



Meaningful Coincidence and Life Purpose

By Luc Watelet

The Trauma work we are doing in Adams County has really shaped the pathway for therapy and the work of our individual therapists. As we look forward to Luc Watelet's visit on June 25th to the Gettysburg area it is interesting to know more of his path and how we plan to reflect on our own. In working through self-care, discussions with our therapy team, and reflections of the history of the region where we do our work it comes to mind that truly caring for one's self requires that we incorporate our work and our path—but that our work life and professional lives can have boundaries. We can carry ourselves into our work, but retain who we are and our work retains the identity of the client. Please join me in reading from Luc's work on Synchronicity as a reflection of Carl Jung. Join me also in welcoming Luc on June 25th to our community. In good health~ Andrea Niedererr

From Luc:

When I reflect on my life, I notice numerous moments that helped me to the next step toward my purpose. I won't list all of them here as it would take too long, but I will relate the most important.

- 1) I read a book by Freud and another by Jung when I was 16. I felt I belonged with them. I did not like Freud's ideas but I wanted to argue with him. I felt more of a kinship with Jung. I don't remember how I came across those books. I think one was an old book a library was giving away. It was not the kind of things I found at home or that other people around me were reading. These books sort of came to me. At 17, when a waiter I was working with asked me what I wanted to do when I grow up, I blurted out that I wanted to be a psychotherapist. I had not thought about it prior, it just came out of me as a revelation. As I said it, I knew it was true. It was where I belonged.
- 2) When I mentioned it to my dad, he suggested I do psychiatry so I would learn about the body and not just the mind. So I enrolled in pre-med. I soon realized that the study of medicine was not for me. So I took a couple of classes in psychology: Intro to Psychology and Childhood Development. I aced both of these courses but did not feel the excitement I felt when I read Freud and Jung. I was turned off by the content of those courses. It is not that there weren't truths in what was taught... But, to me, there was no inquiry, no self-discovery. It was all a bunch of theories, devoid of life.
- 3) So I had given up on psychiatry and now I was giving up on psychology.

- 4) What was next? I discovered a passion for mathematics. I did math and that led to a Master's degree which led me to apply for a PhD in biostatistics. I got scholarships. I could travel to a new campus. I was happy, except for one thing, I had no excitement for biostatistics. But I did not know what else to do.
- 5) Between the end of my Master's degree and the beginning of my PhD, I had a car accident. I had a concussion which led to an out-of-body experience. That out-of-body experience led me later to realize that while I saw my body and mind completely unconscious, I was aware of everything: I could see, hear, understand people's feelings... that part of me was not of any of the identities we learn about in psychology: no age, no gender, no race, no sexual orientation, no socio economic status... and the most important of all, it was not hurt by the accident. So I understood deeply that there was more to the people I met. I understood that their bodies and identities were a vehicle for their spirit, and that if a person was disabled or suffered from a mental health difficulty, it did not define them.
- 6) I went on with my PhD, but I kept asking myself: "Why am I here? Where am I going?"
- 7) I got married. After my PhD, my wife got a job in Atlanta as a biostatistician. Meanwhile, I wrote fiction and my writing led me to explore my childhood. It led me to confront difficult life memories that I did not know how to heal from. In the process of trying, I had spiritual experiences: a couple of unconditional love experiences and an angel experience. My interests and questioning were guiding me away from biostatistics but I still worked as a biostatistician to make ends meet. Soon my marriage withered. I fought its dissolution with all my might only to realize that I needed to give myself and my wife the freedom we each deserved to each fulfill our purpose.
- 8) Life led me to Rochester, NY, with a series of coincidences. There I met a group of people who meditated, some of whom practiced Reiki. I remembered that as a 7 year old child, I wanted to be a healer like Jesus. I had not pursued or inquired about it. I kept it a secret. And now I was among people who said it was possible to learn healing.
- 9) I was also invited to a yoga class and then to living with a community where yoga was taught. I fell in love with Kundalini Yoga and, studying it, I learned there was a healing practice that was a part of Kundalini Yoga. I studied it and practiced it on my yoga students after classes. As I practice healing them, I realized I wanted to talk with them about what I experienced while in healing mode and that led me to discover a kind of therapy based on experience and inner knowing.
- 10) My out-of-body experience nourished my understanding that it is important to reconnect with our spirit, because without my spirit, I felt like a sail boat without a rudder.

There were so many more moments in this series of synchronistic events that guided or influenced me but this gives a little of a perspective that even though I tried in two different ways to enter the field of psychotherapy, I gave up on the idea of doing it. But life guided me right back to it, except not in the way I expected. And my dad was right, I needed to learn about the body, but not from a medical perspective, instead it came through the practice of yoga.

And of course, the series of synchronicities has not stopped. Every moment is guiding me to the next. In this, I have learned to trust that my real education comes through life and will keep coming... and that everything happens for a reason. I am skeptical about almost everything until

it is confirmed to me by life. It is up to me to pay attention, to study life, to welcome life, to dance with life, and let go of any belief that comes in the way of life's instructions.

Jung said: "Synchronicity is an ever present reality for those who have eyes to see."

The Buddha said: "All things appear and disappear because of the concurrence of causes and conditions. Nothing ever exists entirely alone; everything is in relation to everything else."

A practice:

Pay attention now to your life. Ask yourself what led you to where you are today? What choices have you made? Where have you rebelled? Know that whatever choice you made, even if you regretted it, was not an accident. There is always a message from life to you from decisions you made, even if you were half conscious when you made them. Nothing happens by accident. No experience is wasted. And it is not because you give up on something that it is necessarily lost. You cannot abandon what is yours as long as you keep curious about what might be next for you. Psychotherapy came back to me despite my giving up on it. But it came back not in the way I thought or imagined, instead it came back on its own terms.

How do we engage synchronicities in our life more consciously? By asking questions that we don't have answers to or by asking for something we deeply want. For instance: "How do I meet the love of my life?" "How do I know what my purpose is?" "How do I heal from this?" or "I want to experience unconditional love!" And the question I found to be the most powerful is: "Who am I?" I got answers I never expected. Now when asking, we also have to be open to be surprised by how we need to receive it and pay attention.

Ask yourself what you wish for the most in the world even if you don't think there is an answer, even if you don't think you can really get it, be truthful to your deepest yearnings.

I will now relate to you an experience on how I use synchronicity in therapy. I changed the name of my client.

Jack could hold his alcohol so well I did not know he was drunk. At the request of an experienced counselor, I gave him a breathalyzer test. He came out with a 0.40, a level that can be lethal for some people or at the very least affect their memory. Yet when I met him later and he was sober, he remembered our conversation perfectly.

This story is less about alcoholism than learning to trust life in helping my client. When I saw him the first time he was clear that he wanted to be sober. But he had a girlfriend who drank with him and he could not stay sober with her. He knew he would have to leave her if he wanted to succeed. The next time I saw him he tested positive for alcohol. I had to tell him we could not have a session and dismissed him. He got a ride home. When I told what happened to my supervisor during our next regular meeting, she wanted to send him to an inpatient clinic to get him detoxed, so she wanted to have a meeting to announce her plan to him and his parents.

Jack was about 40 years old and already felt humiliated to have to stay with his parents. I knew he would not want his parents involved in this decision. I did not think involving his parents was right in his situation and I did not think the inpatient clinic was the correct first move because we had not given him a chance to prove to himself that he could get sober on his own. I preferred to give Jack an opportunity to take responsibility in changing his life on his own because then he would build self-confidence, rather than imposing a change on him from the outside.

My supervisor was sure her decision was right from her experience and asked me to call him and set up an appointment with his parents. I did not tell him about the reason for the appointment, just that my supervisor wanted to talk with them as a family. As I suspected, he did not want his mother involved. His father would not come. I left it as: "Just trust, we have to do what my supervisor says, and we will see what happens, ok?"

What happened was worthy of a Hollywood movie! Before the appointment a snow storm started which ended up being the biggest storm that winter and made it impossible for anyone to come to our center. We had to cancel the appointment. My supervisor then said that I should just have my regular appointment with Jack the following week, give him the breathalyzer test and take it from there.

When he came to our regular appointment, he scored 0 on the breathalyzer test but he was honest and told me he had spent the weekend at his girlfriend's drinking as always. When drunk, she pulled a knife against him and drew blood on his chest. He called the police and asked to be driven back home. He had preferred to be with her rather than be with his parents to keep a sense of personal freedom, but now he was done with her. He'd been sober since. I was afraid that for his health he should not stop so abruptly given the quantity of alcohol he'd gotten accustomed to drinking regularly. His response was that he'd done it before. He knew himself. He could do it. I tested him at each of our sessions per protocol. He remained sober for the next six months until he graduated successfully from our program.

You see how I became clear about what I wanted. I did not force the issue with my supervisor. I simply trusted in life. And a miracle happened that supported my client in the way I thought was best. But in trusting in life, I also trusted that I could be wrong and that the best who happen for Jack's sake.

Another story:

Here is a story written by Jung in his book called: Synchronicity:

My example concerns a young woman patient who, in spite of efforts made on both sides, proved to be psychologically inaccessible. The difficulty lay in the fact that she always knew better about everything. Her excellent education had provided her with a weapon ideally suited to this purpose, namely a highly polished Cartesian rationalism with an impeccably "geometrical" idea of reality. After several fruitless attempts to sweeten her rationalism with a somewhat more human understanding, I had to confine myself to the hope that something unexpected and

irrational would turn up, something that would burst the intellectual retort into which she had sealed herself. Well, I was sitting opposite her one day, with my back to the window, listening to her flow of rhetoric. She had an impressive dream the night before, in which someone had given her a golden scarab — a costly piece of jewelry. While she was still telling me this dream, I heard something behind me gently tapping on the window. I turned round and saw that it was a fairly large flying insect that was knocking against the window-pane from outside in the obvious effort to get into the dark room. This seemed to me very strange. I opened the window immediately and caught the insect in the air as it flew in. It was a scarabaeid beetle, or common rose-chafer (*Cetonia aurata*), whose gold-green colour most nearly resembles that of a golden scarab. I handed the beetle to my patient with the words, "Here is your scarab." This experience punctured the desired hole in her rationalism and broke the ice of her intellectual resistance. The treatment could now be continued with satisfactory results. – Jung

Closing Remarks: How this relates to alleviating stress

Part of my reason for writing this is because in my experience very few therapists trust their clients the way people need to feel trusted in order to gain the self-esteem they need in order to heal. Let's consider adult clients first who have some sense of responsibility and accountability. When we don't trust our clients, we end up acting as parents. This means we don't respect their free will and thus we don't help them build a sense of self. But at the some point what happens is that the client grows tired of being addressed as a child and starts rebelling against the therapy and the therapist, or starts projecting his or her problems with their own parents onto the therapist. Freud called this *transference*. I think it comes instead from the way the therapeutic relationship is set up as a parent-child relationship and not from a psychological problem. So by using a parent-child approach to therapy, we cause resistance and conflict, instead of harmony toward healing. We add stress to therapy.

In reflecting on this issue, and on the way therapists worked with me and what I would have preferred instead, I took notice on how life worked with me. I remembered the series of synchronicities that happened in my life and served as guidance. And I thought it would be best to help my clients benefit from learning to trust their life as guidance, than to think of me as being their guide because then I was not creating dependence on me.

But another aspect of this is that becoming aware of synchronicities engages us to work with life as a team with our clients, we no longer need to take on the responsibility to heal them. We only need to engage them with their life and what they want so they can notice of their own guidance. Of course we have more knowledge and understanding than they do, but they have their own life to live. By trusting in life we respect our clients' free will and their own ways of learning from experience. And in doing so we help free them.

When we work with children it is a little different because they could be in danger in their family of origin or in their foster families. And they cannot make the decision to escape the family like an abused spouse may be able to. We have to make decisions for them. Respecting a child's free will is not the same as respecting an adult's free will. But we can still ask life to guide us in our

decisions. We can ask life to bring about the kind of experience where we are in a position to act directly on what is going on and to trust the process.

In doing so we relieve ourselves from much stress, because we don't have to carry the entire responsibility of the decision making. We work with life, and this relationship helps with our own sanity.