

Driven, or Called?

By Ann Gila

My question is: “Can we truly separate drive from call?” I’m not sure that we can. Yes, it is true, for example, that a drive to acquire more and more money or power may be a survival mechanism rooted in early wounding and unmet needs. Probably most of us would not interpret such a drive as call. How do we know, however, that this drive of acquisition isn’t a first step in a call—a call that is yet unconscious—to one day, for example, establish a charitable foundation with the resources that have been acquired? As someone said—was it Assagioli?—that Self will use whatever it can as it calls us.

I believe no one can judge whether another is being driven or being called. Only the person themselves know this. I had a client many years ago who was making significant personal sacrifices to care for a friend who was seriously ill. This client was physically and mentally exhausted, as well as strained financially. She was in therapy with a therapist who diagnosed her as codependent (driven) and was pressuring the client to accept this evaluation. The client ended this therapy, believing her sacrifice was call; she would not allow her sacrifice to be diminished by another who judged it to be a drive. Some years ago, I heard the question: Was Jesus responding to call, or was he codependent (driven)?

When I reflect on my own life, two of my most significant calls might have been labeled as drives. And they *were* drives. The first was a profound desire to find a partner who would love me unconditionally. This drive, of course, was rooted in my early childhood wounding. When a man appeared in my life who I hoped would be such a partner, all the signs seemed to indicate that this drive was never going to be met by him. One obstacle after another appeared, including a direct message that this budding relationship was only a friendship and would never be other than that. The drive in me was so strong that it was almost unbearable to think of ending it. I prayed and asked, “What am I to do?” In prayer, the message I received was to stay present. It was painful, but I chose to follow this message (this call). I stayed present and a few years later I married this man (John Firman) and was loved unconditionally. We went on to work together for many years, teaching and contributing to the body of psychosynthesis theory. If I had determined that my desire to be loved unconditionally was simply a drive and that therefore I needed to “work on it,” I’m sure that I would have never actualized the potential that existed within me.

Another significant call that was rooted in a drive was my search for my family roots. My Italian grandparents immigrated to the United States, leaving behind families that remained in the deep shadows of the past. One of the impacts of never knowing these roots was a lifelong feeling of not belonging and an intense desire to know where I did belong. This drive culminated in the call I heard one summer day as I sat in a quiet church. The call literally spoke these words in my mind: “Take your grandmother

home.” What did this mean? My grandmother had died and was buried in California. After prayer and meditation, I knew that I had to search the hills of northern Italy for my family. Three weeks later I found my grandmother’s nephew, the first of many cousins who I came to know over the following ten years. The threads of my identity strengthened, and I experienced an inner cohesion, finally rooted in the soil of my family’s history. I belonged.

At the same time, I can look at my drive to be busy, or my drive to eat a little more even after a satisfying meal. Are some drives a step in a call, or are they “simply” a drive? This is only for us to decide.

Some years ago, John Firman and I were in the province of Perugia, Italy, on the small island of Isola Maggiore in Lake Trasimeno. On our walk around its perimeter (two kilometers), we came upon a church that was part of a Franciscan monastery that was in ruins. Standing in front of it was Assunta, an old and somewhat disheveled woman, yet energetic and eager to invite us into the church. She held a large flashlight and beckoned us to enter. The interior was dark. The floor was covered with plaster that had fallen from above, and the paintings on the walls and ceiling were water damaged and discolored. Side altars were in ruins. Despite the dirt and grime, she shone her flashlight everywhere, seemingly wanting to show us the beauty that the church had once been, or perhaps what she still believed it to be. She then led us to a far corner, and there on a small altar that remained standing, were lit candles. She told us that she came every day to light them. We imagined that it was her way of expressing her adoration of the divine. After this experience, John and I asked ourselves, “Was she following call or was she driven?” We asked the same question as we watched the elderly women who so carefully arranged the flowers before the statues in St. Dominic’s church in Los Angeles where John once worked. Was Assunta driven or called? Were the ladies in St. Dominic’s driven or called? Only they knew. And does it make a difference?