spiritus* meaning “spirit” in Latin, as a movement it postulates that reality entails more in the immaterial world of the spirit than all that we know and this reality can only be perceived via spiritual means, thus to reach this reality it suggests turning inward as a goal. There are relatively newer terms that are related to these terms, which one comes across in discourse. Perennialism and Perennials Philosophy is one of them. According to this philosophy, there are certain common presuppositions in all cultures. These presuppositions can refer to immaterial realities as much as they can refer to material realities, because people are thought to have the intuitive perception to sense, that which is not physically present. A certain common spherical channel is in question. Since the beginning of history, people living in different geographies have arrived at the same reality through different practices. Such saints as Origen and Clement of Alexandria in Christianity, thinkers like Ibn Arabi and Rumi in Islam’s, and leaders like Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Ramah in India are provided as examples for this thought. Commentaries suggest that all of these people from different religious backgrounds have similar discourses (See: Wikipedia, ‘Perennial Philosophy’). In his work titled *Alternative Spiritualities and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Adam Possamai, says that Perennialism is a *Syncretic Spirituality* (a kind of spirituality that tries to reconcile different teachings). Moreover, he talks about three characteristic aspects of Perennialism: It tries to explain the world as if it was a monastery. Every element is related to another. In fact, there is no dualism just unity.

Subscribers to this philosophy try to form the potential morality for mankind  
Perennialists are in pursuit of spiritual knowledge (Possamai, 2003: 33).

Animism can be considered another concept that might be referred to under the spiritualism heading, which can briefly be defined as the belief in ghosts and spirits that human beings share the world with; it classifies spirits as good and bad, and affects most human behaviors (Giddens, 2008: 588).

Furthermore, we should talk about “New Age” and, in a related vein, “Neo-Paganism” as trendy concepts. New Age is a term created to encapsulate alternative spiritual ways of searching (meditation, reiki, yoga, feng shui, etc.) in modern Western societies. It points out that human beings are on the brink of a new age of faith and spirituality. Neo-Paganism, on the other hand, carries the ancient world to today with all of its pagan elements.

### **MYSTICISM and PSYCHOLOGY**

Maslow had recognized in the 1930s that modern psychology was built on the examinations of mentally ill people. To him, however, mentally healthy people in the world were more than those who were ill. So, how could psychology that relied on pathology provide reliable information on the workings of the human mind?

Maslow began examining mentally healthy people around him. He then describes his first findings as follows:

*When I started examining the psychology of healthy people, I started with the best specimen I could get; the perfect, most healthy ones. They were remarkably different than average people with respect to multiple aspects. I learned a lot from these people, but there is a certain point that concerns us here. I found out that these individuals were generally living mystical lives, having moments of profound joy, intense feelings of happiness, and even ecstasy.*

*At these times, these people were experiencing pure happiness and exuberance, leaving behind all doubts, fears, inhibitions, tensions. It was as if their conscious of the “self” was disappearing. Their differences and distances from the world were all left behind, and they were feeling as one with the world, identifying with it, and belonging to it.*

*But probably the most important thing was, they were saying in their recollections that they experienced the absolute truth, and that they felt the secret of life as if a curtain was unveiled before their eyes. This taught me something new. The few things that I knew about mysticism I underestimated like most scientists, linking them to religions and metaphysics, and perceiving them to be absolute non-sense, without having any faith in them at all. Maybe they were hallucinations, or hysteria, but they were absolutely pathologic. But, the people who told me about these experiences were not. These were the healthiest people. (Güleç: 90-91)*

Based on Maslow, Cengiz Güleç suggests that ‘Magic’ too is closely linked to personal development for several reasons. Its first and most important benefit is that what is observed in most practices of magic is that it helps people make decisions or comprehend their own decisions. He identifies the real reason for visiting a fortuneteller, or an oracle, or a doctor, or a psychologist is often times this (Güleç: 80).

At a more complex level, the reason for magical rituals is to realize the real will of the person. According to testimonials of modern magicians, the real will is probably related to the individual's recognition of her subconscious desires, and magical rituals are shaped to create high levels of emotional tension and relaxation. From certain aspects, their effects resemble those of therapy. Nevertheless, the underlying assumptions are directly opposite of each other. The magician or mystical leader believes her will to have achieved the power necessary to induce change through her actions. Psychoanalysis too, at least, would consider this as a regression of the thought to its childish belief level concerning its absolute power (The number of people who, for example, try to get out of bed from their right side or those who step out of their houses with the right, as opposed to left step is in the order of millions, due to these codifications created through historical and cultural processes. (Güleç: 80)

Cengiz Güleç says the act of regression, which is carried out with the help of the psychoanalyst with regard to the person's subconscious conflict, tendency, and impulses, performs a similar function: "This symbolic psychosexual regression can be extended to such an extent that the person can become so much baby-like that she would recall her in-vitro experiences". (Güleç: 81)

Güleç makes the following interesting statement. "Whatever those people who are more inclined to scientific thinking might think, there is no use rejecting the lure of these. Indeed, when we consider all human beings who have ever lived, it is almost certain that most people have lived, and even today continue to live, in accordance with the 'magical' system of thought, rather than 'scientific'." (Güleç: 80) This statement appears to be an important reality of human history. Regardless of how much they are preached to act rationally, mystical and magical beliefs can penetrate into all walks of life. Despite they are not believed in at times, these practices sustain their experiential lure. Just look around yourself; there is hardly anybody who can resist Turkish coffee fortune telling, in Turkey.

It is stated in the same study that the common theme stressed in Western Hermetic Cults, Mystical Kabala, and Muslim heterodoxy and orthodox Sufism is the concept of "unity of existence", that is, the unity of the man with the universe. Thus, the road to self-determination passes through recognition of the forces acting upon us and the results of our impact on the world.

Most scientists have pointed out the universality of the fundamental experiences and behavior concerning death and rebirth (reincarnation). That is, such practices can be observed in practically all cultures. Rituals aimed at coping with these two concepts can be seen in all open and closed cultures around the world, regardless of their socio-economic development stage or geographic location.

A diversity of traditions such as shamanism, alchemy, and mysticism have deliberately practiced techniques symbolizing the return to the state of "death" or an undifferentiated primary being (a mystical term conveyed by such concepts as the primary ore or the divine, eternal spirit) as a necessary precursor of an enlightened initiate's (a person accepted to a closed and secret cult through an ascension ritual and who is thus enlightened) rebirth. (Güleç: 81)

*When developed sufficiently, a skill can be equal to direct perception. This can be likened to the almost instantaneous reactions of a skillful actor. The benefit of practice in achieving enlightenment (i.e. through various meditative exercises) has long been known to Zen Buddhism and Middle Eastern schools of mysticism. Athletes' recollection of their peak performances to be accompanied by a state of ecstasy supports this contention. We can also state that overly skilled people have a hard time verbalizing how they perform: These are in the extra-conscious. Indeed, the effort to put these practices to word leads to a loss of their originality and their breaking. (Güleç: 82)*

Expanding on Güleç's words, we can give the following example: Think of a magician. Let's say she is practicing a magic trick of disappearing a coin. First of all, she might have to practice this trick a million times as she develops the skill to have the coin disappear. In doing so, she also has to envision herself standing in front of millions of people doing the trick someday, as if she was granted the supernatural powers that allow her to do this. She might still be able to have the coin disappear if she does not have this faith, but in that case something will be missing from the experience her audience would have, as well as missing something herself. On the other hand, another magician who believed in her ability to make the coin disappear in front of millions of spectators in a magical atmosphere might recollect her experience doing that with an accompanying higher level of consciousness that she had at the moment. Moreover, based on Güleç and Stace's definitions, she would probably not be able to define her exact feelings. She is not herself alone, at that moment. Or, she is experiencing herself in a different way than she normally does. It is as if what happened was actually magic. That might as well be what most artists or virtuosos would call 'magnificent,' while not being able to describe it precisely afterwards.

Following up, Güleç points out that different mystical teachings have adopted methods similar to each other:

*Regardless of its exact manifestation, all mystics have under their control isolation, condensation, repetition of a sentence or motion (e.g. in invocations and prayers), and deprivation (e.g. of food or oxygen, lack of a stimulant which can be compared to fasting that exists in all divine religions). Although each teaching originates from tradition or personal disposition, these methods and techniques should not be expected to be idiosyncratic and have only one form (Güleç: 82).*

## **Faith in the Sacred**

Based on prior work of Marsel Mesulam, a cognitive neuroscientist, Nevzat Tarhan says, in his work titled "*Psychology of Faith*," that ninety percent of the human brain processes emotions, thoughts, and behaviors whereas the five senses are processed with the remaining ten percent. This means that of the 50.000 to 100.000 thoughts generated by a person any day, 90% is generated with the portion of the brain that operates in the subjective, while only 10% is generated with the portion of the brain that relies on objective observation. Thus, imagination, feelings, and other 'subjective' elements have an important effect on all of our thoughts. That is precisely why the value of an antique is 1 dollar at the blacksmiths' bazaar, whereas it is a thousand dollars at the antique dealers' bazaar (Tarhan: 25). We can increase the value of a

good made of iron or wood profoundly by attributing values and making decisions with the highly subjective portion of our brains.

Faith in the sacred is part of this structure (Tarhan: 21). Following up in his work, Tarhan indicates that individuals who had a mystical experience wear a type of armor and protect themselves from the staggering effects that discussions on god and the sacred can have on them. That is, the number of people who achieve internal balance by preempting a vital issue that would leave them lingering, due to the ever-present uncertainty of their outcomes, by a postulate (faith in sacred) to be able to take care of their daily chores is in the order of millions.

The results of a study carried out by the American Journal of Psychiatry on two thousand psychiatrists in the USA suggests that over 90% of participating psychiatrists confirmed the need to openly deal with religion and spirituality (Tarhan: 51).

While it should not be confused with a faith in the sacred, the following perspective that Mustafa Doğan brought to the debate, based on his very good study on superstitions, needs to be examined. *“All sections of human life are filled with faith. The psychological existence of a human being without any faith cannot be contemplated, since this would be a human being with no continuity”* (Doğan, 2006: 12). When he says this, he indicates why faith has to be continuous as follows: *“The fact that new areas of ambiguity emerge as we learn more suggests, paradoxically, that superstitions would continue to exist in human life perpetually”* (Doğan, 2006: 12).

## **Our Daily Dilemmas**

In his work titled *Religious Faiths and History of Thought*, Mircea Eliade indicates that the oldest “paleoantropiennes” faced a very fundamental problem as they started using technological tools (that are used to make lethal weapons!). As Andre Varagnac has said, each technological advance brought a new danger of mass killings to the society coming up with it. When examining the subconscious activities of humankind throughout history – dreams, fantasies, visions, and fiction – it is important to state that they differ from those of modern people only in intensity and breadth. Nevertheless, these terms of intensity and breadth have to be considered with their strongest and most dramatic meanings, because human beings are the result of a decision made at the beginning of time: ‘killing to live’. Eliade says that the mystical relationship between the hunter and the prey arises from this killing (Eliade, 1976: 18). The blood that is spilled resembles human blood and thus has to be sanctified. This, in turn, would carry some paranormal codes into the genes of human beings. This is inevitable, because cognitive balance has been destroyed.

On the other hand, Carl Gustav Jung suggests that primitive people had to show their respect to ever hidden psychological disasters throughout their lives. There is a proactive effort here too. Human beings seek various methods to alleviate potential problems that can arise. Creation of taboo topics is an extrinsic proof of this fact. Jung describes the numerous taboos as psychic domains with specified boundaries that are protected with difficulty and fear (Jung, 1998: 20). We can give the following example here: the message that the person tries to convey to her subconscious by getting out of bed from her right side every morning is “I should do this to ward off the bad things that can happen to me today.” The ritual is actually known to

be most useful when she does not get out of bed from her right side and coincidentally things go bad for her that day. She would then be able to say “These things happened to me because I did not get out of bed from the right side,” blaming all that has transpired to the lack of practicing the “getting out of bed from the right side” ritual, thus achieving internal peace. The person has found the reason for the bad things that have happened and got rid of a concern. She is not the problem.

Skinner, on the other hand, is among the first who suggest that performative conditioning is the governing principle for the formation of superstitions (given food at coincidentally when it was scratching its head, the animal might form the habit of scratching its head with the expectation that food will ensue) (See: <http://www.all-about-psychology.com> Superstition in the Pigeon by Skinner).

## **MYSTICISM and SOCIOLOGY**

George Gerbner considers ‘culture’ as the collection of all stories aimed at explaining the universe. When people tell each other the story of little red riding hood, the main topics of the story are *gender roles*, *fear*, and *power*. People convey the cultural notions of the society in which they are living with the stories that they tell each other. Gerbner suggests that the main duty of people, in general, is to exchange stories. According to him, whether the stories are correct or are not is not of importance. The important thing is that they are synthetic, chosen, frequently mythical, and most importantly socially structured (Batus *et al.*, 2006: 24-25). Human beings try to achieve their own inner peace through some discourses, which could be considered to be mystical, that they believe in, dream, imagine, or repeat. Wherever the danger comes from, a mystical behavior is created targeting it and cognitive problems are thus taken care of. This, in turn, makes human beings less ill-tempered and can even lead them to success if they use this in a good way. At least, it does not allow the motivation to disappear.

There are essentially two opposite approaches invoked in evaluating mystical practices. The first is that there is ease and comfort for a human being in overcoming the dilemmas she faces by going through the same ways in which her society has gone through and solved such dilemmas in the past. Some kind of solution has been developed by the society to the dilemma and the spoiled balance has been reestablished. This is a positive approach. Since human beings would eventually face some kind of depression at some point in their lives, it can be said that there is no harm in invoking some mystical cultural genetic aspects. These have been passed from generation to generation through societal learning processes. The only difference is that it is possible to rewrite them with slight changes at each transfer between generations.

In his work titled ‘*Psychology of Masses*’, Gustave Le Bon suggests that miracles and legends are the main supporters of civilization. When he says that appearances and pretensions play a more important role than reality in the history, he suggests that the surreal always have always been superior to the real. He points out that masses can only think through their dreams. Thus, he says, “the art of acting upon the dreams of masses is the art of governing them” (Le Bon, 1895: 60-64). It was a time in which reason was taking over against the superstition when Le Bon wrote these sentences. Rejecting everything that was out of reason was the general trend then. Let’s hearken to him in such an era:

*The philosophers of the last century have strived with great effort to deconstruct the religious, political, social delusions that have sustained our fathers for centuries, thereby drying up the fountains of hope and consolation. They found the merciless and unforgiving forces of nature against the weak behind those dreams that they sacrificed. Despite its great ascension, philosophy could not offer an ideal that could draw societies to them. Since delusions are necessary for societies, people intuitively follow the leaders who offer them these delusions. The great cause of the making of societies has never been the 'truth,' but 'unreal' (Le Bon, 1895: 99).*

On the other hand, there is an opposing reality that has to be approached with utmost care. These unscientific and unreasonable practices can be very dangerous and harmful to societies, at times. It is known that most of hip dislocation cases arise from a societal swaddling tradition. Weird beliefs concerning tight swaddles inhibit a baby's development and can even lead to a permanent disability.

Another striking example for the unreasonable in action is burning of individuals who were believed to be possessed by the devil in medieval West. Societies had become slaves to their beliefs without any material evidence. Paranoid people who thought they were the mentally healthy ones burned people who had mental illnesses and those in need of mental therapy to death.

In his book titled "The Open Society and Its Enemies", Karl Popper, criticizes unreason with the following expressions:

*I strongly believe that this insistence of unreason on affect and passion would lead to an outcome that I can only describe as murder. One reason for this is that this attitude entails, in the best sense, succumbing to the unreasonable characteristics of human beings, and, in the worst sense, looking down upon human mind, which would eventually lead to resorting to bestial power as the arbiter of any conflict. For when a conflict emerges, this means, in principle, that constructive feelings like respect, love, and commitment to a common goal, which could be hoped to eliminate the conflict in the first place, have failed to solve it. But if this is the case, then what else would the unreasonable have at hand but less constructive feelings and passions, fear, hate, envy and all of this eventually leading to resorting to violence? The tendency to give in to such feelings, in my opinion, is fueled by another, and possibly more important, tendency inherent within unreasonableness, which is not believing that human beings are not equal (Popper, 2008: 302).*

Nevertheless, there is also the following reality. While some people who were believed to be possessed by evil spirits were burned in some parts of the world, another method was in use in the Eastern and particularly Turkish societies: those who are thought to be possessed by evil spirits could be cured with music. The rituals etc. performed did not hurt the bodies of the people involved; on the contrary, they were performed with incenses and soothing odors that would help the person being treated to calm down (See: <http://www.rehabilitasyon.com>).

Since the collective consciousness always tends to pick the positive and leave the negative, while 'burning people' has been given up today, treatment with music and incenses continue to



exist. Moreover, when science comes up with a different cure that is more accessible, that is, when the light of the mind fully illuminates the issue, old practices rapidly wither. That is, treatment with music and incense would probably continue to exist, possible as a method of supplementary treatment, so long as they do not contradict other ways of scientific treatment.

Thus, the fact that mystical beliefs and spiritual behaviors can find a domain of practice for themselves even today is due to this dialectical traveling companionship. Until they arrive at more prevalent explanations, human beings would continue to entrust themselves to the protecting and enveloping tradition of ancient beliefs for all of their cognitive dilemmas. Here, "entrust" has been chosen to highlight the temporariness of this travel companionship. The owner of the mind who entrust herself allows for a solution, while retaining the right to reclaim herself. This represents a sort of cross-border operation carried out within the territory of non-reason. The border is crossed in a controlled and precautionous manner and once the objective is completed, the forces are pulled back to within the borders again.

Malinowski, talks about the need for positive knowledge to carry out the chores of a society. This knowledge is essentially rational and it has to be rational. Having minimum technical knowledge is necessary to set a fire. The person who uses positive knowledge is the leader of her society. Thus, as we knew before, resorting only to magic, religion, or other forms of 'blind belief' cannot solve the problem of the first administrator. Belief that success can be achieved with magic, talismans, or rites only emerges as a complement. They always surface at the stages where human knowledge falls short. "Her experiences attest to the fact that, no matter how much she thinks about such phenomena, the workings of her hands cannot generate rain, sunlight, wind, hot or cold. Thus, she casts spells on them." (Malinowski, 1992: 161).

Based on the notion that even internal reactions that lead to the most basic physiological activities have to be trained to a large extent by culture Malinowski talks about fears of black magic that the primitive man created in order to prevent urinating or defecating in plain view. So much so that, the Aboriginal man who had to eat the totem animal to assuage his hunger would atone for this action by feeling nauseating and throwing up (Malinowski, 1992: 103). In this way, the spiritual belief would be fulfilled, and the person would continue to govern herself and her society, because the animal that was chosen as the totem animal was often times an animal that would allow the continuation of the society.

Now, what happens when you take such a natural solution out from its roots in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and commoditize it by adding fantastic elements? Probably, the issue would slide into the domain of Satanism, as was the case in incidents of hacking cats. Let's explain more explicitly. The cat totem, which was considered to be a sacred aid in preventing the growth of population of pests such as rats (recall the cat figurines in ancient Egypt), is recreated due to various beliefs today, which lead to cats' being the subject of Satanist rites in which they are cut and their blood is drunk.

As is known, dozens of movies, stories, and books created with inspiration from mystical stories on cats eventually led to a mass hysteria of fear of cats. Generations, which have been spectators in this process eventually started, with some additional influence from other fantasies, to hate cats.

Getting back to the subject, Malinowski says “Human beings have to abide by technical rules, form a collective attitude, and keep the tradition of knowledge, law, and morality through a system of action in order to create all artifacts in the society. When examined, this system of action turns out to have economic, legal, educational, political, magical, religious, and ethical aspects.” (Malinowski, 1992: 129). That is, magic and myth is also a reality of social reality, along with the others.

Malinowski, who indicates that the primitive man had primitive knowledge concerning health and sickness, mentions the situation of the person who thinks that an evil spirit, instead of ‘destiny’, inflicts this sickness upon him. This person can resist the sickness, strengthening her organism, by believing that a good doctor who is more powerful than this evil spirit can cure her sickness. “This is visualization of the desired goal by word and action beforehand.” He suggests that magic, from a social perspective, would act as the spiritual partner of the leader who has the positive knowledge, disciplining and organizing her, thus helping the social organism blend as a whole (Malinowski, 1992: 161-162).

### **Various mystical and sociologic codes**

Turks have always believed in some secret powers existing in nature throughout their history. We can easily say that they acted within the scope of respect, making these powers sacred and mystically positioning them. In some sources, it said, on this topic, that how these beliefs were formed throughout the history cannot be quite followed and only partial observations can be made (Günay – Güngör, 2003: 70). In past beliefs of Turks throughout history, it was believed that entities in nature such as mountains, trees, water, rocks, etc. each had a spirit. Moreover, these spirits were classified into to: those that *provide goodness* and those that *bring evil*.

In his work titled “Phenomenology of Religion,” Ekrem Sarıkçıoğlu, indicates that sanctity in Islam is seen in the persona of saints (*evliya*). These are people of high morality whom the God considered to be friends. They are devoid of bad features like hatred and greed, living lives of piety and devotion to God. Saints do not boast about their supernatural powers. Some are believed to have supernatural powers such as being able to travel vast distances instantaneously, appearing at multiple locations simultaneously, walking over the surface of water, knowing what people have at their hearts, etc. Using such powers is referred to as wonders (*keramet*) and the word concerning their wonders gets about. Their wonders are believed to even continue their *motion* after their death i.e. the death of the saints. That is why tombs of many saints are visited and they are offered oblations (Sarıkçıoğlu, 2002: 175).

Ali Bayramoğlu suggests that the ‘social actor’ is determined by a “series of thought codes” that connects the given mentality and today, that is believed to represent continuity within the scope of history, and that builds the feeling of responsibility. (Bayramoğlu, 2006: 44) This operation inevitably raises the problem of abolishing of the distance between past and today within the furnishings of the mind. Humankind needs some shifts in meaning as this distance is abolished. That is, realities have to be transformed into a somewhat paranormal state. Thus the saying “A sheik does not fly, it is his disciples who gets him airborne” is realized. A discourse is developed for a nonexistent reality, which is eventually assumed to have been real.

*Like in all patriarchal order, the “body” forms the main framework in this type of research. A morality that preaches the pure and the untouched enshrouds a controlling mechanism that it has created through the mechanisms of faith and virtue. Normalization of the codes, bans, and taboos by applying them to the body, and recreation of their discourse originating from that body, rests upon the unity that provides the identicalness of the “man and the society,” as much as it rests upon the “purity of man and the society.” Indeed, any change in human behavior, attitudes, and value system is perceived as deterioration and the inputs that lead to this change are being tried to be eliminated. (Bayramoğlu, 2006: 45).*

We observe that the search for paranormal codifications originating from the West have been increasing in the last few years. While most of them use religious paranormal elements, some of them rebuild some fantasies. While this situation sometimes brings to us stories taken from religious books that are garnished with fantasy, it sometimes produces cult films like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*.

*When we examine the history of civilizations, we see that the aspect that appear to be radical in most popular self-actualization programs that have mystical-magical content are nothing but reinventions of old ideas (Güleç: 83).*

*As an example, consider Oscar Ichazo’s methods that are very popular in the Western world: let’s take the meditation techniques practiced at an isolated location several thousand meters above sea level in Chile (Ari). Let’s keep in mind that meditation performed at a mountaintop, like those that are practiced widely in Tibet and Nepal, would induce a change in consciousness by hallucinations seen due to low levels of ambient Oxygen at those elevations. One of its main methods, ‘ARICA’, is a blend of Aikido, a Japanese Yoga system, and some exercises derived from the physical training drills of US Air Force, and presented as if it were a genuine technique. At its core, however, lie the meditation practices of reclusive priests of Christian monasteries in the Middle Ages or the dervishes of Muslim dervish lodges and Islamic monasteries performed standing, walking, or via deep contemplation devoted to worship, as part of these priests’ and dervishes’ lives spent in isolation and piety [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar\\_Ichazo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Ichazo)*

Oscar Ichazo’s theories and practices may appear to be meaningless, or not. Thousands of other systems can too...

*The undeniable truth here is that millions of peoples’ lives, throughout the written history, have been profoundly affected, if not completely governed, by such belief systems and activity programs. Psychology has so far ignored such psychological phenomena, which obviously have huge importance (Güleç: 84).*

Interestingly, many people incorporate some characters from these movies to their lives. Clubs are formed, and social exchanges are carried on through these fictional characters, which are taken by some as role models. Works of art, such as the movie *Avatar*, which has recently been aired and has made an overwhelming impression that refers to ancient beliefs, has found broad audiences from all around the world. We would like to explicitly state that “*intentional communities*” would have profound presence in the near future. Such means of communion

might also lead to the creation of stand-alone stories and people living in those realms by sharing ancient beliefs with each other. Networks established around much simpler fiction would replace such implantations that religious communities perform today.

Joyce Ann Mercer includes striking developments concerning spiritualism targeting children in her article that was published in 2006.

Mercer, who states that child spiritualism has become a major sector in USA, recently, says, for example, that there are over 46.000 titles in Amazon.com on child spirituality. Despite the decline observed in book/video sales in all categories, sale of religious and spiritual titles targeting children are on the rise. “*Veggie Tales*”, which was created by Phil Vischer, is a good example for this. (Veggie Tales teaches children morality via stories taken from the Bible in which plants talk.) The production company has sold over 25 million copies of movies in the last decade. The company made a profit of 24 million dollars from the latest Veggie Tales movie and has sold over 3 million DVDs.

### **An Interesting Sociological Approach: Recession Approach**

Prof. Dr. Vamık Volkan, a leading expert in political psychiatry, suggests that the “*recession*” that individuals experiencing anxiety can go into might actually be quite healthy. Since anxiety is something that is not desirable, people develop defense mechanisms to avoid it. This is ‘recession’. Recession should not be judged to be good or bad. Sometimes it can be very healthy. For example, after a tiring day of work, when an individual goes back home thinking about the kind of attention you might have received from your mother when you were a little kid, is a typical recession. It allows for progress that would be made the next day. Vamık Volkan indicates that show troupes, or religious sects, or even whole nations can exhibit recession. For example, after a natural or manmade disaster, or following disasters that serve as stimulants of ethnic, national, religious, or ideological nature, group level recession is frequently observed (Volkan, 2005: 79-85). Societies that have experienced such mass-scale traumas, loss of lives and property, loss of prestige, and insults, exhibit typical aspects of recession, such as (see Table 1 below):

Table 1

Group members lose their individualism
The group gathers around a leader unconsciously
The group is divided into subgroups based on their allegiance to the leader (those who are loyal to the leader, and those who oppose her)
The group creates a clear distinction between themselves and their enemies as “us” and “them”
The moral and religious system surely adopts a punitive stance
The group practices apparatuses of “introjections” and “projection” and consequentially changes in mood, ranging from shared depressive emotions to common paranoid expectations, can materialize.
The group develops a thought of having the right to do something to maintain their common identity.
Group members increasingly experience a clouding of the boundary between magical thought and reality
Group members experience new cultural phenomena and adopt recreated versions of traditional societal customs to preserve group identity.
Selected past traumas and victories of the group regain effectiveness and this leads to a breaking down of the sense of time.
The leadership dissects the historical continuity of the group and recreates a new history.
Group members start to live some of the common symbols of the group as proto symbols
Common images increasingly depict other groups perceived to be enemies as characteristics that are deemed to be lower than human or using proto symbols and dehumanize them. Demons, insects, microbes, rough drafts of humans...
The group experiences the geographic or political boundaries as a “second skin”
The group focuses on the little differences between themselves and their enemies.
The fundamental trust within the family is broken down, and a new family hierarchy is created.
Group members become exceedingly involved in the notion of “blood” and common or pure existence of the group.
The group starts behaviors that symbolize purification.
Group experiences difficulty in differentiating between its likings of beautiful and ugly.
The group turns its physical surrounding into a gray-brown, amorphous (symbolically excrement-like) structure.

(Volkan, 2005: 87)

It can be said of late that the instant acceleration of spiritual streams in the West, particularly in the US, is driven by a “recession” that started on September 11, 2001.

## MYSTICAL MARKETING: The Dimensions of Concern

When we look at Amazon.com's bestseller list, we come across sufficient elements of mysticism and spiritualism that relates to our discussion in the summaries of four of the top ten best-selling books. Naming the first of these should suffice: *Women, Food And God*. It is indicated in this book that ways of eating and beliefs are inextricable. Besides, it refers to the concept of God. Also, the third best-selling book, *Dead in the Family*, is about intra-family relationships of vampires and werewolves. *The Short Second of Life* tells the story of a newly minted vampire and ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in the bestseller list

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books>. Finally, *The Red Pyramid* ranks 8<sup>th</sup> and its story is briefly as follows: Julius Kane goes to a museum together with his son and daughter to carry out research on the *Rosetta Stone* (a stone that significantly helped decipher hieroglyph writings, which has information, on its surface, on how to erect the statues in temples). During his research, however, he accidentally awakens the Egyptian God Seth. Seth sends Julius Kane to Duat (an underground place which, according to mythology, houses the spirits of gods and the dead). Kane traces the other members of his family. Meanwhile, his children learn that their family lineage goes back to a secret society from the pharaohs' era as they try to stop Seth. His children are also magicians due to their bloodlines.

The question that Adam Possamai seeks answer for in his work titled *Alternative Spiritualities And The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* is the following: are the modern spiritual streams that Bauman "composed of a weird combination of the supposedly new and the not-so-well-understood traditional. We can almost talk about a tumult of thought and technique in which the correct elements are not new and the new elements are not correct" (Güleç: 92).

There are many questions that these programs and techniques cannot answer. One of them is: are all of these techniques valid for all human beings? Some of them can be valid for some people under certain circumstances and they can be actually beneficial. Of course, what we mean by validity and the benefit that they provide is not clear either.

The second critical question is: is it possible for everybody to develop and to uncover their said 'hidden potential'? Or, are the current improvements mere eliminations of unfortunate obstacles? We cannot know.

The third question is: do these techniques of self-actualization and awareness have any common aspects? Since there has been no conceptual inquiry into the matter, this is really impossible to answer.

We can also state that known self-actualization methods cannot yet be compared to the fortunate outcomes of everyday experiences. Maybe we can develop our nature through conscious effort: it is indeed possible to experience excessive affect and pain, and not benefit anything at all from these experiences.

Personal growth is in connection with the development of a sense of identity, the skill with which one can act autonomously, and the reality itself. Nevertheless, even this mere statement entails several assumptions. One of them is that these aspects necessarily depend on behavior that we think is worthy of liking. For example, respect to others. Another assumption

is that there is such a thing that is called the reality, or we do not have any alternative but act as if there exists one.

## **SUPERSTITIONS and MYTHS ACCOMPANYING MYSTICAL BEHAVIOR**

Especially some of the legends, superstitions, and myths that are being experienced intensely in Anatolia perform important functions in terms of guarding the cultural characteristics of the society. The opposing stance of this interactive belief system against the authority at all times has to be underlined. Wherever the dangers that threaten the social life come from, what we can refer to as the “*Paranormal FM*” of the radio frequency of the population kicks in at once, creating imaginary elements that aid in defending against these threats. All historical elements are reset and offered to the use of the society to eliminate the noise in the mass communication in a cognitive fashion. Just give an example to clarify what we mean, during the era in which porn movies were increasing their prevalence and the code name of “2 films in succession”, referring to playing porn movies in cinemas open to public, a rumor sprang into action that vampires were seen in these dark movie salons and they killed a few people, drinking their blood, and disappeared. This rumor has proliferated in the society to such an extent that the majority of young boys stopped even passing in front of cinema buildings.

It was not important as to where this rumor originated from, or whether there were multiple sources that spread the rumor. It was deterrent, protective, and came about at just the right time. Saying that such an outdated rumor came about at just the right time and thus praising it might be considered to be wrong. To clarify, the conjuncture of the day has to be evaluated with all of its facets. If it was possible to choose, of course a strict monitoring the age of the people who could watch these movies by the government, upon recommendations of psychologists, would have been preferred. Nevertheless, we can observe that it was a time in which the government was weak and the streets were ruled by lawlessness, which led to such a completely reflexive reaction to fill this gap with superstition and myths.

Maybe we can make the issue more understandable by citing stories that Ahmet Tacemen provides, as told by different sources, in his book titled ‘*Turkish Identity in the Pre-Islam Grounding of Literature*’ and touching upon their connotations.

The first of the stories, transcribed as is, is as follows:

*There is a spring in the shades of the walnut trees on the left side of the road to Fatih from Ankara. This spring or the location, which is now known as the spring of separation, was known as the stone of separation in very old times. Sons were sent off to war, and daughters were sent off as brides at this location. In doing so, people used to tie red kerchiefs to this stone so that the one they sent would safely return, and the stone would turn red from all the kerchiefs tied to it. Indeed, as the saying goes, “Fate may be it that you go but cannot return, or you return but not find the ones you yearn.*

*Betroth of a betrothed girl dies at war and is lost without identification. His betrothed was betrothed in the cradle [Translator’s Note: their marriage was arranged between their families when they were babies]. The girl had ever dreamt of living together all throughout their lives. She has not come out of her house since she heard about the death of her betrothed. One night, an old man with a white beard told this girl, in her dream, “Wake up,*

*my daughter! Dress up at once! Run to the stone of separation!" The girls woke up, heeded the old man's words, and when she got to the stone of separation, she found that the stone was gone and her betrothed was standing in its place. They hugged in tears. Then the boy said "Water". Gosh, whence could she find water? The girl ran to the village –Fatih– to fetch water. When she returned to the stone of separation, with the pot filled with water on her shoulder, she found the stone of separation with a crack passing through its center and ice cold, beautiful water coming out of it in the form of a spring. The girl looked around for her betrothed, shouting and running. Then she laid her pot on the ground and waited for her betrothed. Her betrothed had, in fact, quenched his thirst and was watching her from within the invisible.*

*When the sun rose, passersby saw the lifeless body of the girl hugging the spring. They tell the villagers. Henceforth, the stone of separation came to be known as the 'Spring of Separation'... (Source: Güldane AYTEKIN. Born in Ankara in 1950. Is not schooled beyond primary school. Date and time of recording: province of Ankara, county of Sincan, Fatih U. Hasan neighborhood – December 1997) (Tacemen, 2001: 319).*

There are several messages that the story (fiction) conveys. One of them is that those in love cannot be separated even by death, and thus wars and deaths can be endured better. The most important message is the consolation in the belief that the 'separates' sent off to far away at the stone of separation would surely reunite with their loved ones. Mission accomplished and the person who was sent off is entrusted to a 'sacred'. The spirits of the betrothed who separated at the stone of separation would help those who went away to come back without harm. Now, waiting can be done better in resignation.

In another story, the subject matter is how people who experienced a disaster resettled. It also entails hints of how people moved to a settled life. What needs to be done as people settle at a location is highlighted with the paranormal motifs included in the story. The hearsay that will be told leaves Dame Emine the legendary, who possesses supernatural power and who is devoid of the mud of the flood. Another takeaway lesson, of course, is that disasters are at our elbow and we need the sacred to protect us from them.

### **The Ghost.**

*Begre is a little village tucked at a remote part of the province of Malatya. People of Begre used to keep livestock and live as nomads. There was a woman named Dame Emine living at this village and she was braver and more fearless than men. When her man was not at home, she herded cattle, would not come back home from the mountains, and always carried a rifle on her back. She is such a woman that her fame spread to vast distances. The villagers even today pray to God to grant their sons "Dame Emine's strength".*

*In summer, she used to herd the cattle onto the mountains and stay with them, making a tent from the branches that she gathered. She would feed the have the animals graze over the mountain. These villagers call the products that they obtain from animals "katik". They would collect their katik and return to their houses in autumn. They would set their tents next to streams since it is closer to water, as well as being warmer. As a matter of*



*fact, there is not much difference between the summer and winter weather there. Dame Emine used to set her tent, like everybody else, next to a stream.*

*It used to rain a lot then. One day a flood occurred such that it tore everything down, dragging away tents, animals, and people. This flood took away so many people. Dame Emine was dragged by floodwaters too... After the flood was over, all the other people who were dragged were found, but not Emine. Months passed by. One day, a shepherd who herded his herd at the mountainside saw Dame Emine on the highest branches of a tree. He climbed to the tree and found Dame Emine dried up, her mouth, eyes, face all covered up with mud, enshrouded in branches. The flood could not get to these branches where Dame Emine was. Dame Emine had climbed up the tree, moving out of the mud of the flood, and was left there as she was. No one had thought of looking at tree tops when they were searching for her either.*

*Hen Dame Emine was brought down from the top of the tree where she was, the image of a woman appears where she was laid on the ground. It is as if a sculpture was formed there. That tree remained evergreen, come winter or summer. The villagers made that a wishing tree, tying cloth to it. (Source: Bayram Kılınç. Born in Malatya in 1940. Is not schooled beyond primary school. Date and time of recording: province of Malatya, county of Doğanşehir, Begre Village-June 1999) (Tacemen, 2001: 329)*

The last story what would be excerpted from Ahmet Tacemen is about people's marrying with demons and fairies, which is frequently found in Turkish culture and Anatolia. This story is about Karamurt Uzbeks living in Kazakhstan. It is similar to Köroğlu's marrying a faerie. Beyond marrying supernatural beings, a series of cultural norms are mentioned in the story.

*A grocer's marrying a faerie is still told as a story among Karamurts. The grocer falls in love with the faerie who appears to him. The faerie sets a condition for him to be able to marry her that he has to live with honor. The grocers accept this condition and they marry. According to the condition set, the magical faerie entrusts her gown to the grocer for his keeping. The grocer puts the gown between the pages of Koran, which the faeries cannot touch in any way. After some time, though, the faerie learns that her husband drinks alcohol, and does other things that harm his honor. She goes to her mother in law at once. She tells her mother in law that her husband did not abide by the conditions set. She requests her gown that her husband placed between the pages of Koran. Although her mother in law is very upset with what her son did, she gives the faerie's gown back to her. The faerie wears the gown and becomes invisible. Nevertheless, she continues to watch her husband from a distance, invisible. Being a loudmouth, the grocer tells other women that he is married to a faerie, and the faerie gets upset. She quits following her husband around. She deserts him forever. The grocer loses his mind after that. He starts calling his dog as his "beloved", as he used to call his faerie wife before. (Source: K. Tayjanov, H. İsmailov, Osobenisti Doislamish Verovaniy u Uzbekov Karamurtov, Drevnie obryady verovaniya i kultiy narodov Sredney Azii. Moscow, 1986) (Tacemen, 2001: 403)*

All three stories are based on some social events, are fictionalized, and are transferred from generation to generation, with fantastic elements being added to them, thus being continuously recreated. It is obvious that social concerns are their originators.

All three narratives lead to the creation of some mystical beliefs and some ritualistic behaviors. Ambiguities are tried and mitigated so as to allow people to move to a higher cognitive position than where they currently are.

## CONCLUSION

We have to admit, at least to a certain extent, that these reflexes that are developed are natural systems whose protection of the society have been tested time and again, since they have been practiced for thousands of years and continue their existence even today. It is interesting that they are resilient against all tricks of capitalism that are the smartest and have the most variable characteristics, making them more convincing. The might of shopping malls that are the bastions of global capitalism can only last until hearsay on vampires spreads around. These spiritual codes that are carried in the social genes are resilient, no matter how much they are subjected to efforts aimed at shaping them. The most fundamental proof for that is the conflict between Islam and various superstitions. Despite Islam's and Muslim scholars' fast opposition, people continue to visit tombs in Turkey, which 99% of the population is said to be Muslim. Despite all warning signs posted on tombs that read "they do not have a place in our religion", people offer oblation at tombs. The images in Aysun Özkan's thesis titled Psycho-Sociological Dimensions of Tomb Visits, showing women who distribute candies to visitors (since their oblations were accepted) just a few meters away from signs that read "no oblations", support this contention. Pious people do not heed the advice of religious leaders beyond a certain point (Özkan, 2009: 92). Mustafa Doğan, who served as a religious official himself, expresses the opposition of Islam to superstition with the following sentences: "Religion's handling of the situation is philosophical, beyond considering it to be a psychological and social problem. Islam bans such beliefs and practices not because it rejects their reality or that they lead to certain outcomes, but it bans them because they are not in compliance with the notion of oneness (of Allah). This is because Islam does not accept any power that is equivalent to or greater than that of Allah." Despite this opposition and all Muslim scholars' (for example Wahhabis' in Saudi Arabia) use of coercion at times, people still continue to embrace these beliefs and practices.

We tried to touch upon psychological and sociological aspects of mysticism. Based on our observation during our literature review that this field is quite fertile, we believe it can be studied more comprehensively by covering hundreds of sources. Discussions concerning this topic in scientific circles generally lead to one party's alienation of the other beyond some point. Nevertheless, it is a shame for all of these debaters that what hundreds of millions of people experience in their worlds of belief cannot be named consensually! Our work more so includes hints as to how mysticism can be (re) set up in our time. We need to approach the setting up of mystical elements that belong to peoples and cultures today from two perspectives.

People can be exploited using mystical elements, through capitalist methods

Or, oases could be created that would soothe the spiritual worlds of people by highlighting mystical elements. In doing so, commercial ends might be observed moderately.

We think that mysticism would continue its course of action today around these two axes, and

overlapping at times.

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