

*A Personal Account**

The first two articles in the most recent issue of *Hakirah* touched some old and very raw nerves. I would like to follow the advice of the Rosh HaYeshiva, R' Shmuel Kaminetzky, *Shlita* and share with you my experience, as I clearly identified myself as being gay during my adolescence and 20s. My fear of writing this letter, albeit anonymously, is that you, the reader, will assume that there must have been something different about my upbringing, my family of origin, some trauma I experienced, a genetic flaw. Perhaps you're thinking I was molested or my family life in my childhood was dysfunctional. For the record, I grew up in the most normal of situations. I attended Flatbush camps, Flatbush yeshivot and post-high school yeshivot. My siblings too all attended the regular run-of-the-mill yeshivot and Beis Yaakovs. My parents are board members of the *shul*, my father is in business and attends his Daf HaYomi *shiur* regularly, my family's *rov* is a well-known Torah Gadol, my mother is involved in *chesed* projects, one of my sisters is married to a well-known *rov*'s son, etc.

As a young pre-teenage boy growing up in Brooklyn and attending regular, mainstream yeshivish yeshivot, sexuality was something I struggled with. I knew nothing of sexuality, nothing of mainstream culture's views on gay rights and nothing of the Torah's perspectives. I knew only that I was very clear about two very contradictory things: 1. I was attracted to other boys, and 2. I did not want to be.

But how can you change things that have to do with desire? Yes, I was able to learn Gemarah, *b'iyun* and *b'kieus*, and I even led *chaburos* in yeshiva very often. I did well in school, got 90s on all my Regents and was somewhat popular with my friends (I had a good jump shot). I could learn from a book, follow Mitzvoth and stay away from Aveiros, act disciplined, impress my rebbeim and

*Although it is our policy not to print letters from anonymous people, the writer gave us a reliable source with whom we were able to verify his story. He asked that we include his e-mail address, ex_ssa@yahoo.com, and urged those who feel they would benefit from speaking to him to please contact him.

my parents, and yet I lugged around this burning secret—I was gay. There existed no formalized Torah curriculum in yeshiva to discuss issues of morality. My parents never had a discussion about sexuality with me; they assumed I knew it all as most of my friends' parents did. My secret was frightening, overwhelming and consuming as the nature of my sexuality was almost surreal. On the one hand I looked at my sexuality from a bird's-eye view, disassociated from it; it was foreign to me. Yet it was something deeply ingrained inside of me. As I came to learn about gay culture through the Internet, terms like "orientation" and "identity" and "pride" rambled loudly in my head. "Hey," I thought, "my sexuality is so deeply a part of me that I can identify myself as being gay."

What does desire mean? What does identity mean? No one taught me. *Barasi yetzer ho-rah barasi Torah tavlin* ("I created the evil inclinations and I created Torah as its antidote" (Bava Basra 16a).) Tosafos don't explain it and the *lomdus*, deep analysis, of a good Brisker *shtikel* Torah didn't resolve anything either.

I tremble as I think back to those haunting days of my life. You see, I was fortunate enough to be guided to a therapist, a therapist who opened my eyes up to the true beauty of my own *neshoma*, my soul. A trained therapist helped me find the courage to dig deep inside and find a psychologically healthier me. And I learned what identity means. I learned what it means to have not developed fully (see Dr. Joseph Berger's article in *Hakirah* vol. 12, p. 55) and more important, I found myself. I remember those years in therapy, the sweet sweat mingled with joyous tears of personal growth. I was given a *matanah*, a gift, from Hashem, a challenge to overcome, and in doing so I accomplished the monumental task of finding myself.

So I sit here all these years later with tears in my eyes writing this letter, taking a break from putting up our *sukkah*, lovingly watching my wife and our beautiful children as they decide which decorations to hang on the walls. I sit here with tears in my eyes as I think of the *shiur* I gave last week to my eager students, about Yiddishkeit, Judaism, about the importance of having a personal relationship with Hashem and learning about what it means to them personally to be a Jew. I am not a rebbie in the conventional sense of the word but I give *shiurim*, lectures,

routinely. I have a job that I am very proud of. I have a beautiful family and I have no questions about my sexuality. In fact I have come to understand desire and identity in, perhaps, a way more unique than most of my peers, and I continue to live my life experiencing the beauty that Hashem gives me daily. So I heed the Rosh HaYeshivah's call and send this message out to *Hakirah* and all those who will read this. Homosexuality is a challenge. The corruptness of a society that wants us to believe that a person's identity (essentially our *neshamos*, souls) can be based on sexuality / *taivah* is insane. I don't have a political agenda but I can say that I have been in the depths of this struggle and have come out whole, *min ha-meitzar karaisi Kuh, anani ba-merchav Kuh* ("In distress I called out to Hashem; Hashem answered me and brought me relief" (Psalms 118:5).) If my story can be of *chizuk*, fortitude, to you then I know that Hashem has truly brought my story full circle. Thank you *Hakirah* for having the audacity, the *azus d'kedusha*, to print these two articles and shedding light on an issue that until now has been too sensitive for public discussion. ❧