

Your Authentic Self is Your Most Beautiful Self

by Barry Johnson-Smith

"You should kill yourself, you piece of garbage", whispered the voice in my head as I laid in my bed feeling lifeless. This has been occurring for a while where my mind would constantly tell me how worthless I am and at a point I was starting to believe it. This was the voice I was constantly hearing last summer when I was battling depression. Before the summer began I just ended a relationship with someone that I was with since my freshman year of college. I consider this person the love of my life and express an unconditional love for her, unfortunately she didn't love me for who I was. She told me I was too goofy and corny and didn't like the way I talked, dressed, or behaved. Regardless, I wanted us to be good friends and make the break up amicable and peaceful, so I repressed the hurt, anger, and pain I was feeling. I made it appear everything was fine, while my dark emotions were eating away at my essence. Eventually these repressed emotions become too much to bear and I eventually exploded. My energy was quickly drained, this voice started speaking into me telling me how worthless I am, and I eventually lost the will to live. Day after day I experienced these feelings until it got to the point one night that I contemplated

killing myself. Death seemed such a more pleasant experience, than the suffering I was feeling at that time.

Despite having those thoughts of suicide, a burning desire to live awoken within me. I wanted to enjoy life, to love myself, and to share a love with others to remind them, they are amazing the way they are. As a result, I decided my purpose was to bring joy to others and use this purpose to learn more about myself and help alleviate this depression. To act on this purpose I became involved in this previous school year as Vice President of Georgia Tech Chapter of The National Society of Black Engineers (GTSBE) and as Cultural Diversity Affairs Chair (CDAC) for the Student Government Association(SGA). As Vice President I was tasked in leading the executive board in carrying out the vision our president had set for us and for CDAC I was tasked on making campus more inclusive and welcoming to all Georgia Tech students. Through my involvements with these positions I fulfilled my purpose and brought joy back to my life.

With my role as VP, I took a diligent effort to understand the different personalities of the executive board and worked with them to develop them to be the leaders they wanted to be. I created leadership workshops and talked to them individually to encourage them to express their creative persona. The welcoming

environment encouraged them to confide in me with issues they were personally facing and I did the best I could to help address their issues. It warmed me when the executive board members informed me about the impact I made on them, how they enjoyed being in GTSBE, and how they felt valued for their unique personalities. It was so beautiful to see how they developed and how they felt appreciated for who they are. It illustrated to me the positive impact I can have on others and how skillful I am in developing and growing people. I smiled with joy knowing I can make a difference in the lives of others and how amazing I can be. Just like that, light replaced the darkness inside of me.

In my role as CDAC co-chair, I embraced the beauty of different mindsets, identities, and backgrounds. My co-chair and I both decided that our role were to be allies to different cultural groups on campus. We interacted with different cultural organizations on campus and wanted to learn more about the identities they represented and how we could help them out. It was awe inspiring to interact with different people on Georgia Tech's campus. I loved how they appreciated us reaching and partnering with them. I was able to attend some of their events such as an Indian Dance Team Competition, Tour of Asia, and the Muslim Student Association's CultureFest. It was beautiful to witness how different cultures operate and what they value in

life. One is not better than the other, but a unique way to live through life. It helped me realize that my personality and values about life are not less than or worse than other people, but just different. I learn to cherish and appreciate my uniqueness. I found worth in myself and eventually I stopped hearing the voice in my head saying I was worthless.

As I helped other people throughout the year, they were also in fact helping me. I learned to embrace my own personality and accept how wonderful it is. Nothing is wrong with who I am and I shouldn't feel bad if people can't love or appreciate me for my personality. I love how goofy and corny I am. I love the way I talk, dress, and behave. My uniqueness is sensational and I express it because my authentic self is my most beautiful self.