

TRUSTING THE SPIRITS

Offering an egg to a tree

by G. Lee Young

I recently offered an egg to a tree.
What could the meaning of such an act be?
Well, it's always better to give than receive,
And to give to a tree with make believe
Invites meaning to infinity.

Introduction

1. I'd like to present a rationale for a specific act I performed recently: I offered an egg to a tree.
2. In the first section of this presentation, I develop the beginnings of a justification for spiritual belief, a justification that involves an appeal to imaginative living.
3. In the second section, I detail my specific act of offering an egg to a tree in order to analyze the various specific imaginative acts making up that action. I do this for the benefit that specific examples give to theory.
4. If the act is meaningful and not harmful, I cannot see why I shouldn't offer eggs to trees, and other such things, if I like. In fact, I'm compelled to recommend such imaginative acts to those whose lives want for meaning.

Synchronicity and Spiritual Belief

5. The starting point for me – that catalyst for the “spirit path” – is synchronicity. Synchronicity is a coincidence of events, or some sort of thematic alignment, that is remarkable in some way, but not intended, at least not by people. For example, seeing the same number over and over again, or encountering the same name repeatedly. Someone calls just as you're thinking about that person. These are commonly encountered and very basic examples of synchronicity, what you might call “generic synchronicity.”

6. More examples could be given which are even more specific in character, specific to the situation of one's life. In my view, the more specific the synchronicity is to your situation, the more remarkable it is. Too much can be made of the significance of generic synchronicity. Given how much happens everyday, it is not statistically unusual that odd coincidences would occur regularly, and that the same odd coincidences would occur to many people, like noticing when the time is 11:11.

7. Let me give a more specific example of synchronicity from my own life that occurred around the time of this writing. I had just made a move to a house on Oak Street that's a very short walk from a bar. To get to know the neighbors, and not yet having any other established routine, I stopped by the bar every night for a week or so, which, though useful, put a strain on finances and on my health and mood, given all the extra drinking. At a certain point, I decided to stay home from the bar for a couple of nights. By the third night, a Wednesday night, I didn't have much to do the following day and I'd just had one of those more sour days at work, so I felt more need than usual to blow off some steam. But at the same time, I had only a little bit of cash

and I wasn't sure if I was getting paid the next day or the day after that. I didn't want to drink away cash that I might need the next day. The point I'm getting at here is that there was a little risk involved in going to the bar, but I decided to go anyway.

8. It turned out to be movie night at the bar, and the movie playing was *The Life Aquatic*, with Bill Murray. As it would happen, I'd just put together a pile of items that I wanted to give away, stuff I decided I didn't need anymore after the move to Oak Street. Among them was the poster for *The Life Aquatic*. So, I brought it over and the guy showing the movie was really happy to get it. That inspired me to go grab a crate of about a hundred CDs I didn't want anymore and see if someone at the bar wanted them. Sure enough, two of the bartenders and a regular from the neighborhood were interested in *all* of them. They decided to rotate the crate amongst themselves to copy all of the CDs onto their computers. One of the bartenders even offered to sell the CDs to a music store and give me the money. I wouldn't have done this for myself because of the hassle. Now it looked like I was in for a couple hundred dollars. Giving away all this stuff was probably helping me to seem like a good neighbor, too, which was my hope.

9. And then the movie was playing, a very enjoyable movie for me, which is why I had the poster in the first place. The message of the movie is that life is an adventure, a very encouraging message, especially after a sour day at work. I ran into more friendly people than I expected at the bar (my last time there on Sunday had been a bit less encouraging), and I was able to get rid of stuff and give people something they appreciate all at the same time. Things seemed to work out pretty well, and I was sure that going to the bar was the right choice. Also, I did get paid the next day.

10. So, where was the synchronicity in all this? Of the only two movie posters I'd put aside to give away that week, one of those movies was playing at the bar down the street, which led to getting rid of the poster and other stuff as desired. So this is a more specific case of synchronicity than those mentioned before, and one that involved benefit as a result, but I'd like to point out more about the specific context of the synchronicity.

11. I had a choice between doing A (staying home) and doing B (going to the bar), where doing B seemed to involve some risk. Having chosen B, a rather unlikely beneficial coincidence occurred. It is not just that a coincidence specific to my situation occurred, but also it helped to confirm my specific decision to do B over A. This is when synchronicities really begin to get my attention, when beneficial coincidences seem to confirm the path that I'm on in obvious ways. This is more impressive than, say, deciding to go for a walk and seeing that the clock says 11:11 on one's way out the door.

12. Beneficial synchronicities seem to me to be a more powerful kind of synchronicity worth pondering on their own. A good word for beneficial synchronicity is "serendipity." Serendipity is the ability a person has to receive benefits not consciously sought after. (Anti-serendipity occurs, too – it's become known as "Murphy's Law," strangely coincidental detriments.) I call serendipity a kind of synchronicity because it is a particular kind of alignment, between what one needs and what one gets, even if one at first did not know that one needed it or at least didn't know how one could get it. What's important is that the alignment is not arranged by a known conscious agency – that's what makes the occurrence mysteriously meaningful, calling for explanation.

13. I call this kind of synchronicity more powerful than basic synchronicity because it seems to point to one's *path*, or at the very least confirms a decision or various decisions one has made or will make. In the case of going to the bar, my decision to give away the poster and to go

to the bar were confirmed along with everything else I was deciding to do and not do by going to the bar. There seems to be some force of agency, external to you in some way, which is helping you to follow a path that is suited to you, by removal of obstruction or presentation of aid. With basic synchronicity, there are signs, but the question remains what the signs are for. With serendipity, one more clearly sees what the sign is for, that is, the path one should follow, at least for the present.

14. Everyone notices such occurrences in their own lives, I believe, but people vary as to how seriously to take synchronistic events. The thing about synchronicity is that it begs for explanation, or to have meaning given to it. Taking synchronicity seriously is simply to answer that call for explanation and meaning.

15. I take it as a psychological fact about those who have such experiences that there is an automatic need to explain it, understand it. That is what the mind wants to do with unexpected occurrences. Unintended alignments are unexpected, however often they may occur, because we expect order to have agency behind it. Of course, one can become accustomed to expecting the unintended alignments (expecting the unexpected). For me, that's part of what it means to live a spiritual life.

16. But there are those who do not answer this call, this psychological need to explain and understand synchronicities. (i) Perhaps the person is too busy to give it thought, however compelling it may be to reflect on the possible meaning. (ii) Others reject the call for meaning outright, thinking of synchronicity as mere "coincidence," in the more diminutive sense of that term.

17. What, I wonder, is the source of this rejection? What is the nature of the rejection of meaningful synchronicity? To say, "It's just a coincidence" – why is it so important to make this judgment? (a) Perhaps it is based on fear, of what it might ultimately mean for the person experiencing the synchronicity. In this case, one really does take it seriously, and is protesting too much. One sees and acknowledges the signs but is not heeding them.

18. (b) Or perhaps the rejection is in a way more sophisticated, based on principle, on the view that there is no "logical" or "rational" explanation for the co-incidence of synchronistic events. The event is prejudged to be random, without cause, because such events are not among the kind that can be treated with the forms of scientific explanation we've come to accept.

19. I believe that this dismissive response to synchronicity is based on what could be called a "modern scientific attitude." I don't want to explore the source and nature of this attitude too much in the present writing. Here, I'm focusing instead on the attitude I'm developing in my life (spiritual) rather than the attitude I'm relaxing (scientific). For now, let me just say (or assume) that rejecting the "scientific attitude" is not to reject science and basic empirical methodology. The scientific attitude rejects more than can be rejected by science. Also, the approach I'm developing is designed to be consistent with science, although I may in future work have to challenge some aspects of the scientific *attitude*.

20. In the approach that I am developing, I espouse *perpetual tentative hypothesis* of the meaning of synchronicities that occur. Such hypotheses are not the sort to be thrust upon others or even on oneself as dogma. Meanings are offered for those who want to consider them, but no claim is made of absolute truth. In my view, more important than the truth of such hypotheses is that we feel permitted to provide imaginative conceptual responses to help explain and give meaning to synchronicity.

21. My approach is not intended to establish any common belief system, though I may use this approach to permit myself to build and continually modify my own belief system, which

I will call spiritual. In this approach, I define spiritual belief as those beliefs developed ultimately to account for synchronicity. The word “spiritual” seems, to me, apt, because one seems forced to suppose that some agency or other is behind this occurrence of synchronicity; and spirits, as a hypothetical entity, are typically conceived to be agents. Other sorts of forces, cosmic mechanisms, psychic mechanisms, etc., might get hypothesized to explain synchronicity, but it seems to me that some spirit, or many spirits (or agencies), must at some point be included in the overall explanation of any synchronicity.

22. One might object that positing some sort of invisible agency as the designer of synchronicity requires rejection of scientific explanation, since scientific explanation does not make use of invisible agency. But it is not the case that positing invisible agency requires rejection of scientific explanation. The invisible agency supposed by spiritual belief can operate alongside or behind events following the deterministic natural laws science makes appeal to. As a last note about science for the present work, defense of this spiritual approach may require a defense of dual explanation of events. One form of explanation would utilize deterministic causality, while another form of explanation would utilize invisible agency and purposes to explain what happens.

23. Aside from the question whether it’s legitimate to go beyond scientific explanation, there is a more basic question of trust. Even once we feel permitted to trust that there is a legitimate spiritual level of explanation of events, how can we trust any one interpretation of a given synchronicity? How can we trust any of these signs to be meaningful or helpful? Well, that’s what I mean by the title “trusting the spirits” – (i) first, to trust spirits is to trust that there are spirits; (ii) second, to trust spirits is to trust that you understand the signs provided by the spirits; (iii) third, to trust spirits is to trust that, given true understanding of the signs, the path indicated is genuinely beneficial. Building this trust is not easy, but I believe it is worthwhile to attempt to build this trust, a view I will be supporting in what follows.

24. It is often said that “spirit heals” or “the spirits heal.” Healing correlates with following a path suited to you. This is a main reason to develop trust in the spirits.

25. Trusting the spirits in the first and second ways just described (to trust that there are spirits and that you understand their signs) requires a self-licensing to be imaginative and to use make-believe. Use of the imagination is an intuitive, creative and projective exercise. (i) As an intuitive exercise, imagination is drawing on more than your conscious awareness. (ii) As a creative exercise, imagination helps you to come up with new ideas, new thoughts, new connections. (iii) Imagination is also projective, which is what is meant by “make-believe,” to project thoughts as if they are true. With the power of make-believe, you can act as if something is true even if you aren’t sure that it is – as when people *hypothesize* – or even if you know that it is not true – as when people take fiction seriously. I think that imagination and make-believe are key tools in personal growth and healing for everyone.

26. We imagine and make-believe in our daily lives much more than we are typically aware. In fact, if I may be so bold, all cultural belief is make-believe, in that different cultures can understand the same natural events differently, and then on top of our cultural belief we project all manner of individual associations onto things, further enhancing whatever natural meaning they may have. Everything we experience we add value to. We are living in an imaginary world already, which isn’t to say that we are separated from reality, but that we live in an already imaginatively enhanced reality. When it comes to spiritual belief, then, the question becomes, *not* why believe in something that might not be real, but *why not* have a spiritually enhanced understanding of reality, since we imaginatively enhance reality already?

27. Also, it is important that we feel some control over what we imagine the world to be. It's possible that certain frameworks for imagining reality actually cut off our deep-down, intuitive perception of what is happening and what we are capable of. If we are at the helm of our imaginations, then we are making use of that intuition and aren't so much in danger of being alienated from intuition. In finding for ourselves that there are other ways to view reality and perhaps more reality to view, we may also find within ourselves more power within that reality. That is to say that personal use of the imagination can undo restrictive use of the imagination that might have been intuitive for another person or another situation. Also, it's very likely that some imaginative frameworks (even spiritual ones) are designed by those in power to limit the imagination of individuals using the framework. If there is anything to the possibility of "magic" which enables someone to achieve personal goals in uncanny ways, it is probably based upon personal power unlocked through direct, intuitive use of the imagination.

28. What's been said so far describes the general structure of my approach: To find meaning in synchronicity and serendipity, one must be permitted to imagine a spirit world. The spirits are arranging the synchronicities to send signs about the path one is best suited for.

Offering an Egg to a Tree

29. One night, just before leaving the neighborhood of Hog Alley in my move to Oak Street, I placed an egg on a mound of flour before a tree.

30. What led up to this? Well, I wanted to do a ceremony before leaving Hog Alley. What kind of ceremony? Before getting to that, let me dwell on this desire "to do a ceremony." Where does that come from? I wanted to do something to make more concrete an attitude I had, to *complete a feeling*. I felt thankful for having made it through the last year while I lived in Hog Alley. Completing that feeling required imagination, because there was no one real person to thank for the entirety of the year. Along the way, specific people were helpful, but it seemed as if there was a larger agency at work, arranging such people in my path, and arranging other beneficial events. To have only thanked the particular people would not have been as complete an act of gratitude. Also, it didn't seem complete to simply be thankful for the situation of having made it through my year at Hog Alley. Completion of this feeling seems to need *someone* to whom I could be thankful.

31. So, I felt a psychological need to complete a feeling of gratitude about something that loomed relatively large in my life, which required the performance of an act of gratitude toward some entity to whom I could ascribe responsibility for my protection and good fortune. How did I pull this off?

32. About a month before leaving Hog Alley, I finally discovered a particular tree in the neighborhood, which I should have noticed before, since my walks sometimes took me past it. It seemed very clearly to be a "shaman tree" when I finally noticed it. Old and overgrown with vines, it stood in the middle of a field with one small tree as an attendant. This field was near some steps leading up a hill to the levee wall of the Industrial Canal, a fairly wide river that flowed past Hog Alley. Toward the end of my year in the neighborhood, I would regularly take walks at night. I'd stop at the levee wall and look out over the canal, where the moon was often reflected in the rippling water, and where some kind of fish liked to make leaps into the air.

33. Turning away from the canal I could lean back against the wall and view this shaman tree. It was in the shape of a cross. No limbs protruded from the trunk until fairly high up on the tree. It had more than one pair of arms at that height so that the tree seemed to be facing in more

than one direction, looking out over the neighborhood of Hog Alley and over the river in various stances. I got a strong sense that this tree was a protective force over the neighborhood and my ultimate local protective force while I'd been living there.

34. So, some imagination was being used here, although the imaginative "leaps" were fairly automatic, once I finally noticed the tree during the context of my life at that time. Why "shaman" tree? It seemed to be old and person-shaped, a tall body with arms, and vine growth at the top suggested a head. It seemed to have a ritual location, rather alone in the middle of a field where the sky is more open to view, and at the bend in a river. It was placed to have a larger view of the area, inspiring a broader perspective. I thought it was neat that local kids in pick up trucks would do donuts in the field, creating a circle around that tree.

35. Again, the tree was in the shape of a cross, a geometry that can inspire deep meaning. In Christianity, the cross tends to symbolize sacrifice, and in Vodou, a cross is a "crossroads," particularly between the visible world and the invisible spirit world. Shamans perform their function at the crossroads, dealing both with living people and with spirits. Persons who "work" at crossroads might rightly be viewed as sacrificial figures like Jesus, because they give up prioritizing careers within this world in order to take on a "career" between worlds.

36. So, to analyze more closely what is involved so far in imagining a shaman tree: (i) suggestive physical characteristics of the tree, resembling a person; (ii) suggestive placement of the tree within nature and within a human community; (iii) deep symbolic interpretation of cross formations; (iv) the (synchronistic) timing of my discovery of it, at the end of my stay in Hog Alley when I was looking to offer thanks to someone.

37. To get to offering an egg on a mound of flour to this tree, there are a few more steps. During my time in Hog Alley, I had been studying Sallie Ann Glassman's *Vodou Visions*, a book detailing the nature of the symbolism in the "New Orleans Voodoo Tarot Deck." Glassman is a local vodou priestess. She did the artwork for the Voodoo Deck and collaborated on its development.

38. I'd been intensely interested in Tarot since my evacuation from New Orleans after Katrina and was gradually learning the "Voodoo Deck," while absorbing the conceptual background of spiritual belief that informs Vodou practice. In my year at Hog Alley, there were periods with lots of free time for reflection (similar to my year after Katrina) and my study of the Voodoo Deck heated up tremendously. I would use the cards in my own small makeshift rituals and meditations to help me focus and reflect on various aspects of my life situation, while also learning the card meanings.

39. Also, on my computer, I have the ability to choose a random shuffle of image files that tile the desktop background, a shuffle that changes every five minutes. I'd had the idea a few years ago to put the images of all the cards of the more well-known Rider Waite tarot deck in the image shuffle. At some point while I lived in Hog Alley, I also included the image files for the Voodoo Deck. I found all these images on websites and just downloaded them to the Desktop Photos folder on my computer. While journaling at the computer, and whenever I'm at or near the computer, I also pay attention to the cards that show up "randomly" every 5 minutes.

40. One of those cards in the Voodoo Deck is the "Magick Mirror," which is some sort of device, like a mirror or crystal ball, which can be used to get reflections from the spirit world. This is precisely what my computer monitor itself became, a magick mirror. More often than not, especially when I'm journaling and meditating, cards come up that seem apt to what I'm thinking or doing. Based on a trust in the meaningfulness of this synchronicity, complex reflection and decision-making can follow.

41. Well, I mention all this, because when I returned from my walk after my first encounter with what seemed to be a shaman tree, the first card I saw in the mirror was from the Voodoo Deck, the card for “Damballah Wedo.” In the picture Glassman painted for this card, there is a large, benevolent snake (Damballah Wedo) coiled about a tree that has the shape of cross. A tree in the shape of a cross? Interesting coincidence. It seemed there was a good spiritual correlation between the Hog Alley tree and this vodou spirit. Having discovered the correlation through synchronicity made it seem more important to pay attention.

42. I reread the information about this card and this spirit in Glassman’s *Vodou Visions*. Damballah lives in the water but suns in the tree, which can be easily visualized for this tree – a great snake coming out of the Industrial Canal and climbing onto that shaman tree. Damballah is a benevolent creator or grandfather kind of spirit, distant from specific human concerns, but able to provide blessings. This was the kind of agency that had seemed to be watching over me during my time in Hog Alley. So, in my thinking about the ceremony of thankfulness I wanted to do, performing an offering to this spirit seemed to be just the thing.

43. In her book, Glassman also indicates what offerings each of the spirits prefers. Damballah likes eggs presented on a mound of flour. When it came time to perform an offering to Damballah, I put an uncooked egg in the bottom of a cup, and then flour on top of that. When I got to the tree, I just overturned the cup at a spot near the base of the tree so that the egg came out on top of a mound of flour, and in my mind I expressed gratitude for my time in Hog Alley while walking away. It was a great feeling to have been able to do something so concrete for a specific purpose to a specific agency in this way.

44. Okay, now to analyze what further imaginative steps were required on top of the four already mentioned before I was able to complete a feeling of thankfulness by offering an egg to a tree. Through the first four steps, I found a tree that it was very easy to imagine spiritually. Through the remaining steps, I brought in a system of spiritual belief that could fittingly make use of the tree in an imaginative ceremony: (v) use of a Magick Mirror; (vi) use of Tarot Cards; (vii) use of the Vodou pantheon and ritual belief, which in turn made use of (viii) deep symbolic interpretation of eggs and the color white.

45. (v) Use of a magick mirror is an effective imaginative technique based upon synchronicity and on the depth and breadth of interpretation of what forms appear in the mirror. In the case of the magick mirror that has come into my life, I use mainly Tarot cards as the forms that appear in the mirror, and regularly pay attention to what they are saying.

46. (vi) Like a magick mirror, use of Tarot cards is effective based upon synchronicity and on the depth and breadth of interpretation of the cards. What’s more, Tarot is a *complete* divining system, which is important. Complete systems are more powerful systems. To “divine” means to conjure or guess using intuition. What’s being guessed is a life situation pertaining to the querent. To be a *complete* divining system is to be a system that can be used to show all life situations.

47. (vii) Most systems of spiritual belief also aspire to completion, in order to account for all the various kinds of forces in the cosmos and in life. To imagine spirits in the framework of a complete belief system is very orienting – to know that one is focusing on one spirit is to know that one is *not* focusing on all the others. More can be said about complete systems, but here I’ll just assert that to understand what one is doing within a range of all possible action is to have greater consciousness of what one is doing. To be more oriented is more powerful. Imagining the structure of an entire spirit world, then, can render more meaning than imagining a more random array of spirits and forces.

48. (viii) Deep symbolic interpretation of symbols often follows imaginative lines that are intuitive in some way, though it may not be easy to see that at first. In the case of this ceremony, I've borrowed from Vodou the idea of offering an egg on flour. As Glassman's book suggests, the egg symbolizes new beginnings and the mystery of creation. Imaginatively, it is believed that the great snake Damballah Wedo likes to eat them raw, which is like a reenactment of creation. In my case, this was also fitting since I was entering upon new beginnings, leaving Hog Alley in my move to Oak Street. It's like the great spirit I was thanking for the prior stage in my life was at the same time blessing me for the next stage.

49. Honestly, I was less in tune to the use of white flour, but I went along with the traditional ritual to see what could be learned from it. Store bought eggs are typically white like the flour, and, as it says in *Vodou Visions*, all the white can symbolize *ritual purity* and readiness for *possession*, concepts I am still working on understanding. It is not necessary to understand everything one is doing in spiritual ritual in advance. One learns by doing. One purpose for make-believe and hypothesis is to try something new and learn from it.

49. Notice that the meaning of the egg as new beginning, creative mystery and creative potential does not require any belief in spirits. What we have is symbolic projection and transformation of the concrete egg into something more abstract. This abstraction exists in an imaginative space. In the imaginative world the spirits can interact with the abstractions. In fact, the spirits are best understood as abstractions themselves, abstracted personality types, or archetypes.

50. In any case, to sum up, I spiritually imagined a particular tree in a framework of preexistent Vodou spiritual belief. A couple of synchronicities encouraged this imaginative process, helping me to trust that spirit was at work, rather than it just being me forcing an imaginative framework onto things: (i) discovering the tree just as I was looking for a big thankfulness ceremony; (ii) the interesting coincidence of Damballah showing up in the magick mirror just after I discovered the tree.

51. I want to emphasize that it's not my purpose here to defend Vodou or any particular spiritual system. Vodou just happens to be a system I am getting more conceptually immersed in at the time of writing this. Anyone on a spiritual path should be immersed in a complete system at some point, and my hunch is that "polytheistic" systems are more insightful and better suited to everyday life than one-god systems, which lean too much toward more austere abstraction and stubborn dogmatism. Many-spirit systems encourage balance among the spirits and can better handle the emotional complexity of everyday life.

52. Whatever the system of belief, my purpose here is to explore and defend synchronicity-encouraged spiritual imagination in order to satisfy psychological need. Spiritual belief without lived imaginative response to synchronicity would be a dry proposition.

53. Finally, was any harm done in offering an egg to a tree? The only harm that I can think of is trespassing and littering, and maybe freaking people out if they find the egg on flour and don't know what it means. The field is apparently owned by the warehouse next door to it, but it's not fenced in and folks in the neighborhood regularly pass through the field. Also, there's a fair amount of trash near the tree, since the warehouse makes no use of the field, and what I left was biodegradable. I made a judgment call. In my view, the risk was small and the harm was nil. The benefit was meaning.