



What's Luck Got to Do with It?

Using Quantum Mechanics to Alter the Crapshoot of Life

By Fred Alan Wolf, Ph.D.

Ever wonder how lucky or unlucky you are? Or do you think that whatever success or failure you've had had nothing to do with luck at all?

Well, if the quantum world has anything to do with it, not a single moment has passed without Lady Luck looking over your shoulder as you attempt to draw to that inside straight called the game of life. But if we live in a quantum world, there is a way to beat Lady Luck at her game. All you need to do is look vigilantly and carefully at the world—and take action with that same care and vigilance.

Observing in the Quantum World

Quantum physics describes the behavior of matter and energy, particularly atoms and subatomic particles. It is nearly impossible to imagine the strange behavior of this matter using our common sense. An electron in an atom, for example, performs a trick much like the crew aboard *Star Trek's* Enterprise when it "beams" from one energy level to another by jumping from one place to another without passing in between.

If we aren't watching this jump, then we have no control as to when this will happen. But suppose we do watch? Then things change dramatically.

The quantum physical world is very different from the world we are accustomed to. In our ordinary, everyday lives, this difference isn't noticed. But if current experiments in quantum physics are relevant to our everyday experiences, you can alter the crapshoot of life, so long as you begin seeing things quantum mechanically and learn to take appropriate action in doing so.

According to quantum physics, there is no reality until that reality is perceived. We call this "the observer effect." Because we don't typically pay attention to the perception process, our immediate experience usually will not show how our act of perception changed anything. However, if we look carefully, we can see that our way of perceiving did indeed change the history of our observations.

This may make sense to you when looking at some past events and deciding in hindsight what they meant. But you may wonder, "I didn't actually change reality, did I? I just changed my interpretation of it." The answer, as surprising as it may seem, is that you did in fact change reality by the manner you went about observing it.

A Watched Pot Never Boils

In the world described successfully by quantum mechanics, observers ultimately and fundamentally affect the universe whenever they observe anything in it because it is not possible to observe everything about anything in any single observation. If we were to see atomic and subatomic processes, this realization would be very apparent and the difference would be quite magnified and astonishing to our normal way of seeing.

Take the old proverb "a watched pot never boils." Now imagine an atom-sized pot of water being heated on a correspondingly tiny stove. We all know that heated pots of water will in fact come to a boil, given a little time. You would certainly think that this watched "quantum" pot would also boil. It turns out, however, that if you vigilantly watch the pot, it will never boil. In fact, all vigilantly watched "quantum pots" refuse to boil, even if they are heated forever.

The only requirement for non-boiling is that observers must have the intent to see the object—in this case, the quantum pot—in its initial state. This intent is determined by the frequency of their observations. Looking repeatedly, in very short time intervals, they find the object in the same state as it was the last time they looked.

Suppose a physicist doesn't watch vigilantly. Or suppose that she or he does, but does so with the intent of seeing the situation evolve differently. Then what? If the physicist looks intermittently, expecting it to boil eventually, the pot will follow its natural unobserved course and will boil. These infrequent observations have little effect on the natural result.

There is another important bizarre aspect to all this. What if you want the watched pot to do something wild or highly improbable? If the intent to observe that occurrence is vigilant enough, the object will actually follow the bizarre path. You may vigilantly observe the object along an unnatural evolution by narrowing your vision to observe only those pots that have reached new goals at appropriate times. Hence, a watched pot boils on a cake of ice, if you intend it to. Again such a measurement or observation is one where you ignore those results that do not conform to your wilder expectations.

A Watched Life

I'm referring here to boiling pots of water, but I'm sure you see how the principle applies to your life, to the pursuits and aims you care about in your life, and to the power of your consistent intent.

Intent refers to the action of vigilant observation along a specific path. It matters little what you hope for or even what you passively expect will happen. You need to actively pursue your vision in order to manifest your intent in the physical world, not passively dream about it or simply hope it will come true.

Thus, quantum physics tells us that in our own everyday lives hard work and desire accomplish things. Our desires and the actions that accompany them are what actually governs our daily lives.

Luck has nothing to do with it.

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