

August 20, 2005 at 3:16 pm I had a seizure. I had just celebrated my seventh birthday. I was in Mrs. Ashley's (possibly my favorite teacher ever) second-grade class. Mrs. Ashley had called my mom earlier in the week to tell her that I wasn't acting like myself. I hadn't socialized with really anyone the whole week. At recess, I chose to sit alone under a tree instead of playing with everyone else. My mom decided to make a doctors appointment just to make sure everything was okay. My mom picked me up from school early — around 2 pm. We drove to midtown where my doctors office was. I got out of the car with my sister and we both walked inside and took the elevator to the third floor. The last thing I remember before I started seizing was looking out the window at a tree. Just blankly staring at it. Once I started seizing, my mom and my sister panicked. They were both shouting asking what was happening. Later that day I woke up and looked around me. I was in a hospital room with two IV's in my left arm. I tried to get up, but I didn't even have the strength to sit up. I looked at my mom and dad holding my hands looking at me with tears in the corners of their eyes. My mom kissed my forehead and let out a shaky sigh and said, "Thank God you're okay. I don't know what I would've done..."

Was it just a coincidence that I was at the doctors office when I had my seizure? If I hadn't been there, would my life be different today? Would I still even be around?

I'm having trouble articulating what I really want to say in this paper because for the first time in my life, I don't know exactly what I believe. I've lost sight of what I thought was my unwavering faith. I thought researching further on the subject would make my beliefs more prominent, but it has almost done the opposite. I was raised by a family who all considered themselves Christians. As I grew older, I began to question everything. I went through phases where something would happen and I would immediately place all the blame on God, so I guess you could say I believed in him. However, I wouldn't say it was for the right reasons. It's because that's all I knew. However, as more time went on, I found that I was subject to my own beliefs. With this, I realized I had more freedom. I had to confront my confusion when I was faced with the question: are things coincidence, or does everything happen for a reason as a part of Gods plan (aka fate)? Is there technically a correct answer? The only thing I'm sure of at the moment is that there is not a correct answer; this is what makes it a controversial subject. Everyone believes that his or her opinion is correct, so there's never going to be a time where a conclusion is made, and everyone agrees.

For the most part, I think my family isn't aware of my current beliefs on the subject. This stands as a warning, prepare yourself there are things you don't know about me.

The dictionary definition of coincidence is 'a remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection.' The definition of fate is 'the development of events beyond a person's control, regarded as determined by a supernatural power.' These words have such similar definitions, but at the same time such different meanings. So how do you know if something was meant to be or if it was just a coincidence? Most of the time, a decision is made by your mind telling you the "right answer," or the answer that you believe is right, even if you don't realize it. This is called the subconscious. It's kind of like when I used to pray as a child. I would constantly be asking God for answers, and then when an "answer" came into my head, I didn't know if I was making that answer up myself, or if it was actually God trying to communicate with me. How can you be absolutely certain of either one? To some, coincidences are phenomena; they fascinate both believers and skeptics. For skeptics, a coincidence is a chance; it obeys the law of probability and has no special meaning. For believers, coincidence is the seemingly purposeful occurrence of two supposedly unrelated events (J. Neimark). So how

do we as humans know the difference between this, and fate? Do we as humans make choices that change our fate or do we just think we're making choices while our whole life has already been planned out for us?

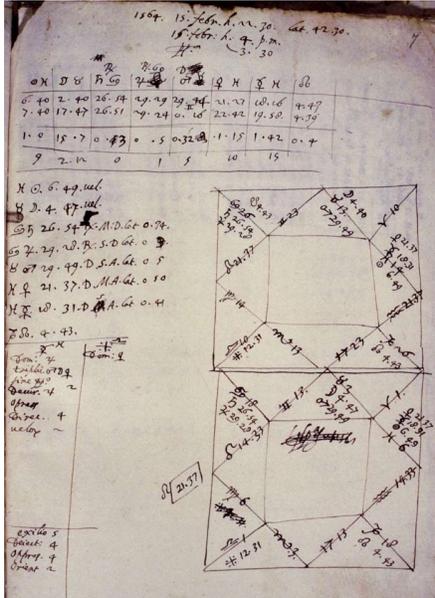
Recently I've been thinking a lot about a higher power, and more specifically, whether or not it exists. I've even been wishing that I believed that one existed. The Bible says that the human was created with the ability to make moral choices and that ultimately, he is responsible for those choices (C. Rubin). Growing up, my mom taught me that whatever happens, happens, and we can't do anything about it. This is called "fatalism," and it is not something that's mentioned in the Bible. Fatalism is a major theme of Islam, which demands total submission to the sovereignty of Allah (S. Hameed). Hinduism, too has a fatalistic view of life that helps keep India's caste system in place. In addition to Hinduism and Islam, Greek mythology tells the stories of three goddesses who are weavers of men's lives. These three women are the Moirai, or the Fates. Their decisions could not be canceled or changed, even by other gods (M. Carmody). In the Bible (Romans 8:29-30), it says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." This is saying that God, in His infinite foreknowledge, knew that certain people would submit to be conformed to the image of His Son (Jesus Christ), and he predestined them for this.

Squire Rushnell, writer of When God Winks, believes there's a third option, other than coincidence and fate, called "godwinks." I emailed his assistant, asking questions about coincidences and fate, and then asked if she could forward them on to Squire. I got a response the next day saying that he wanted to set up a phone call with me, so I happily accepted. We set up a time to talk about my questions on April 21. I was kind of skeptical going in to it because I knew he was very passionate about his religion, and I was scared that he would try to convert me or convince me my opinions were wrong. He had almost the opposite affect on me. Talking to him gave me some sort of peace about my wavering faith and thoughts that I hadn't been able to find anywhere else. He told me stories that I could relate to myself, and told me that it was okay that I wasn't sure what I believed because I'd figure it out.

When I asked Squire what his definition of a coincidence was, he replied, "A coincidence is something that occurs that I believe has no emotion connected to it; that it is just too random things that happen to turn out a certain way." He says that coincidence is different than a Godwink because, "A lot of people get uptight with the G-O-D word, that's why I came up with the word Godwink... There were certain things that were happening in peoples lives that were so extraordinary that they defied such mathematical odds; that people naturally described a divine source for whatever had happened." After hearing Squire unravel his thoughts, I



remembered why I believed in God. It was me being optimistic; hoping that there was someone up there planning out my life for me so that I wouldn't have to. I was also scared about what my family would say. My great-grandmother, who is 96 and still going strong, is one of the most religious persons I have ever met. When I was watching *Mr. Nobody*, the main character said, "How can you be sure of anything... how can you even be sure you exist." I wasn't sure how she could be so sure of anything, especially something she couldn't even see. So ultimately, the phone call with Squire just made me even more confused than I was prior to the conversation.



With this sudden emotional confusion, I decided to turn to the more scientific facts. The Mesopotamians were the earliest recorded mention of the zodiac (particularly the people of Babylon). They recorded astronomical events on clay tablets, many of which have been found and studied by archaeologists. These tablets tell us that the zodiac was used in the 5th century BC, so starting in 500 BC (B. G. Sidharth). It was founded on the Babylonian theory that the planets and stars have a sympathetic relationship with the earth and everything on it, including man (S. Langton). This lead to a new idea; the belief that the stars know and choose our fate. Dr. Michael Laitman, founder of the Bnei Baruch Kabbalah Education & Research Institute, Professor of Ontology, and PhD in Philosophy and Kabbalah, talks about this controversial subject. He says, "A person cannot control his life. And that is why people are so interested in

astrology, which supposedly can predict a person's character and his entire fortune by the stars. (M. Laitman)" I see horoscopes as a kind of religion; something for someone to believe in so that they aren't accountable for their choices, or something to blame for their own mistakes. This is what causes chaos, which is important because it shows a limit to how well we can predict, and control, the physical world (C. Budd).

Dean Radin, a scientist at the Institute of Noetic Sciences in Petaluma, California, has been testing coincidence on a global scale since 1998 (Neimark, 2004). Radin invents machines to measure whether or not events that involve a mass consciousness (the minds of everyone on the planet) are able to affect the machines. For this experiment, he studied 168 significant events that occurred over five-year period. Richard Shoup, scientist and entrepreneur, believes this kind of data may challenge the belief of randomness that is at the base of much scientific thought today. I agree with Shoup when he says he thinks it will also challenge the people who believe coincidence is just chance.

Anselm Kiefer, a German painter and sculptor, was my inspiration for this subject. Kiefer has a piece in the Hess Collection titled *The Secret Life of Plants*. I remember looking at the piece for at least 15 minutes. I was completely dumbfounded by it, I had never seen another work of art anything like it. The piece is several lead sheets from the roof of a cathedral, with constellations painted on them. I've always heard the saying "the stars know our fate," and it's always been something that intrigues me.

I remember being in the mall when my mom got the phone call from my sister, Avery. We had just walked out of a new jewelry store at the mall, and had picked out some earrings for me and my sister. The phone rang and my mom answered with a perky, "Hey hon how are you?" I could hear my sisters voice on the other side of the phone. It was shaky and she sounded panicked. Immediately, I knew something was wrong. My mom walked over to a pillar and slowly slid down it, repeating the phrase, "I'm going to faint... I'm going to faint." After another minute or so she hung up and called my dad to explain the situation. She was still sitting on the floor in the middle of a pretty crowded mall. I asked her what happened and she said Avery had been in a bus crash with her whole volleyball team while going to team camp in Florida. I was terrified. I had a billion questions, but I realized my mom knew as much as I did. Once my sister got home from the hospital, I asked all the questions. The bus driver had dozed off, gone off the road, overcorrected, causing the bus to flip two times and land on a grassy area off of the road. Some of the players had glass in their body, broken bones, concussions, and nose bleeds. But everyone was alive; it was a miracle. I remember Avery turned to me and said, "If this had happened 200 feet earlier, our bus would've flipped off a bridge." Is this another coincidence? Or fate?

Where I stand now with my beliefs is different than when I started this paper (somehow). That doesn't mean I've completely regained my faith, but I'm on the road back to it. I think it's in my best interest to believe that I'm not the one making these big decisions in life. I can barely pick out clothes to wear every morning, I don't want to be responsible for my fate.

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