

Hiram's Lighthouse



PROVIDING MASONIC *LIGHT* FROM TORONTO EAST DISTRICT

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Nullius in verba

... by the Lighthouse Beam

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Unified in brotherhood we find strength, purpose, and harmony.

This quote is from a recent reading that was presented at our District Divine Service. These few simple words carry a powerful message. Brethren the tenets and principles inculcated throughout our Masonic teachings are a true testament to the spirit and strength of the Craft.

We are humbled in our first steps through the door to the lodge.
We are given the tools to be enabled to be passed and stand to all
as true and upright men. We are finally raised from darkness to
light.

All this miraculous progress is made possible through the unified
strength of the Brothers who walked this path before us.

The support, strength, kindness and love of the craft guides us
with purpose and harmony to make deep and lasting bonds with
our Brothers in Masonry.

Brethren stand tall and proud to be a Mason.

Yours sincerely in brotherhood,

R.W. Bro. Nick Zarafonitis
District Deputy Grand Master
Toronto East District

...Now here's a Lodge in



**Sunset Masonic Lodge
1720 Ocean Park Blvd.
Santa Monica CA**



Around and About
(News & Notices)

EVENTS TO COME



[Museum Night 2024: visit the Freemasonry Museum in Paris at night](#)

The Freemasonry Museum is participating in the 20th edition of Museum Night, on Saturday May 18, 2024, offering the opportunity to discover the influence of Freemasonry on the evolution of society!



[The Museum of Freemasonry: an organization between History and mysteries](#)

Discover the influence of Freemasonry on society and the History of France over the centuries, in the heart of the Grand Orient of France. The opportunity to learn the mysteries of this organization!

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[Books and Manuscripts](#)

This Month in History

May 1, 1707 - Great Britain was formed from a union between England and Scotland. The union included Wales which had already been part of England since the 1500's. The United Kingdom today consists of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

May 20, 325 A.D. - The Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council of Catholic Church was called by Constantine I, first Christian Emperor of the Roman Empire. With nearly 300 bishops in attendance at Nicaea in Asia Minor, the council condemned Arianism which denied Christ's divinity, formulated the Nicene Creed and fixed the date of Easter.

May 22, 1972 - President [Richard Nixon](#) became the first American president to visit Moscow. Four days

later, Nixon and Soviet Russia's leader Leonid Brezhnev signed a pact pledging to freeze nuclear arsenals at current levels.



Please take the time to log in and review the new Grand Lodge website.

www.grandlodge.on.ca

Nature & Science



The Science Behind Coincidence **What's really going on when we encounter uncanny connections?**

The most notable coincidence in my life was just a few days shy of my first Thanksgiving without my dad — at least as I'd known him. He'd had heart surgery in January 2017, followed by complications ranging from strokes to a life-threatening bacterial infection. The repeated assaults on his system transformed him. Last Thanksgiving, he had run circles around my 3-year-old. This year, he sat motionless in a chair, unable to spoon his own mashed potatoes.

I needed a distraction. So I hit eBay in search of a license plate for my boys' transportation-themed bedroom. I decided to look for a Massachusetts plate, because I spent a lot of time there with my dad.

When the first one popped up, the numbers nearly leapt off my screen. It was a 1938 plate, the same year my dad was born, with the numbers 143264. My mom was born in February (2) of 1943, and they married in 1964. I contacted the seller, who told me the plate was part of his father's vintage collection. He had thousands of them.

"I lost my dad last December, after a 10-year battle with Parkinson's disease," he wrote. "He was my best friend. Every time I box up a plate, it kills me, but I do it for my son and nephew's college fund."

Was it a coincidence that almost all of the numbers lined up with different aspects of my parents' lives? That the seller and I shared a yearning for dads who were no longer there? The majority of scientists say it's simple mathematics. Some researchers subscribe to the fringe claim that invisible forces "make things happen." But most camps agree such scenarios are part of our brain's innate need to create order out of chaos — and we experience them more often when we're paying attention.

We Are All Connected

Stumbling upon that 1938 plate at the moment I was missing my dad — and the fact that the plate led me to someone who was also missing his dad — isn't a coincidence. At least according to psychiatrist Bernard Beitman, a visiting psychiatry and neurobehavioral sciences professor at the University of Virginia, and a coincidence researcher.

He says it's synchronicities, indicators of an invisible network that connects everyone and everything. Beitman suspects humans transmit some unobserved energetic information, which other people then process or organize into emotion and behavior.

"Just as sharks have ampullae in their skin that detect small electromagnetic changes to help them locate their prey ... it's plausible, maybe even probable, that humans have similar mechanisms that detect coincidences," he says.

There's no evidence for this, but he's not the first one to pursue this fringe line of thinking. Austrian biologist Paul Kammerer believed coincidences arise out of unknown forces, or waves, that he called seriality. He wrote a book on the subject in 1919. Albert Einstein even commented on it, saying it was "by no means absurd." And in the 1950s, psychiatrist Carl Jung came up with a similar idea, his so-called synchronicity theory, to describe these bizarre occurrences.

The most pervasive argument, though, may be a combination of our brain's need to seek patterns and order, and plain ol' math.

Order Out of Chaos

A 2015 study published in *New Ideas in Psychology* reported that coincidences are "an inevitable consequence of the mind searching for causal structure in reality." That search for structure is a mechanism that allows us to learn and adapt to our environment.

The very definition of coincidence relies on us picking out similarities and patterns. "Once we spot a regularity, we learn something about what events go together and how likely they are to occur," says Magda Osman, an experimental psychologist at the University of London and one of the study's authors. "And these are valuable sources of information to begin to navigate the world."

But it's not only recognizing the pattern that makes a coincidence. It's also the meaning we ascribe to it — especially meaning that provides solace or clarification. So when we see an unusual configuration, we think it must hold some significance, that it must be special. Yet most statisticians argue that unlikely occurrences happen frequently because there are so many opportunities for surprising events to happen. "It's chance," says David Spiegelhalter, a risk researcher at the University of Cambridge.

Spiegelhalter collects anecdotes of coincidences. In fact, he's accumulated more than 5,000 stories since 2012 as part of an ongoing project. In 2016, an independent data firm analyzed these stories and revealed 28 percent of them involve dates and numbers. But no matter what the nature of a coincidence is, Spiegelhalter claims coincidences are in the eye of the beholder.

A classic example: In a room of 23 people, there's just over a 50/50 chance two of them will share a birthday. Most of us would view that as an inexplicable coincidence, but mathematical law suggests such events are random and bound to happen. Any meaning we attribute to them is all in our heads.

Take the tale of my license plate and how the numbers jumped out at me. “Had it instead been the full date of your father’s birth, or your mother’s, or your own, or some other combination of these, then you would still have thought it striking,” says David Hand, a mathematics professor at the Imperial College London and author of *The Improbability Principle: Why Coincidences, Miracles and Rare Events Happen Every Day*. “The point is, there are lots of ways an interesting number could arise. If any of these ‘lots of ways’ would make you take notice, then it’s not so unusual after all.”

And as Beitman pointed out, my plate also came with a rub: Where does the number 1 on the plate fit in? I reasoned it’s from the month of my dad’s birth (October, or 10) — or maybe, as a romantic, I could decode 143 as short hand for “I love you” because of the number of letters in each word.

But 1 isn’t 10, and 143 could, with my logic, mean other things, like “I hate you.” “And that’s the predisposition of those who want to see a coincidence,” Beitman says. “The brain sees a pattern that does not exist.”

Cultivating Coincidence

Regardless of what triggers coincidences, research suggests they’re more likely to happen to certain people. “People who describe themselves as religious or spiritual, those who are more connected with the world around them and those who are seeking meaning — or in distress and searching for signs — are more likely to experience coincidences,” Beitman says. Back in 2002, researchers published a study in *Perceptual and Motor Skills* noting that people who are more likely to be surprised by coincidences are also more likely to believe in the paranormal.

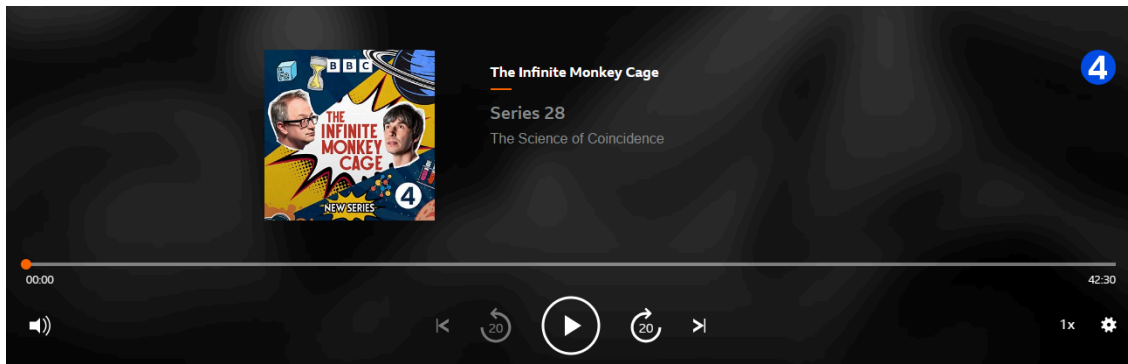
So perhaps it’s not surprising I homed in on that plate. I was emotional, missing my dad, and I do hold strong paranormal beliefs. Had the seller shared my dad’s birthday, I would have likely felt that, too, was an uncanny coincidence. And admittedly, when I asked my husband and sister if they recognized the plate as destined for me, both were stumped. They didn’t see the sequence as anything unique.

The irony of my story? Through a comedy of errors involving insufficient knowledge of eBay logistics and a busy holiday weekend, I lost the auction. Channeling my dad’s fighting spirit, I contacted the winner through the seller. The 1938 Massachusetts plate is now on my boys’ wall.

Connect With Coincidence

Certain people are more coincidence-prone than others, but all of us can learn how to cultivate them. “The more you notice the events, the more they happen,” says mathematician David Hand. Want the world to feel like a more magical place? Try these strategies:

1. Pay attention. Coincidences happen to people who are mindful and notice things. When you go about your daily activities, keep your senses open to coincidental opportunities.
2. Talk to strangers. According to work by risk researcher David Spiegelhalter, coincidences often arise out of talking to someone you don’t know. If you don’t introduce yourself to your neighbor, you can’t possibly know both of you were born in the same hospital, on the same day, in a city several hundred miles away from your current homes.
3. Seek meaning. Whether you see a string of numbers on a license plate or hear a song on the radio, ask yourself if you can make meaning out of the experience.
4. Write it down. Keep a log of the coincidences that occur in your daily life. The more you notice coincidences, the more likely they are to happen to you.



Released On: 08 Nov 2023

Available for over a year

Are some people just lucky? Is there any scientific formula behind coincidences? Is randomness the norm? Brian and Robin team up with comedian Sophie Duker, mathematician Marcus Du Sautoy and statistician David Spiegelhalter to uncover the reality and the maths behind seemingly incredible coincidences. How many people do you need in a room to find two with the same birthday? What is the weirdest coincidence that the panel have ever encountered? Is there a mathematical formula to being lucky? How good are we at judging how likely something is to happen? The answer is not very, as Brian and Robin unluckily discover.



**Sharon Hewitt
Rawlette Ph.D.**

Are Coincidences Signs From God?

Here are two essential things to remember before embracing a message as divine.

We often view ancient people as superstitious, because of how readily they ascribed unusual events to the action of the gods. But a belief in divine intervention isn't found only in ancient civilizations or in the surviving remnants of indigenous cultures. A 2009 survey of people affiliated with the University of Missouri-Columbia found that "the most strongly endorsed explanations for coincidences were God and fate"

(Coleman, Beitman, & Celebi 2009: 269). That is, when it comes to unusual events, more than 200 years after the advent of modern science, God and fate still rank higher among the college-educated than the naturalistic alternative of chance.

Perhaps the explanation for the prevalence of this point of view—both in ancient times and today—is not [superstition](#) but personal experience. To take just one example, author Elizabeth Gilbert relates in her best-selling memoir *Eat Pray Love* how she and a friend wrote a petition to God asking that Gilbert's agonizing, months-long wait for her husband to sign their [divorce](#) papers would finally come to an end. Within hours of writing this petition, Gilbert says, she got the long-awaited call from her lawyer saying that it was done (Gilbert 2006).

When things like this happen to us—and bring life-changing consequences—it can be difficult to accept that they are nothing but the products of chance. And while I do believe that chance is a hypothesis that must be considered (Rawlette 2019), let's grant for the moment that there are certain coincidences for which chance does not provide an adequate explanation—events that are simply too improbably meaningful to be random. I want to focus here on a further question. If chance is not the culprit, is God the best alternative explanation?

It's easy to see why many people would think so, especially when striking coincidences happen so soon after praying. However, there are a couple of essential points to keep in mind when considering the possible divine origin of these events.

First, there is increasing evidence that the human mind itself has the ability to produce “coincidences.” We're talking about more than just selective [attention](#) or [memory](#). There are now hundreds of laboratory experiments whose results suggest the existence of unmediated, non-local interactions between human minds, and between human minds and the physical world (Cardeña 2018). These interactions could easily explain common coincidences such as thinking of someone just before they call, finding the right book at just the right time, or hearing a song on the radio that speaks directly to a problem we're having.

Also, a close look at the way coincidences operate in people's lives reveals that these events often reflect the mental state of the people who experience them. (See [this post](#) for some examples.) Rather than conveying divine guidance, coincidences often appear to act as a mirror for whatever is currently going on in the experiencer's conscious or [unconscious](#) mind. This helps to explain some of the disturbing coincidences people experience, especially when dealing with mental illness (Surprise 2012). In fact, certain patterns we see in coincidences—their tendency to reveal repressed thoughts and emotions and to use personally meaningful symbolism in doing so—strongly resemble the patterns we see in [dreams](#) (Eisenbud 1983), which are widely

considered to be primarily (if not exclusively) the product of our own minds.

In addition to the importance of recognizing our ability to cause our own coincidences, the second essential point to keep in mind is that, even if a coincidence we experience is caused by a mind other than our own, that mind does not necessarily belong to the God we learned about in Sunday school.

Consider an analogy: When you were young, you might have written letters to Santa Claus asking that he would bring you specific toys on Christmas morning. You may have taken the fact that you received the toys you requested as reason to continue believing that Santa Claus was real. Of course, when you got older, you discovered that your gifts had actually come from Mom or Dad or some other human being who loved and cared about you.

The thing is, our current ideas about God—or any other aspect of the universe that transcends our everyday experience—are very likely as far from the ultimate truth about the world as our childhood belief in Santa Claus was from the reality of our parents' buying us presents at the store. Of course, this doesn't mean that whatever transcendent intelligence might exist in our universe can't choose to respond to our requests, just as our parents responded to our requests directed to Santa. However, it's important to remember that receiving an answer to a request that you made to a specific spiritual being doesn't prove that that being exists in exactly the way you imagine them. Research shows that people with different, conflicting religious beliefs experience apparently miraculous events (Pew Forum 2008), so we can't take a strongly meaningful coincidence as evidence that our particular ideas about God are accurate.

Furthermore, the coincidences we experience can sometimes appear to prompt us to do something that offends our sense of right and wrong. In these cases, we should be especially wary of considering a coincidence as a sign from God. The world is much more complicated than we often recognize, and just because something extraordinary or seemingly paranormal happens to us doesn't mean it's automatically to be trusted. Like everything else in our lives, coincidences are something that we have to carefully reflect on, using our own intuition and good sense in deciding how to respond.

Ultimately, meaningful coincidences have great potential to enrich our lives. They can serve as valuable guides to our own conscious and unconscious mental states, opening our minds to aspects of our own psychology that we have been ignoring, and they can also potentially connect us to a form of intelligence that exceeds the bounds of our own minds. However, to reap any of these benefits, we must be careful not to approach coincidences with the idea that we already know what's behind them and what they mean. Whether they come from within us or without, the value of a coincidence will always lie in its

ability to show us something new about ourselves and the world around us.

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A Conversation with David J. Aldous

Shankar Bhamidi

Abstract. David John Aldous was born in Exeter U.K. on July 13, 1952. He received a B.A. and Ph.D. in Mathematics in 1973 and 1977, respectively from Cambridge. After spending two years as a research fellow at St. John’s College, Cambridge, he joined the Department of Statistics at the University of California, Berkeley in 1979 where he spent the rest of his academic career until retiring in 2018. He is known for seminal contributions on many topics within probability including weak convergence and tightness, exchangeability, Markov chain mixing times, Poisson clumping heuristic and limit theory for large discrete random structures including random trees, stochastic coagulation and fragmentation systems, models of complex networks and interacting particle systems on such structures. For his contributions to the field, he has received numerous honors and awards including the Rollo Davidson prize in 1980, the inaugural Loeve prize in Probability in 1993, and the Brouwer medal in 2021, and being elected as an IMS fellow in 1985, Fellow of the Royal Society in 1994, Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2004, elected to the National Academy of Sciences (foreign associate) in 2010, ICM plenary speaker in 2010 and AMS fellow in 2012.

Key words and phrases: Exchangeability, Markov chain mixing times, scaling limits, local weak convergence, random graphs, network models.

3.9 How not to explain coincidences

Being a professional mathematician, [Littlewood] . . . defined a miracle as an event that has special significance when it occurs, but occurs with a probability of one in a million. This definition agrees with our common-sense understanding of the word “miracle. Littlewood’s Law of Miracles states that in the course of any normal person’s life, miracles happen at a rate of roughly one per month. The proof of the law is simple. During the time that we are awake and actively engaged in living our lives, roughly for eight hours each day, we see and hear things happening at a rate of about one per second. So the total number of events that happen to us is about thirty thousand per day, or about a million per month. With few exceptions, these events are not miracles because they are insignificant. The chance of a miracle is about one per million events. Therefore we should expect about one miracle to happen, on the average, every month. Broch tells stories of some amazing coincidences that happened to him and his friends, all of them easily explained as consequences of Littlewood’s Law.

Freeman Dyson, in a review in the New York Review of Books.

To me, this is mind-bogglingly awful prose – an exemplar of how not to write for the public. That is not the usual meaning of the word miracle (“an effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause”), so using that word creates needless confusion. It is difficult to determine which real events have a 1 in a million chance, so invoking unspecified hypothetical events is hardly convincing. But the main point is that we are discussing a quantitative issue – those who assign spiritual or paranormal significance to some coincidences would hardly deny that “ordinary” coincidences also happen, but assert that some occur that are so very unlikely that they cannot be explained as just chance. One may believe, as part of a rationalist world-view, the assertion “amazing coincidences might be explicable as consequences of Littlewood’s Law”. But to demonstrate they are thus explicable, rather than merely assert it, would require an actual quantitative argument from real-world data.

Leadership Development



Leaders Making Better Decisions, Think Probability!

The world has become much more complex and uncertain recently. The business world is full of examples of disruptions that completely transform entire industries very rapidly, leaving behind leaders with their beliefs that they hold as true for too long. Kodak is the example that always comes to mind, particularly because they have invented the technology that would eventually disrupt their own market. And even despite this, they were not able to switch their business model on time because their leadership team held the belief that consumers would always stay on analog.

Leaders face these situations every day. Making decisions based on assumptions that are constantly changing is difficult, because it asks for reviewing our old beliefs, which our mind is not used to do it. Research in psychology shows that our mind is always looking for

ways to spend less energy and use shortcuts to come to fast solutions. However, these heuristics can be misleading sometimes, because they are more often now based on changing and invalid assumptions. For example, if you were a leader in the movie renting industry in the 90s, you might have taken the decision to double the catalogue or improve services in your movie renting store when you saw that particular survey in which consumers were asking for it. However, this would be completely irrelevant when Netflix completely transformed the rules of this game through the internet.

The main problem with this is the “certainty fallacy”, which happens to leaders who sometimes quickly internalize some beliefs about their business and consistently discount new information that would contradict this belief. Leaders take tonnes of decisions everyday and they got used to simplify problems, extract their essence, form quick opinions and take decisions based on this. Moreover, leaders used to be rewarded by their confidence on their decisions, which sometimes may lead them to overestimate their confidence and close their eyes to contradictory information. Popular culture too often assumes that good leaders are never wrong, which may lead to overconfidence and bad decision making process.

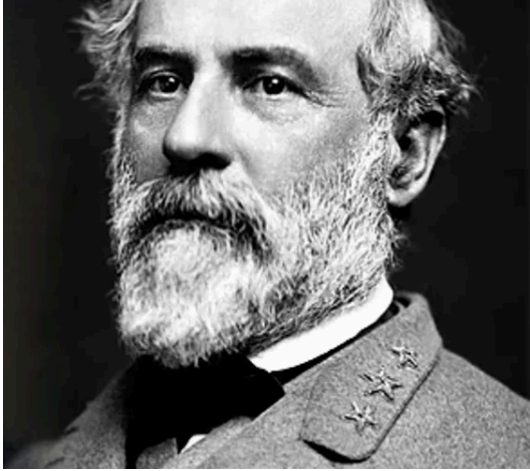
There are many ways to reduce this challenge. Many of the remedies are related to the culture of the organization and the team dynamics that are supporting it. One simple way that helps reducing this is thinking and expressing decision making within teams on probability terms.

One simple way that helps reducing this is thinking and expressing decision making within teams on probability terms.

Think about that, the simple fact that a leader says “this action has 85% of chance to improve our market share” is completely different than “this action will improve our market share”. It implies that the leader herself knows that there is always a chance that things go in the other way, helping thinking on alternative actions or other supportive solutions to address the same problem. It also helps the team to express their divergent opinions and coming with other richer alternatives, which would not be possible when the leader already expressed her mind that THIS IS THE BEST option.

This obviously does not mean that the leader should always communicate this decision in probabilistic terms. I believe communicating in a probabilistic way with her team would be a great opportunity to focusing on diversity and creative ideas. However, when the decision has been taken and we are in an implementation mode, I believe the leader should be more assertive and do not use probabilistic language. For instance, during the organization’s annual convention, the leader should definitely insist that this is the best course of action, which would facilitated information processing and

engagement from employees. However, in the boardroom, when we are exploring alternatives and thinking the problem through, probabilistic language helps to facilitate divergent thinking and more creative solutions.



“We failed, but in the good providence of God apparent failure often proves a blessing.”

- Robert E. Lee

... by the Lighthouse Beam



Strange coincidences: Are they fluke events or acts of God?



In February 1973, Dr. Bernard Beitman found himself hunched over a kitchen sink in an old Victorian house in San Francisco, choking uncontrollably. He wasn't eating or drinking, so there was nothing to cough up, and yet for several minutes he couldn't catch his breath or swallow.

The next day his brother called to tell him that 3,000 miles away, in Wilmington, Del., their father had died. He had bled into his throat, choking on his own blood at the same time as Beitman's mysterious episode.

Overcome with awe and emotion, Beitman became fascinated with what he calls meaningful coincidences. After becoming a professor of psychiatry at the University of Missouri-Columbia, he published several papers and two books on the subject and started a nonprofit, [the Coincidence Project](#), to encourage people to share their coincidence stories.

"What I look for as a scientist and a spiritual seeker are the patterns that lead to meaningful coincidences," said Beitman, 80, from his home in Charlottesville, Va. "So many people are reporting this kind of experience. Understanding how it happens is part of the fun."

Researchers who study coincidences are divided over their significance. Some, like Beitman, believe they suggest a deeper

connection between our minds and the material world than modern science can explain. Others see coincidences as pure mathematical probabilities akin to the “infinite monkey theorem” that states that a monkey hitting keys on a typewriter randomly for an infinite amount of time will eventually produce the works of Shakespeare. Unlikely perhaps, but not inexplicable.

Still, most coincidence scholars agree that noticing coincidences and interrogating them help us gain a greater appreciation of the way the world works.

Beitman defines a coincidence as “two events coming together with apparently no causal explanation.” They can be life-changing, like his experience with his father, or comforting, such as when a loved one’s favorite song comes on the radio just when you are missing them most.

The element of surprise is essential, said Mark Johansen, a psychology professor at Cardiff University in Wales. “When you experience a coincidence, you are surprised because there was an event that conflicts with your causal model of how the world works,” he said. “There’s a mismatch.”

Although Beitman has long been fascinated by coincidences, it wasn’t until the end of his academic career that he was able to study them in earnest. (Before then, his research primarily focused on the relationship between chest pain and panic disorder.)

He started by developing the [Weird Coincidence Survey](#) in 2006 to assess what types of coincidences are most commonly observed, what personality types are most correlated with noticing them and how most people explain them. About 3,000 people have completed the survey so far.

Beitman is still collecting data, but he has drawn a few conclusions. The most commonly reported coincidences are associated with mass media: A person thinks of an idea and then hears or sees it on TV, the radio or the internet. Thinking of someone and then having that person call unexpectedly is next on the list, followed by being in the right place at the right time to advance one’s work, career or education.

People who describe themselves as spiritual or religious report noticing more meaningful coincidences than those who do not, and people are more likely to experience coincidences when they are in a heightened emotional state — perhaps under stress or grieving.

The most popular explanation among survey respondents for mysterious coincidences: God or fate. The second explanation: randomness. The third is that our minds are connected to one another. The fourth is that our minds are connected to the environment.

For Beitman, no single explanation suffices. “Some say God, some say universe, some say random and I say ‘Yes,’” he said. “People want

things to be black and white, yes or no, but I say there is mystery.”

He’s particularly interested in what he’s dubbed simulpathity — feeling a loved one’s pain at a distance, as he believes he did with his father. Science can’t currently explain how it might occur, but in his books he offers some nontraditional ideas, such as the existence of “the psychosphere,” a kind of mental atmosphere through which information and energy can travel between two people who are emotionally close though physically distant.

In his new book published in September, “Meaningful Coincidences: How and Why Synchronicity and Serendipity Happen,” he shares the story of a young man who intended to end his life by the shore of an isolated lake. While he sat crying in his car, another car pulled up and his brother got out.

When the young man asked for an explanation, the brother said he didn’t know why he got in the car, where he was going, or what he would do when he got there. He just knew he needed to get in the car and drive.

“I don’t say I’m right, but I’m telling you this stuff happens,” Beitman said. “Scientists have difficulty believing it because they don’t know *how* it happens.”

David Hand, a British statistician and author of the 2014 book “The Improbability Principle: Why Coincidences, Miracles, and Rare Events Happen Every Day,” sits at the opposite end of the spectrum from Beitman. He says most coincidences are fairly easy to explain, and he specializes in demystifying even the strangest ones.

“When you look closely at a coincidence, you can often discover the chance of it happening is not as small as you think,” he said. “It’s perhaps not a one-in-a-billion chance, but in fact a one-in-a-hundred chance, and yeah, you would expect that would happen quite often.”

Take winning the lottery twice. If you have a 1-in-a-100-million chance of winning the lottery once, he said, then the chance of winning twice is 1 in 100 million squared — a seemingly impossible event. But, if you consider the number of people who play the lottery, and the number of times they buy tickets, then it becomes almost certain that someone, somewhere, will win twice — and in fact, several people have done just that.

Hand calls this the law of truly large numbers. “You take something that has a very small chance of happening and you give it lots and lots and lots of opportunities to happen,” he said. “Then the overall probability becomes big.”

Asked how he understood Beitman’s experience with choking at the same time as his father, Hand questioned whether another person,

less sensitive to coincidences, would have noticed the coincidence at all. Such a person might simply have assumed he had a dry throat.

Would Beitman have been just as amazed if he'd choked at the same time as a sibling lay dying — or a friend, a professor, or a neighbor? Each additional person on the list makes the probability of one of those events happening more likely, Hand said.

But just because Hand has a mathematical perspective doesn't mean he finds coincidences boring. "It's like looking at a rainbow," he said. "Just because I understand the physics behind it doesn't make it any the less wonderful."

Beitman quotes Hand's work extensively in his latest book, and said Hand's thinking has sharpened his own perspective. Still, he finds Hand's take limiting. "Whether they say it's probability or God, I just go crazy with people who think there's only one thing that causes coincidences," he said.

Johansen, the psychology professor at Cardiff, and his colleague Magda Osman, a professor of basic and applied decision-making at the University of Cambridge, are particularly interested in how we determine whether a coincidence is a chance event or not.

Paying attention to coincidences, Osman and Johansen say, is an essential part of how humans make sense of the world. We rely constantly on our understanding of cause and effect to survive.

"Coincidences are often associated with something mystical or supernatural, but if you look under the hood, noticing coincidences is what humans do all the time," Osman said.

Even scientists are not exempt.

For example, the COVID-19 pandemic is largely believed to have begun when a virus jumped from an animal host to a human at [a wet market in Wuhan, China](#). Is it also just a staggering coincidence that in Wuhan there is a lab facility that studies coronaviruses?

"This question has driven scientific decisions in examining alternative pathways to the origin of the virus," Osman said. "Whether or not the second explanation remains just a coincidence or a viable alternative, causal explanation is now a matter of considerable [scientific](#), public and international debate and controversy."

Charles Zeltzer, a clinical psychologist and Jungian analyst in Santa Barbara County, offers another perspective. Zeltzer has spent 50 years studying the writings of Carl Jung, the 20th century Swiss psychologist who introduced the modern Western world to the idea of synchronicity. Jung defined synchronicity as "the coincidence in time of two or more causally unrelated events which have the same meaning."

One of Jung's most iconic synchronistic stories concerned a patient who he felt had become so stuck in her own rationality that it interfered

with her ability to understand her own psychology and emotional life.

One day, the patient was recounting a dream in which she'd received a golden scarab. Just then, Jung heard a gentle tapping at the window. He opened the window and a scarab-like beetle flew into the room. Jung plucked the insect out of the air and presented it to his patient. "Here is your scarab," he said.

The experience proved therapeutic because it demonstrated to Jung's patient that the world is not always rational, leading her to break her own identification with rationality and thus become more open to her emotional life, Zeltzer explained.

Like Jung, Zeltzer believes meaningful coincidences can encourage people to acknowledge the irrational and mysterious. "We have a fantasy that there is always an answer, and that we should know everything," he said.

Studies suggest most people notice about one coincidence a week, and most of us have at least one favorite to share, including the author of this story.

I'd been on the fence about writing about coincidences when I arranged to meet a friend at a cafe about 20 minutes from my house. When I arrived, I was surprised to see the foreign editor of *The Times*. (Coincidence one.) I hadn't seen him since the beginning of the pandemic, and he invited me to join him until my friend arrived.

I mentioned that the friend I was meeting works as a foreign correspondent for another newspaper. It turned out he was possibly looking to hire someone in the same city where my friend is living. (Coincidence two.) When my friend arrived, she said she was looking for a new job. (Coincidence three.)

At this point, I pulled Beitman's new book out of my bag. (Coincidence four.) I'd grabbed it just before leaving home in case my friend was late and I needed something to read.

Later, as I drove home, I thought, "How can I not write about coincidences after this coincidental cascade?"

Beitman was delighted by my story. He said it represented a meta-coincidence — a coincidence about coincidences. Hand wondered how often I'd been to that cafe (several times) and if the foreign editor is a regular (he is). Perhaps it was inevitable, he said, that we would see each other.

Osman assured me that writing a story based on what might be a random procession of events was not as illogical as it might seem. "Sometimes the options available to us are pretty well equated — should I write this story or look for another one? — and so you look for something to tip the balance," she said.

Honestly, I'm not sure what to believe, but I'm not sure it matters.

Like Beitman, my attitude is “Yes.”

Administration

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