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CASE REPORT

INCREASED SYNCHRONICITIES AFTER AN INTENSIVE PRAYER PROGRAMME: A CASE REPORT

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ABSTRACT

The existence and mechanism of synchronicities, or "meaningful coincidences", is hotly debated. The effect of prayer on synchronicity occurrence has yet to be quantified, even though prayer may predispose to synchronicities by suppressing conscious awareness. Here we describe the case of a 60-year-old woman who experienced an increased number of synchronicities after three months of undertaking a focused and intensive prayer programme. This report sets the scene for future studies aiming to quantify the effect of different types of prayer on synchronicity occurrence and its impact on human health.

INTRODUCTION

Carl Jung first introduced the concept of *synchronicity* in 1952 to describe the simultaneous occurrence of a psychic state containing one or more external events that appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state, i.e., "meaningful coincidences" (Jung, 2010). A synchronistic event can be considered to have four main characteristics: (i) the event is *acausally* connected; that is, not connected through a sequence of cause and effect; (ii) the event is accompanied by a deep emotional experience, usually at the time of the event; (iii) the synchronicity is symbolic in nature and usually related to (iv) a point of important transition in our lives (Jung, 2010). The existence and mechanism of synchronicities is hotly debated, with sceptics ascribing these phenomena to statistical chance (Hand, 2014) or psychological artefacts (Nickerson *et al.*, 1988) and proponents suggesting a mathematical (Von Franz *et al.*, 1974), quantum physics (Stapp, 2004), or spiritual (Rushnell, 2006) cause. With regard to the latter, many believe that prayer itself may predispose to synchronicities (Stein, 1998). There are very few data describing the effect of prayer on synchronicity occurrence. Here we describe the case of a 60-year-old woman who experienced an increased number of synchronicities after three months of focused prayer.

CASE REPORT

A 60-year-old healthy, professional woman self-administered 12 weeks of prayer according to the book "90 Days of Power

Prayer" by Kynan Bridges (Bridges, 2016) supplemented with prayer in tongues. Prayer lasted for one hour per day and was conducted in the morning and evening. The book's author claimed that implementing this prayer strategy had the capacity to transform one's life. The woman wanted to experiment with this claim and quantify any changes occurring in everyday life. Before starting the prayer programme, she had experienced *two* synchronicities over 12 weeks: (i) she had been thinking about a friend with whom she had not spoken to for over a year; a few days later, he telephoned her; (ii) she had been thinking about how it would be nice to work in the United States; a few days later, she received notification that she had been awarded her green card for entry to the United States, for which she had been trying for nine years.

After the prayer programme, she experienced *five* synchronicities over 12 weeks: (i) she needed a strong leash for a large dog; the next day she found the ideal leash lying in the street; (ii) she needed linseed oil, but it was unavailable at her local shop; the next day a friend visited and as he was leaving she noticed something in his hand, which turned out to be linseed oil, which she subsequently bought from him; (iii) she needed new toner for her printer and was wondering where to get it from; the next day, she met a friend in the street while walking, who handed her some brochures for printer toner; (iv) she thought about how she needed to buy a new diary; later in the day, her son returned home with spare diaries and gave one to her; and (v) her son, a new surgeon in a private clinic, needed patients; over the next few days, she spoke with three friends who needed orthopaedic consultations and she was able to recommend her son.

DISCUSSION

Jung and his contemporary Pauli proudly identified as scientists but argued that the dominant science of their day was narrow and problematic and caused patients to cut off from their instincts and emotions (Main, 2014). Jung used the concept of synchronicities to argue for the existence of the paranormal (Main, 2014), in contrast to mainstream science that casts synchronicities as spurious correlations explainable through laws of statistics (Hand, 2014). Similarly, psychologists have argued that synchronicities may arise through confirmation bias (interpreting information to confirm one's preconceptions) or apophenia (mistakenly detecting a pattern in random data) (Nickerson, 1998). Jung himself, however, was a proponent of a mathematical explanation, with numbers being major participants in synchronicity events (Von Franz, 1974). Jung also proposed that synchronicities occur more often when a person adopts a lower level of conscious awareness, or reverie, which consequently energises the unconscious and stimulates complexes and archetypes to an activated state and propels them into consciousness (Stein, 1998). Some people believe that "the supernatural" causes synchronicities, sometimes in answer to prayer; indeed, William Temple, a British Archbishop, said that "when I pray, coincidences start to happen. When I don't pray, they don't happen" (Combs and Holland, 1990). From the Jungian perspective, prayer can be regarded as a lower level of conscious awareness that can promote synchronicities. Therefore, prayer can give rise to synchronicities via multiple mechanisms, with further research needed in this regard. Although only a single case, this report provides a quantitative example of the impact of prayer on synchronicity occurrence and paves the way for more robust studies on the impact of prayer on synchronicities. Given the relatively subjective nature of synchronicities, future studies might measure a more extreme form of synchronicity, conjunctions of meaningfully parallel events (CPMEs), which are defined as requiring at least two independent events occurring within 12 hours of each other and that share a long list of common features or parallels (Perry *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, future studies should explore the type and duration of prayer and whether this has an impact on synchronicity events.

Finally, since prayer improve outcomes after surgery or in disease states (Masters and Spielmans, 2007) and synchronicities have emotional consequences, future studies should examine the relationship between prayer and synchronicity events in clinical populations.

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