

Synchronicity and the Mind of God: Unlocking the Mystery of Carl Jung's "Meaningful Coincidence"

by Ray Grasse



While preparing for his role in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, actor Frank Morgan decided against using the costume offered him by the studio for his role as the traveling salesman Professor Marvel, opting instead to select his own wardrobe for the part. Searching through the racks of second-hand clothes assembled over the years by the MGM wardrobe department, he finally settled on an old frock coat that eventually served as his costume during the movie's filming. Passing the time one day, Morgan idly turned out the inside of the coat's pocket only to discover the name "L. Frank Baum" sewn into the jacket's lining. As later investigation confirmed, the jacket had originally been designed for the creator of the Oz story, L. Frank Baum, and made its way through the years into the collection of clothing on the MGM backlot.

Most of us have, at some point or another, experienced certain unusual coincidences so startling they compel us to wonder about their possible significance or purpose. Do these strange occurrences hold some deeper meaning for our lives? Or are they simply chance events, explainable through ordinary laws of probability, as most scientists claim?

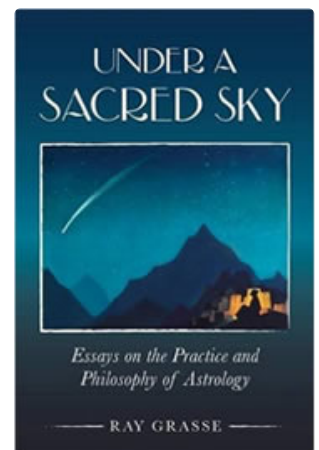
Among those who wrestled with these questions was the famed Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. Having experienced many such uncanny events himself, he coined the term *synchronicity* to describe the phenomenon of "meaningful coincidence." Whereas some coincidences were indeed without significance, he wrote, every so often there occurred confluences of circumstance so improbable they hinted at a deeper purpose or design in their unfolding.¹

To explain such phenomena, he theorized the existence of a principle in nature very different from that normally described by conventional physics. Whereas most visible phenomena in the world seem to be related in a cause-and-effect manner, like billiard balls bouncing into one another, synchronistic events appear to be "acausally" related, as though linked by an underlying pattern rather than by direct, linear forces.

For example, the presence of Baum's coat on the film wasn't caused by the making of the film, nor did the appearance of the coat somehow cause the making of the film; they simply were dual expressions of the same unfolding matrix of meaning. Jung went on to postulate two primary kinds of acausal relationships: between two or more outer events in one's life (as in the case of Frank Morgan), or between an outer event and an inner psychological state.

Since it was first published in 1952, Jung's concept has increasingly filtered into popular culture, having found its way into the plot lines of TV shows, works of pop-fiction like *The Celestine Prophecy*, and the lyrics of rock groups like The Police. In more scholarly quarters, there have been attempts to shed light on this theory through classifying various types of coincidence, scrutinizing it in terms of statistical studies, or even explaining it through quantum physics.

The search continues. In a letter to the late Victor Mansfield, Jungian disciple Marie-Louise von Franz wrote towards the end of her life:



This essay is taken from Ray Grasse's book "Under a Sacred Sky" which can be ordered at [Wessex Astrologer](http://WessexAstrologer.com) or amazon.com

*The work which has now to be done is to work out the concept of synchronicity. I don't know the people who will continue it. They must exist, but I don't know where they are.*²

So what, ultimately, is the message of synchronicity, and how shall we best unlock its significance?

What I'd like to suggest here is the possibility that understanding synchronicity may require nothing less than a radically different cosmology than we're accustomed to, one with roots in a very ancient way of thinking – and one in which Jung's "meaningful coincidence" actually plays only a small part. Let me explain.



Most of us are familiar with the well-known parable of the blind men and the elephant. According to the story, a group of sightless men come across a great elephant, and each one tries to determine its nature from their own limited perspective. For the man grasping only its trunk, it seems to be a large snake, while for another, feeling only its leg, it's more like the trunk of a tree, and so on. Because of their partial and limited vantage points, none is able to grasp the true nature of the creature, since that can properly be understood only from a larger, more global perspective.

In much the same way, I'd suggest that by focusing our attention primarily on isolated coincidences we are only witnessing one small facet of a much larger reality, one with many different expressions and dimensions. Unlocking the true significance of Jung's theory thus requires that we step back and attempt to grasp the broader perspective of which synchronistic events are only a facet.

The Symbolist Worldview

What, then, is that "broader perspective"?

It's what I'll here call the *symbolist* worldview – a perennial perspective espoused through the centuries by such diverse figures as Plotinus, Pythagoras, Jacob Boehme, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Cornelius Agrippa, to name just a few. For these and other figures, the world was viewed as infused with meaning, as "saying" something. As the Swedish scientist and mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg wrote in *Heaven and Hell*, "There is a correspondence of all things of heaven with all things of man."³ The universe is a reflection of an underlying spiritual reality; all phenomena express the deeper ideas and principles of which they are a "signature," and can therefore be deciphered for their subtler significance.

For the symbolist, all events and phenomena are seen as elements of a supremely ordered whole. Like the intricately arranged threads of a great novel or myth, the elements of daily experience are viewed as intimately interrelated, with no event out of place, no situation accidental. Consequently even a seemingly trivial occurrence can serve as an important key toward unlocking a greater pattern of meaning: the passage of a bird through the sky, the appearance of lightning at a critical moment, or the overhearing of a chance remark – such events are deemed significant because they're perceived as interwoven within a greater tapestry of relationship.

Pervading the warp and weft of creation is a web of subtle connections sometimes known as *correspondences*. The American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson once said:

*Secret analogies tie together the remotest parts of Nature, as the atmosphere of a summer morning is filled with innumerable gossamer threads running in every direction, revealed by the beams of the rising sun.*⁴

Using more contemporary terms, these correspondences could well be described as "acausal" connections, since they're not based on mechanistic forces of cause-and-effect, like our proverbial billiard balls on the pool table, but on principles of analogy, metaphor, and symbolism.

For example, whereas scientists view the Moon as a material body with certain measurable properties, such as size, mineral composition, and orbital motion, among others, for the esotericist the Moon may also be related to such things as water, women, the home, food, and emotions, since these all linked through an underlying “lunar” archetype, or what might be called the principle of *receptivity*. Understanding the language of correspondences thus provides the esotericist with a skeleton key toward unlocking the hidden connections which unite the outer and inner worlds of our experience.

Since the advent of scientific rationality in the 17th and 18th centuries, the concept of correspondences has been dismissed by scientists as nothing more than an outmoded metaphysical fiction, comparable to a child’s belief in Santa Claus or the tooth fairy. Yet as soon becomes obvious to anyone studying astrology for any length of time, such correspondences are actually quite real and not merely the stuff of overactive imaginations.

Consequently, when the Moon is stressfully activated in a person’s horoscope, they may experience a rash of problems in their dealings with women, say; or when Jupiter crosses over their Venus, they might suddenly experience a run of good luck in matters involving romance or money – and so on. Ultimately, the horoscope provides a complex map of the symbolic correspondences that weave their way throughout a person’s life, in ways that are both testable and repeatable.

The Implications for Jung’s Synchronicity

So how does the symbolist perspective force us to rethink Jung’s synchronicity theory?

For one, in his formal writings on the subject Jung claimed that synchronicity was a “relatively rare” phenomenon.⁵ But for the symbolist, coincidence is just the tip of a far greater iceberg of meaning, the most visible feature of a pervasive framework of design and relationships that undergirds all experience. In a sense, the *entire world* is a vast matrix of “acausal connections” extending to every aspect of one’s experience, from one’s body and thoughts to every event and object in the environment. Said another way, everything is a “coincidence,” insofar as everything *co-incides*!

Jung regarded the synchronistic event as an important “eruption of meaning” in our lives. But as divinatory systems like astrology demonstrate (and as I explore more fully in *The Waking Dream*⁶), there are actually *many* eruptions of meaning in our lives besides the occasional and remarkable coincidence, many of them equally important – marriages, births, deaths, graduations, job changes, chance encounters, accidents, nightly dreams, and many others. All these and more are “synchronistic” insofar as they correspond in acausal and meaningful ways to other unfolding patterns in one’s life.⁷ To borrow a phrase from William Irwin Thompson, we are like flies crawling across the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, unaware of the complex archetypal drama spread out before us; what the infrequent and dramatic coincidence does is pull back the curtain for us on one small portion of that vast tableau of meaning.



For that reason, uncovering the truth of synchronicity won’t be had through scientific methodologies or by carefully studying individual coincidences, but only through a broader philosophical inquiry into the symbolic nature of existence itself. As a result, unlocking Jung’s “meaningful coincidence” may ultimately require a “unified field” theory of meaning that incorporates such diverse disciplines as sacred geometry, astrology, the theory of correspondences, chakric psychology, number theory, and a multi-leveled cosmology, to name just a few. Only within the broad framework offered by just such a Sacred Science can we hope to truly grasp the “whole elephant” of synchronicity, and not simply one of its appendages, as exemplified by the rare and dramatic coincidence.

And it’s against this broader backdrop that we begin to glimpse some of the broader questions raised by synchronistic phenomena, such as: What could possibly organize the phenomena of our world in so profound and meaningful a way as this? In his book *A Sense of the Cosmos*, author Jacob Needleman offers a possible clue to that question with this comment about the uncanny symmetry displayed throughout nature’s ecological web:

Whenever we have looked to a part for the sake of understanding the whole, we have eventually found that the part is a living component of the whole. In a universe without a visible center, biology presents a reality in which the existence of a center is everywhere implied. (emphasis mine) 8

Needleman's comments here could be read as a useful analogy for understanding synchronicity, too. In order for the diverse events of our lives to be interwoven as intricately and artfully as synchronicity implies, and as systems like astrology empirically demonstrate, there would seem to be a regulating intelligence underlying our world, a central principle that organizes all of its elements like notes in a grand symphony of meaning. One needn't think of this as involving a bearded, anthropomorphic deity on a heavenly throne somewhere, of course. As we saw at the opening of this article, the Neoplatonist writer Plotinus referred to this transcendent principle as simply "the One," while the Buddhists speak of "Big Mind," and the mystic geometers of old described a circle whose "center was everywhere but whose circumference was nowhere."

Whatever labels or terms one chooses, the phenomenon of synchronicity hints at a coordinating agency of unimaginable scope and subtlety whereby all the coincidences and correspondences of the world coalesce as if threads in a grand design, and within which our lives are holoscopically nested. Seen in this way, the synchronistic event can be seen as affording us a passing sideways glance, as if through a glass darkly, into the mind of God.