

Oracles

What are they and how do they work?

Scientific Faith

If you would have told me ten years ago that I would one day seek advice from oracles like the *Tarot* and *I Ching*, I would not have believed you. The idea would have seemed completely foreign to my religious indoctrination and the scientific mind I inherited from our culture. Although, by that time in my life, I had already abandoned my formal connection to the Church, the remnants of my religious training declared such activities evil and of the Devil. It's odd, in retrospect to realize the Bible and the Pope are the oracles of the Church. Does this mean the Bible and the Pope are of the Devil?

Eventually my free mind and liberal spirit grew willing to challenge the restrictions imposed upon me by religion, but breaking the chains of scientific rationalism is another story altogether. In a way, *science* is the true religion of our culture. It is the one thought that binds us all together, no matter what our religion; The thought that if it can't be explained rationally, through science, it isn't valid or isn't real. Sure, there are those religious fundamentalists who attempt to supplant the scientific theory of evolution with the biblical story of Creation. But how do they do it? Through science! By attempting to turn the mythical Creation story into the science of *creationism*.

Why shouldn't we put our faith in science? Look at all it has done for us during the past hundred years! Its application to medicine enables us to live longer and healthier lives. In the past thirty years alone its application to technology has shrunk multimillion dollar computers, once the size of entire rooms, down to the size of a phone book with more memory. They're so affordable today, some companies are ready to give them away just to get you to buy their on-line services. By genetically altering our foods, science promises to immunize us against cancer and other diseases. In the near future diabetics won't have to take insulin shots, they'll just peel and eat a genetically altered banana. The pragmatist in us knows that science works because we have seen its results, we trust it. And though there are still many problems facing us today, environmental problems in particular that science has had a hand in creating, we will once again turn to science to help us find solutions. Science will develop cleaner fuels and more efficient engines for our cars. They'll invent better ways of growing food so there's enough to go around for everybody. They're even working on microscopic machines to perform cellular surgeries or eat up toxic waste and oil spills. Science may not be perfect, but it works, and we have all become scientists because of it.

As scientists we tend to put great stock in the idea of *cause and effect*, the idea everything that happens is caused by something else happening which can be traced back, like falling dominos, through the scientific method. If we want to treat cancer we must first find its cause. The invention of the airplane came because scientists discovered the cause of flight is the interchange of air above and below a winged surface. Today there is the promise that many birth defects can be prevented as scientists discover their causes in human DNA.

Since the Seventeenth Century Kantian revolution during which Immanuel Kant, influenced greatly by Newtonian Physics, determined that human beings are part of a well oiled machine in which all parts are interconnected, we have all become devoted to the principle of causality. Today, like magic, we can fill a room with light by flipping on a switch. Hear music by turning a dial. We can climb the entire length of the World Trade Center in just seconds by pushing an elevator button. We can prevent unwanted pregnancy by interrupting its cause through the use of condoms or the pill. We can control our weight by decreasing our calories or increasing our metabolic rate. On a psychological level we can even trace the cause of criminality, neurosis and psychoses back to childhood or to the lack of chemical production in the brain. For we scientists everything must have a logical explanation!

The Effect of Cause

So how can we logically explain the use of oracles? How can we put any value, for example, in randomly removing a Tarot card from a deck and applying meaning to its image which relates to our current circumstances, when there is no causal connection between our circumstances and the image on the card? Perhaps, like the religionists, we can simply suspend our propensity toward reason and accept the oracle on blind faith, without explanation. Or, like children, who have more imagination than experience, we can ignore our experience, the expertise of our being, and regress into childish fantasy and magical thinking. Or, perhaps there is another way to validate the use of oracles without suspending our reason. To paraphrase Jesus, "Verily verily I say unto you, I have not come to do away with the law of the scientists, but to fulfill it!" The use of oracles doesn't have to exclude your scientific mind.

I first learned about the value of oracles from a man I consider one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, Carl Jung. Having studied his biography and, more importantly, his collected works, I believe this great man who has become many things to many people—mentor, counselor, sage, spiritual guru—was first and foremost a scientist. If you don't believe me just try reading *Volume I* of his collected works, *Psychiatric Studies*, or *Volume III*, *The Psychogenesis of Mental Disease*. In *Volume II*, his *Experimental Researches*, Jung documents the responses of numerous subjects to a list of random stimulus words. Jung would simply give a stimulus word and the subject would respond with the first thing that came to his or her mind. Without paying any attention to the actual response word, but solely to the response time, number of repetitions of stimulus words, and the inability on the part of the subject to reproduce or remember certain responses, Jung was able to correctly detect the presence of emotional and psychological complexes within his subjects. In some cases, with the completely objective and mathematical calculation of his association experiments, Jung was even able to determine the guilt of persons suspect of various crimes.

Could this meticulous scientist be the same man who wrote, in his forward to Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *I Ching*, "For more than thirty years I have interested myself in this oracle technique, or method of exploring the unconscious, for it has seemed to me

of uncommon significance." When a heavyweight like Jung has something like this to say about the oracular, the western rationalist perks up and is ready to accept that the *I Ching* might be more than an insignificant collection of ancient symbols or magic spells. The rational mind, however, must still be satisfied with a logical explanation. Jung does so by taking on what he calls "certain prejudices of the Western mind..."

Our science... is based upon the principle of causality, and causality is considered to be an axiomatic truth. But a great change in our standpoint is setting in. What Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* failed to do, is being accomplished by modern physics. The axioms of causality are being shaken to their foundations: we know now that what we term natural laws are merely statistical truths and thus must necessarily allow for exceptions. [xxii]

In short, the old physics, based on Newton's theory the entire Universe and all the objects therein are governed by the same natural laws as falling apples, has succumbed in recent years to the new science we call Quantum Mechanics. In other words, classical science, which perceives the Universe as separate parts bound to the same natural laws, like the law of gravity, rationally concludes that every falling apple will hit ground. Quantum physics, on the other hand, may admit this as a statistical probability, but allows for the possibility that one day an apple may fall upward into outer space. This possibility is possible, says the quantum scientist, because the outcome is dependent, not on natural law, but upon the situation of the experimenter. On the subatomic level, reality is not separate from the experimenter. Therefore, objective observation is impossible, the expectations of the experimenter will play a role in the outcome of the experiment. As Gary Zukav puts it in his book, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*; *Newton's laws do not apply to the subatomic realm...* quantum theory cannot predict, even in principle, the course of a single electron. The whole idea of a causal universe is undetermined by the uncertainty principle. [p.113]

As an example when various experiments are applied to light, the light will behave as either waves or particles. Of course, natural law prohibits light from being both waves and particles. Nevertheless, as Zukav puts it, "The 'we' that does the experimenting is the common link that connects light as particles and light as waves." [p.95] The Nobel Prize winning physicist, Niels Bohr once wrote that quantum mechanics entails, "...the necessity of a final renunciation of the classical ideal of causality and a radical revision of our attitude toward the problem of physical reality." [ibid.]

What then, do we replace our old idea of causality with? How do we keep from going mad in a chaotic Universe that has no rhyme or reason? Carl Jung answers these questions with his theory of *synchronicity*. Synchronicity is what happens when two or more events, with no causal connection in time and space, develop an acausal relationship. It's what happens when we experience some good fortune and say, "I was simply in the right place at the right time." It's what happens when you think of an old friend and the next thing you know you receive a phone call or letter from that friend. I remember a news story a couple years ago in which a man, having run out of gas, found himself walking at night on the desolate Western Kentucky Parkway. Along his way he began to hear a strange sound coming from the bottom ditch alongside the road. He

discovered a woman injured and trapped inside her overturned car and was able to flag down another motorist for help. This is synchronicity. The woman's accident had not caused the man's car to run out of gas so he could walk by and hear her faint cries for help. Nevertheless, the two acausal events have an uncanny relationship.

Oracles

We can now begin to apply these principles to understanding how oracles might work. In brief, the principles are; 1) The idea of *causality* isn't the end of reason. 2) The perception of the *observer* effects the observed. 3) Finally, two or more apparently separate events can have an acausal relationship. Hence, when you pull a card from the *Tarot*, cast the *I Ching* coins, or remove a *rune* stone from its container, it is reasonable to conclude it will relate to your current problem or situation in life.

On a subatomic, or quantum level, there is no separation of parts. Everything is an interrelated whole. Consciousness works by breaking the whole apart. This is how we perceive the phenomenal world. I am conscious of otherness because my physical senses seem to separate me from the world of others and of things. What my senses cannot enable me to do is perceive the whole. However, the unconscious mind, the psyche, the soul, which is eternal, that is, exists independently of time and space, knows just what card, hexagram or rune I need in this moment because it is part of the whole.

Now, lets us briefly explore the question, *what is an oracle?* Etymologically the word comes from the Latin word meaning *to pray*. It is also connected to the word for *mouth*. In essence an oracle is a conversation with divine forces. In ancient Greece it was a place or person to whom one would go to consult deities. One of the most famous oracles was Sibyl whose prophecies governed ancient Rome for hundreds of years. Today, in Afro-Brazilian and Haitian cultures, individuals are still considered oracles. After being lost in a frenzy of dance a particular god will enter an individual, who members of the group may then approach for consultation. I mentioned earlier that the Pope is an oracle. He's an oracle because his followers believe his word is final. He speaks for God. Protestants believe the Bible is the final word of God, God's oracle. Have you ever randomly opened the Bible to see what it has to say to you?

I've already mentioned *Tarot* cards, the *I Ching*, and *Runes*. There are many versions of these, Medicine cards based on Native American folklore, Angel cards and Inner Child cards based on fairy tales. I sometimes use a pendulum to predict the weather. You can use a forked twig or a couple of wire coat hangers to locate underground water sources. Just about anything can work as an oracle, from the palm of your hand to the stars in the sky. Ultimately, life itself is an oracle because everything is connected and, therefore, a teaching about the whole.

I want to end by with an experience I had with an oracle. It was about a year and a half ago when I was feeling really desperate to find a new job. On my way to work one morning I thought about a recent experience I had videotaping a new story on a blue mold epidemic facing tobacco farmers. The experience was quite satisfying, and I

though how nice it might be to work for an organization that would allow me to do more of it. I determined that when I got home later that day I would call a friend of mine who worked in Frankfort and ask if he had any connections with anyone in the State Parks or Agriculture departments. Unfortunately he was on vacation that week. Feeling rather unsettled, I decided to consult an oracle. I got my Jungian Tarot cards and my Runes and went into the sun room. I obtained a cigarette and cleansed the cards and runes by blowing smoke on them. I also watched the smoke disappear into the nether-world and thought of it being symbolic of my prayers going into the realm of the gods.

I then took four rune stones and placed them at the four cardinal points around me, North, South, East and West, creating a medicine wheel. I then spread the Tarot cards in a big circle around me. From the circle I drew four cards to accompany the four rune stones. I spent some time meditating on the meaning of the stones and cards, which seemed to tell me that something was going to happen with my job but it had nothing to do with any actions I might take. I simply needed to let go. One stone in particular was the image of a mouth. It indicated that I must be open to an unexpected message or gift from someone.

I felt calmer and better about my situation after the consultation and decided to take a nap. My wife and children were out of town at the time, which allowed me to do so. Suddenly I was awoken by the phone. I picked it up and heard a voice on the other end saying, "Todd, it's Donny." I only knew one Donny, a work-mate, whom I wasn't particularly fond of. "I hope you weren't sleeping." he continued.

"No. No. Not at all." I politely lied.

"Good." he said, "I don't know if you're looking for another job but I just learned Kentucky Farm Bureau is looking for a person with your experience. If you're interested I can get you the name and number of a person to call." I could hardly believe what I was hearing. This event seemed directly connected to my earlier oracular consultation but had no causal relationship. Of course, Donny got the ball rolling and before I knew it I was working in exactly the kind of job I had dreamt about that day.