

Shrink Rap Radio #75, February 6, 2007, A New Theory of Synchronicity
David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave,” interviews Gibbs Williams, Ph.D.
(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Susannah Mitchell)

Excerpt: *I got particularly challenged by Jung’s extraordinarily provocative conclusion, in which he says these things are essentially not understood by the usual routes of science, and indeed a rational explanation is not even conceivable. Now to this kid – me – who had majored in philosophy, a large part of it analytic, and was undergoing a personal psychoanalysis in which critical thinking was starting to manifest itself, I found this stuff really extraordinarily challenging. And I began to get immersed in whatever the literature was and discovered that instead of leading to absolute answers, the Jungian assumptions and definitions and organizing concepts were raising more important questions and leading to definitive answers. And I guess what I really started to do was to take each one of these questions and explore them in depth, and that became the basis of my research.*

Introduction: That was the voice of my guest, Dr. Gibbs Williams. Gibbs Williams, Ph.D., is a psychoanalyst and supervisor in private practice in New York who has spent 40 years thinking about and studying synchronicity. His choice of profession is an outgrowth of four major interests: philosophy, depth psychology, spirituality, and the esoteric occult. He received a B.A. from Columbia University, majoring in Philosophy, an M.S. in Psychology from Yeshiva University, and a Ph.D. in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling from New York University. His dissertation topic studied the relationship among male heroin addicts, selected treatment programs, and ego weakness. Dr. Gibbs is on the faculty of Washington Square Institute, teaching an original course on psychoanalytic research. Additionally, he has taught and conducted workshops at other colleges and learning centers in New York. These include New York University, the New York School for Social Research, and Adelphi University. Now, here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Gibbs Williams, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Thank you, Dave. A pleasure.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I was looking at your blog and at your website, and you are a very interesting person, and you’ve got a very interesting academic background,

and a lot of our discussion today is going to center on your theory of synchronicity. But I'd like to step back and just have you start with your personal history.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: All right. I think the best way to begin is to say – well, I'm near 70, which is going to be next month, so we're talking about decades ago – when I was around 19 years old, I became preoccupied with what I think a number of the people in the field do, with questions of speculative philosophy, in which I was really more than preoccupied – I was obsessed with trying to answer what I would call essential – I wanted essential answers to ultimate questions: Who am I? Where am I from? What am I doing here? Is there a purpose? How do you know it? How do you know it for certain? That kind of thing.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: That led into formalizing it by going to Columbia University and as a default subject majoring in philosophy, because nothing else seemed to make sense to me. And then from there I – through, I guess, my own identity quest and being a very mixed-up sophomore in college – sought out two therapy – psychotherapy experiences which turned out to be failures, but at least it turned me on to reading Freud, but that...left me –

Dr. Dave: Now let me interrupt you there.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Yes.

Dr. Dave: You said the psychotherapy experiences turned out to be failures.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Yes.

Dr. Dave: How did you know they were failures? What happened that said, "Hey, this isn't –"

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Only after the fact. I diligently went twice a week in my first – from sophomore through senior – for three or four years. And my analyst was fond of dreams, and we had a routine where I would go back to my dorm room at John Jay and have these elaborate, two-page dreams, bring them in, and he would interpret them, brilliantly, but without asking me for any input. So I would sit there dazzled, thinking, "Gee, this man knows a great deal," but coming out of it

feeling like, “I don’t know what happened.” And then diligently going back and starting a journal, which I kept for 35 years –

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: – in which I would tell the truth in what was happening, and we were mismatched, so at the very end of the therapy one day, he said to me, “You’re angry at me,” and I said, “No, I’m not,” and he said, “Yes, you are,” and I said, “No, I’m not.” And he suggested the next day that I go into analysis with a woman. So the truth of it is, I left dizzy, and after four years came away feeling that I flunked psychotherapy.

Dr. Dave: Oh my goodness. All right.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Meanwhile, I had taken it very seriously. And I did get myself involved in depth psychology with Freud and others, however always feeling incomplete and dissociated. And I happened to have met a sculptor who was fond of Jung, and he introduced me to some extraordinarily interesting people in New York City who went to a church called The First Spiritualist Church of New York. And these were really exceptional people. Among them was a rather well-known psychiatrist who I saw, just to sort of hang out with on a Sunday in his extraordinarily beautiful apartment, and what made this man very interesting was that he would go into trance and purportedly channel poems from Freud and Jung, which I diligently took down. And then from there, I met other people in the church who invited me to become part of their séances. And it was during one of the spiritual raising consciousness talks that I really had what I would consider my first really meaningful coincidence, which I call Lazarus Raising. So I guess what I’m trying to say – oh, in addition, in the journal that I had, I had unwittingly recorded, in the midst of my experiences, what I would look back on as 19 major synchronicities, which subsequently, 35 years later, became the basis of my research.

Dr. Dave: OK. Now I’m curious about these channeled poems from Freud and Jung. Were they any good?

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Well, this guy was a very, very intelligent fellow, and depending upon whoever was saying it – him or who else – it really – it wowed me at the time. Yes, I thought it was really quite interesting.

Dr. Dave: Do you still have those?

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Yeah, I have one of them. It's in a journal. I haven't looked at it in years, but I do have that.

Dr. Dave: It'd be interesting –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: It'll go into the book that I'm completing.

Dr. Dave: OK, that's great. OK, so back to your story. You're in this Spiritualist group, and you say you had your first – well, maybe it wasn't –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Really meaningful coincidence.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: And in addition, I was studying – I got really immersed in the esoteric occult. I was doing experiments with astrology and tarot. I really made a pretty thorough investigation of various things, Kabbalah and so forth. I was steeped in it up to my ears. And that's when I discovered Jung, and of course he's credited with having coined the term synchronicity. And it's important to note that even today, many years later, the bulk of the theory – theoretical understanding of meaningful coincidences is through Jung and the Jungians. And they have a lock on the synchronicity understanding market by about 95-5, of which I am in that 5% category that's not.

So I guess what I'm saying is I started out as a de facto Jungian. And the next turn in the road was that I was invited to go to a Spiritualist outing in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, where they were going to have all these, you know, demonstrations, like ectoplasm and fancy occult things, which are really quite impressive if true, and I discovered that there was [inaudible] warfare. And two different groups came up to me and said, "You're going to be captain to the St. Germaine group, and don't tell anybody. It's a secret society." The other half said, "Be careful. They're going to try to seduce you into the St. Germaine group. It's a bunch of baloney." So I got very cynical and figured, "Oh, good Lord, even in spiritual – in Spirit Land, there's politics like everything else."

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I got very jaded and turned off.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: And that deepened my identity crisis, which was getting hot and heavy. And that led into my experience at Odyssey House, which was an innovative therapeutic community for treating addicts, which was one of the very first, along with Synanon and Daytop and others, in which I had 17 months of probably the most defining experience of my life, where there was the best and the worst of what happened in that community, in which I came out with my sense of reality really up for grabs. I didn't know what was up and what was down, what was good, what was evil.

Dr. Dave: I can really believe that, because I was involved with Synanon for a time.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Oh, well then you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, when I was in graduate school. And I left after a period saying, "Wait a second. I am not up to par for tangling with these streetwise people –" (laughs)

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I – I – exactly.

Dr. Dave: " – who want to get even with society by messing with my head."

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Well, the woman who ran this place was a psychiatrist and a lawyer, and she was what I would call an evil genius, and she was both the best of what you could possibly imagine in such a person and a terrible abuser of authority, so I came out absolutely dizzy. That propelled me into an 11-year psychoanalysis, on the couch three times a week, no insurance, so you know I was really dedicated to doing it.

Dr. Dave: Boy, I'll say.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: And that began to save my life.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: And, as a result, I started – a lot of my associations were dealing with trying to understand the implications of these coincidences, which became increasingly more important, and from a Jungian point of view, they really believe wholeheartedly that when you have these things and they're especially meaningful, that you're really connecting with a realm of spirituality that is giving you exceedingly important guidance, as if you feel like you're on the right road, that kind of thing. So that from their vantage point, the world is spiritualized. There's divine intervention. It comes to you in the form of these coded messages. And you know, it's really – you're in a state of awe. You intuit these things by intuition and feelings. And that's, you know, impressive. And then as I went into my own analysis, though, I began to realize that I come into analysis feeling like I needed to be guided, and I would be very happy if these things were true, and I started to plug in critical thinking, which I had never really done, and the critical thinking led me into trying to research these extraordinary events, and I got particularly challenged by Jung's extraordinarily provocative conclusion in which he says these things are essentially not understood by the usual routes of science, and indeed, a rational explanation is not even conceivable.

Now to this kid – me – who had majored in philosophy, a large part of it analytic, and was undergoing a personal psychoanalysis in which critical thinking was starting to manifest itself, I found this stuff really extraordinarily challenging. And I began to get immersed in whatever the literature was and discovered that instead of leading to absolute answers, the Jungian assumptions and definitions and organizing concepts were raising more important questions and leading to definitive answers. And I guess what I really started to do was to take each one of these questions and explore them in depth, and that became the basis of my research.

Dr. Dave: OK, well let's – maybe we should start off with your definition of synchronicity, and by the way, just so you know, I sort of have a foot in the Jungian camp myself and kind of subscribe to some of that stuff –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I don't want to step on it. I just urge you to have an open mind, and I think relative to what's going on.

Dr. Dave: I do have an –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I don't mean – I don't wish to be adversarial. I think that there really is a pressing need to try to objectify this stuff as much as possible, because there's no question something of great importance is going on.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes, and I actually had a chance to listen to you interviewed elsewhere, and I found that I actually agree with at least part of the point that you're making here, so I don't think it's going to be adversarial at all. But let's start off with how you define synchronicity, and then maybe you could give an example from your own life.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Sure. Let me give an example. Before I went on another radio program, I thought to myself, you know, I have an awful lot of material. I really have been researching these things for 40 years. My wife is extremely upset that I have so many papers around, would love me to get rid of them, but I can't bear to part with it. In any event, obviously I can't compress and distill everything I've done in you know, 30, 40, 50 minutes. So as I was thinking about, you know, what's the essential? What am I really – you know, what am I really contributing, if anything? That was the context in which I went to sleep this particular night, and on my mind was the idea of going back to my origins, which I mentioned before was that I was always interested in the questions of speculative philosophy. So just before I went to sleep, I said to myself, you know, I really ought to start out with my interest in philosophy. I get up the next day. I go to work. I'm on the subway. I look up, and I see a poster across from me in which it says – it was an advertisement for an institute of practical philosophy, and it says – it listed a bunch of questions, and one of the questions was, are you concerned with who are you, where are you from, what's your meaning, and so on.

Dr. Dave: Great.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: And I thought to myself, "Good Lord, here we are." Now that is a synchronicity.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: When you have something on your mind that is really preoccupying you and it's in the form of – I don't know – an obsession, a problem, a concern, and you need some guidance, you need an answer, and it's not forthcoming, and something happens in external reality which seems to mirror exactly the state of mind that you are having, and it seems extremely meaningful to

you, that whatever is occurring is not only meaningful text, but that it's happening in exactly the right time, so it's happening – you get a sense of simultaneity that somebody or something or you are talking to yourself, or you're getting some kind of guidance from – who knows from where, and it's being externalized in whatever the thing is outside, so that in effect, while all synchronicities are different, they have a common structure.

So you have a subjective state of mind. Let's call it A. And then you have a parallel mirror that is equivalent in meaning. Let's call it A prime. And that the two are linked together in some mysterious way, unexplained way. They clearly are related to each other in terms of equivalence of meaning, and what lends the uncanny character to it is the fact that they seem to be happening simultaneously. And what is most important is that when you go to explain the link between A and A prime, the subjective event and the mirroring external event, you can't use causality. Conventional scientific causality makes absolutely no sense. Clearly on the subway the practical school of philosophy did not insert that ad because it knew I was interested in the subject matter, and I didn't somehow invent the ad to occur. So that it does have a sense of strangeness and uncanny connectedness.

Dr. Dave: So that's why Jung says, well, it's an acausal connecting principle, but yet there's something about that that bothers you.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Well, it bothers me because what he's really doing logically is saying you can't explain these causally, so he invents this vague term, fuzzy term called acausality, which is reality causality in a way. I don't mean to be picky logically, but it makes no sense. In any event, his provocative conclusion that you can't explain that link by causality really translates to me that you can't explain it using conventional causality, but that doesn't necessarily mean you have to throw the baby out with the bath. How about the possibility of expanding our definition of causality?

So it's questions like this that began to get my analytic part of me into gear, and that started to raise questions such as: He says you can't explain it using causal, you've got to have an acausal principle, whatever that means. You're left with equivalence of meaning and simultaneity. All right, but that raises more questions because then what you have to do is to try to understand what is meaning? Or what is the meaning of meaning? Or what is the relationship between meaning and conventional causality? And he would say that in synchronicities, you're connecting with the so-called realm of absolute meaning, meaning it's whole.

There's no interpretation. You channel this so-called vital information, and you take it in passively. Well, that's a nice, from my vantage point, fantasy, but what I know about meaning is that it takes an individual to have a coincidence, or a meaningful coincidence, and in terms of meaning, an individual always brings something of his own unique self to (a) first of all, have something that's going to be meaningful, and then you shape your own meaning. You make meaning. I don't believe there's anything that's being interpreted. It doesn't make any sense to me. So it's questions like this that started me to do this research.

Dr. Dave: OK, and what has your research revealed?

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Well, the crux of the matter is trying to explain the mysterious link between A and A prime, and in – Jung propounded three what he calls anticausal arguments. Not to go into great detail, but just to introduce the topic. The first argument is one of lack of methodology. The second has to do with meaningfulness, and the third has to do with the nature of time. The big crux of this is he says you can't use conventional science to make any objective sense – you can't have a science of synchronicities, because in order to do that, you've got to experiment. You've got to be able to pin down the phenomena in such a way that you experiment with it. You do something to it, and you see – you know, you look for patterns and regular patterns of reliability and so on. Since these things seem to happen like firefly flashes, how do you pin it down? Well, I found a way to pin it down.

The way you pin it down is that you view synchronicities as if they're waking dreams, and you analyze the synchronicities from the vantage point of how you would analyze a dream, meaning you stick the dream material, you stick the synchronicity material into the ongoing flow of people's experience, so that people that are truly interested in this should keep copious journals, and when they have a synchronicity, date the synchronicity and put it into the date that you are – you know, have your journal material. And this is what I discovered.

Dr. Dave: Okay, I'm totally on the same page with you. You know, when I heard you speak before and talk about journal keeping, I sort of slapped myself upside the head and said, "Duh!" You know, yeah, of course you can study synchronicity in the way that you're describing, maybe not in the way of – you know, and maybe someday it'll be possible to study it in terms of some kind of magnetic fields or some sort of energy that we don't know anything about yet, but

in terms of studying it psychodynamically, you're right. It's definitely a subject that's up for grabs and available for psychodynamic study of how it fits into –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: It's very interesting. It's very interesting that the thing that's the – the coincidence that triggered Jung was an experience with a patient who he found to be – let's call it obsessive and uptight – and felt that she was too rigid. She had too much animus and needed more anima. So he felt he was stuck with her, and he felt she needed to be shaken up, shocked in some way so she could experience her feelings.

So he's trying to figure out what to do, and she has a dream the previous night in which she is handed a golden scarab pin or brooch or something by some man, and she seems to be very excited about it as she's relating this dream to him, and as she's relating the dream, he hears a tap on his window, and because he's a botanist and he knew everything, he was aware of what was there, he opens up the window, and he's aware that there's a beetle who happens to be called a scarab beetle – it has the same coloration. He pulls – he takes his fist, puts the beetle into his fist, moves over to the patient, opens her hand, and says, "Here's your scarab." Apparently, from the little that he records, she has this, like, illumination, and she's flooded with affect and apparently has this major therapeutic breakthrough, and it's obviously, seemingly a very major coincidence for her. However, interestingly enough, Jung, who dates everything in copious detail, has not dated that. There is no recording as to who the woman was, nothing about her history, and I wrote to a person who has written a definitive Jungian biography, mentioned it to her, and she said, "That's a really interesting fact." She doesn't know what to make of it. However, it became a very important synchronicity for Jung, because he spent the rest of his life trying to figure these things out.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Now what becomes important is that while he would speak in Freudianisms – you know he was supposed to be Freud's heir apparent – he and Freud had huge differences when it came to synchronicities. As a matter of fact, there's a great one having to do with a synchronicity in Freud's study in which they had an enormous fight over the implications of what happened that led partially to the break they had. But the important thing about this is that Jung really did not fit this material into a person's ongoing psychodynamic flow. He was more interested in results. He was more interested in having these kind of

people hook up with what he felt was a missing spiritual connection, and he was interested in ends. He wasn't interested in origins. So my major contribution is seeing these things from the ongoing flow of a person's psychodynamics.

Dr. Dave: Okay, well, say more about that. Say what you've discovered about how that works.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I have found the following, both with myself and I would say about 10 patients who fortunately gave me their unsolicited journals. They will each synchronistically prone, I would say, and this is what I discovered: that at least with these particular people, and I say that guardedly because I think that there are other possible types of synchronicities or other types of people who may have synchronicities, so I don't want to overgeneralize; however, I will go to court and be sued for this one and feel very certain of my findings. What I have found is that the people I'm talking about, that synchronicities, which are fairly rare, come at a point where they are preoccupied with some major psychological issue, and in terms of finding a problem, it keeps on being elusive because all roads seem to lead to cancelling each other out. It seems to be an extreme problem in which the left side doesn't work, the right side doesn't work, nothing works, and they reach a point that I would call a zero point or quintessential stuckness.

Now there are two attitudes to being stuck. The first is a passive attitude where you sort of give up and just forget it. The second attitude is, under certain conditions, if the person really is of mind to keep on persisting to find an answer, they can what I call magnetize the issue, and they're – they don't give up. It's like they'll go to the grave. They may not get the answer, but it isn't because they stopped trying. And once they do that, I think what happens is that they stimulate not the collective unconscious, which is what is emphasized in Jungian stuff, but they stimulate the personal, creative unconscious which is scanning the periphery for clues as to how to form a pathway between the two extremes, and from my vantage point, synchronicities occur at a point when whatever systematic work has been done on the self finds indeed a creative solution to a problem which has seemed to have been elusive, sometimes for years.

And in adaptation terms, what's really going on, or one way to explain it is that the person is moving from assimilating an answer to accommodating an answer. So in brief, I think that synchronicities, the ones I'm talking about, occur when a person is doggedly determined to find some kind of novel solution to that kind of issue

which seems to be impossible to resolve, and the point when they do it, these things become naturalistic byproducts of the idiosyncratic creative process of individuals. However, they occur in coded form so that like with a dream, you have to keep associating and make the pre-conscious conscious to note the meanings of the particular synchronicities.

Dr. Dave: Okay. So I believe what you've described is a set of circumstances that gives rise to the experience of synchronicity.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Correct.

Dr. Dave: And that person who's really working an issue in psychotherapy, you've found that if they're really working it, and they've come to a place where they feel stuck, that that gives rise to a situation where synchronicity is likely to happen, where they will experience some kind of incredible coincidence that, if they examine it, will deepen their experience and bring into consciousness the resolution of the issue with which they've been struggling.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Well, yes, but a little bit different. I think that when they have this thing, these synchronicities, it really reflects a major shift of their consciousness has already occurred. They feel it. They feel released from the problem. There's more of a sense of vitality, more of a sense of deepened insight. That which was previously foreign becomes familiar. That which was dead comes alive. There are many virtues of what occurs when these things happen.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Interesting. So in a way it's a kind of developmental process that it signals that there has been a developmental advance.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Leap. That's exactly right. Now that gets into another concept that I came upon. It's the idea of unconsciousness work. I think there is two – these concepts that you use, like spirituality, consciousness, and so forth, and treat it as if everybody knows what they mean – no, we don't. No, we're just at the forefront of what they mean. They need to be really thoroughly examined. So for example, I came up with this notion. Maybe I probably borrowed it from somebody, but I'm stuck with what I have. I don't remember it. There's a continuum of consciousness, and I've identified certain things like what I would call in the beginning, when you have a very scattered patient who is dissociated, I gave the term kaleidoscopic consciousness. That leads to symbiotic, transitional –

no, transcendent, transitional, transformative, ego, and on up the line maybe to cosmic and so forth, and each one of these states of consciousness, which is active, acts as a kind of filter in order to organize your own chaos, but depending upon the filter of the attained level of consciousness, people will experience synchronicities at any step along the way, but their interpretation is going to be largely determined by the characteristics of the state of consciousness that they're in.

Dr. Dave: Okay. I can buy that. What I want to ask you about, though, is okay, you've defined a set of circumstances that can give rise to the experience of synchronicity, but are you saying that synchronicity is entirely a matter of projection, that in other words, there's not really anything going on beyond mere coincidence, but a person, out of their own unconscious need, creates a relationship that's not really there in any objective sense.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I know what you're asking. I guess what I'm really saying is I'm not particularly concerned about the external event and when it happens. There are billions and billions and billions of connections that occur to everybody all day long, individually and collectively. Statistically, it has been demonstrated – some very interesting statistics, like with the presidents, Lincoln and Kennedy, there are all sorts of hits that you would say are uncanny. On the other hand, they don't show you the other list of all the things that don't hit. Or for example, when 9/11 occurred, there are all sorts of anecdotal tales telling you that people literally had the Twin Towers blowing up, and they felt terrible. All right, that's true. On the other hand, not everybody felt terrible. While most of our country was probably grieving, half the other world was joyous, so that there's always some kind of a something that the individuals individually, collectively bring to the identification of these things and the meaning that they have. So I can't get away from the central importance of what is the dynamic, individually and collectively, brought to bear?

Now with respect to the amazing timing of these things, how about the following idea? That we are meaning-making objects, and that we see patterns all over the place, and when there's a heightened sensitivity to pattern-making, you don't need to have one set of events occur. It could be any one of a number of sets. When I broke a wrist, I never saw so many people with orthopedic surgeries in my lifetime, and I didn't even know that they existed. Somehow when I had a personal identification, everybody had it. Or if you want to be a pregnant lady, suddenly you'd see half of New York City is pregnant, and so on. In other words,

heightened sensitivity and attention will allow you to see in the general flow of normal experience that which you're attuned to.

Dr. Dave: Right. The example that I use is, you know, you buy a new car. You buy a Volkswagen or whatever. That you used to be the car was the Volkswagen Bug.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Oh, great.

Dr. Dave: And suddenly you notice they were all over the place.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: They're all over the place.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, everybody's driving one. Everybody copied me. Why did everybody buy a Volkswagen when I bought a Volkswagen?

Dr. Gibbs Williams: So what I am saying –

Dr. Dave: So there's this heightened sensitivity. There is a spectrum that goes from skeptical on the one hand, extreme skepticism, all the way to extreme credulity on the other. Now, you seem to be expressing –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: A fly in both houses. I'm right in the middle.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I sort of am, too, because it sounds like you're expressing the extreme skeptical position, but in the other interview where I heard you interviewed, it sounded like you were open to certain forms of telepathy or ESP.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I am open to anything. If the people who are interested in this will go online and pick out Mark Twain's 10 synchronicities, if that doesn't seem to suggest absolute concrete evidence that telepathy is real, then I don't know what telepathy is. It certainly seems like it. On the other hand, in going through his autobiography and seeing where these things occurred, there's no question in my mind this man was also a dissociated personality, and from my vantage point, synchronicities tend to occur to dissociated people, because they're trying their best to synthesize, and what they typically are doing is compartmentalizing various streams of information, like intuition, feelings, thinking, and so forth, and in synchronicities, these different streams of information tend to come together in a

synthetic way. So I think we're really talking about a developmental process in which the organizing and synthetic autonomous ego function is developmentally coming along.

Dr. Dave: Let me explore another angle with you here, and I think you've already copped to the possibility that you've got a narrow sample and there may be some bias in your own observations, and I would say that there is the possibility – you know, Freud has been accused of having a psychopathological bias in the development of his theory of personality, because it's all based on the clients that he saw, the patients that he saw, and so he generalized from –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: And himself.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, but he generalized largely from pathology, and so the Freudian worldview has kind of emphasized degrees of neuroticism, rather than degrees of health.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: That's true.

Dr. Dave: And so, in a sense, you're also generalizing from the patients that you've seen, so you're looking at it through the filter of the analytic situation, and what I want to –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Well, except one other thing, and let's get back to philosophy, and I think that's what's missing. So for example, if you make the ontological or epistemological first assumption that everything is connected and that's there's a god, and God is consciousness, and God can intervene in the affairs of men, then I can predict what your theory of synchronicity is very likely to be. It's likely to be highly weighted on the Jungian side. If, however, you turn that first assumption on its ear, and you really are participating in a debate between Aristotle and Plato, and you say, "Well, wait a minute. All we really know is what science can give us evidence for." And if you make the connection that everything is, you know, obviously connected, but whether there's a consciousness that's independent of – you know, like a collective unconscious – instead of assuming that's a given fact and operate from there, I would say it's a very seductive hypothesis that is hardly proved. And let's say that's fair. If you go that route, you get an entirely different set of organizing concepts through which, at the end of the line, you come up with what I think I've got, which is a more naturalistic, non-

mystical, not supernatural explanation. So I would say depending upon your first assumptions and the organizing concepts that flow from them, you're going to get an entirely different vantage point. Now it's up to you – you know, whoever – to choose which, if any, you prefer, but at least I wouldn't throw cold water on either one of them. I don't know the truth.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah. I was trying to go somewhere a little bit differently, which is to say that I think that synchronicities can arise from places other than pathology, other than struggling intensely with a problem, and this I would base, certainly, on my own experience that, you know, I've had what seemed to me to be amazingly synchronistic incidents happen in my life, where I was not in a position of extreme seeking or extreme conflict or anything like that, and I have taken it to be a sign of being on some sort of a path.

I'll tell you what my hypothesis is, and it doesn't run counter to what you've said. I think it might expand it. I think that people who have an inner orientation would be more likely to experience synchronicities, and the more intensely involved they are with this inner orientation, the more likely they would be to experience synchronicities, so my hypothesis is that meditators, journal keepers, dream journal people, that these people would be much more likely to experience synchronicity than people who, say, have a very outer orientation towards the world. What do you think?

Dr. Gibbs Williams: No objection. Try the terms attunement, same wavelength, speak the same language. I generally find most people do not really hear or listen to each other for two and a half seconds, and most of the time, people are talking past each other. Every so often you really connect, and you really feel you have made a meaningful connection. I agree with you. Those people who are interested in truly making those kind of meaningful connections are more likely to have these kinds of events and certainly take them seriously. I agree.

Dr. Dave: And that actually could be a piece of naturalistic research, which if I were still in graduate school or I were supervising candidates, you know, I would try to get somebody to carry out that research. That's a study that you could do.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I think that's a very good idea. It leads to one of the pet things that I've had. I also am very interested in the nature of spirituality and its relationship to what we're talking about, and I've located, probably borrowed

somebody else's idea, but at least what I have found is, I locate what I would say is the essence of spirituality with certain experiences such as love, persistence, hope, faith, trust, and hanging in there, to the year one consciousness of a pre-Oedipal child. And we looked at it from that vantage point, then synchronicities – and this goes back to the first one I had, Lazarus Rising – I was in desperate need of feeling that somebody out there knew me and was interested in me and cared about me and would guide me, and the first synchronicity I had was an experience that that had actually come to pass, and it was extraordinarily moving. But having developed beyond the point where I needed external guidance, I now see it as my indicating, like step one of the help program, that I really could not – I couldn't live in my own bubble. I really needed help, and it was allowing myself to acknowledge, "I need help," which is the first step in AA.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I see it entirely differently now. I see it as the beginning of my attempt to grow a cohesive self, which I did not have.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Would you want to share that synchronicity of Lazarus Rising? It sounds like that was a powerful one.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: That was powerful. Here I am in a consciousness raising group in this little apartment on the left side, with this little old medium Romanian lady, Agatha, who was 88, and we're sitting in darkness in a circle, eight other people, me and Agatha. Lights go out. She says, "Say the first thing that comes to mind." I said, "I can't see anything. I'm not very good at this." She said, "No, no, no. Really, just say what you see." And being skeptical and half laughing at the whole thing, I said, "All right. Let me go with this." Suddenly in my mind's eye was illuminated a yellow, oval colored kind of thing, and in the oval, like a frame, was what I said was a grandmotherly face, and I said this to Agatha, and she said, "How do you know it's a grandmotherly face?" And I said, "Because you've got granny glasses on," and she said, "Who do they belong to?" And I was turned on to the woman next to me, and I just facetiously said, "Well, they obviously belong to Diane. It's her grandmother's glasses." And Diane said, "I have granny glasses on my mantelpiece at home." That's not the synchronicity. I went there with the idea that – the question in mind, is there a conscious god and may God intervene in the lives of people? In effect, do miracles exist? That was what was in my mind. After I get this interesting experience, I was shaking, in a nice way, I'm about to

leave, very excited, and somebody said, “Look, if you want answers to these questions that you’re always asking, when you go home, take the Bible, ask a question, open it up, read any place. It’ll give you an answer.”

So I figured fine. Go home. Had a Bible. I said, “Do miracles exist?” I open the Bible, and the first thing that hits my eye is the raising of Lazarus from the grave. That was not my synchronicity, but I got very excited, and I figured, “Great.” I had a great opportunity to call Diane and share this interesting experience with her. I called Diane. We’re talking about this. I tell her my experience with Lazarus. She said, “What an incredible coincidence!” I said, “What are you talking about?” She said just that day, she was going to Central Park, walking with her rather odd, unconventional psychiatrist, who said to her that he, in a past life, was at the raising of Lazarus. I heard that whole thing. I tingled. And that to me, that was uplifting. And that started my forty-year research.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Yes. So what do you make of that at this point? I mean, you’ve subsequently, you went through 11 years of analysis. You probably see this in some psychodynamic light in terms of your own life. Is that something you could comment on?

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Yes. I believe that – another pet of mine is trying to understand the esoteric occult and its relationship to depth psychology, and my sense of it is that it is the precursor of self psychology, and the appeal to esoteric occultism is the promise of wholeness, unity, a reconciliation of opposites, and which I desperately needed and my inept therapist really didn’t speak that language, so that when I got into this whole thing with astrology and all paths leading to unity, that was really appealing to me. I fell for it, and then when I got finally into my analysis, and my analyst in a way mirrored back. He said, “You know, you’re suffering from an incohesive self.” And when he talked in those terms, it took the mystery of the occultism, which I really didn’t need, concretized it, and started me on a developmental quest to really build a cohesive self, and in so doing, I had relied initially on intuition and feelings to guide me, and they’re okay, but they can be somewhat distorting and misleading, so that I also plugged in critical thinking, as like a scientist who would realize his biases and try to correct for them, and discovered that there’s no antagonism between these things. It seems to me if something’s truthful, it’s got to vibrate at all levels. They don’t disagree. There’s a kind of unity among what I would call streams of information, so that – I’m not sure I’m answering the question, but that’s what happened.

Dr. Dave: Okay. I'm trying to put on your synchronistic experience as if it were a dream, and you know, if I put myself in your shoes and if that I had been my synchronicity, maybe I would be tempted to look at it as that that 11-year analysis was the beginning of the raising of me out of some kind of grave, out of some –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Oh, oh, I see what you're talking about, and in a way, that's really true, and that I have in the – I'm glad you mentioned this. If you look at a run of synchronicities – let's say you have a patient, and over a course of 10 years, they give you 10 synchronicities, if you add the synchronicities up sequentially and look at the meaning of it, it invariably will lead you to an understanding of the person's primary issue, their life theme that I think people have, evidence of significant psychological change. When they stall, you can tell why they stall. It's a very, very potent indicator of what I would call individual fingerprint of each person.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Well, as we wrap –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: You can see I'm excited about the subject.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I can – definitely. After 40 years –

Dr. Gibbs Williams: And it's endless. You think you've exhausted it all, and there's always another wrinkle. I don't pretend to have the answer, but I do think that there are approaches and new concepts and revisions of other concepts which is really what is extremely important and needed in this complicated field.

Dr. Dave: Yes, and I thank you for that. You've challenged my sort of passive acceptance of the Jungian concept of it sort of being not able to be studied, and you've persuaded me that it can be studied, and so I thank you for that. I wonder if there's any final words that you'd like to offer to our listeners as we wrap things up here. Anything maybe that you haven't – ?

Dr. Gibbs Williams: I would say in the light of my own personal experience, that if anybody is interested in this stuff at all, instantaneously go out, get some pages, call it a journal, and start writing a journal, and then when you have one or more of these things, fit the synchronicity into the timing of the journal, and then start to – well, you might get a book called *The Magic Years*, which gives you a

developmental perspective of the way consciousness seems to develop, and then just sort of inch your way around, you know, trying to – you'll utilize it any way you want to. I guess what I'm really saying is try all the various alternatives and see what works. My analyst is fond of saying there are 495 therapies that obviously work for somebody, but it's not a question of what works, it's what works best for you.

Dr. Dave: Exactly.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: One of the things that I think I am trying to contribute through this is that the Jungian stuff with archetypes and all of that kind of thing are very interesting, but there's a confusion of meanings, which I think are too fuzzy and nonspecific. The way I – my focus is on trying to concretize what I would call person-specific information.

Dr. Dave: Okay, well, I'm going to put a link to your website and to your blog so that any interested listeners will be able to read a paper that you have there on synchronicity and other ongoing reflections that you have on the topic. Also, I believe you are bringing a book out soon. Is that right?

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Well, I hope so. I have something tentatively called *Understanding Meaningful Coincidences: Synchronicities, the Phenomena, the Awe Response, Implications, Explanations, and Uses*.

Dr. Dave: Well, it sounds like a hot title to me.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Well, interestingly enough, three years ago on Googling – if you Google the term synchronicity, you get 75,000 references. Three years later, you get 177,000 references to synchronicities. These things are flying off the map.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Something going on here.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: Something's going on.

Dr. Dave: And that's what I think they tell us. So Dr. Gibbs Williams, thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Dr. Gibbs Williams: You're a fine man. You've got exquisite taste, and I appreciate your very good interview.

Dr. Dave: Thank you.