

The Wife Of A Same-Sex Struggler Speaks Out

My name is Rachel. My husband struggles with same-sex attraction (SSA). I'm writing to share my experience in coming to terms with my husband's SSA.

Shmuel and I were married for 13 years before he told me about his SSA. One day he came into the house looking nervous and concerned about something. He said, "There is something I have to tell you." Then he couldn't get the words out — he kept hesitating. So being impatient, I said, "Shmuel, just say it ... what is it? You're gay?" But I was not serious. I just figured if I said something so big, he would have an easier time telling me whatever it was. Well, lo and behold, I wasn't far from the truth! My first reaction was wow! This is not possible!

Then I looked at him and said, "How could you have lived with such a big secret for such a long time?" I couldn't understand how he could enjoy life and his family while holding in such a secret. Also, because of my attitude toward secrets, I felt really bad for him. Secrets make me feel anxious and worried. Secrets to me are awful. They take up my whole being. They fill my waking hours and my dreams.

He acknowledged that he kept the secret for *too long*, that he was ashamed to admit his issues, first to a counsellor at JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality <http://www.jonahweb.org/>) with whom he had been working to grow out of his homosexuality and then to his therapist who he had secretly been seeing (recommended to him by JONAH). Both apparently strongly counseled that when he felt ready he needed to bring me into the picture and thus become more authentic in his relationship with me as his spouse.

My heart went out to Shmuel, and at the same time I was glad he unburdened himself. I felt bad that he lived with anxiety and unfilled needs, unable to share his deepest pain with anyone, particularly me, until this point in time. I understood it was too shameful for him. Yet I felt bad that he didn't confide in ME, his wife. Didn't he trust me? What did he think I would do if he told me the truth, ask for a divorce? No way! I take our marriage very seriously. My feeling always was that we can work through whatever comes our way. I believe that we truly are each other's "bashert" (fated soulmate).

Then came Phase 2. ANGER. Lots of it. Although I didn't scream and yell (we generally don't fight), I was angry inside. And, he knew it. I felt like I was made a fool of for 13 years. But then again what was Shmuel supposed to do? Tell me before we got married? I don't know that we would have married (only because I think my family would have objected.) I come from an Orthodox Jewish home where community opinion plays a large role in the way my family sees things. The community is generally closed minded and ignorant when it comes to issues such as homosexuality. My family has never had any experience with any relatives or friends being gay. They simply would not know how to deal with it.

That first year that followed, Shmuel was in the midst of therapy and we didn't really discuss the subject too much. I just accepted it; he went to therapy and that was that. However, there came a point where his therapist recommended that I come with Shmuel for a therapy session. I agreed to go for a few reasons. I wanted to meet the therapist to get better answers as to what was happening as well as to enable him as a healer to gain a more complete picture of Shmuel's life. I also wanted to talk about some of my husband's issues and understand them better. I wanted to be helpful to my husband's healing process. I also wanted to know how I came into this picture and how our relationship toward each other and our children would be affected by Shmuel's revelation. Shmuel's therapist was incredibly helpful in answering many of my questions and assured me that Shmuel had the capacity not only to overcome his homosexuality but more importantly to alleviate many of his underlying emotional woundings that led him to his homosexuality.

One of the processes recommended by JONAH for men struggling with SSA is for them to attend the New Warriors Training Adventure. (<http://www.mkp.org/>). For those of you who know men who are unhappy being gay, or question their own internal sense of masculinity, tell them to GO! After the New Warriors weekend is when we started to talk a lot more openly about my husband's struggle with SSA (not to outsiders, only among ourselves). Because he began to internalize some of the lessons of authenticity taught by Warriors, he began being more authentic with me about his own emotions and his own feelings. It made our communication about marital issues far easier.

Then there was the Journey into Manhood Weekend (JiM) (<http://www.peoplecanchange.com/>), another experiential weekend recommended by JONAH. This weekend enabled Shmuel to become even more open about his feelings and to recognize how his own perceptions about himself and others affected his life. It also gave him a clearer vision of what he needed to do to make the necessary changes to be the kind of man he always wanted to be. In addition, Shmuel expanded his network of men, getting to know many new men who were living with the same struggle as he was but, who like him, were determined to grow out of their same sex attractions.

An important element of these relationships was that these men accepted him just as he is. It was an extremely affirming experience for him. Again, if you know men who struggle with SSA, tell them that JiM was an incredible experience for my husband (and therefore for me as well).

What helped me most was Shmuel's newfound willingness to include me in every way possible. Now, of course he needs his privacy. He needs male affirmation, which is something I obviously can't provide for him and which he had lacked for so long. Indeed, that is one of the very causes of his SSA.

Nevertheless, he includes me wherever he can. We talk a lot,

which is very helpful to both of us. Shmuel is working hard towards change. He could have said, "Forget it. This is too intense for me. Forget my wife's feelings....Forget family life..." Instead he chose to work hard on himself for change.

Shmuel and I have developed an interesting practice which helps my husband bond better with other men while simultaneously helping him, me, and SSA men he knows. We invite some of these men to our home for meals, be it weekday or Shabbos. These are men whom Shmuel has met through the network of activities in which the SSA strugglers participate. By my exposure to other men facing similar issues (whether they are single or married), I can better understand my husband's issues. For the men who visit us, I believe their participation in a warm, nurturing family environment helps them, as many of them never had such an environment in their youth.

I thank God that Shmuel and I always had a good relationship. I'm at a point where I realize Shmuel loves me, always has, always will, and I feel the same way about him. This is not about me. There really isn't anything I can do to change the way he feels; only he can do that. What I can do is be supportive. Let him go to his men's groups without me complaining about the late hours. Truthfully, it's not easy for Shmuel to go out two evenings a week (and sometimes three if he has a therapy session). But he's doing this for US. I sometimes forget that and must try to always remember that whatever psychological work

Shmuel is doing, he is doing for both of us and our family. He is becoming a better and better husband, father, and man.

Yet, there are many conflicting emotions that I have gone through and still go through. It is not easy for me. But, generally, I have a feeling of acceptance and most of all, love for my husband. I always believed I was there for him but now that I understand the causes of his issues and his occasional distance (I have taken the time to read the literature and educate myself), I am even more supportive. All of us have issues. None of us are perfect. If we are aware of our issues and work together as a team, as G-d intended, then we are living a life which is true to our faith and ourselves.

Best wishes to all you brave men and to your present and future families,

--- Rachel

NOTE: JONAH, Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality, can be reached at <http://www.jonahweb.org/>. I strongly recommend that anyone affected by this issue, be it an individual struggling with the issue or a family member or a friend that cares about someone with the issue, reach out for help from JONAH. They are compassionate, caring, and have developed a relatively complete program to help.