

For Men: Recovering Our Guidance System.

by Steven Keeler, MFT

In an ever changing world, many men have found themselves more lost than ever before. In the USA, societal norms have changed. No longer are men as valued for their sacrifice, and no longer are men as valued for their presence in the family as the sole breadwinner or protector. When families break, men are usually the first to go and the last to be cared for. In my experience as a therapist, I have observed that men seem to be lost and are confused about their role. These new expectations make men feel conflicted because they were taught, and still are being taught, that they shouldn't feel, that they should just do. And for that sacrifice they believe they should be rewarded.

The idea of sacrifice has been passed down for thousands of years. When animals began to be domesticated, people noticed that if they sacrificed both males and females, the herd would be smaller the next year. They also noticed that if there were more than a few males, there would be less of a herd next year. So they began sacrificing the males and keeping the females, thereby increasing their herds and their food supply. Many Western religions are predicated on the sacrifice of a male. In ancient Greece, the best males would be plowed in the ground with caricatures of their heads set on altars.

When chosen for sacrifice, men expected, and were given, the best food, best grain, best care, best jobs; they expected to be loved and appreciated. All they had to do in return was pay with their lives. What are boys and men still taught? If the ship is

sinking and as the life boats are lowered, who stays behind if there aren't enough life jackets nor enough room for everyone? Men are taught they are expendable, and never before has this been more evident than now. Never has it been so confusing for men, since many are still living the old ways in a world that has changed. The old way was sacrifice and don't feel; **the new way may require men to learn to use their feelings for their intended purpose: guidance.**

History and society have valued the minds of men more than their hearts. In other words, thinking is better than feeling, and it is very useful not to know how to feel when about to be sacrificed. The mind is an extremely useful tool, yet when it is robbed of the guidance of the heart, it is relegated to using old beliefs for guidance. These old beliefs are about sacrifice, throwing ourselves to the lions, being cannon fodder, repressing feelings, and so on. In my opinion, **now** is an excellent opportunity for men to truly find a role that does not require their self-esteem to be based on sacrifice.

I believe that the way for men to adapt to these positive societal changes is by reacquainting themselves with their guidance system, with their hearts. Aristotle said that the heart is the seat of the soul; if men are not in connection with their hearts, they cannot be in connection with their souls, which robs them of guidance from their source. Much new research has shown that the heart may actually be more in charge of the body than the brain, yet the brain is a formidable foe, and focuses only on survival, unless re-trained by the heart.

The implications of this are tremendous! If men need to find a new way to have value in their lives, they simply and easily (as you will see) can turn to their own hearts for guidance.

As everyone knows, feelings are the language of the heart. But who is in charge of our feelings? Often in my private practice I will hear people say, "She made me mad," or "They made me do that." If this were in fact true, then we would be under the remote control of anyone who decides to manipulate us. I do not believe this to be the case. **WE** are in charge of our feelings. And if we are not, then we must train ourselves to be; otherwise we will be faced with much chaos, difficulty, and disappointment in our lives.

Furthermore, our feelings inform us as to whether or not we are following our true intentions. Put simply, if we have a negative feeling, then our words, thoughts, and actions are not consistent with our intentions; if we are feeling good, then they are. This is our guidance system. And it is a system that has been in place since our births. It has been sending signals that men refuse to acknowledge. I believe this accounts for the reason men die much earlier than women do—we are trained to ignore our feelings.

For anyone who is out of touch with his guidance system, the simplest way to re-acquaint yourself with it is to begin to dream again. Not in regard to sleeping, but in regard to setting forth your hopes, wishes, and yearnings. For instance, answering the question, "If you could do, be or have anything you wanted in your life, what would it be?" Once you establish some of these dreams, you will

know if you are aligning yourself with them simply by monitoring how you feel: good feelings mean your words, thoughts, and actions are matching your intentions; bad feelings means they are not.

Currently in our society, it appears that men are starting to be valued for their feelings, yet many have no idea how to negotiate this playing field. We men have to pay more attention to our feelings. We have to learn to value and understand the messages they send.

If we men can recover our guidance system, we can better adapt to these changing times. And once we begin not only listening to, but *following*, our hearts, we will experience more internal peace, and therefore, so will our world.

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