

I Needed to Feel Like One of the Boys

By "Jack Yosef"

On Sunday evening (April 2009), I returned from a Journey Into Manhood weekend that is strongly recommended by JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality) to all of its participants.

It was possibly the most powerful, thought provoking, authentic weekend of my life.

At the JiM weekend I had an opportunity, for the first time, and in a totally safe environment, to be utterly authentic with myself and with others. I allowed myself to be emotionally open, perhaps for the first time in my adult life. It was so powerful for me to tear down, piece by piece, the defensive walls I had built to protect my inner child from the core wounds I internalized in childhood.

Each of the processes at the weekend chopped away at the walls and ultimately I was able to knock down these defensive walls which I had built up over many years; it allowed me to return to my golden true self, my authentic inner core.

I realized for the first time I am completely normal, and my suffering is only because of factors in my childhood for which I was not responsible nor did I have the ability to control. I realized that I did not feel in control of my life, nor was I the man I wanted to be.

For me, the greatest thing I learned from JiM was self awareness. The lessons I internalized from the weekend allowed me to finally understand why I acted out. I needed a deep connection with men, but no amount of sex with men would ever achieve that, because in same-sex sex, I was projecting, not connecting. The only thing that brings the connection I truly crave is genuine, authentic non-sexual interaction with men.

I needed to feel like one of the boys, and needed to align how I see men with how I see myself. If my sense of self and my concept of what constitutes masculinity are in alignment, my need to seek out my sense of masculinity through others dissipates.

In many ways, I realize now that I saw men as emotionless, distant, and lacking in common sense, something I did not wish to be. I saw myself as the opposite of other men, but now, and only now, can I begin to realize that men can authentically express emotion without sex, can feel closeness to other men without sexualizing it, and can function with a sensitivity and intuitiveness that permits authentic connection.

My concepts of who I am and how I see other men are becoming more and more congruent. I am now finally able to start aligning my feelings about myself with how I feel about other men.

Another important realization I gained from the weekend is how I am attracted to the projection of what I want myself to be, and once I realize that, the sexual attraction fades. At the beginning of the weekend, I felt attracted to so many of the participants, and by the end, not even one of them. As I got to know them as real people and not as a projection of who I visualized them to be, I found myself authentically bonding with them in a healthy, non-sexual way. What a change from the mentality I found in the gay world.

Deep emotional breakthroughs are often experienced, and participants are able to affirm their inherent value as men, just as they are. JiM weekends are open to any man who experiences UNWANTED same-sex fantasies, arousals, identity, and/or behaviors. It is non-denominational. (Men of every race and religion are welcome). Orthodox Jewish practices are respected and taken into account by the originators of the weekend and may be practiced during the weekends.