

Has Anyone Really Changed from SSA to OSA? Yes. Me.

Written By: Bart Roberts

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Introduction by the Author: A person new to the process of change of sexual orientation bluntly asked me, "Does anyone ever succeed in escaping same-sex attractions (SSA)?" When I responded in the affirmative, he asked several more specific questions and what follows is the reply I sent which describes several of my personal experiences and changes within me that impacted my current level of healing.

After writing this piece, I decided to save it in my journal because I believe it summarizes my reflections and personal experiences. I also gave JONAH permission to publicize this article because they thought what I wrote may be helpful to others undertaking the same journey.

Please forgive any implied or expressed notion that I can't or won't ever slip. "Falling down" is part of life's experiences but "getting back up" or "back on track" is what allows us to know we are alive. A religious proverb tells us that the righteous man is one who may fall seven times but he remains strong enough to get back up each time in order to overcome his challenges. Please note that as a religious man, I believe I'll stay in this good place as long as I continue to surrender to G-d and allow Him to keep me strong. Surrendering to G-d enables me to feel G-d's power within me and thereby open myself to do the deep intra-personal psychological work that is necessary to recreate ourselves, to heal, and to grow. Surrendering to G-d permitted me to actually do the deep and personal psychological work I did over the past year. This secular psychological work was essential. It allowed me to move forward, to change my self-perceptions, and to turn my life around.

My brother,

You have asked if anyone has ever been successful in eliminating his SSA.

I answered, very briefly, "Yes" ... Me!

I'll answer your questions by explaining how I got to the point where I can say "yes."

First, I consider myself no-longer enslaved by SSA. It has become a non-issue for me. What I think that means is best described by repeating what one prominent SSA therapist said eventually happens when we grow out of SSA:

- I notice men.
- I admire men with certain characteristics ... some of the time.
- Certain body types or personality characteristics may get my attention.
- But such attention is no longer a "sexual attraction." I NO LONGER NEED TO CONTROL (or repress) MY SSA AND THOSE FEELINGS NO LONGER CONTROL ME. The entire issue of controlling the obsession and subsequent compulsive behavior has faded away.

These changes did not happen suddenly, although I remember exactly the day when they first happened. Why? Because I remember communicating with G-d on the day I believed I was delivered. I told Him, all I wanted was one day in my life to be free, to be straight, and at the end of that day I would be ready to go. This was neither a desire to commit suicide nor a death wish, but rather a very grateful expression to G-d that He had answered my prayers to have just one day as a straight man. But that one-day has stretched out now for many, many days, and months, and is now stretching into years.

Do I still find some men attractive? Of course! But, that's because they are attractive! OSA men also notice attractive men, but not as sexual objects. Millions of OSA men notice these hunks and many of them wish they themselves were that attractive.

My memories of being a child give me a picture of being attracted to girls in some way. I believe my thinking and actions were within the normal range, but a traumatic event that occurred in pre-puberty changed that process: I was pulled into sex with another boy. After being molested at age 10, I believed I was ripe to take off in another direction. I hungered for fatherly affection. My father was never my dad. I was neglected to the point that he hardly noticed I was in the room. We had a miniscule amount of father-son time. I had no confidence in myself as a boy or as a guy. Thus, at the end of the molestation event, I remember saying to myself: "I'm not a real guy and I never will be a real guy". I came to believe that I needed to learn how to be really good at that behavior in order to be one of the guys and to be accepted as a real guy.

I dated some women in my adolescence and twenties. I had a girlfriend, and engaged in a few kisses. She and the rest of the girls that I would occasionally date were mostly a fantasy. The reality was that I would dump them out of fear. I even had women invite me to have sex with them, but I turned them down under the guise of "religious convictions," when in actuality I was afraid because I wasn't "turned on." The truth of my desires, however, involved more of a desire to masturbate with her brother than to have intercourse with her. Immaturity reigned supreme.

I got married in 1981 at age 28 to the only woman I ever actually got involved with in an intimate sexual activity - and it was only once before we were married. It only happened a few weeks before our marriage and it was to satisfy my fear that I would not be able to perform on

my wedding night. I wanted to make sure I could perform. I didn't enjoy it. (So much for the standard advice of many in the clergy: a good woman will fix you.) It was somewhat a marriage of convenience for both of us. And, because I believed she really didn't love or want me, we didn't have much of a sex life for the next 30 years. Our average was between one and four times a year. (By the way, I had told her about my SSA in 1987 and thankfully she decided to stay with me. We have two beloved children.)

During most of our 31 years of marriage, she didn't appear to want me (or at least that was my perception) and I thought it was because I wasn't much of a real man. I therefore believed I could not turn her on. Of course, I also thought my penis wasn't large enough. Neither belief was true. I've discovered in my new journey to wholeness that I can indeed turn my wife on and that I'm perfectly OK in the size department. All those fears of being small were a lie. I could never see it before now; I'm at the very least, average. But SSA blinds one to the truth about so many things, including the desirability of one's body, the size of one's genitalia, and doubts about our manhood . . . the list of negative perceptions is endless.

For so many years, I had a negative self-image, a belief system in which I viewed myself as something less than a man. Perhaps a year ago, I wrote in my prayer journal a request that G-d help me control my SSA. I referred to it as the "thorn." I wanted to control the thorn. But as the days and weeks moved on, my prayers became much more intense; probably as intense, or more intense than they had ever been on this issue. After a few weeks of prayer, I marked through the words, "control the thorn" and wrote instead "destroy the thorn." This was a major step in my eventual healing: I moved from an effort to simply repress my SSA and instead started to look for a way to transform my SSA. (In retrospect, this change of motivation was a critical aspect in my eventual healing, analogous to a key that opened the door to recovery.)

I started looking for help but there wasn't any in my city. One therapist who himself went through recovery explained that I needed to resolve rather than fight my homosexual feelings. This could be done, he suggested, by meeting the deep unmet need from my childhood and youth that may have involved a longing for affirmation from my father, the unmet need to feel part of my peer group, or simply an internal belief that I wasn't one of the guys. This underlying core need for brotherly love, rather than seeking sex or romance with other men, would help me resolve a lifetime of pain and hurt that was inconsistent with my deepest values, beliefs and life goals. This Florida based therapist suggested that as a starting point, I consider attending an experiential weekend (meaning not just sitting and listening to lectures, but rather experiencing, actively participating, connecting with others, and exploring who I am and what I want) such as the Journey into Manhood (JiM) weekends (found at www.PeopleCanChange.com), a 48-hour immersion program of self-discovery, catharsis and emotional healing. I had read about JiM previously but dismissed it because of the price (and really my own lack of motivation to work at

overcoming my issues.) (But this time I went to my wife and told her I wanted to go. She said I could spend the money and go.

I went. My Journey began in earnest. G-d was answering my prayers. The day after that weekend, I had that one day of being straight that I prayed for so many years ago. And, my wife and I did not have sex that night. Sex has nothing to do with this! On the other hand, throughout the weekend, my self-esteem and self-image did a 180 degree turn: I recognized myself as a "man among men" and found myself believing in myself as a man created by G-d.

Since I could not find any Journey into Manhood grads to hang out with in my city, I started attending an open I-group of the Mankind Project (I-groups are weekly meetings following an experiential weekend). This process started filling some of my need for male friendship, affection and acceptance. When I was later initiated on one of their weekends, I "came out" as a person with unwanted SSA to the entire room of men, 98% of whom were straight, which was probably the most freeing thing I've ever done. I experienced true acceptance, affirmation, and approval as a man among straight men. They loved and accepted me just as I am. They did not attempt to convince me that I needed to accept a "gay-identity" nor that I should engage in behavior inconsistent with my religious value structure. (Such an open value-free attitude is perhaps somewhat unusual in this day and age but it was just what I needed.) But that experience was when the deeper healing began in earnest. It reinforced what I had experienced at JiM. I opened myself to those I had been initiated with, hoping they would not be merely "polite" to me. They were not polite. They affirmed and accepted me. I opened the door as wide as I could to let them into my heart and to let them know the authentic me.

I learned from these weekend programs that if I change my beliefs, I can change my reality. And, by doing so, I come across to others as a different person. I most graphically experienced this truth shortly after my Mankind initiation. My wife came home from work, came through the door, wrapped her arms around my neck and gave me an amazingly passionate kiss. She said, "You are the man I have always wanted". I had changed the way I carried myself. My outward demeanor had changed because my internal dynamics had likewise changed; she now saw me as a different person (as indeed I now also saw myself--I changed my beliefs and thus changed my reality.)

My emotional maturity had changed dramatically. (It had caught up with my chronological age.). In short, I stopped identifying myself as a "gay" man. I grew up and saw myself as a man like any other man. I stopped "being gay" because I started to believe in myself, and deliberately told myself, whether out loud or silently, that I was and am straight. When I stopped telling myself I was "gay", and anchored myself by telling myself I was indeed a straight man, something started clicking. I work out. I swim. I'm in shape. I look great. I'm handsome. All of these things are merely facts. And all of those facts were facts many months and even years ago when I still

thought of myself, and saw myself, as a victimized gay man. Being proud of my physical accomplishments has helped greatly. Being with men who love and accept me unconditionally has been huge ... this is a non-negotiable element of my healing. None of us can be healed if we aren't with men we trust, who know our issues, and love and accept us unconditionally. Going through PeopleCanChange's Journey into Manhood was when the fire lit this flame within me. Without it, I don't know if I could have come this far.

Am I healed? Yes, I am healed. I know this not by any measurement that another guy might insist that I take. By MY measurements, I'm healed.

Do I struggle? Yes, and I always will in one way or another. We all face challenges in our life. BUT, I no longer need or even seek to have sex with another guy. I don't need that any longer; truthfully, it never filled my needs! Indeed, I now understand that it wasn't ever possible for that (sex with another guy) to ever fill my needs. The greatest part of all of this is that I don't give a damn! This is a non-issue! If I see a guy who I find attractive, I just enjoy his attractiveness without beating the hell out of myself for noticing that he is attractive.

HERE'S THE BIGGEST ONE: I am no longer envious or jealous of other men. Because I no longer envy or am jealous of other men, I no longer sexualize them; nor do I seek to internalize or to bring within me what I used to perceive as their masculinity. My own masculinity is both adequate and enough. I do not need to feel envy or sexualize them because I now know that I am a man.

My best friend and buddy is OSA (Opposite Sex Attracted) and has always been so. He is extremely attractive, has an absolutely wonderful build, and is as masculine and as manly as any man can be. I used to be eaten alive with envy and jealousy of him. I no longer feel any envy toward him. I admire his body and his face and his wonderfully powerful manly qualities. I know that he sees me as a real guy, too. He sees me as a manly man. I love him now, like I have never loved him before, because I'm no longer envious of him. He is truly my brother. And, I believe he loves me even more now that I am feeling and demonstrating my confidence in my manhood.

I've never told him exactly what my struggle has been, but I believe with all my heart that he figured it out, and that his friendship was so strong that he decided to keep loving me unconditionally. When I wrapped my arms around him, he was wrapping his arms around me. When I gave him a healthy hug or kissed him on the neck or the cheek, he didn't pull away. When I told him that I loved him as my brother, he told me that he loved me, too.

YOU WILL NEVER GET WHAT YOU NEED WHILE BEING ALONE. Isolation is a harbinger of SSA. Homosexuality at its core is based upon relationship deficits. It can only be healed by healthy non-sexual relationships with other men. While alone time is important, SSA

IS A DISEASE OF THE HEART. It can only be healed by experiencing the love and acceptance of another man's heart (an OSA man), or at the very least, a mature SSA man with rock-solid boundaries.

The problem will only get worse if you fight it all by yourself. In my judgment, if you don't find an OSA guy to be real with, then you can forget about finding a way out of SSA. Probably the most important ingredient in getting healing is learning to trust an OSA man, letting him be your friend, and really believing that he loves and accepts you.

What I often need is to be held in a healthy, non-sexual way. When my OSA buddy hugs me and holds me in his arms, he transmits a healing energy into me that I can't get anywhere else. I have dreamt of him, but if those dreams start to get sexual, I stop him or myself from acting the least bit sexual. In a recent dream he kissed me and started to kiss me again, only with passion. I gently pushed him away and told him that we couldn't do that!!!!!! If that's not healing, I don't know what healing is! Even my dreams now have boundaries. That's it ... I have boundaries now and am able to honor those boundaries.

And, what about my relationship with my wife? I now have a complete marriage, my wife wants me and I want her. We make love... A LOT!!! And, it actually is passionate lovemaking, not simply sex. There is true intimacy and connection. The mere touch of her hand, some holding, some kissing, and I feel like an 18 year old boy (experiencing women for the first time) even though I am 59 years old. There is an interesting footnote to this story. Five years ago, before my healing, I came down with a bad case of erectile dysfunction. After a while even the expensive Cialis didn't work. I had to start giving myself penile injections to get an erection FOR MY WIFE, but strangely during my "gay identity" years, I was able to experience an erection for other guys. That has all changed!!! Today, I don't need a drug or an injection to get an erection for my wife, and as to other guys, I no longer get an erection for them.

But here's another struggle that has arisen since my healing which is proof in my mind that our form of sinning may change but we are all still a sinner. I occasionally see women out in public who may excite me; I hear myself say, "Damn, I would love to have her!" But that fleeting thought is as far as it goes and it certainly evidences the profound change within me.

So, how do you get started towards changing your sexual orientation?

Step 1: Get on your knees and do business with G-d. Beg. Plead. Demand. Threaten. Cry. Pound the floor. And then do it again and again and again. Believe in Him and agree to follow his commandments. Demand that G-d give you some relief before you die.

Step 2: Stop telling yourself you're gay. Stop beating yourself up every time you feel some SSA.

Step 3: Get help from people who have experienced some success.

Step 4: Take Action. Find straight male friends and hang out with them. Imitate them.

Step 5: Start seeing yourself as a complete, whole man.

Step 6: Get yourself in shape and start doing some "manly" things.

Step 7: Get a therapist who will help you drag all the B.S. out of your head and heart that your parents, childhood peers, or culture installed within you.

Step 8: Stop masturbating

Step 9: Stop looking at porn and masturbating

Step 10: Repeat numbers 1 through 9 over and over and over and over ... and then LIVE.

Notice, having sex is not one of the steps. Having marital sex is wonderful and highly recommended with a woman you love. But sex has nothing to do with being straight ... it's how you carry yourself INSIDE your head and heart that matters. Feelings, thoughts, and behaviors are changeable, but only if you make it a priority in your life.

Best regards on your Journey!

Bart