

A Long, Hard Road

*By Daniel Meir Horowitz **

There has been much ado in the Jewish media about the idea of Orthodoxy and homosexuality. I have decided to share my personal story for the purpose of letting others know that, despite what so many people claim to “know,” there *are* options and there *is* a way out of Same Sex Attraction (SSA).

I was raised in a modern-Orthodox, frum family. I clearly remember in 8th grade being among other boys discussing which girls in our class they had crushes on. At the time I had absolutely no attraction to women and, to avoid embarrassment, I blatantly lied and said that I did indeed have a crush on a certain female classmate. But inside I was tormented: “When will I feel these feelings like the other guys?” I asked myself. I kept hoping that someday I would just wake up and be “normal.” Unfortunately, that time never came. By 10th grade I had already come to the conclusion that something was wrong, and also admitted to myself that I was instead attracted to other boys in my class. I recall praying and crying to G-d to “take it away” and heal me. One summer I spent every day saying the entire book of Tehillim (Psalms) in the hope that I could earn enough merit to make my homosexuality go away. But it didn’t.

After graduation, I dutifully spent a year in an Israeli yeshiva. Being in a dormitory situation was a complete nightmare. I felt trapped in a prison that I could not escape, tempted by things that I could never act upon, dangled in front of me constantly. By the end of that year I was almost non-functional, and finally mustered up the courage to discuss my situation with the Rosh Yeshiva. I was sure that I would be summarily cast away and shamed, but felt I didn’t have a choice since I was suffering so much. I needed to talk to someone. Instead, I received compassion, advice, and a recommendation to see a local psychologist.

When I returned home at the end of the year, I began immediately seeing a religious psychologist to try to work through these issues while I stayed in yeshiva. Over the next seven years I cycled on and off seeing a total of three different psychologists and one psychiatrist, spending at least twenty thousand dollars. These were highly recommended professionals, some of whom are rather well known. They all assured me that they could help me with my SSA. Yet after all of my time and money, I accomplished absolutely nothing. I still was embroiled in attraction to other men, and felt no attraction to women. All of my friends were getting married and having children, while I just spun my wheels.

During those years I became depressed and hated my life. I often contemplated suicide. Multiple times while driving home from the therapist’s office, frustrated at our lack of progress, I would think: “Just turn the wheel a little to the left and slam into the divider on the freeway. No one will know it wasn’t just an accident.” I would have to consciously switch to the right lane so I

could be sure I wouldn't give in to the temptation. Part of me truly wanted to die, though, and I regularly wished that a car would hit me when I was crossing the street.

In utter desperation I began searching the Internet for possible alternative treatments. I was willing to try almost anything if I thought it would work. I discovered a weekend retreat for men struggling with SSA. After consulting with one of my rabbeim and my therapist, I signed up for the next available open slot, bought my plane tickets to Utah and set out. The retreat changed my life. I met other men who had struggled with SSA and had moved through it. I was taught about reparative therapy and that there was hope. Soon after that weekend I started seeing a licensed reparative therapist regularly, and within a year began to slowly see signs of progress. I don't remember exactly when, perhaps 18-24 months into the therapy, but I was reading a magazine and an attractive woman in an ad caught my attention. I found myself staring at the photograph. Then it struck me: I was actually interested in looking at the woman! I felt such exhilaration at the experience. I had instinctually done what I never would have done before. Something had changed.

Anyone who says that working through homosexual desires and feelings is an easy, quick process is lying. It is a long, hard road with many challenges, pitfalls, and setbacks. But it is possible. I wish I could say there is a "cure" for SSA, but there is no such thing. SSA is something I will struggle with for the rest of my life. But I have been in control of it. It no longer tortures me. When I am diligent and follow the game-plan, it fades to the faintest whisper in the background. And I am attracted to women, when I never was before.

Why was I so tortured? Why did it hurt so much? What drove me to become suicidal? Being a frum person with SSA felt like being trapped in a prison with no escape. If I have homosexual desires, urges to do what the Torah blatantly forbids, I have only three options.

A) To give in to those desires, and violate the Torah. Many have taken that path, often eventually abandoning all Torah observance. I truly believed, and believe, that G-d gave us the Torah, and so giving in to my desires was not an acceptable course of action for me.

B) To "white-knuckle," to try to resist these temptations with sheer willpower and live a "normal" life despite them. This was an unbelievably depressing prospect. It meant getting married with no real desire for a woman. It meant having desires that could never be fulfilled. It meant being trapped in the closet all alone, suffering. (To say nothing of how wrong doing so would be to the woman I would have married.)

There were those who would try to offer me a variant of this option: Accept myself as a homosexual and identify as gay, and stay single, all the while refraining from violating the Torah. While on the one hand it sounded brave, I knew it to be a fallacy and an empty dream.

Firstly, I would still have to suffer a lifetime of unfulfilled yearnings. The reality is, however, that despite firm initial convictions, every single person that I know who tried this, eventually succumbed and ended up violating the Torah. This always devolved back into option A.

C) To try and change the desires, or at least mitigate them until they become a mere nuisance. This seemed to be the only viable approach to me. And I tried for many years, floundering along through therapy, even taking extra jobs to pay for it. I remember thinking at one point: “What more can G-d possibly want from me? I’m doing everything I can!!” Yet, I persevered and eventually found a treatment that helped.

That approach is what led me to where I am.

There are those who will wish to silence me, and protest the publication of my story. They will describe reparative therapy as a sham. I can only say that I wish someone had told me about it earlier. There are no guarantees for any treatment of any illness. But I would rather have tried mightily and failed, than to have had someone stifle me by censoring those who would have given me options and hope.

Of course, no one should ever be forced into therapy if they don’t want it. And no one can experience any change unless they want to. The most meaningful family and friends won’t achieve anything if a person doesn’t want to do it for himself. But for those who choose to work through their SSA, there are paths for them to take. And they can lead to truly fulfilled lives. Even if after spending time with one therapist doesn’t help, that does not in any way mean that another won’t be helpful. If, G-d forbid, someone was diagnosed with cancer and a certain treatment wasn’t working, he wouldn’t give up. He would seek out another doctor with a different method, or try alternative medicines or modalities. I spent almost ten years trying different therapy methods, and eventually one worked for me. So if one doesn’t work for you, who knows? Some other treatment might.

I want to shout to all those plagued by SSA who wish they were not: Don’t give up. Please. Despite what you read and hear, a ray of light might be just around the corner.

** This is a pseudonym. Certain other identifying details have been changed as well. I truly wish that I felt safe enough to use my actual name and identify myself. However, as someone still searching for his soul mate, I am keenly aware of how careful I must be to explain these details about me at the right time and in the proper context.*