

## **One JONAH Struggler's Thoughts on the Gay Pride Events in Jerusalem**

*Written by Akiva*

(Posted July, 2012)

The planned 2006 Gay Pride march in Jerusalem – whether it takes place or not - is, no doubt, triggering a number of reactions in the Jewish world. But while most discussions revolve around national and religious issues, some of us are affected on a far more personal level. For those of us who are dealing with homosexual desires, this march represents a major crossroad in our lives.

On one hand, we can continue with unanswered questions, double lives, and feelings of emptiness as we feel left behind while everyone else seems to be finding their lifepartners and settling down. Or, alternatively, we can ‘come out’ and join the parade. We can embrace - and hopefully be embraced by – the Gay Community.

To some, the choice may seem obvious. The march seems to offer so much: Glitz, glamour, freedom, liberalism, an accepting community, etc. But, remember all that glitters is not gold. I am not certain that it can fulfill all its promises. So, don’t make any hasty decisions – just because the ‘circus has come to town’. Don’t get caught up in the event or make bold ‘coming out’ announcements. Waving rainbow flags on national TV with thousands of others will definitely provide a sense of camaraderie, but what happens after the parade, when everyone goes home?

Those of us who have this struggle owe it to ourselves to investigate all options before making decisions that could affect our entire lives, and contrary to what the Gay Movement would have us believe, other options are available. Unfortunately, many of these options have been belittled and stigmatized. The Gay Movement is very quick to cite ineffective or inhumane treatments of the past, such as exposing homosexual men to gay pornography and then giving them electrical shocks, or advising them to snap themselves with an elastic band every time they had a homosexual thought. Even if these techniques were once considered a cure for homosexuality, they are no longer.

Today therapists have a far deeper insight into the root causes of homosexuality, and it is at this deeper level that they focus. When I started reading about their theories and insights, and the life stories of people they were helping, I was amazed. It was as though they had summarized my life into a book. I realized there must be a classic pattern to the causes of same-sex attractions (SSA), and it seemed they understood these well.

Here are a few things that I wish I had been told when I first started my search: First, you will often see the term “Reparative Therapy”. This is quite an unfortunate term, as it seems to imply

that these therapists feel we are broken and need to be fixed. Don't be put off by this. Once I understood the reasoning and explanation for the term's use, a light went on. The term refers to a therapeutic approach that is based on something called a "Reparative Drive": Part of developing our masculinity is building healthy bonds with other men – particularly our fathers and same-sex peers – but for some of us, for whatever reason, this did not happen early on in childhood. So in an attempt to repair these unmet needs for attention, affection and approval from other men, we develop same-sex attractions. Reparative Therapy focuses on pinpointing the initial factors that prevented these bonds from developing naturally, dealing with these factors, then helping us develop these bonds and bringing out other important qualities that have gone underdeveloped.

This brings me to my second point. From my personal experience, very little of the therapy is actually focused on the same-sex attractions. Rather it focuses on a number of underlying issues that, when dealt with, would improve our ability to live healthy and productive lives. These include: building better bonds with men; developing healthier relationships with our parents; feeling better about ourselves, our bodies, and our insecurities; building confidence and assertiveness; taking healthy risks; participating in physical activities, going to the gym and developing our bodies; learning how to deal with stress, anger and rejection; identifying stress triggers that arouse same-sex attractions or lead us to act out; dealing with our unhealthy pornography and sex addictions. Wouldn't anyone benefit from growing in these areas, whether they have SSA or not? And, even if the therapy did not resolve all our same-sex attraction issues, in any event, the benefit derived in overall personality growth would, I'm sure, be more than worthwhile.

You'll notice that I used the words "same-sex attraction" or "SSA". You'll see it used pretty often in the literature. Initially, I was quite cynical of this terminology. Why not just say "gay"? That's what it means, right? But, if SSA and GAY were one and the same, then why not talk about the "Same-Sex Attraction March" or celebrating "Same-Sex Attraction Pride"? The term SSA refers to only one particular aspect of our lives, while using the term "gay" implies a total identity, one that encompasses our whole existence. "Gay" says this is us and defines us. As freeing as it may be to some to come out as gay, it felt even more freeing to me when I realized that I did not have to base my entire life's journey on these attractions nor to totally define myself by such an identity.

The final important point I think anyone should know before investigating these options is that there are few clear, definitive answers upon which everyone agrees. One study says one thing, another says the opposite, and there's considerable mudslinging between the proponents of the two. Sometimes, you'll hear about someone who no longer experiences SSA and is now married or involved in a fulfilling heterosexual relationship, while at other times, you'll hear that the best one can hope for is leading a fulfilling celibate life.

Even if there are people out there with definitive answers, it takes considerable time and effort to start trusting the process and to find a therapist and therapeutic route that would work best for you and your individual challenges. It's a process with ups and downs. Often the end point may not be clear and indeed the end point may differ for different people. Some will be able to substantially reduce their SSA and develop opposite-sex attractions (OSA), while for others this won't be possible. The important point here is to not expect to find someone who can sprinkle a little 'antifaerie dust' on you, and make all your problems go away. That is simply unrealistic. Once you've done some research, you'll know what's possible and what's involved, and you will be able to make a far more informed decision. You can then decide how you would like to deal with this, and whether this is something that you want to deal with.

Although it doesn't necessarily have to, once we set out on a process of change, it tends to occupy much of our thoughts and energy. If you're working on growth in other areas of life and seeing progress, then this progress may be good enough for the moment. If, on the other hand, life is getting you down and out of desperation you feel about ready to take up that rainbow flag as an apparent answer, then it may be time to start investigating these other options.

Also, if you're in Israel – even if you originally came to support the 2006 Gay Pride events – you should be aware of and take advantage of the resources available here. Many come to Israel to “find themselves”. Israel is geared towards people who are soul searching and are on their own personal growth paths. There are rabbis and therapists who specialize in this area. There are support groups for people who are struggling with the same issues. Contact the people who run the JONAH website and they can put you in touch with local therapists who specialize in this issue in Israel and many other parts of the world.

There is certainly a huge difference between coming out to the world as being gay or sharing one's struggle with a few trusted people who may be able to listen, advise and guide us and with whom we can build deep long lasting healthy relationships. Sharing this struggle with others is scary and risky, but I have found the rewards to be ten-fold. At the end of the day, the decision is yours. Everyone you speak to will have their own opinions, issues, prejudices, and motives. You need to make sure that the choices you make are right for you, remembering that they will affect your life not only today, but tomorrow as well. Don't make your decisions out of frustration or impulsivity, but rather make them rationally and knowledgeably. I wish you much luck and success on your journey.