**OCTOBER 26, 2008 THESKEPTICARENA.COM**

[**Argument # 21: The Skeptical explanation for answered prayers.**](http://www.victorzammit.com/skeptics/winston.html#top)

**Typical usage: "Prayer only works because you selectively remember the answered prayers but not the unanswered prayers, which occur by chance and coincidence."**

**This argument is pure speculation.**

**WINSTON - SO IS THE CLAIM.**

**Again, just because skeptics can’t see how a God could exist or how thought intentions could affect external reality doesn’t mean that any claim of answered prayer is merely the result of chance. There are several counter-arguments to this and compelling evidence that prayer works as well.**

**WINSTON, I HAVE SEEN WHAT PASSES FOR “COMPELLING EVIDENCE” IN YOUR WORLD - IT IS ANYTHING THAT AGREES WITH WHAT YOU WANT TO BELIEVE. YOU WOULDN’T KNOW EVIDENCE IF IT BITCH-SLAPPED FOR 30 MINUTES.**

**First of all, we don't even know what a coincidence really is or even if it really exists.**

**WINSTON - MORE TIME IN THE DICTIONARY / LESS TIME PLAYING VIDEO GAMES.**

**It’s just a term to define something that behaves unpredictably or doesn't behave according to a pattern that we can see.**

**SEE WINSTON - NOW YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS. THAT WASN’T SO HARD WAS IT?**

**SINCE YOU SPEND SO LITTLE TIME IN DICTIONARIES, I’LL PROVIDE THE DEFINITION FOR YOU: “THE OCCURRENCE OF EVENTS THAT HAPPEN AT THE SAME TIME BY ACCIDENT BUT SEEM TO HAVE SOME CONNECTION.”**

**According to physicist David Bohm, there may be two kinds of order in the universe, implicit and explicit. Things that appear random may in fact contain a higher degree of order that we can't perceive.**

**WINSTON. WHERE’S HIS PROOF?**

**Second, as I heard one preacher say "If answered prayer is coincidence, then there sure are many more coincidences that come up when I pray than when I don't pray." For spiritual or religious people, praying results in a higher rate of coincidences that help manifest the desire or wish, often higher than by ordinary chance. Of course, there are countless anecdotal accounts of prayer answered in miraculous or sometimes humorous ways.**

**WINSTON. ENOUGH WITH THE CLICHÉ GENERALITIES. THE ONLY THING HUMOROUS ABOUT PRAYER IS THAT SO MANY PEOPLE ACTUALLY BELIEVE IT WORKS.**

**As Theology Professor Greg Boyd of Bethel University told me in an email:**

**"My wife prayed that God would honor a "deal" with her about who she would marry (this deal included her future husband saying a certain particularly unusual phrase), and despite all my frustration with knowing she had made such a deal, I said what was "included" in her deal with God without ever actually knowing what the phrase was, not only that, it was the last thing I said to her, several times, immediately before I distinctly felt God leading me to propose to her."**

**WINSTON, THAT KIND OF PULP IS PERFECT FOR YOU. IN YOUR WORLD THAT IS EVIDENCE. NOW SOMEONE WHO WASN’T FRIGHTENED TO DEATH OF AN INVISIBLE IMAGINARY GOD MIGHT ASK WHERE THIS WOMAN GOT OFF THINKING THAT SHE HAD THE POWER OR THE RIGHT TO MAKE A DEAL WITH GOD? SINCE WHEN DOES GOD BARGAIN WITH MORTALS? BUT THESE THOUGHTS NEVER CROSS THE IRRATIONAL MIND BECAUSE TO DOUBT THE EXISTENCE OF THE SKY-DUDE IS TO INVITE YOURSELF TO THE BIG BARBECUE. SO JUST HANG ON TO YOUR BIBLE WINSTON AND KEEP YOUR EYES CLOSED AS TIGHTLY AS YOU CAN.**

**"The phrase was "It's good to be alive." This seems like a fairly unusual thing to say since it is so obvious at one level.**

**WINSTON, YOU ARE SO RIGHT. I HAVE NEVER HEARD ANYONE SAY THAT BEFORE.**

**Anyway, it is not something that I would be likely to say on an average day. On the day of our "engagement" I said it several times at just the right moment (during a prayer about our relationship) and actually the prayer (we were praying together) immediately followed a longish conversation about why I didn't believe in engagement periods at all. It seems God has quite a sense of humor at times."**

**WINSTON - YOU ARE PROOF OF THAT.**

**Amazingly, there are those who get almost every prayer answered because their motives come from a pure heart that is in tune with the values of their faith.**

**WINSTON, I CAN’T BELIEVE THAT EVEN YOU, ONE OF THE MOST GULLIBLE PEOPLE TO HAVE EVER LIVED, COULD POSSIBLY BELIEVE THAT ONE.**

**What this means is that Christian prayers seem to get answered a lot more when they ask for things that a Christian is supposed to want. Same with prayers from those of other religions.**

**WINSTON, WAIT. WHAT DO YOU MEAN “OTHER RELIGIONS?” WHO IS ANSWERING THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO PRAY TO OTHER GODS? AS A CHRISTIAN YOU CANNOT POSSIBLY BELIEVE THAT OTHER GODS EXIST. THEREFORE, YOU MUST BE CLAIMING THAT YOUR GOD IS ANSWERING THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO PRAY TO OTHER GODS. DID YOU BOTHER TO THINK THAT ONE OUT AT ALL BEFORE YOU WROTE IT? WINSTON, PUT DOWN THE GAMEBOY AND TRY TO FOCUS ON WHAT YOU ARE SAYING.**

**This has been the case in my own experience as well. When I was a devout Christian at 14, I was the only Christian in my family and had no one else to share my faith with or go to church with.**

**WINSTON, FORGET THE VIOLINS. YOU DON’T NEED ANYONE TO GO TO CHURCH WITH YOU. ONCE YOU GET TO CHURCH YOU WILL FIND MORE FRIENDLY PEOPLE THERE THAN YOU COULD EVER MANAGE TO TALK TO.**

**I felt lonely and incomplete about this.**

**WINSTON, MAYBE YOU NEEDED TO CHANGE CHURCHES.**

**So one night I prayed and asked God to send me some Christian friends. Two nights later, I got a call from an old friend that I hadn’t spoken to in over a year. He’s not the type of person to make phone calls either, so neither of us knew why he just decided to call me.**

**WINSTON, YOU SAY HE’S NOT THE TYPE TO MAKE PHONE CALLS IN THE SAME PARAGRAPH WHERE YOU ADMIT HE CALLED YOU UP OUT OF THE BLUE. THIS IS WHAT RELIGION DOES TO YOUR BRAIN WINSTON. REASONING IS FORCED TO THE REAR OF THE BRAIN, IF NOT OUT COMPLETELY - AS IN YOUR CASE.**

**After talking a few times, we got to the subject of church and religion. We were surprised to find out that we were both devout Christians!**

**WOW WINSTON IMAGINE THAT. I MEAN WHAT ARE THE ODDS IN A COUNTRY THAT IS 75% CHRISTIAN? HOW DID YOU EVER FIND EACH OTHER?**

**When I explained to him that I had no Christian friends or church to go to, he warmly invited me to an outing with his Church Youth Group which he attended on a regular basis. That Friday night, we went to his Youth Group for an all night outing. We went haystack riding, played miniature golf, cherades, Pictionary, kick-the-can and had a lot of fun. I liked the people in his Youth Group, they were sincere and didn’t have attitudes or pre-judgments.**

**WINSTON. THAT’S PROVIDED YOU ARE CHRISTIAN. IF YOU ASKED THEM HOW THEY FELT ABOUT COMMUNISTS OR BUDDHISTS YOU MIGHT HAVE DISCOVERED THAT THEY WERE FILLED WITH THE SAME PRE-JUDGEMENTS AS EVERYONE ELSE.**

**I felt very comfortable around them. From that point on, I started attending the Youth Group regularly. Now a skeptic could argue that the friend called me out of coincidence, but I don’t buy that because it was strange how this friend I hadn’t talked to in over a year suddenly out of nowhere kept calling me a few times. Not even he knew why he did that. Yet it led to my prayer for Christian fellowship being answered.**

**WINSTON - THE LORD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS; AND NOTHING IS MORE MYSTERIOUS THAN COINCIDENCE.**

**Third, based on conversations with some Christian friends of mine, I have found that God doesn’t just answer prayer through coincidences. There is a more amazing type of answered prayer. Often, as in my own case above, a prayer is answered with the help of other people who themselves don’t know why they are doing what they’re doing. (as if they’re hypnotized) Nick, a Christian friend of mine, related to me a fascinating faith-transforming account in his life. After turning away from his Christian faith for years, one day his fishing boat went down in deep waters and nothing he and professional divers did could get it out. After months of failed attempts, he and the divers gave up. Then a friend of his told him "You will get your boat back. God will see to it." Soon after, some stranger called Nick and offered to help raise his boat for free. This guy said that he heard that Nick needed help and went to great lengths to find Nick’s phone number to contact him. As we all know, strangers don’t tend to go to great lengths to find you just to help you out for free and for no reason! That does not seem like an ordinary coincidence. This stranger even offered to pay all the expenses of lifting the boat out! (I’ve heard of random acts of kindness, but this is phenomenal!) It turns out that he barely got it out and it almost sank again after it was lifted, but the rescuer saved it just in time. The next day, a short story about his boat (the boat’s name was mentioned in the headline) being "resurrected" from the sea appeared at the top of the front page headline, even above the story of Pope John Paul’s arrival in town! Astonished, Nick called the newspaper to find out how his trivial story appeared on the front page headline since it was not a significant event to the public. However, no one there seemed to know why it was there or how it got there. (Very strange!)**

**WINSTON, THAT ISN’T STRANGE THAT IS SIMPLY DISHONEST. SOMEONE AT THE PAPER DECIDES ON THE HEADLINES. FOR YOU TO INSIST OTHERWISE IS PURE DISHONESTY.**

**This served was such a powerful sign from God and testament of faith to Nick, that from then on he led a faith-based life in God.**

**WINSTON. IF NICK HAD ANY CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS HE WOULDN’T HAVE ACCEPTED THAT GOD PLACED HIS STORY ON THE FRONT PAGE. OBVIOUSLY NICK ISN’T ROWING WITH ALL HIS OARS.**

**Many other Christians have personal accounts of answered prayer similar to this of course.**

**YES WINSTON, I’VE HEARD A MILLION OF THEM AND NOT ONCE HAS ANYONE PRESENTED ANY EVIDENCE. IN YOUR IMAGINARY WORLD, HOWEVER, THIS IS EVIDENCE.**

**I’M VERY GLAD THAT YOU AND I DON’T LIVE ON THE SAME PLANET. I’M SURE YOU FEEL THE SAME WAY.**

**It would seem that God somehow hypnotizes people (for lack of a better word) into answering someone else’s prayer, since these people don’t know themselves why they’re doing something that results in another’s answered prayer.**

**WINSTON, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR CLAIMS OF FREE WILL? IF GOD HYPNOTIZES YOU AND MAKES YOU DO STUFF THEN YOU ARE ACTING WITHOUT FREE WILL. BUT YOU NEED FREE WILL TO EXIST OR ELSE YOU CAN’T EXPLAIN HOW YOU CAN CHOOSE TO BELIEVE IN CHRIST. WHAT ARE YOU TO DO WINSTON?**

**In my experience with prayers, it seems that prayers from a selfish nature tend to get answered less than when they come from a desire for what is right and best for all.**

**WINSTON, THEN HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE BOAT STORY YOU JUST TRIED TO SELL US? THAT WAS A SELFISH PRAYER. HOW WAS THAT “RIGHT AND BEST FOR ALL?”**

**One metaphysical explanation for this that I’ve heard is that when desires come from an altruistic motive, they reach the energy from higher astral planes or levels of consciousness. These higher planes are supposedly where more advanced spiritual beings reside, including Gods, Jesus, Buddha, etc.**

**WINSTON, WHAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN DID YOU SAY YOU WERE? I NEVER MET A CHRISTIAN WHO BELIEVED IN OTHER GODS. GOD IS PRETTY CLEAR ABOUT THAT IN MANY PLACES IN THE BIBLE.**

**IT SOUNDS TO ME LIKE YOU AND I MIGHT BE SHARING SOME BURGERS AT THE BIG BARBECUE AFTER ALL.**

**Perhaps prayers of a selfish nature cause a separation from you and your higher self that is attuned to the higher planes. This inner separation leads you to down the path of ego and illusion rather than unification and wholeness. After all, a divided kingdom falls, even if it’s an inner kingdom. This theory is subjective and can't be proven scientifically at this point, but it's one possibility to consider which would explain why purer altruistic motives for prayer tend to result in a higher rate of success.**

**WINSTON, I NEVER HEARD OF THAT STUDY. THE ONLY STUDIES THAT HAVE EVER BEEN DONE REGARDING PRAYER HAVE ALL FAILED TO PROVE THAT PRAYER HAS ANY EFFECT. THE LATEST STUDY BEING THE ONE FUNDED BY THE TEMPLETON FOUNDATION.**

**Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, recent studies on prayer done by Duke University and others have revealed the effect that the power of prayer has on those who are critically ill. Double-blind tests done have shown that those who were prayed for recovered much more quickly and at a higher success rate than those not prayed for.**

**WINSTON, THAT IS COMPLETELY FALSE. THE TEMPLETON FOUNDATION (WHICH IS PRO-CHRISTIAN BY THE WAY) DID A DOUBLE-BLIND STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF PRAYER ON PATIENTS. NOT ONLY WAS THERE NO EFFECT OBSERVED, BUT, IN WHAT HAS TO BE ONE OF THE BIGGEST SLAPS IN THE FACE OF GOD EVER RECORDED, THE PATIENTS THAT WERE PRAYED FOR ACTUALLY DID A LITTLE WORSE THAN THOSE THAT WEREN’T.**

**MAYBE THEY SHOULD HAVE TRIED ZEUS INSTEAD.**

**As one of Duke’s own articles summarized:**

**"In a feasibility study conducted by the Duke University and Durham Veterans Affairs medical centers, angioplasty patients with acute coronary syndromes who were simultaneously prayed for by seven different religious sects around the world did 50 percent to 100 percent better during their hospital stay than patients who were not prayed for by these groups."**

**WINSTON - THAT IS PURE HOGWASH. IF THAT WERE TRUE, CHRISTIANS WOULD HAVE BLASTED THAT NEWS ALL OVER OUR TV SETS FOR MONTHS AND EVERYBODY, AND I MEAN EVERYBODY INCLUDING ATHEISTS, WOULD BE DOWN ON THEIR KNEES RIGHT NOW.**

**Of course, Christian prayers are not the only ones that get answered. In fact, amazing accounts of answered prayers are common from all faiths and beliefs.**

**WINSTON, WHY DON’T YOU JUST MAKE IT EASY ON YOURSELF AND CONVERT TO HINDUISM? THEN YOU CAN HAVE HUNDREDS OF GODS. THINK OF HOW MUCH STUFF YOU’LL GET WHEN YOU PRAY TO THAT MANY GODS. LOOK HOW WELL IT WORKS FOR THE PEOPLE OF INDIA. SOME OF THEM ACTUALLY AREN’T STARVING.**

**This is even true of the spell work of Wiccans and those into witchcraft. Some propose that rather than answered prayers being the result of deities, they could also be due to the psychic energy of the one praying, in conjunction with the true intent of their higher selves. While we don’t know for sure whether God or psychic mental abilities are the force behind answered prayers, the bottom line is that prayer does seem to work in ways that ordinary coincidences can’t explain.**

**WINSTON, WHEN YOU GET TO THE PEARLY GATES, YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE SOME ‘SPLAININ TO DO.**

**[Argument # 22: The Skeptical explanation for precognitive dreams.](http://www.victorzammit.com/skeptics/winston.html" \l "top)**

**Typical usage: "The only reason that precognitive dreams come true is that you selectively remember when your dream comes true but not when they don’t, thus attribute it to psychic precognition."**

**We don’t know that much about where dreams come from and what they mean to assume that they’re nothing but random thoughts and images. We understand how people dream, but not why. Skeptics again are inadvertently claiming to know too much to declare something false or coincidental. In addition, the fact that there is convincing evidence for psychic phenomena in general such as telepathy from the numerous labs that did the ganzfeld experiments, psychokinesis from Princeton’s 20 year PEAR programs, and remote viewing/clairvoyance from SRI and other research labs, makes precognition much more probable than otherwise.**

**UNFORTUNATELY WINSTON, NOT ONE OF THE SOURCES YOU LIST AS YOUR “CONVINCING EVIDENCE” HAS EVER CONVINCED ANYONE OTHER THAN TRUE BELIEVERS.**

**You see, when one form of psi is proven, it raises the plausibility of the others by indicating that there are indeed paranormal powers of consciousness that we don’t understand.**

**BUT WINSTON, WE ARE ALL STILL WAITING FOR THAT “ONE” YOU MENTION TO BE PROVEN. THE FACT THAT YOU BELIEVE IT HAS BEEN PROVEN HAS NO WEIGHT OUTSIDE THE IMAGINARY WORLD YOU INHABIT.**

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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**MORE INTERESTING PHYSICS FACTS:**

**Isotope Same atomic #, different atomic weight.**

**Law "Conservation of Angular Momentum" (Ex: spinning skater).**

**Radius x Rate of spin = Constant quantity.**

**Light Has 3 primary colors (red, blue, & green) from which all other colors can be derived.**

**speed & distance = 186,282 miles / second ; 670 million miles / hour ; 5.9 trillion miles / light-year.**

**Laser = light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation.**

**Polarization: Light moving through space is made up of countless individual waves; although all the waves move at the same speed and in the same general direction, they do not normally move in the same plane. One wave may speed ahead oriented parallel to the horizon (essentially lying on its side), while another racing alongside may be perpendicular to it. Other waves moving with them may assume a limitless number of angles in between. As light is concentrated to create a laser beam, however, all the waves end up squeezed into the same orientation; this is known as polarized light.**

**blueshifting: objects appear blue when light is approaching.**

**redshifting: objects appear red when light is receding.**

**ex: boat moves through water creating waves that are shorter in front and wider to the rear.**

**order of light in a standard spectrum (mnemonic: rely on your great brain if virgin): red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.**

**romer, 1676 estimated speed of light ~136,000 (not bad) considering they thought au = 140. bradley, 1728 finally got it right.**

**Magnetic field Results from a moving electric charge.**

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**THE ARENA GOES ABROAD**

**THE CONGO**

**Accusations of witchcraft led to a deadly stampede at a soccer game in the Congo, the BBC reports. Fighting broke out between rival teams after players from one team accused the rival team's goalkeeper of casting spells. Police intervened but were pelted with rocks by the crowd. They fired tear gas in response, and 13 were suffocated in a crush at the stadium exit. The Congolese government plans an investigation.**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**Desmond John Morris (born 24 January 1928 in the village of Purton, north Wiltshire, UK) He is now 80 Years old!**

**He is most famous for his work as a zoologist and ethologist, but is also known as a surrealist artist and author.**

**He achieved world-wide fame in 1967 with his book "The Naked Ape".**

**HIS QUOTE:**

**"I viewed my fellow man not as a fallen angel, but as a risen ape."**