

An Epiphany About My SSA: The Relationship Between My Acting Out and My Need For a Best Friend.

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First, let me introduce myself: My name is Nathan, I am married with 3 children. In my life, I have constantly "needed" or at least sought out a best friend. One good friend. That's all I needed, that's all I wanted. Of course, after a while, my need became obsessive. During the time I actually had such a friendship, my same-sex attraction (SSA) was virtually nil. When I didn't have these intimate connections, I was more prone to acting out with other men.

I always focused on and looked for this best friend rather than choosing a larger circle of men with whom to have relationship. My effort was to have a few deep friendships that provided an emotional connection. Ultimately such friendships did not last. This then left me feeling emotionally drained and craving to replenish this feeling of closeness I lost. I would then look elsewhere to fill the void and start all over again. For several years, I have been trying to figure out why I had this repetitive need to find this one best friend.

When I first began my work several years ago, I kept telling myself that I didn't seem to fit the mold of those with SSA. I chose to not engage in therapy. After all, the classic risk factors or causes didn't seem to apply to me. The story I told myself was that I never had issues with my peers; and, that I was close with my father, even though emotionally he wasn't demonstrative. Deep down, I told myself that I "knew" how he felt about me: I believed that he loved me and was proud of me.

So the only issue that seemed to fit the risk factors or causes concerning my early childhood was sexual involvement with an older male that I never accepted as (and to a large degree still don't) characterize as sexual abuse. I was a willing and eager participant in the activity and I never felt bad about it. (Please don't try to convince me that it was "abuse" -even though I was young- because at this point it would be counter productive.)

This past weekend I attended a Call of the Shofar men's experiential weekend in Israel (www.calloftheshofar.org). While working on some of my issues there, I developed a theory about why I constantly looked for a best friend. While working on my issues, I was able to get in touch with my feelings and realized that although I had a close relationship with my father, a major part of that relationship was him teaching me and my siblings how to do work around the house that involved fixing things. I wasn't very good at it, and when I would mess up my father would yell at me. Eventually he stopped trying to teach me how to do the "men's work" and I was in turn relegated to cleaning up after my siblings and preparing lunch. What came to me during the weekend work was a recognition of the deep pain of this childhood experience and such understanding brought about some major clarity: My SSA was caused by my father giving up on me, relegating me to "woman's work," and not teaching and mentoring me with the patience and understanding that I felt I needed.

I realize now that I felt like a failure because my father gave up on trying to teach me how to do the "men's work" around the house. This in turn has led to a lifetime of low self-confidence. As my self-confidence waned in childhood, I developed a sexual relationship with an older boy. Like I said

earlier, I never considered the situation abusive. However, what came to me during the weekend processes was the interconnection between the early sexual activity and my perceptions about my father's put down. I began to realize that my sexual activity was my psyche's way of compensating for this perceived inadequacy. I attempted to satisfy another man, to make him happy and proud of me. Indeed, whenever I felt down, I would seek out a man to please so I could feel that I WAS A SOMEBODY. In some cases, I sexualized it; in other cases, I simply sought out a best friend. Either way, I engaged in what some psychologists call a "repetition compulsion"-a continual recreating of a past traumatic event. In other words, continue to attempt in the here and now to recreate the traumatic failure of my father relegating me to "woman's work" by seeking out masculine approval in the hope of a better outcome.

Of course it didn't work because I quickly went back to being me with all of my insecurities and perceived inadequacies. I also recognized during the weekend that whenever I had this best friend (non-sexual) or sexualized relationship, I was substituting that person as an idealized version for the attention, affection, and approval (three A's) that I was seeking and needed from my father. These needs, call them core needs or developmental needs, went unmet. And, my unfilled yearning for fulfillment of these needs, coupled with my detachment from my sense of masculinity through these childhood incidents with my father, expressed itself as unhealthy attachments to another male-whether it be sexualized or simply by clinging to someone as a best friend.

This led me to a further epiphany. When I have an emotional relationship with this one friend that I so desperately need, I

am using him as a father figure. I realized that I became obsessive in my need to be in touch with him, to know what is going on with him, and having him know about me. I needed to please him and required his affirmation and love. I currently have such a friend, but I find that if something changes, like I don't speak to him as often as I did, or I don't think he gave me the affirmation I was seeking, I begin to panic that I did something wrong and fear that he isn't going to be there for me anymore. So while I know that this type of relationship isn't healthy, at least I have come to an understanding of where it all stems from.

Regardless of the symptom I utilize to decrease my anxiety and father wounds, and whether I work to continually reduce my acting out and simultaneously make efforts to reduce my compulsion to find a best friend, I understand it can take time. However, the major step is the first one I have taken-which is to understand the common story behind my SSA and my obsessive compulsion to always find a best friend. This insight represents a huge awakening! I then need to accept this pattern for **what it is**: a pattern I built up a long time ago which enabled me to move forward in my life. The insight also allows me to see this pattern for **what it is not**: the thinking that I was born this way as many elements of society continually preach or a belief that my SSA is so ingrained that it can never be overcome. Baruch Hashem [Blessed be G-d], I understand the impact all this has had upon my life and what I need to do to continually diminish these symptoms until they are practically gone. Rather than continually recreate the traumatic failure of the non-acceptance of my masculinity by my father, I now realize I have the ability to develop healing relationships which offer me the chance to do in adulthood what I could not do as a child, that is, to acknowledge and grieve the loss I felt from my father's actions while stopping

my attempts to "import" happiness and fulfillment from another human being.

I still have major work to do, but I am on my way.