

I'm So Confused; Can I Really Change?

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[Introduction by JONAH's Co-Directors: This E-mail was received from an American teenage boy studying for one year at a Yeshiva in Israel. Jacob expresses his confusion over the mixed messages he has internalized from society and candidly sets forth the internal struggles that plague him as he determines what he should do about his same-sex attraction (SSA).]

I have done a lot of thinking since coming to Israel this year and came up with many conclusions after reading up on web sites like www.jonahweb.org and www.peoplecanchange.com. My most amazing conclusion is that I agree 100% with what these sites have written.

When I asked Elaine Berk at JONAH about how I can develop into a healthy straight male because I experience Same Sex Attraction (SSA), she replied that SSA was not really about sex, but rather about an emotional need to feel in an authentic way and to receive affirmation and acceptance from other males. She also stated it represents an unfilled need to feel more secure in my own sense of masculinity. After doing the necessary reading she suggested, I realized my normal emotional needs for masculine bonding had indeed become sexualized. Why? Because I was looking for something I thought I couldn't find in myself and that I hadn't received adequate affirmation and approval from my dad nor from other boys during my childhood.

Being that my dad neglected me and my brother abused me, I didn't have appropriate male role models and friends around me, so it makes all the more sense that I would want to view men in a sexual way. I also felt I wasn't worthy of receiving masculine attention, approval, affirmation, or love in any other way. I used to blame myself and believe that I had done something wrong or that I was "less than" (or inferior to) other boys and men. I got sick and tired of those beliefs but in my confusion I started to believe these messages and others of our secular society (which were repeated by the media and the gay activists) that I was born gay and cannot change. Further, they tell me that I am a person who is defined by my sexual urges, and finally, that I should be proud of sexual orientation toward other men and enjoy the experience of sex with other men.

I'm still having trouble getting away from these kinds of messages that the media, the schools and most people keep repeating. I'm hooked onto believing there's an easy way out (that is, give into these urges and go with the flow of society) rather than having to work on myself, understanding the origins of my issues, and changing the way I respond to life's events. I

learned from the reading materials on the JONAH site and other web sites that Elaine directed me to, that I can change and that I don't need to give into my initial feelings/responses nor to the gay affirming messages which only appear to be an easy way out.

My therapist helped me put the pieces together of my confused feelings, rather than reinforcing the false belief system that this is the way I was born. I therefore began to reevaluate my entire life. One of the first things I confronted (first in my head and then in my heart) was something that evolved into a major internal conflict: should I really try to change myself or should I simply give in to my confusion and act upon the messages of promiscuity that society keeps feeding me? Which course of action would give me maximum pleasure? Which course of action would be true to my internal belief system? Though I was terribly conflicted, I realized that by giving in to my confused feelings, I wouldn't get what I'm truly looking for: a life in which I could be at peace with my moral values and at the same time lead the kind of life where a man can gain a sense of completion by living his life with his "bershert", a woman who is meant for him.

I believe the reason why homosexuals have so many partners is that they hope to take in the masculinity they feel they lack. But two things happen: (1) The same sex partner can rarely, if ever, fulfill their deepest emotional needs, and (2) because of that simple fact, their relationships rarely last. Thus, the cycle of finding new partners becomes endless. It can easily become an addiction - similar to many other addictions. On the other hand, I also realized I can't just go ahead and run into a relationship with a woman and everything will be OK. I need to do the difficult internal work that will enable me to clarify the unmet emotional needs that I am constantly seeking to fulfill. Not doing this ultimately rewarding work is why there are so many people who remain confused and in the process come to the conclusion that they're really homosexual. Whether for lack of courage or simply by buying into the "politically correct" messages of gay affirmation, these people never engage in (or begin and then abandon) the tough work that could alleviate the emotional damage they previously experienced and is directing their lives. (We constantly hear stories that such therapy can damage people or that it doesn't work, etc., but these stories are just that: stories.) Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that any counseling will work but we know it has worked for thousands of people.

As someone who has chosen to attend a Yeshiva, I realized I want to lead a religious lifestyle and part of that lifestyle involves marrying a person of the opposite sex and building a family. I also recognize that our religion gives us tools to learn how to be happy within ourselves. With these motivations, I have determined to get help in order to regain my innate masculinity, as G-d intended, and, in the process, rebuild myself as a man who can be authentic and comfortable in masculine settings without craving sex from these other men. I want to be happy around

other men, rather than envy them and then sexualize them. I do not wish to think sexual thoughts of other men; instead I seek to enjoy a healthy heterosexual relationship and be able to bond with other men in a non-sexual way. I now believe this will occur through efforts to empower me and to build up strength within my inner self.

So, to accomplish all this, I need to not simply rush to find a woman (who I would be misleading if I do not complete the work I need to do.) I likewise need to try to ignore both the media and the cultural messages that I have no choice about the way I live my life.

Where do I start? I need help to get me away from the untrue myths preached by society and the media. I need to be involved with the truth. While the words "born that way" and "you can't change" are stuck in my head, at the same time I know I can change. Being able to change is not an overnight process; it is not taking a magic pill that will cure us. In fact, it's so difficult that I often feel discouraged and tired as I engage in the process. However, within me, I recognize some truths: Every man has an inner need to be a man and every woman has an inner need to be a woman, no matter what messages we hear to the contrary. But often these contrary messages overwhelm me, so I need help motivating me to find the real me. I also need help to take off the pressure, stress and sick feelings within me that accompany the confusions brought on by hearing such messages. These are the reasons I am now convinced that organizations like Jonah are so critically needed in our messed up world and why they can help guide me to getting back to my true self.