

#303 - Exploring Synchronicity with Jungian Analyst Dr. Jeffrey Raff

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka Dr. Dave interviews Dr. Jeffrey Raff

Introduction: You may recall today's guest Dr. Jeffrey Raff from Shrink Rap Radio number 290 on Ally Work. Today we'll be discussing his views and experiences in relation to synchronicity. Jeffrey Raff, Ph.D. is co-founder of the C.G. Jung Institute of Denver and a senior Jungian analyst who's been in private practice in Denver since 1976.

Trained in Zurich in the early 1970s, Dr. Raff is the author of four books including *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination*, *The Wedding of Sophia* and *The Practice of Ally Work*. He's written many articles on alchemy, the Kabbalah and the nature of evil.

Currently president of the C.G. Jung Institute of Denver, Dr. Raff is also an adjunct professor at Pacifica Graduate Institute and the Training Analyst in the Interregional Society of Jungian Analysts and has taught numerous workshops and classes all over the country. Now here's the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Jeffrey Raff, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Raff: Well, thank you. It's a pleasure to be back.

Dr. Dave: Yes, back in December, you and I spoke about your adventures in Ally Work. That interview received a lot of listener reaction and comments and so I am glad to have you back on the show again. This time we're going to talk about synchronicity.

Raff: Right.

Dr. Dave: I guess the place to start is what is synchronicity? How do you define it?

Raff: Synchronicity is an idea that Jung formulated pretty early in his career but never really wrote about until much later. I think he wanted to have a chance to develop the idea more and also was concerned about his reputation a little bit because this is one of those ideas of his that's pretty far out.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, right and a lot of people have gotten blasted for venturing off into this territory.

Raff: That's right. He did it in a couple of articles published as I say pretty late in his career. I think actually all the way in the 50s. What he was concerned with was what he called meaningful coincidence. He was very interested in chance events, seemingly random events with no apparent causation occur in someone's life with a great deal of impact both in terms of sense of meaning that they have and also a certain kind of feeling that they create. It might be good to start with a couple of examples.

Dr. Dave: I agree.

Raff: The most famous one is the one that Jung himself offers in his essay and that was he was talking to a client in an analytic session and the client was a pretty rational woman, very skeptical about the reality of the inner world and the unconscious. But she had had a dream about a scarab beetle the week before the session with Jung and as she was talking to him about this dream, they heard a buzzing at the window and Jung got up opened the window and in flew a beetle. So he was struck and she was struck also by the apparent coincidence of this that they were talking about a dream about a beetle and then a real beetle flew into the room.

So that's kind of a rudimentary example of —

Dr. Dave: And I remember that story. I gather that the beetle that actually appeared was scarab beetle looking which is what she had dreamed about.

Raff: Yes, which is fairly unusual for Switzerland.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that was another key point, yes.

Raff: Yes.

Dr. Dave: And sort of more prosaic examples that I think that most people have experienced such as thinking about a friend that you haven't heard from in years and years and then the phone rings and they are there or these days they Facebook you.

Raff: Yeah, exactly. It's a little less thrilling than it used to be because of Facebook, I think, but yeah, that's one really good example. I

had a synchronicity when I was 14, which has stayed with me which is one of the reasons that I became interested in this topic and that was at this point I had just gotten my first pair of glasses which, of course, was always a traumatic event in high school. I got up for school, everyone else had left, and I was getting ready to catch the school bus and I couldn't find my glasses. I got into a panic because I was going to be late and I needed my glasses and I couldn't remember where they were. I looked everywhere for them. At this time also, I don't know if you remember the old ant farms that we used to get as kids?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Raff: You'd get this plastic container with a little package of ants and they live on a little farm. Well, I had just gotten one about a month before and all the ants that I had ordered died in the mail, which was fairly common.

Dr. Dave: Oh, no. (chuckles)

Raff: (chuckles) Being enterprising, I went outside and collected ants and put them in the farm but what I didn't realize was if you take ants from different nests they'll fight with each other. They don't get along very well.

Dr. Dave: Oh.

Raff: Yeah, so I put all these ants in there and they all started fighting with each and killing each other. I thought that was kind of interesting and somewhat neat. It was kind of like your own gladiator game.

Dr. Dave: (chuckles)

Raff: (chuckles) You know how it is at 14.

Dr. Dave: Yes, the shadow is strong.

Raff: Yeah, very strong. So I'm running around looking for my glasses and I come into my room where the ant farm is and I have this really powerful thought that it was wrong what I was doing to use the ant farm and the way I was doing it — it was just wrong to put ants in there and kill them and so on. And it was so strong that I stopped looking for my glasses and picked up the ant farm and at that time

we had trash cans buried in the ground way down at the end of the driveway. I took the ant farm down there. The trash had just been emptied the day before so the trash cans were empty. I lifted up the can, the top of the trash can to throw the ant farm away and at the bottom of the trash can were my glasses.

Dr. Dave: Oh, boy. Wow. (chuckles)

Raff: (chuckles) And I still have no idea how that could have possibly happened. There was no rational way that I know of that they could have gotten there.

Dr. Dave: At this age that kind of thing happens to me all the time that I've put things where they don't belong. (chuckles)

Raff: Right.

Dr. Dave: Presumably this is well before that kind of phenomenon had exhibited.

Raff: I hope so. The interesting thing about it was that it had such a powerful emotional effect on me.

Dr. Dave: That's one of the components of synchronicity, isn't it?

Raff: That's right. Yep, the emotional part is one of the most powerful components. What you have in a synchronicity is few events. One that's considered an inner event such as a dream image or thought, vision and at the same time that you're concerned with that inner event, there's an outer event that occurs which strikes you as connected to the inner event.

Dr. Dave: Yes, you mention dreams. I regularly have dreams and I don't know whether to call it precognitive or synchronistic but something happens the next day, something very minor, nothing very dramatic but something that really feels like, oh, this is somehow the result of what I dreamt last night.

Raff: Mmm. Or connected to it in some way.

Dr. Dave: Or connected to it in some way. There's an example that sort of on the fringe of my mind here and hopefully, I can bring it back. I should have consulted my dream journal. I know I wrote it down. It was something about — I'm trying to remember now. It was

something about getting sprayed with water. I just don't remember the details but I remember being sprayed with water. Either I was spraying someone or someone was dumping water on me or something. I told my wife about it when I woke up that morning and then as I'm reading the paper later in the Zits comic strip, which is a comic strip about a teenager growing up, and he has written on his parents' car which was very dusty he wrote "wash me." In the next panel of the strip, you see his mother squirting him with the hose and he's saying, "No, no, no. I meant the car not me."

Raff: (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: That just brought back that image and a lot of times, from my dream, and a lot of times people will say, "Oh, well you just think you dreamt that because now this thing has happened and it seems to ring some kind of a vague bell." But there are several cases where I've told my wife or somebody else about the dream before that synchronistic event happens.

Raff: Yeah, that's precognition. Jung would consider precognition a kind of synchronicity.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Raff: It would fall into his definition of synchronicity because what you have again is an outer event that's coming in some fashion resonates with the inner event.

Dr. Dave: Do we have any sense of why, at least in my case, and I've heard this is true for others that it always seems so insignificant. It doesn't seem to be — I'm not foreseeing some earthshaking event by which I could avert disaster for myself or others.

Raff: Well, it depends. I mean definitely there are synchronicities that seem really powerful and life changing. There are certainly synchronistic events that don't seem minor. The minor ones are interesting. One of the parts of the definition of synchronicity includes what we've just talked about in terms of strong affect. The kind of affect that Jung calls "numinous."

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Raff: And when you have an experience of a synchronicity you should have a numinous feeling with it. It gives you chills or makes your hair stand up a little bit.

Dr. Dave: (chuckles)

Raff: It's uncanny in someone.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I love that word numinous, numinosity and just the whole — the way you've just described it. I've not heard it described in quite that way but it really captures the feeling tone of it.

Raff: Yeah, yeah. Little synchronicities, if we can call them that, if they don't have a numinous feeling connected with them, Jung would be more or less indifferent to it. It's like maybe that's synchronicity. Maybe it's falling on a cusp or maybe he would say it's just chance.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Raff: Unlike the Chinese who influenced his thinking about this, Jung doesn't believe that everything is meaningful. He only believes that certain chance events carry meaning. We'll know that by the amount of feeling that it generates for us.

Dr. Dave: When you talk about him being influenced by the Chinese, maybe that's worth focusing on a little bit. In what way was he influenced?

Raff: He was influenced by the Chinese concept of the Dao. He was very interested, of course, in the I Ching and in the Dao Te Ching and a number of the Daoist works. In his study of the I Ching, especially, he was influenced by Chinese thought on synchronicity because the whole idea of the I Ching, like any oracle, is if you throw coins, which is an outer event, it will match up with the Dao or the meaning of a particular moment.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Raff: He was really struck by the fact that the German translator of the I Ching, Richard Wilhelm, translated the Dao in German as sinn, s-i-n-n, which translates in English to meaning. Jung speculated

based on these ideas that meaning was actually a fourth of the university.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Raff: Jung speculated based on these ideas that meaning was actually a force from the universe.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Raff: That we could experience meaning that isn't just subjective but also has an objective quality to it.

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Raff: I find this idea particularly fascinating; he kind of dances around it. Sometimes he seems to be saying we can only understand synchronicity as a result of the subjective meaning. And other times he seems to back away from it. But the idea that there is a force in the universe that brings things together that orders events based not on causality but on meaning is a very interesting idea.

Dr. Dave: Indeed it is. Somehow that has a little bit of a familiar ring. I'm not sure what it is that's tickling the edges of my mind here, and ordering force in the universe.

Raff: Well, I'm not sure.

Dr. Dave: (chuckles) You can't read my mind?

Raff: (chuckles) He was very interested in the possibility that quantum physics would come up with ideas of this sort.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Raff: There are certainly some ideas in quantum physics that resonate with synchronicity because quantum physics gets away from the idea of causality and that's another important thing about synchronicity. The events like the scarab, you dream of a scarab beetle and a beetle coming into your window are obviously — they are not causally related. There is no way your dream could cause a beetle to come to you or for me to find my glasses. There was no causality. You could say if I hadn't taken the ant farm out I would

not have found my glasses but deciding to do that didn't cause my glasses to be there.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Raff: We get past the notion that everything that we experience in life is causal because I had certain experience when I was ten, I'm going to be like this at 15 and like that at 20 and so on. Rather we can say that things come together in your life that are not causally related but they are meaningful.

Dr. Dave: What about chaos theory? Does that have any applicability here? Not that I am well versed in it but my sense of it is that chaos theory allows for patterns in nature that look to be meaningful. (chuckles)

Raff: Yeah, you know I probably know less than you about chaos theory. I do know that some of the current writings on synchronicity do refer to chaos theory as a possible paradigm that would work partly because of the idea of patterns and probably getting away from causality as well.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Raff: I think there would a relationship to any theory that speculated that there's a formative principle that it's not necessary causal. There are biological theories like that too you know of the form of a tree creating the actual tree rather than the tree coming from the acorn.

Dr. Dave: Boy, that's a platonic idea. Plato felt that there were ideal forms out there and that everything that we see is somehow represented somewhere else in its ideal form.

Raff: Right. And, of course, Jung bridges the platonic idea to the modern world through his idea of the archetypes. One of the — you know the archetype is a universal pattern of behavior or a universal pattern of perception. One of the ways he brings the archetype into the theory of synchronicity is he argues that possibly the way that you discover a meaning of a particular synchronicity is discovering the archetype that's activated at that moment. If you can discover what archetype is behind the particular image, then you might understand the meaning.

For example, the scarab beetle is an archetypal image of rebirth and resurrection very widely used in ancient Egypt to represent rebirth. So we could say that the experience of that synchronicity for the woman, Jung's client, had to do with free birth for herself in some way.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, I could see where that could be a powerful guiding thought.

Raff: One of the things I do sometimes when I'm teaching about this is to have people make a little diagram of major synchronicities that they might remember in their lifetime and put them in a kind of chronological order and then tease out the images that are connected to those synchronicities and see if they can see an archetypal pattern behind all of them.

Dr. Dave: Can you remember an example like that either from a student or from your own life?

Raff: I could tell you one other example — an early example for myself as an image of that. I think it was 1973 I was in Zurich studying at the Jung Institute and I had a dream about the Russian dissident Solzhenitsyn and I couldn't remember the dream but I knew he was the star of that dream and I woke up early and I was thinking about what could he mean to me. Then of course he was a very famous dissident in the Soviet Union who was fighting at that time for more freedom for the Russian people. So for me he represented a kind of image of freedom. As I was thinking about that my radio went off, the radio alarm that I set went off and it was the news. It was announcing that Solzhenitsyn had just been expelled from the Soviet Union that morning.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Raff: Yeah, so of course that made the dream even more powerful and later that day my wife and I decided we were going to go shopping in Zurich. We went to downtown Zurich and we were walking by the train station and we saw this crowd of people. I said I'm going to go over there and see what that commotion is about. Well, he had just arrived in Zurich. When they expelled him from Russia, they sent him to Switzerland.

Dr. Dave: That very next day after your dream.

Raff: Yes.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Raff: That same morning.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Raff: That's what we call seriality. In other words, there was more than one synchronicity. There was the radio going off and then actually running into him and getting to see him.

Dr. Dave: That's a good one. I had not heard of that seriality phenomenon before but there's one that has stayed in my mind that I guess would be an example of that where I had a dream of one of my colleagues. I encountered him in a dream, one of my university colleagues, and I realized in the dream that he looked somewhat different. I knew it was him but he looked different.

I said, "Barry, you look different. Did you change your hair?"

He said, "Yes." I said, "No, that's not quite it."

I said, "Did you have a beard before and you cut it off?"

He said, "Yes."

And that still didn't feel quite right and finally I said, "I know. You've had a head transplant, haven't you?"

Raff: (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: And he said, "Yes."

Well, head transplant was not anything that I can ever recall having thought about or read about or anything. The next day I was reading a book by I think it was Marilyn Ferguson called *The Aquarian Conspiracy*. I'm impressed that I can remember that right now. One of the paragraphs started off saying things are moving so fast these days that some people are even speculating about the possibility of head transplants. That was synchronicity number one.

Later on that evening — then in the paper that same day there was a story about a Japanese woman who had cut off her son's head

and then in the late afternoon, it happened I was teaching a psychology class to a group of police officers in Santa Rosa and one of them was telling a story in which he — it was something about he was so angry that he wanted to cut the person's head off or somehow that same theme came up again.

Raff: Yeah, that's the repetition of the same motif. That's a good example too if you wanted to play around with that idea of the dream. You start out with a hair cut and of cutting off a beard or something; relatively minor changes. But a head transplant would be rather a large transformation one would think.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Raff: It's possible, talking off the top of my head so to speak, that the archetype behind that synchronicity for you is that it would be about transformation also.

Dr. Dave: Yes, and I wish I was closer in so I could remember what else was going on around that time but I certainly wouldn't discount that.

Raff: Yeah. Finding the archetype is one way that we can try and work objectively with the experience and see if we can get a deeper insight into what it could mean to us. Sometimes with synchronicity you just know. I mean it's so powerful and clear like the one with the Russian dissident was to me so much about freedom, which was a big issue for me at that time. Trying to free myself from my old personal habits and right in the middle of a very powerful analytic process. I was very taken with that and believe it was really about the need to really liberate myself.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I even had the hit when you were telling it and I just want to test it out with you. I was wondering if you were fighting any of the ideas that you were being exposed to at the Jung Institute if you were struggling to find your way and your own freedom among those.

Raff: Yeah, I think that's absolutely right. Yep. There was definitely a need to free myself from having to fit into certain Jungian expectations or ideas that didn't really match what I was experiencing.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Raff: And that, of course, was a very difficult thing to do in a situation like that in an institute in a foreign country where that was your community but at the same time you had to define yourself in opposition to that community in the way that he did in the Soviet Union. So yeah, that would be a good interpretation.

And that kind of synchronicity gives you a lot of conviction that this is the right track that this is something important to you and meaningful and something to struggle for.

Dr. Dave: When you are seeing people in analysis, and I would imagine that sometimes they would come up with a synchronicity, would you direct them to look for the possible archetypal connection?

Raff: Yeah, it depends again. The first thing I want to do is really hear about the feeling that it evokes. Is it really numinous? What was the sense of it? Did it have a — sometimes as I say it has an instant “aha” connected to it. And sometimes it’s very mysterious. You really don’t know what it’s about. When it’s mysterious like that, then I really recommend studying the archetype and playing with the symbols because even if you can’t figure it out intellectually what that usually will do is stimulate another dream and sometimes another synchronicity which will give you more information about the meaning of what’s going on at that moment.

Dr. Dave: Speaking of another synchronicity, there have been periods in my life, particularly one period, where I had what I guess I would call a run of synchronicities. I mean it was just synchronicity after synchronicity that all seemed to be leading somewhere.

Raff: Hmm.

Dr. Dave: And I forgot what I was going to ask you about that other than just to say what about that phenomenon?

Raff: Yeah, you do definitely see that there are periods in your inner work or development or something going on in your life situation that opens up a real period of growth or potential growth. That’s when you would expect more synchronicities to occur because there’s something big happening within your unconscious and it kind of sets a pattern and then that pattern replicates itself in a variety of synchronicities.

Dr. Dave: When that happens for me or even in these minor synchronicities that I mentioned earlier, I sort of tend to take them as a reminder that there is something bigger going on than my conscious mind is aware of because by in large I'm a pretty concrete down to earth kind of person and reasonably literal so I think I need to be woken up.

Raff: Un-hunh.

Dr. Dave: And I think maybe that's the role that these synchronicities play for me.

Raff: Yeah, and that's another layer of meaning, of trying to understand the meaning of them. We talked about the archetype that might be behind a particular synchronicity. Another layer of meaning definitely for almost everyone who has these experiences is the realization that something is happening that is much larger than the normal perception of reality that we have. Again because you are talking about things that are not causally connected and yet when they come together and strike you with such force that you feel like something brought them into your life. It's almost like a miracle that a religious person might call a synchronicity a miracle that just happened.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Raff: Definitely part of the meaning is to say you know open your eyes, look around, there's something bigger here that goes on in your life than you're normally aware of.

Dr. Dave: I love your use of the word "miracle" here. I hadn't thought of that or brought that into this context but because of the miraculous quality, I've tended to be a big fan of "synchronicity" and get kind of excited about it — about the concept, about when it's in my life, when it's in other people's lives and sometimes back one of my listeners sent me an e-mail that sort of reprimanded me about getting too, too enamored with synchronicity. I guess he was pointing to the fact that the unconscious can be a wild and unpredictable force and seemed to feel like I was maybe getting inflated with the notion of synchronicity or something and I kind of resisted that e-mail.

Raff: Yeah. The problem can be how you take the synchronicity; being excited about them or being really interested in them, I think, is good. I don't see that as an inflation but Marie-Louise von Franz tells the story of a schizophrenic client who called her into this large ballroom to make a pronouncement to her. I think he called in the middle of the night. She went down there. He's standing in this large ballroom and saying, "I've just realized that I am God." You know kind of a schizophrenic thing.

Dr. Dave: (chuckles) Yeah, yeah.

Raff: As he said that the crystal chandelier on the ceiling fell —

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Raff: — narrowly missing him. And he said, "See I made that happen."

Dr. Dave: I think he missed the message. (chuckles)

Raff: (chuckles) Yeah. It's too bad the chandelier missed him it might have made a difference.

Dr. Dave: (chuckles) If it wasn't more evident to him.

Raff: (chuckles) But that's where it can get a little bit strange if your ego says this is happening because I am a very special person or because —

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Raff: — I have great power or I'm a great shaman or magician or whatever it is. I suppose you could get so excited about a synchronicity that you don't objectify it a little bit and say what does it mean though? But the excitement that they generate I think is part of the luminosity of the experience.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Raff: The reason we get so excited is because we are in the face of something unknown and yet very real, something that we have just experienced in a very real way. That can be very exciting.

Dr. Dave: One of the things that helped to open me up a little bit more to that person's cautionary e-mail happened way down the line not so long ago when I interviewed Stan Grof. I assume you are aware of Stan Grof and who he is, right?

Raff: Sure.

Dr. Dave: I was interviewing him about one of his recent books, which was quite autobiographical and quite interesting. In it he describes his first marriage and how there was this magical string, again a run of synchronicities that seemed to just bless this relationship. How on the day that they were married there was a big rainbow in the sky and there were all these other synchronistic seeming blessings —

Raff: Right.

Dr. Dave: — that seemed to just sanctify this path that the two were on and then once they were actually married — I may be exaggerating it but it turned into a kind of living hell. (chuckles)

Raff: (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: It was clear that it was a mistake. I found that very interesting and he did to. How could this be? I guess one could evoke the trickster archetype.

Raff: Yeah, it's possible. I had an experience in Zurich very early on too. I was very, very interested in synchronicity back then and very interested in Chinese philosophy and how it related to synchronicity. I was thinking well, I could go to the university here and study Chinese and that way I'll be able to read the source material. I was telling my analyst about this because it was a pretty big step. As I was talking to him the phone rang and he picked it up. On the line was a client of his who was just studying Chinese at the university.

Dr. Dave: (chuckles) Wow.

Raff: So he said, "Well, there you go. I think you should try it." It was a total disaster. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: (chuckles)

Raff: I mean the classes were in German and you know I was studying Chinese and German. It was just horrible. I thought a lot about that. On the one hand it could certainly be the trickster and you can't — it's a mistake to say a synchronicity is saying I should do something.

Dr. Dave: Um-hmm.

Raff: Rather what it's saying is that this is meaningful for you.

Dr. Dave: Um-hmm.

Raff: My hunch is if it's not just the trickster archetype, my hunch is that it was right to go ahead and get into that disastrous situation because it was something I needed to learn.

Dr. Dave: Maybe for Grof too.

Raff: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: Maybe it was leading him to an important lesson.

Raff: Exactly. We can't say that synchronicity is a blessing in that way. That it means happy ending. This is the right path. I've found everything I'm going to need but rather this is meaningful to me and as my life progresses, I have to find out what that meaning really is about.

Dr. Dave: Um-hmm.

Raff: Which is a far more challenging kind of thing. That's the third layer of meaning if you like. The first one is kind of this the world is bigger than you know. Open your eyes.

The second one is well what's the archetype that might be behind this particular event.

The third one seems to be that meaning means that the particular image or synchronicity is about myself with a capital "S." It's about my becoming a whole person; my individuation process. In that context it's right to work with synchronicity and even follow it knowing that it's leading to an experience of your own transformation and wholeness but it's not necessarily what the ego is wanting it to be.

Dr. Dave: Um-hmm. So it sounds like one can work with synchronicity in much the way one would work with a dream.

Raff: That's right. You would work with it and kind of trying to come to some kind of interpretation that will give you a sense of what the meaning of that event is which both allows you to understand it better and at the same time to try to work with it more clearly. Like the example I gave of working towards my own freedom in the context of the Jung Institute knowing that that was the meaning of that event allowed me to continue to concentrate, to work on that issue much more and to try to integrate what the synchronicity was pointing me towards.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Raff: They're kind of miracles but not always happy ending miracles. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: (chuckles) Right, right. Now I actually was reading in that essay — I was only aware of one essay that Jung wrote in the collected works. Are you saying that there's more than one and did this word crop up in one of his other writings? Or did he kind of basically write about it and then not much anymore?

Raff: Yeah, I think there's a long one and a short one both in volume 8 of the collected works *Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*.

Dr. Dave: Well, I seem to recall that he was aware of and made reference to the research that J. B. Rhine was doing at Duke University and he was, of course, the great American pioneer of attempting to scientifically study what came to be called parapsychology, paranormal or psychic phenomena.

What's the relationship between synchronicity on the one hand and what we might call psi or psychic phenomenon on the other?

Raff: That's a very good question. Jung was definitely taken with Rhine's work and in that essay he includes a lot of reference to Rhine. Some people now feel he tied his wagon a little too closely to Rhine because there are problems with Rhine's research that emerge later. Rhine was attempting to demonstrate that there was greater than statistical probability with guessing cards and dice and that kind of thing. Jung thought well, this is a good way to open the

door to synchronicity through the study of parapsychology. Sometimes he gives you the impression that parapsychology is totally a kind of synchronistic phenomenon because we are dealing with a causality, at least we think we are. There are a lot of different theories about it. He thought that the study of parapsychology might shed light on the nature of synchronicity and he was also pleased that Rhine seemed to be showing that there is statistical proof for some kind of parapsychological phenomenon.

Today it's not quite as clear. We don't know if we can define all of parapsychological phenomenon as synchronistic phenomenon. If you have an experience of a ghost, for example, is that a meaningful coincidence? Does it hit you — it may be scary and it may have a numinosity to it, but does it hit you as something that is particularly meaningful? Or is it an encounter with another reality and has meaning at that level? It kind of depends on how you shade it. If it comes together with a numinous feeling and a sense of meaning and a pretty clear acausal correlation then I think we would call it synchronicity but it's not a done deal.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, right.

Raff: Not everybody agrees on it.

Dr. Dave: Is there anyone in the Jungian world who stands out as sort of Mr. or Ms. Synchronicity? Somebody who has pushed the theory forward or elaborated it in any way or is it just kind of a concept that's out there and everybody works it in their own way?

Raff: There are a good six or seven books on synchronicity. Some pretty early on. I'm trying to remember the fellow's name — Ira Progoff. You remember him?

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeah, yeah. I know him for his writing about journal writing and keeping a journal.

Raff: Right. Well, he collaborated with Jung on a book about on synchronicity that he brought out under his own name. That was one of the very early books on synchronicity. There's one last year that was just published. But there isn't anybody who's dominant in that field. What we are facing there is the sad reality that no one's really pushed the envelope much further than Jung did. We have Jung's theory about this stuff and we have people who have written after Jung giving great examples, telling their life story about it, showing

how quantitative physics might relate to it but our conceptualization, our understanding of synchronicity is pretty much the same way it was 60 years ago.

Dr. Dave: OK. Well, are there any other ideas that come to mind that we should touch on before we wind down?

Raff: The idea that interests me as you know I'm in my Ally Work I talk a lot about engagement with inter figures and psychoanal entities and what we might call spirits and allies. If you look at the original conception of synchronicity in China, you know that the Chinese peasant on the road who throws the I Ching or pays the (Inaudible) for someone to throw the I Ching for them believes that's what's going on when you consult the oracle is that the spirits are talking to you.

Dr. Dave: Um-hmm.

Raff: That you throw your yarrow sticks or your coins and it's not chance how they come out. It's the spirit that makes them come out a certain way. So there's a certain kind of causality that they would ascribe to the spiritual world relating to synchronicity. Jung speculated that synchronicity was actually a creative act of the Divinity. It's when the normal causal flow of events is interrupted by something entering the ordinary world in a non-ordinary way.

Again, he doesn't really nail this down or reach any definitive conclusion but one possibility he talks about is that and this goes back to synchronicity being a miracle that when a synchronicity happens it's the intervention of a Divine force in your life.

Dr. Dave: What about the possibility of it being an internal force rather than an external force? I know that's kind of — it gets to be a very fine metaphysical distinction maybe but could it be some part of one's own unconscious that is in fact causal in some way?

Raff: It's possible. Jung rejects that idea because he says that would lead to an inflation of the unconscious. He argues that the unconscious as psychic phenomenon does not have any control over physical manifestation. For example, to say that the unconscious caused this scarab to fly in the window he thought would be an inflation of what the unconscious is really about.

Dr. Dave: OK.

Raff: But instead what he says is what if we have physical reality and psychic reality joined on a continuum of some kind and underneath both of them is a third reality, which he would call the psychoid reality. It's a change in that third reality that affects both psychic and physical reality.

Dr. Dave: Uh-hunh.

Raff: It'd be easier if I could diagram that but the basic idea is that something causes an archetype to get activated in my psyche so I dream about the scarab and at the same time that same thing is activating a real scarab in the physical world. Because it's neither physical nor psychic, it has an influence on both of them.

Dr. Dave: Going a slightly different direction in these far out or close end possibilities, people who have studied and written about poltergeist phenomenon which often seems to happen in the context of an adolescent girl in the home. And people have drawn a correlation between that and poltergeist phenomenon with the underlying theory being that this young person's unconscious was somehow triggering these physical phenomenon.

Raff: Right.

Dr. Dave: I don't know that I believe in any of this but I've read about it.

Raff: Yeah, that's another possibility. Again, I think Jung would prefer to think that there's something that's not psychic behind the whole thing because otherwise we would be saying mind over matter in a causal kind of way. Or matter over mind. There's some kind of potential conflict there with the idea that there's a third realm that influences both of the other two. It provides a connecting link. You can't say brain activity determines consciousness and consciousness determines brain activity but maybe both are being determined by an unseen third that only manifests in synchronicity.

Dr. Dave: OK.

Raff: I find that idea interesting. I find the idea that maybe there's a spirit connected to a synchronicity kind of interesting. You could take that as you said towards the inner realm and then we would talk about it as an archetype.

Dr. Dave: OK.

Raff: There are a lot of different ways to play with this.

Dr. Dave: Well, I want to thank you for being willing to come on here and play with me with this.

Raff: It was great pleasure. (chuckles)

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and it was my pleasure. It was fun to talk to you again. Dr. Jeffrey Raff, thanks for being my guest once again on Shrink Rap Radio.

Raff: Well, thanks for having me.