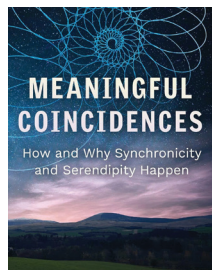


**BOOK AND  
MULTIMEDIA  
REVIEW**

# Meaningful Coincidences: How and Why Synchronicity and Serendipity Happens

**Lance Storm**

lance.storm@adelaide.edu.au  
School of Psychology  
University of Adelaide



Beitman, B. (2022). *Meaningful Coincidences: How and Why Synchronicity and Serendipity Happen*. Park Street Press.

**ISBN 978-1644115701**

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20253671>

PLATINUM OPEN ACCESS



Creative Commons License 4.0.  
CC-BY-NC. Attribution required.  
No commercial use.

I first became acquainted with Bernard Beitman's books on coincidence when I discovered *Connecting with Coincidences* (Beitman, 2016) a few years back. That was when I started my own serious research on synchronicity with the aim in mind of uniting psi and synchronicity (Storm, 2025). As an aside, long before that (in my late teens, perhaps?), I had decided that psi should be treated as synchronicity (as an acausal connecting principle which yields a meaningful outcome), and I based that notion on Jung's (1951/1969) own words: "the innumerable cases of meaningful coincidence that have been observed not only by me but by many others, and recorded in large collections ... include everything that goes by the name clairvoyance, telepathy, etc." (para. 983). More on the psi/synchronicity dichotomy shortly.

According to Jung, two or more events constitute synchronicity when a *meaningful* connection—a meaningful association—can be made between the events, which can be separated by great distances and/or time intervals, thus suggesting telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and even psychokinesis. Some kind of similarity criterion is required to make the association. Naturally, since the connection is acausal (neither event causes the other), the occurrence is often seen as paranormal.

In *Meaningful Coincidences*, Beitman sees meaningful coincidence as a multi-factorial phenomenon. While I personally use the term 'meaningful coincidence' to mean psi and synchronicity specifically, Beitman gives meaningful coincidence a wider context, seeing it as including 'serendipity' (i.e., an accidental but fortuitous event), 'seriality' (i.e., an objective series of related events), and his very own 'simulpathity' (i.e., a shared emotional experience; pp. 13-21). Situational contingencies seem to change the parameters of our experience and force these terms upon us, but in some sense, they are all the same thing (or at least *only similar*). For Beitman, there is only one main end-point—the experiences are there for us to learn from and to bring about change. Beitman lists a number of other benefits that can emerge from meaningful coincidence, including aids to decision-making, decision reformation, and need-serving.

Ultimately, however, 'change' in ourselves seems to mark the truest benefit of meaningful coincidence (particularly as synchronicity)—to achieve a transformation of personality in some way, which Jung saw as the embodiment of the individuation process, "having for its goal the development of the individual personality" (Jung, 1921/1971, para. 757). Of course, to assert objectively that healing, or transformation, or individuation, etc., do actually transpire, or are underway, after a given synchronistic experience requires adequate knowledge of the circumstances (especially if the experience is not our own), which is not always available. It does appear, though, that experiencers are capable of making judgements about their own experiences, and they can and do discern meaningfulness (see Beitman & Shaw, 2009; Coleman & Beitman, 2009).



Thereby, coincidence can be used *scientifically* in one's life (i.e., by method), the aim being to harness it to build better relationships, improve one's health, and even attract money. The way to do that is a little more complicated than the simplistic and unrealistic procedures advanced in Byrne's (2006) *The Secret*.

Beitman's *Meaningful Coincidences* is really a follow-up to *Connecting with Coincidences*—it certainly picks up where the latter leaves off. While I find commonalities in both books, *Meaningful Coincidences* does go a step further: Given that Beitman has had five or six years to gather more material and think more about meaningful coincidences, I can say that it is more of an examination of the psychological and philosophical implications of synchronicity, serendipity, and so on. Beitman explores the deeper truths about our lives from a coincidental perspective, inevitably seeing the various coincidence forms as indicators of a broader connection of ourselves with the world.

But I must come back to the relationship between psi and synchronicity, and for good reason. Years earlier, so did Beitman. In a co-authored paper he recognised the psi/synchronicity overlap: For example, “knowing who is calling before picking up the phone can be considered a telepathic experience ... [but] context ... can make it synchronistic” (Beitman et al., 2010, p. 457). Therefore, the authors differentiate synchronicity from psi on the basis of information validation. They suggest this can be done by considering the *verifiability* and *meaningfulness* of a given anomalous event: While the psi event is easy enough to verify, synchronicity “gains its relevance by rendering an ambiguous experience personally *meaningful*” (p. 457). Context is critical. So, although parapsychologists seem to overlook the meaning in a psi event, Beitman sees that one is inevitably drawn to conclude that meaning makes psi a synchronistic phenomenon. Specifically, Beitman ties coincidences to, and sees parallels with, Rex Stanford's Psi-Mediated Instrumental Response model, as one mechanism by which synchronicity might work. He describes meaningful coincidence as working like “human GPS [Global Positioning System]” (p. 80). But we must concede (or be reminded, or be informed) that while such a form of GPS may be seen as psi, it is only a descriptive term, not an understood mechanism, yet that has not stopped psi from becoming reified. For similar comments, see Ballard (1986), who called out the difference between a “nominal definition” (i.e., “an assignment of meaning”) and a “real definition” (that which is, or can be, “affirmed to exist”; p. 146).

Nevertheless, Beitman appeals to human GPS as a possible mechanism in the intriguing case of a troubled young person who wanted to escape “all the suffering

in the world” (p. 81). The youth took ‘his’ father's loaded gun intending to kill ‘himself’ (Beitman doesn't specify the person's sex), and drove to a secluded spot by a lake to do it. While tearfully contemplating his situation, a car pulled up. It was his brother who took the gun away from his distraught sibling. The youth recalled:

I was breathless; I was totally shocked. All I could do was ask him how on earth he knew I was feeling this way; how did he know I had this gun, and, most importantly, how did he find me? He said he had no answers. He didn't have any idea why he got into his car; he didn't know where he was driving, nor how he got there, or what he was supposed to do when he arrived (p. 81).

Beitman describes this psi incident as a case of *simulpathity* and acknowledges that the psi factor may have been at work. But in parapsychology, psi is considered a causal phenomenon (an ability), and meaningful coincidence is not (or at least it isn't when it is synchronicity), so we have to decide whether or not simulpathity is a ‘causal’ exception, and if it is, whether it may still be a meaningful coincidence. The other problem (just raised) is that parapsychologists are far from explaining psi as a mechanism, even though they have made some advances in characterizing the phenomenon and made a range of formal (albeit general) statements about what *seems* to transpire when ‘psi happens’.

In reconsidering the above case, it might be just as reasonable to propose that an archetypal factor underpinned the two siblings' experience. I tend to think that the archetype *per se* is just a simple way of identifying a complex psychophysical and neurophysiological system of functions that align and work together for an outcome, just as we understand of the instincts. The Playfair and Sheldrake examples that Beitman presents (pp. 30-31) are cases in point as far as this reviewer is concerned. Going further, I would argue that we have a considerable body of literature that points to a new approach to understanding these nonlocal inter-personal encounters, and I find it well-embodied in the concept of *inter-brain neural synchronization* (IBNS; Valencia & Froese, 2020). To go further, as indeed Valencia and Froese do, we may yet find that the concomitant idea of “extended consciousness” (p. 1) is a key component of IBNS, which seems supported by the mainstream neuro-scientific research reviewed by the two authors. If we are after a psi or synchronistic mechanism for these anomalous forms of ‘communication’, IBNS may help us, but it is still anybody's guess what underpins *synchronization* and *extended consciousness* in IBNS, whether they may be unified under a single

construct, and whether it even detracts from a scientific point of view to think of these processes as acausal.

In the meantime, parapsychologists tend to take statistical approaches to confirm that psi phenomena do not occur by mere chance. If they do occur by chance, we needn't take them as real effects, but that's because *meaningfulness* never enters into it. However, any event, no matter how casual and innocuous, may be synchronicity if it is *meaningful*. Yet that wouldn't make it psi by parapsychological rules—it has to pass the statistical test, literally. Beitman spends a whole chapter on statistics, pointing out (for example) the lack of relevance to synchronicity of the Law of Very [Truly] Large Numbers and other 'laws', concluding

We need to go beyond these "laws" and randomness to explain coincidences and how they shape our reality. Probability is a characteristic of all synchronicities but not the only possible explanation (p. 86).

Earlier, Beitman (2017) had already come to the crux of the matter:

Every coincidence has at least theoretically a probability.... So, that's a quality of a coincidence to have a probability [but] it's not necessarily an explanation ...

In conversation with Beitman, Browne makes a further clarification:

if something has a low probability of happening, it can still be chance and not synchronicity, and a 'synchronicity' can have a much higher chance of happening and can be synchronistic, and its synchronistic quality is far more significant than its chance factor (Browne, as cited in Beitman, 2017).

I see a place for both, statistics and meaningfulness, in synchronicity, and I suggest we treat both in their own way as serving different purposes. Wisdom comes in knowing how to gainfully employ which and in what situation. Having said that, I also see no reason why synchronicity cannot be tested in a large-scale statistical framework just as psi is.

Beitman has referred to himself as a "coincidence expert" (<https://www.coincider.com/>). That's a privilege well-earned because he writes largely from many decades of personal experience, giving anecdotal accounts from his own life as well as the lives of others. Readers

will appreciate the opening chapters that define and explain coincidences, and in later chapters, Beitman gainfully interprets and points out the significance of coincidences—he offers readers the means by which they, too, can draw out the meanings of these experiences. But I am more drawn to the 'whys and wherefores' of synchronicity—I have made it a life's passion. The more compelling material in *Meaningful Coincidences* opens the door to more questions, the answers to which one hopes will not only broaden our understanding of meaningful coincidences, but I suggest will also put a perspective on psi that makes fewer demands on our credulity. Just for that reason alone, Beitman's *Meaningful Coincidences* is a worthwhile read.

## REFERENCES

- Ballard, J. A. (1986). Adequacy of some parapsychological terms. In D. H. Weiner & D. I. Radin (Eds.), *Research in parapsychology 1985* (pp. 144–148). Scarecrow Press.
- Beitman, B. D. (2016). *Connecting with coincidences: The new science for using synchronicity and serendipity in your life*. Health Communications.
- Beitman, B. D. (2017, September 21). CCBB: Laurence Browne – The many faces of coincidence (Episode 36) [Audio podcast]. *Connecting with coincidence with Dr. Bernie Beitman*. <https://www.spreaker.com/user/xzoneradiotv/ccbb20170921ep36nfb laurenecbrowne>
- Beitman, B. D., Celebi, E., & Coleman, S. L. (2010). Synchronicity and healing. In D. A. Monti & B. D. Beitman (Eds.), *Integrative psychiatry* (pp. 445–483). Oxford University Press.
- Beitman, B. D., & Shaw, A. (2009). Synchroners, high emotion, and coincidence interpretation. *Psychiatric Annals*, 39, 280–286. <https://doi.org/10.3928/00485713-20090423-02>
- Byrne, R. (2006). *The secret*. Atria Books/Beyond Worlds.
- Coleman, S. L., & Beitman, B. D. (2009). Characterizing high-frequency coincidence detectors. *Psychiatric Annals*, 39, 271–279. <https://doi.org/10.3928/00485713-20090423-01>
- Jung, C. G. (1969). Appendix: On synchronicity. In *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 8, pp. 520–531). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1951)
- Jung, C. G. (1971). *Psychological types* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 6). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1921)
- Storm, L. (2025). *A new approach to synchronicity: Re-appraising Jung's acausal connecting principle*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003561330>
- Valencia, A. L., & Froese, T. (2020). What binds us? Inter-brain neural synchronization and its implications for theories of human consciousness. *Neuroscience of Consciousness*, 20, Article niaa010. <https://doi.org/10.1093/nc/niaa010>