

DEAR JEAN:
WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO:

A Revelation of the Dramatic Hidden Forces that make you do what you do:

Let me start with my conclusion: Though you experience yourself as a rational being and have a fundamental conviction that you drive and direct your life in a considered and reasoned fashion, I want to put to you that you are in fact more an emotional, religious, and poetic being that you ever dared to consider. You view others and life through the religion of your private constructs, beliefs, motivations, preoccupations, and needs all of which have very little to do with an objective assessment of the present world you inhabit.

I have a close friend of mine who is an intellectual genius. He is professor of Mathematics in a prestigious University, he a strong intellectual and will debate passionately a host of issues. He prides himself on his reason and intellect and has little time for non-scientific beliefs and attitudes, supports the God delusion, is atheist, and is largely cynical about emotional vulnerability, altruism, and the necessity of sentimental love. He is utterly convinced by his reason. However, because I know him well, and his childhood, I have seen him grow and develop through life and know, as he has disclosed to me in quieter moments, that his life has been controlled and shaped largely by having to deal with a ruthlessly critical alcoholic father growing up. From an early age every soft sentiment he had was cynically removed by a father that humiliated him at every turn. Though Sean had a ferocious intellect, his father belittled him. Though Sean achieved the highest marks of any pupil in the country on every subject, he never got one word of praise or affirmation from his drunken father. This, and a whole host of other behaviours and, as you can imagine, abusive incidents in the home, meant that Sean had to create a worldview that enabled him to survive and cope with these things. He had to withdraw into himself, he had to cope with intellectual studies, he over-achieved to gain some form of approval and recognition, he became driven in his pursuits, he rejected the sentiment of a religion that he found hypocritical, he resented his father social posturing, he withdrew from relationship and became not only terrified of intimacy, but ultimately unable to understand it.

He developed a set of beliefs, convictions, attitudes, and behaviours that enabled him to survive. All of these beliefs and attitudes and expectations and behaviours and interpersonal style and motivating forces and temperament styles developed within the context of his life experience and became the glasses through which he viewed the world. The scaffolding around which he built his life was all based on these early experiences and his psychological and emotional development.

The net effect of all of this is that Sean's behaviour, interpretation of others, primary life values, preoccupations and his interpretation of other people's behaviour and motives, and his assumptions or constructs about life were all pretty much clicked into place by the time he was 8 years old. The things I, Sean has no concept of this. He experiences himself as entirely rational and that he interprets the world through straightforward logic. How his motives and preoccupations have been shaped by his emotional life is something that lies entirely outside his awareness. Like cannot see himself for what and who he truly is. In fact, he is in utter denial about his frail vulnerability.

DEAR JEAN:
WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO:

A Revelation of the Dramatic Hidden Forces that make you do what you do:

The point I want to make here is that Sean's belief systems and personal constructs are the equivalent of a private religion in that his beliefs, values, and motives emerge not from the present, or from his rational analysis of his current situation, but an entire contrived system he superimposes on his everyday life. In this way Sean is a deeply religious person not in any belief in the transcendence, but in his necessity to superimpose an emotionally derived belief system on others and his world in order to be able to cope with it.

I want to suggest that this necessity, this urge to make sense of our world, and find ways of coping with life are essentially emotive, symbolic, imaginative and religious because they are a construction of beliefs, illusions, delusions, and ritualised behaviours as a way of coping with life.

What I want to suggest is that you are no different than Sean! In fact everyone of us clings tightly to our beliefs, rationalizations, compulsions, expectations, preoccupations, rituals, and ways of being in ways that define our character and personality.

From an early age you have developed a private inner religion about why things happen, the kind of person you are, and the consequences of certain behaviour. This private mythology was developed and refined over many years as a consequence of a range of emotional and irrational forces that swirled around you. Later in life you superimposed an adult logic on top of this to make your beliefs seem reasonable. You convince yourself that the thousands of idiosyncratic beliefs and behaviours that make you different from everyone else are reasonable and rational.

It may sound strange to suggest that you have your own private mythology or even private unique religion, but we find this to be more and more the case.

Mythologies are in their original form poetic and imaginative ways to make sense of life and cope with suffering and death. They usually consist of beliefs and rituals that show respect for a vertical dimension to life that is beyond the horizontal control of everyday concerns. They succeed when they provide hope and compel people to live more fully. A mythology, in essence, helps us to live a meaningful and passionate life.

Unbeknownst to yourself, you have been creating your own mythology in your private little life. Your private religion or spirituality choreographs your behaviour in the most mundane emotional dramas of family or work life. The thing is that you deny it vehemently claiming that their behaviour is reasonable and logical.

So in the small culture of your domestic life you ritualise your life and sacrifice yourself or others to create control and order in an emotional world. Beneath the modern exterior of your everyday urban life, behind the curtains of your poise and composure, you are no different than primitive woman repeating chants and rituals in order to come to terms with life – to soothe yourself in the face of its terror, to dance in the aftermath of its joy.

DEAR JEAN:

WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO:

A Revelation of the Dramatic Hidden Forces that make you do what you do:

Of this I am certain, you do what you do, feel what you feel, and believe what you believe because you have a set of attitudes and rituals that consolidate an identity you have established for yourself that has been created on the anvil of your imagination. In truth, you are what you imagine yourself to be.