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collection of Campbell's late lectures. His sensitivity to the place of the feminine in mythology and his natural reception of her story is itself an example of his unique capacity to value and receive the feminine as he explores her rich simultaneous tradition in world cultures. Campbell relied upon Gimbutas's research and incorporated her findings into his lectures and writings of the late 1970s until his death in 1987. These writings on the feminine divine begin with considerations of the Paleolithic figurines Gimbutas found and identified. The inherent integrity of the archetypal image is illuminated from its basic "irrepresentable" energy and form, to the highly differentiated feminine and masculine counterparts in Hindu and Greek mythology, to the illumination stories in the Biblical tradition. Campbell crudely presents the Goddess in her multivalent representations and places her within the ongoing storyline of mythology, exemplifying the archetypal motifs present in these ancient and contemporary mythologies. Rossi expertly includes these primal patterns of psyche in her scholarly compilation.

KEY WORDS

Joseph Campbell, feminine divine, Marija Gimbutas, Goddess, mythology, Safron Rossi

Embracing Synchronicity

Toward a New Medical Science of Meaningful Coincidence

JONATHAN DAVIDSON

Review of: Bernard Beitman, *Connecting with Coincidence*, Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 2016.

*And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace and hue,
In shadow, silent distance grew the Iceberg too.*

*Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate wedding of their later history,*

*Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event.*

*Till the Spinner of the Years
Said 'Now!' And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two
hemispheres.*

From "The Convergence of the Twain,"
by Thomas Hardy

The idea of connectedness between humans and their environment through meaningful coincidence may be taken for granted by poets and writers. In lines penned to raise money for the families of those drowned in the *Titanic* disaster, Thomas Hardy eloquently captured the simultaneity of two formative processes—the building of a grand ship and the distant formation of a North Atlantic iceberg (Williams 1960, 87). Seemingly dissociated from one another, they collided in a legendary and catastrophic manner. The poet's job is to put experience or insight into words, not to explain the mechanism of things. In "The Convergence of the Twain," Hardy tips his cap to fate, which he refers to as "the Immanent Will" and the "Spinner of the Years." It is more for scientists to explain how such coincidences come about, yet coincidence is often brushed off as random and meaningless.

With writing that is part poetry and part science, Bernard Beitman's new book, *Connecting with Coincidence*, represents a rare offering from a respected authority within mainstream medicine. Beitman sees himself as "an engineer for Jung's theoretical ideas" (2016, 3), by which he is referring to Jung's notion of synchronicity—the "concurrence between a psychological conflict and a

symbolic environmental event that helps the person make a significant psychological change” (122). Jung defined synchronicity as an “acausal connecting principle” involving “the simultaneous occurrence of two meaningfully but not causally connected events” (Jung 1952, 441), and “the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state” (441). Essential to the synchronistic experience is an acausal correspondence between inner and outer events as well as a sense of meaning (Fordham 1957; Frey-Wehrlin 1976; von Franz 1975; Wharton 1986).

Synchronicity is a poorly understood process by which mind and environment become temporarily connected, and Beitman’s aim is to further this understanding. Beitman is among a small vanguard of psychiatrists to expand significantly on Jung’s pioneering observations about synchronicity in a scholarly and evidence-based way that includes Jung and a variety of other perspectives, and his work has led to the emergence of the field of coincidence studies. His book reflects years of original research and theory that aims to confirm the usefulness of coincidences in resolving conflicts and showing a way forward in life. Beitman shares many informative and striking case examples of coincidences in an open-minded, yet skeptical way, where he customarily tries to, first, eliminate other explanations for what happened. For example, he describes the case of a young driver who applied the brakes of his car, at the last minute, as a child ran out into the street. Although the driver was convinced his (and the child’s) good fortune was due to a good angel or lucky coincidence, Beitman offered his conviction that the man’s fast reactions were due more to the brain’s

immediate but unconscious perception of danger in the amygdala (2016, 94).

Connecting with Coincidence is directed primarily toward those who want to know more about coincidence and for those who are looking to enhance their personal experience of coincidence. Writing with a warm, empathic, and engaging style, Beitman stays with his audience and explains arcane or technical terms in simple language. He has a flare for memorable and pithy aphorisms, such as “we are embedded in a matrix of meaning,” which concisely embodies one of the book’s fundamental messages (Beitman 2016). Beitman has coined the term *simulpathity* to describe shared feeling at a distance, such as feeling the pain of a loved one in a distant location (14). He asserts, “The conscious mind can set goals. The subconscious mind with its GPS-like and simulpathity abilities can provide the detailed means for achieving them in a balanced way” (240). Beitman contends that coincidences may be “windows into hidden realities” (217).

Scientific dogma has typically repudiated the idea of purpose or meaning so a topic like meaningful coincidence is rarely regarded as legitimate scientific study (Sheldrake 2012; and reviewed by Hay-Edie 2012). The scientific study of acausal meaningful coincidence has been sadly neglected outside of the Jungian community and orthodoxy grants little credence to such work (Jung 1952). How many universities or medical schools, for example, are nurturing the study of synchronicity as it manifests in medicine or psychology? In considering itself to be a messenger of truth, science spurns subjectivity and barely recognizes the extent that bias affects scientific interpretation. Rather than being taboo, the introspective study of consciousness warrants consideration as a subject of legitimate scientific enquiry (Wallace 2000).

Important principles described in Beitman's book include that meaningful coincidence is more likely to occur under conditions of transition, need, searching, and elevated emotional tone. Attributes that can create coincidences or enhance their impact include preparation, optimism, perseverance, learning from failure, curiosity, flexibility, and keen intuition (Beitman 2016, 196, 240). Beitman reminds us that excessive levels of anxiety, depression, anger, and resentment can interfere with the ability to experience coincidence (240).

Perhaps we should parse the word *interfere* a bit further and recall Hardy's lines about the *Titanic*. Interference can mean "to prevent" coincidence or "to produce damage," as in an unfavorable outcome. Hardy opens his poem with reference to human pride, and it is well known that without hubris on the part of the shipbuilders and the *Titanic's* captain, it is unlikely the twain would have converged as they did. As a state of mind that leads to poor preparation and faulty decision-making (Owen and Davidson 2009), perhaps hubris can be included among factors that can influence coincidence to produce malign outcomes.

Given the Delphic nature of coincidences, which are "more like signposts than directives" (Beitman 2016, 222), Beitman reminds us that a meaningful coincidence is not always beneficial, and that the outcome is linked to how the person acts afterward: "Coincidences can offer possibilities, not certainty. The responsibility for interpreting coincidences falls on us" (41). An anecdote about a therapist who was seeing a couple who were co-CEOs of a small tech company aptly demonstrates that judging the "success" of a coincidence can be a complex process in which one has to take into account who is affected and how one might define success (245). In this case example,

the therapist disclosed to a colleague some synchronistic information that had arisen in the couple's therapy session. This information concerned the couple's long-term business plans and their possible use of an app that, as it surprisingly turned out, was invented by a therapist who practiced in the office next door. The husband complained that they had not given permission for their confidentiality to be breached by revealing that they were in therapy. Beitman discusses how the outcome of this synchronistic event could be seen as (1) harmful, (2) beneficial, or (3) a learning experience for the four individuals involved.

Connecting with Coincidence is organized into three parts, including twelve chapters. Part 1 describes the various ways in which coincidence can touch a person's life, such as in matters of family, romance, finance, health, work, and religion. One of many illustrative examples is provided of a couple looking to buy a home (Beitman 2016, 62). They had found a house that was satisfactory, if not one that fully met their needs. After leaving the bank, on a whim, the husband decided to drive home by a longer and rarely taken road. They passed a woman who was placing a "For Sale" sign in her yard, whereupon the couple stopped to investigate further and they ended up buying that property. Beitman contends, "It seems as if the two beams of need connected and drew the buyer and seller together; they picked up the information for each other and from each other." Moreover, Beitman asserts, "We all have this capability, which is increased during high emotion and shifted contexts (like taking a different way home)" (62–63).

Part 2 focuses on growing the capacity to experience coincidence and its practical application. The suggestion to "let ideas emerge into awareness" calls to mind Jung's technique of active imagination (Beitman 2016, 222).

Beitman's recommendation to seek out a coincidence counselor raises questions regarding the availability and qualifications of such experts. This advice should not be passed over casually, as it foreshadows a time in medicine when coincidence counseling could become a recognized practice: a new therapeutic approach. It also implies that an increasing number of professionals can develop the necessary personal qualities and skills that, through simulpathity and GPS mechanisms, may make possible the medical application of detection at a distance as, for example, has been described by Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer in her book, *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, Skepticism, and the Inexplicable Powers of the Human Mind* (2008).

Finally, in Part 3, Dr. Beitman outlines his ideas about the neurobiology of coincidence. Of necessity, and with the general dearth of established facts, this part is more speculative. Although we now have a deeper understanding of brain circuitry and the correspondence of brain regions and pathways to cognition, emotion, and volition, little attention has been paid to the questions addressed in Beitman's book. Beitman applies some of this understanding to synchronicity. He emphasizes the twin pillars of simulpathity and a human GPS mechanism, whereby the former connects one person to the experience of another at a distance, and the latter makes it possible to find a way to that person (or to an idea or a place) without conscious knowledge. Beitman postulates yet-to-be-discovered *Energy-Information (EI)* receptors in the brain, which can transduce input into a neuroelectrical impulse. The analogy of migratory birds and their ability to respond to small magnetic fields through trace amounts of iron-oxide receptors is helpful. Intriguing possibilities are raised by his comments that biophotons can be activated

through human intention (263) and the possibility that primitive sense receptors for odor, cold, and heat may detect subtle energy inputs (264). The location of these purported human EI receptors remains to be determined, but Beitman suggests that the GPS EI system may depend on grid cells located in the entorhinal and anterior cingulate regions of the cerebral cortex. Elsewhere, Beitman indicates the possible role played by mirror neurons in expressing empathy. Beitman conjectures that EI receptors and mirror neurons become activated at times of need, transition, or emotional arousal. To what information might EI receptors respond, and how this information could be conveyed are questions he explores. Beitman posits a field of living energy that he calls the *psychosphere*—a medium located within (or around) the earth environment that he draws parallels to spirit, *Qi*, the Akashic record, the collective unconscious, Teilhard de Chardin's noosphere, and Sheldrake's morphic fields and morphic resonance. How does the *psychosphere* compare to these and other kindred notions? I question the relationship between the *psychosphere* and Jung's notion of the Self, particularly the psychoid Self, that aspect of the human organism that can be most directly experienced as a part of nature (Progoff 1973, 112).

Beitman also expands on the ideas of others regarding coincidence. Three who may warrant mention are Rudolf Steiner, Ian Stevenson, and Dilip Jeste, whose pioneering contributions may have relevancy for coincidence studies.

Rudolf Steiner proposed the existence of etheric and astral bodies—the former being a general life force, and the latter being a more specific sphere of influence embodying desire and intention with personal and transpersonal components. Steiner believed that the wisdom

of the unconscious may invoke a kind of karmic event and/or wish for an undesired coincidental event in order to create new opportunity. It was his opinion that “waking consciousness is not as smart as the subconscious” (Wehr 2002, 202).

Beitman exposes the reader to Ian Stevenson’s attempts to explain how memories can be transmitted from one life to another during the reincarnation process. Stevenson coined the term *psychophore* (“soul-bearing”), which he saw as being akin to a morphic field. Of interest, he observed how extreme emotion or stress (violent death) had occurred in the previous life of one who later had a memory of that life or bore some physical stigmata related to the fatal injury. Provocatively, he pondered if concentrated attention could have such a profound effect, and whether thoughts could exert “appallingly destructive power” over our bodies or if they could have equally powerful healing effects (Stevenson 1997, 2100). While Stevenson was describing his work on claimed memories of a former life, some parallels may exist between his proposed explanatory models and those that explain meaningful coincidence. Is Stevenson’s *psychophore* similar to Beitman’s *psychosphere*?

Recent studies by Dilip Jeste and colleagues have illuminated the topic of wisdom, which Beitman occasionally refers to in his book, suggesting some overlap between wisdom and the propensity to experience coincidence. Meeks and Jeste (2009) also suggest the relevance of mirror neurons and sketch neuroanatomical pathways in the anterior and posterior cingulate, medial and lateral prefrontal and orbitofrontal cortex, amygdala and nucleus accumbens. They describe how these networks might correspond to components of wisdom. Since part of the coincidence puzzle includes skills in dealing

with ambiguity and uncertainty, and the ability to act in ways that benefit others, perhaps it is germane that Meeks and Jeste identify tracts arising in the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex that sub-serve value relativism, altruism, and tolerance. Other, dopaminergic, tracts subserving ambiguity arise in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and course to the amygdala and ventromedial prefrontal cortex. Could it be that similar pathways are involved in the capacity to experience meaningful coincidence? The precuneus and inferior parietal lobe might play a role due to their underpinning of empathy and the capacity for forgiveness.

Another noteworthy point is the overlap between Beitman’s characteristics of coincidence-prone individuals and those observed in resilient people, including vitality, intuition, and meaning-making (Beitman 2011; Connor and Davidson 2003). Could it be that resiliency and receptivity to coincidence have a bidirectional relationship and promote one another?

Jung originally postulated his theory of meaningful coincidence in the 1920s, arising out of discussions with Niels Bohr, Albert Einstein, and Wolfgang Pauli, and first presented it formally in 1952 (Jung 1952). Although over sixty years have passed since that time, its study remains in a state of infancy and has scarcely percolated into the academic world. While not diminishing the seminal work already accomplished, opportunities to study synchronicity are boundless for medical science, psychology, and other disciplines. The implications of synchronicity are profound if, as Beitman believes, the building blocks like simulpathity can be acquired and presumably harnessed by intention. Consider, for example, if it became possible to consciously apply simulpathity to save the life of someone who was on the point of having a medical

emergency: to be able to invoke simulpathity or GPS honing would be a valuable diagnostic screening test to say the least. Is it possible for humans to cultivate the ability of heightened perception at a distance and activate it consciously and then apply it in a medical setting? The same might be said of premonitory dreams. Although this might seem fanciful, who would have predicted the amazing spread of mindfulness meditation (with its “nonscientific” Eastern roots) and its many applications in contemporary medicine? Twenty years ago, claims to the therapeutic value of mindfulness were greeted with indifference, at best, by the scientific community. Today mindfulness is endorsed by treatment guidelines in traditional medical settings and has given rise to much scientific research, nearly all in the absence of commercial sponsorship. Could this happen to the investigation of synchronicity?

With the profusion of terms such as *synchronicity*, *serendipity*, *seriality*, *psychosphere*, *psychophore*, *morphic resonance*, *Self*, and *noosphere*, there is a critical need for clear cartography and guiding footpaths. In *Connecting with Coincidence*, Beitman offers valuable insights into the taxonomy of coincidence and creates such footpaths. *Connecting with Coincidence* provides useful recommendations on how to cultivate openness to the experience of synchronicity and, lastly, provides fascinating speculations about the central nervous system networks that might mediate synchronicity. This book is essential reading for those who are interested in the emerging field of coincidence studies.

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ABSTRACT

Bernard Beitman's book *Connecting with Coincidence* offers a clear and even-handed account of the ways that meaningful coincidence can affect people in all aspects of life. Beitman discusses some links between coincidence and Jung's ideas of synchronicity. Beitman describes his lifelong interest in unexpected coincidences and provides examples from his personal and professional life. Drawing upon his years of empirical research, Beitman shares such findings as well as his rating scales that assess weird coincidences. He provides practical suggestions to cultivate skills that increase the possibility of experiencing meaningful coincidence and maximizing their benefit. Beitman explores the complexity of interpreting coincidences that are not always benign. Material on the neurobiology of coincidence gives rise to many promising new avenues of research.

KEY WORDS

coincidence, emotional state, energy information receptors, grid cells, mirror neurons, neuroscience, physics, psychosphere, simulpathity, synchronicity