

# National Unitarian Fellowship

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# Viewpoint



## Synchronicity

by

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## **Introduction**

From time to time I have been asked by the Theosophical Society in Bolton to give a talk at one of their Lodge meetings. This year the subject was 'Synchronicity'. What a coincidence! I had been reading about that! Here is the text of that talk.

## **Synchronicity**

Synchronicity is about coincidences. Those coincidences that on the surface of things seem meaningless - but they make you pause - if only to say 'Isn't that odd?' Or maybe to see the coincidence as a sign.

We have probably all had such experiences. Sometimes it can seem an absolutely meaningless coincidence - yet it makes us think. Sometimes it just makes us laugh - but somehow we remember it.

But there can also be meaningful coincidences.

It is all down to Carl Jung, the psychiatrist and psychotherapist who gave us the ideas of introverts and extroverts, the psyche, the shadow, archetypes, the unconscious and the collective unconscious, animus and anima.

Jung had spent his whole life on the edge of that other world - the paranormal. From childhood he had attended seances in the family home. When the medium in a trance spoke in different voices - he wanted to know who or what was speaking through her - was it something from within her? Or was it something channelling itself through her? He had experiences of material changes and of ectoplasm being produced.

He had many experiences which he said were evidence of this paranormal connection - of the feeling of being in a haunted house, hearing bells and being aware of odours. He had experiences of

objects suddenly splitting, table tops or knives.

His theory of synchronicity made a link between the two worlds he lived in.

We have to know something about him, his family and his friends to understand this theory of synchronicity and how he developed it.

He lived from 1875 to 1961. - and that was an interesting age of discovery, interspersed with terrible wars.

There were two things that intrigued him about himself - one was his vivid imagination. Where did all his ideas come from? What was happening when he was dreaming?

He believed that he had a spirit form that guided him - and he called it Philomen. He also believed that his imagination belonged to another character - which was also part of him but was linked to something otherworldly.

What he wasn't sure about was whether his paranormal experiences came from within himself or from somewhere else - he wondered if his unconscious self was projecting them.

When mediums spoke in a trance, he thought that they were communicating with projections of themselves - or others in the séance.

He thought at first that the material world was always connected to the spirit world. He did not believe that spirits existed independently .

Later on he thought that there was a connection between the physical and the other worldly. He thought we might have an intermediary body - a 'subtle' body he called it.

This would explain those out of body experiences, where the body is unconscious or on the point of death but we have an astral body

that still functions.

It could be the astral body that visits the strange places we find in our dreams.

Add to this the fact that Jung had a heart attack and a near death experience himself - and we can see what a highly perceptive person he was.

Many of these experiences occurred at critical times in his life - or at moments when he had a change of direction - the decision to study psychology; his break with Freud. Whereas Freud said that all psychological problems were rooted in sexuality and sexual experience, Jung thought that was only an element in this discipline but not the whole cause of it.

So there has always been a connection between his material world - and whatever was 'out there'.

Secondly he had a friend called J.B. Rhein. He had run an experiment with a mind reading card game where he showed that people were able to know the value of a card that was being held up but which they could not see. They had to concentrate on it. Rhein claimed that the results of these experiments demonstrated the power of telepathy because the results were better than if they had just been based on probability.

Third was his friendship with Wolfgang Pauli. Pauli was a theoretical physicist and gave us quantum mechanics - the behaviour of sub atomic particles - which seem to defy the logic of Newtonian physics. Sub atomic particles just behave differently. They react to being observed. If two parts are separated, a stimulus applied to one will bring a response from both - no matter how great the separation. It is like having identical twins with one here and one in another country. Each is always aware of the moods of the others, suffers the same pains and emotions.

Pauli had a reputation for breaking things - a sort of negative energy. He would walk through a lab and as he passed pieces of equipment would break or fall over. At one time he was barred from entering his own laboratory.

Then of course there was Jung's work - as a psychiatrist.

All these contributed to the development of his theory of synchronicity. Jung spent many years at it - a lifetime really - but you couldn't say that the world ever accepted it as a proper theory with scientific evidence to back it up. But then it seems true!

Later on his theory has been partly used - in the advanced study of whole numbers - apparently.. Science looking for parallels between unrelated data.

The basis of Synchronicity is this: that two events occur and there is a meaningful connection between them.

One of these events occurs at a material level and the other occurs at a psychic level.

One triggers the other but otherwise there is no causal connection - they are random events that come together.

The psychic event might be in a dream, or during a therapy session - or might spontaneously just happen.

He categorised these as well. He said there were three ways for synchronicity to occur:

A psychic event and a simultaneous physical event occur at the same time.

He used the example of one of his patients; He was engaged in a psychotherapy session with a lady who was a difficult patient. She was telling him that she had been drawing a picture of a golden scarab beetle - and didn't know why - didn't know what it meant. As she was telling him this, a flying beetle got into the consulting

room through an open window and started buzzing and flying into the glass doors of one of his cabinets. It was similar to a scarab. It so astounded them both that she was then able to open up and talk about her emotions - until then it had all been rational discussion.

It made him think that this coincidence enabled her to connect with an archetype.

The second is that a psychic event occurs and the material or physical event occurs somewhere else - at a distance away.

He used the example of Emmanuel Swedenborg - the religious leader (who had visits to heaven and meetings with angels).

Swedenborg was having a dinner with friends at Gothenburg. It was in 1759. when he suddenly said, 'My house in Stockholm is under threat. It is on fire!'

There was no other way he could have known and two days later a courier arrived to say that there had been a great fire in Stockholm, 2000 people had been made homeless. His house was saved.

And third, a psychic event occurs in the present but the physical or material event occurs in the future.

A friend of his had said to his son, 'If you pass your exams, I will let you go on holiday to Spain.'

The boy said he dreamed of being on that holiday - there was a town square with beautiful buildings, he was riding in a carriage pulled by two fine cream coloured horses. There was so much detail in his dream. When eventually he did go on that holiday - there was the square, there was the carriage, there were the two cream horses pulling it.

The boy had read no brochures, not talked to anyone who had been to the same place. It was a mystery.

Later in his life Jung added a fourth category - and that is that the two events both occur on a psychic level. People having the same dream or same reaction.

Some of the synchronicity stories are quite surreal. There is a well known story about this. The French writer Emile Deschamps was treated to some plum pudding by Monsieur de Fontgibu. Ten years later, he encountered plum pudding on the menu of a Paris restaurant, and wanted to order some, but the waiter told him the last dish had already been served to another customer, who turns out to be Monsieur de Fontgibu. In 1832 Emile Deschamps visited a restaurant with a friend and is once again offered plum pudding. He recalled the earlier incident and told his friend that only Monsieur de Fontgibu is missing to make the setting complete. At that moment a senile Monsieur de Fontgibu enters the room by mistake.

Jung had his own experience of synchronicity. He had been dreaming that Philomen was dancing around wearing a pair of kingfisher wings - next morning Jung found a dead kingfisher on his lawn.

We might ask 'What is the point of synchronicity anyway?'

It works when you consider his theories with those of his two friends J.B.Rhine and Wolfgang Pauli.

It is telepathy with similar actions to the sub atomic particles. In these dimensions it seems that time and space no longer count - and that is exactly the conclusion that Jung came to with his study of psychoanalysis and synchronicity.

In the world outside our experience time and space do not exist. Everything exists simultaneously.

It explains the three examples Jung gave. Take out the distance and space elements and Swedenborg saw the fire as it was happening.

Take out the time element and the boy saw the square and the

horses as if he was already there.

It introduces us to a world which only exists as 'now' and it is a world outside our consciousness - it is a paranormal world - a world existing alongside ours - but linked to it.

Why is it important? Because it affects the way we live our individual lives. It gives a purpose in life.

Some people say that synchronicity is just an example of these two worlds touching, others say that the touch is for a purpose.

For Jung's patient, it was for a purpose he would say because it unlocked what was locked up in her unconscious.

To get a picture of how this all works and how we as individuals fit into it, I use the example of a flock of starlings.

It is a magnificent sight to see this vast cloud of birds, wheeling and soaring in the sky.

You look at them and there is no leader, no formation - just a mass of birds - but the flock is acting as if it is an independent body - as if it has a mind of its own.

They wheel and soar, rise and fall as one - yet each bird is an individual within it. They have not surrendered anything of themselves, they are not driven into it. They are just part of something greater than themselves.

We are the same without realising it - except we often have the problem of refusing to join the flock.

It is not the physical body that flies but the unconscious mind.

The mind is like an iceberg - with the conscious mind at the top and below it the unconscious mind.

The tip of the iceberg is fed from our everyday experiences and influences, education, use of the senses - but it is also fed from below

- from the submerged unconscious.

The submerged part is the cleverest, but it contains knowledge and experiences of its own. It is connected to the flock as well - what Jung called the collective unconscious.

The collective unconscious contains even more knowledge - and it contains knowledge of what Jung called the archetypes - those mysterious forms that influence our thoughts and actions - hidden role models.

Jung also said there was more to the collective unconscious than just being like a flock of starlings flying around as one - with all its knowledge etc.

The flock of starlings has to get from A to B and has to find a roosting area but the collective unconscious has more of a purpose.

It has a destiny. The whole of humankind has a common destiny and the collective unconscious is flying towards it as the universe is flying through space to who knows where..

We do not know what this destiny is but we can only assume it through our contacts with this travelling flock.

We never seem to be getting very far with our flight to destiny and Jung explains why.

There are blocks and impediments in the process of gaining knowledge about ourselves from the collective unconscious and so we find it difficult or impossible to fly with the flock.

In the first place we have an ego which lives with us in the top of our iceberg. It thinks it knows it all because it lives within the material world of experience and influence.

It thinks it knows who it is because it resists the messages coming from below. It doesn't properly recognise the archetypes whose shadows live in its unconscious mind - in fact it creates shadows of

them which are negative aspects of the true ones.

Because the ego blocks off or misinterprets the messages of the unconscious it is as if we end up with a parallel negative flock.

The dark side is stronger than the light.

The dark shadow flock, the negative collective unconscious gives us our wars, our racism, our distrust. I suppose it gives us our culture of greedy bankers and speculators; and our shallow love of flawed celebrities. It gives us our passion for football teams.

It breaks the connections to that other true spiritual and psychic world.

The spiritual and religious symbols that used to link us collectively to one another and to the spiritual world have been pushed aside in the quest for material success.

The negative side of the collective unconscious is very strong in this day and age.

The negative shadow side of the archetypes is also very strong - we have dictators who rule without any love or care for the people they govern. They are disconnected from the positive flock that flies in the light.

If we want examples of the dark collective unconscious at work we only have to look at Syria - a civil war where both sides are fighting in a spiritual darkness without a cause of values - many groups are fighting for power or to further the dark side of their religion.

Sometimes though this collective unconscious really comes to the surface - I was thinking of the outpouring of grief when Princess Diana died -

She was an iconic figure - and carried the pattern of an archetype - beautiful, a princess, powerful, fighting against an established Palace tradition. Yet she was also flawed - picking bad relationships,

trusting the wrong people, too emotional. She was in conflict with her shadows and this led to an unhappy life. She experienced what many others experience but her story was writ large for all to see and to feel connected with in some way so her death evoked this outpouring of collective grief.

Even with the Olympic games - we were all sucked into the celebration of the torch carrying and the games themselves.

How do we connect into the collective unconscious which is good and in the light - a flock of doves perhaps instead of blackbirds.

Jung would say we connect through the paranormal through psychic experiences and seances

It can be retuned through the religious experience.

Religion used to have a way of connecting us to that other world - to the destiny of collective unconscious.

Religion now has a bad name because its own organisations have fallen into darkness too.

Once religion connected communities to the mystery and wonder of life and the world. It made a connection to the parallel spiritual world. There was a sense of magic in the use of symbols and rituals

Whatever you believe about Christianity, Jesus could be described as the archetype of perfect human being. Loving, caring, forgiving, healing, teaching.

What he was and what the later church made of him are two different things.

The loss of simple religion with its own mythology and symbols is a reason why the connection between the material world and the spiritual world with its universal destiny has become fractured.

Which brings us back to synchronicity and its purpose, which Jung

said was about reconnecting us to that hidden part of the iceberg, the unconscious and the universal beyond.

It is useful in the field of psychoanalysis and unblocking the unconscious and coming to terms with the shadows there.

But it is also a way for anyone to connect to the purpose of life through rebuilding their own icebergs.

Deepak Chopra in his book 'Synchro Destiny' and Allan Hunter in 'The Path of Synchronicity' both say that synchronicity can help us on our life's path - make us whole and happy as human beings.

In the first place, they say that synchronicity helps us to retune our lives into the flock of doves.

Because we live our lives by the top of the iceberg, we fail to notice the nudges and prods that are coming from the unconscious side of ourselves and from the collective unconscious which is all around us.

The nudges and prods are telling us that we have a purpose and a destiny and that we are part of the flock and should flow with it.

They say, look out for these meaningful coincidences and study what they mean. Keep a record of them and see a pattern emerging. See if you are being pushed onto a different path or being urged to stay on the one you are already following.

Consciously try to reconnect with the unconscious.

It is said that in meditation you lower the activity of the conscious mind and increase the activity of the unconscious mind and this creates a gradient where information can flow from unconscious to conscious.

It helps us sort out those shadows and come to terms with them.

Meditation too helps us to deal with the ego - to get into perspective the influences and observations we have picked up and our own attitudes to ourselves. It is a process of rediscovery, restoration and purification, awakens the spirituality within us.

Jung used to write about the 'unus mundus' It meant the whole universe was connected - there was only one and many things happen in parallel within it.

Jung was fascinated by the I Ching which also focussed on the moment of 'now'.

Pythagoras and Pierre de Chardin saw this too - so did Mrs Blavatsky - the omega point, Monads etc.

Jung also thought that astrology had an important part to play in determining our connection to the other world out there, the universe.

He once did an experiment in studying the star signs of married couples in which he hoped to prove that their destinies were astrologically linked.

Synchronicity can tell us something about 'reality itself'.

If everything is one, there is no time dimension 'out there'. In one sense that is what synchronicity is all about. The touching of the universal spiritual or psychic world against our own material one. It is about developing our spiritual oneness, making us aware of our own destinies and the destiny of the whole universe of life.

Synchronicity might explain miracles and religious experiences.

It might explain UFOs (according to Jung) - the psychic creating the material.

It can be used to search for connecting principles between seemingly unrelated events and used in psychic research.

To understand 'transference' between patient and therapist.

It could help to explain near death experiences - or that there is life after death.

There was and still is much scepticism about Jung's theory of synchronicity - but then these coincidences do happen. Sometimes it might just be a meaningless coincidence but then again it might be one of those meaningful coincidences that is giving us a sign!

*Tony McNeile is the minister to the NUF. He retired from active ministry in 2004 and now enjoys playing golf. His book, 'Through the Prism' was written with Lucy Harris and he has just published 'My Little Prayer Book', a collection of prayers for private or collective worship.*

**Comments -**

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