

# Jonah's Psycho-Educational Model For Healing Homosexuality

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**JONAH, Jews offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality, is the first organization dedicated to educating the world-wide Jewish community about the prevention, intervention, and healing of the issues surrounding homosexuality.**

*"I continue to be amazed at what I experienced. The kindness, compassion and love from each man was apparent. All of them courageous - choosing to fight this battle. I can honestly say I slaughtered several of the demons inside of me which have been blocking my growth for years. I know that I am a different person now. I feel different. I think differently and one of the guys even told me that I look different. I am so certain that this battle can not only be fought but won."*

**(Response of a JONAH member after attending a Journey into Manhood Weekend, as reported on the JONAH @ shamash listserv.)**

*"I will be doing some mundane chore when I'll bust up laughing because I know I'm a man! This is such a powerful thing for me to realize. It's what I've lusted for in others for so long, and I now I have it myself. This is so-o-o cool! I am a man among men. NEVER did I think I could say that, or know it in the core of my being, but I'm there ... and I LOVE IT! I welcome it and own it, and feel it."*

**(Response of a JONAH member after attending a New Warrior Training Adventure Weekend, as reported on the JONAH @ shamash listserv.)**

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The above quotes are representative of similar sentiments expressed by our members who have participated in the gender-affirming processes ("GAP") espoused by JONAH.

Gender empowerment, rather than homosexuality or androgyny, is the ideal we seek, and although we are a relatively new organization, we believe that the results demonstrated by our members should be shared with the therapeutic community. We believe our experiences are not only replicable, but will help others gain new insights and tools to help their clients.

While JONAH works closely with other religious and secular groups which share our viewpoint that same-sex attraction (SSA) is treatable through a strategy of inner healing for those who are motivated to change, we are

developing our own comprehensive psycho-educational healing strategy. We believe our model holds great promise for achieving the healing desired by our members or others who utilize it.

Although Dr. Joseph Nicolosi has written about a number of these therapeutic procedures in *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, and others have spoken about them at NARTH conferences, we have been fortunate to see how these strategies effectively interact when used as part of a comprehensive plan of healing SSA.

This holistic strategy of combining elements from several gender-affirming processes ("GAP": a program designed to fill in the developmental gaps) has been praised by our members who noted a synergistic effect which in turn resulted in an acceleration of their healing. When these various aspects of the healing model are combined, particularly when compared to those who only received individual private therapy, we found a marked difference in the ability of the struggler to achieve changes in identity, behavior, arousals, and fantasies.

In fact, the experiential, spiritual and emotional work done by the client outside of the therapist's office was reported to be critically important to implement the cognitive understandings he may receive during the therapy session. However, even at the cognitive level, a variety of additional resources (such as bibliotherapy or participation in support groups, whether in-person, teleconferenced, or e-groups) accelerated the recovery of the client.

This holistic approach to intervention resulted in accessing a member's inner drives, dismantling his defenses, intensifying his affective involvement in the treatment, identifying the transference patterns and projections as they arise, and unlocking the unconsciousness. Analogous to certain aspects of Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy (ISTDP), as developed by Habib Davanloo and Patricia Coughlin Della Selva, this approach appears to shorten the time frame needed for a client to achieve an enduring change for his unwanted same-sex attractions.

Impressive progress in overcoming same-sex attractions and regaining masculine identity has been reported by several of our participating male members. (A separate article will report on which healing strategies our women members found most effective.) Since motivation is a key element in what traditionally has been a relatively long treatment process for healing SSA, the measurable and attainable progress as occurs within this "gap" approach is critical in



sustaining the perseverance needed to continue the process.

The gender-affirming process is completed when a man comes to own his masculine power and takes his place as an equal in the world of men.

To encourage therapists and faith-based ministries to utilize these multiple healing strategies when treating men with homosexual attractions, we are providing brief descriptions of several facets of JONAH's gender affirming process for healing. For more detailed information, please feel free to contact our organization. For the purposes of this discussion, we have listed our healing strategies in alphabetical order:

- Bibliotherapy
- Experiential Healing Weekends
- Healing of the Family System
- Individual Psychotherapy
- Jewish Spiritual Development
- Masculinity Development and Empowerment
- Mentoring
- Networking, Support Groups, Daily Internet E-Mail
- Listserv
- Overcoming Shame and Narcissism
- Receiving Healthy Touch and Affection

We'd like to explain that through our intake interviews, we were dismayed to find several clients who had either been in therapy for SSA for several years or who had participated in certain programs of other faith-based ministries but had no idea about the wealth of resources available.

All too often we found clients who were never informed about books which could help them understand the origins of their feelings or from which they could learn how others healed from many of the same wounds which precipitated their same-sex attraction. We also found a lack of knowledge about helpful websites, group support meetings, and mentoring programs. Most of them never participated in the experiential weekends nor did they even know of their existence.

In other cases, many religiously observant clients maintained an erroneous belief that faith *alone*, without any psychological assistance, would bring about the desired healing. Our observation is that in these cases, all too often, simply a repression of behavior occurred without an effective treatment of fantasies or arousals.

We were surprised to learn from many of our members that numerous therapists (a) never informed them about available resources outside the therapy session nor (b) provided any encouragement to participate in those activities. Our experience has shown that strugglers experience an exponential leap forward when they use our psycho-educational model as a check list to assure themselves that

they are doing everything possible to accelerate the healing process.

## 1. Bibliotherapy

As Dr. Joseph Nicolosi points out in his book, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach* (p.204), the therapeutic utilization of books, reading materials, tapes, video cassettes and other educational sources permits the individual struggling with SSA to gain several beneficial insights. These include:

- The knowledge gained from biographical information of recovered homosexuals lends credence to their own struggle and prospects for recovery. Our members are inspired when they can relate their own experiences to those who have successfully resolved the underlying emotional issues which cause SSA and this simultaneously lessens the concern that they are alone in their struggle.
- Reading material enables the individual to understand the causes, the healing strategies, and the basics of reparative therapy, thereby enabling them to apply this newfound knowledge to their own situation.
- Finally, as Nicolosi says, bibliotherapy can offset the "demoralizing confusion created by gay propaganda and the popular media of our culture" (p. 204).

JONAH has found that reading about the issues underlying same-sex attractions is a vital part of the healing process. In fact, we not only encourage our members to read extensively about the subject but we also recommend that spouses, siblings, and parents read the same materials. Families need to be brought into the healing process, an approach strongly advocated by psychotherapist Richard Cohen in his book *Coming Out Straight: Understanding and Healing Homosexuality*.

Often members report that they saw parts of themselves portrayed in the literature. Book discussions occur within the JONAH support groups as well as on the daily E-mail listserv. Some members who discussed these materials with their therapist reported that the literature provided their therapist with an opportunity to help the struggler dig deeper into his issues.

JONAH has a Book Order section on our web site [www.Jonahweb.org] which lists many recommended books and permits the viewer to order the book directly through our site.

## 2. Experiential Healing Weekends

JONAH refers our members to several experiential weekends, some of which contain a generic spiritual component involving a Higher Power unconnected to any particular religion. (Ultimately we hope to develop an experiential



weekend specifically incorporating certain Jewish motifs.)

Weekends consist of discussions, psychodrama, journaling, and individual "drills" which enable participants to reach feelings not usually accessible in the short time frame of the typical therapeutic session.

The most popular and effective programs, as reported by our members, are three complimentary and synergistic weekends listed here:

- Journey into Manhood (web site: [peoplecanchange.com](http://peoplecanchange.com))
- New Warrior Training Adventure (web site: [mkp.org](http://mkp.org))
- Love, Sex, & Intimacy Seminars (web site: [gaytostraight.org](http://gaytostraight.org)).

Describing the objectives and methodology of one of these weekend programs will illustrate why they are so effective. For example, here is a description of The Journey into Manhood weekend, principally designed by Richard Wyler of [Peoplecanchange.com](http://Peoplecanchange.com), together with David Matheson, an associate of Dr. Joseph Nicolosi. The objective of the Journey Into Manhood is to provide—

"an experiential weekend for men who experience unwanted homosexual feelings and are sincerely self-motivated to work to lessen homosexuality identity, attractions, and behaviors and to increase masculine identity and desires. The training is designed to teach these men, through words and processes, that mature heterosexual masculinity can be achieved through authenticity (or internal integrity), need fulfillment, masculine identity, and male bonding." (Peoplecanchange Journey into Manhood Protocol)

These objectives are accomplished by challenging men to examine their beliefs, perceptions and judgments about themselves and others that may be producing a sense of gender inferiority. They experience trusting and bonding with other men in non-sexual ways, and process deep feelings related to their pasts, themselves and their relationships with others. There is at least an initial release of those feelings that may be blocking growth into heterosexual masculinity as they become ready to embrace a new way of seeing themselves and of being in the world, particularly in the world of men.

As shown in the quotes set forth at the beginning of this paper, men return from these weekends nearly euphoric from the experience of accessing their inherent masculine power. For some, this is the first time in their lives they could sense ownership of their own masculinity and deal with deep personal issues (such as same-sex peer wounds, mother wounds, or father wounds) in a safe, supportive environment which encourages them to break down destructive behavior patterns to which they had clung for many years. These concentrated and intense emotional experiences yield significant results and give hope to many.

Additionally, our members report that when they become sufficiently comfortable in the New Warriors' community of men and have an opportunity to staff a weekend, they find the experience to be even more powerful than the initial weekend because of the leadership role they are able to assume.

### 3. Healing of the Family System

JONAH believes that homosexuality frequently can be viewed as a family system problem, not just an individual problem. When parents, in particular, can become a part of the healing process, it is extremely beneficial to the whole family system. Often, parents inadvertently contributed to the development of their child's SSA. Much has to do with the child's perception of the relationship between him and his mother and father. Once the parents understand the sources of their child's problem, we have found that many are able to assist their child in the developmental growth process required to overcome the condition.

Even when parents cannot be brought into the healing process because of physical or emotional abuse, extreme neglect, or emotional incapacity, there are siblings, extended family, or close family friends who can participate. Sometimes, just to openly discuss the issues with close family or friends brings immeasurable relief to an overcomer who has kept this part of his being hidden for so many years.

We encourage our members to openly discuss their issues with family members and to provide educational material to those in their "circle" who are willing to learn about the underpinnings of homosexual attractions. Several of our members have attended, together with the families, the Love, Sex, and Intimacy Seminars given by Richard Cohen of the International Healing Foundation. In doing so, they reported experiences which enabled them either to begin or to accelerate the process of peeling back their own defensive detachment from their father figure, untangling their mother enmeshment issues, and repairing the fractured relationships with siblings and other family members.

For those who are married, we often find that the struggler was leading a double life. Most wives who are informed of the homosexual condition by their husbands (which we strongly encourage) respond favorably and perform a major role in the healing process. Again, couples who have attended the Love, Sex, and Intimacy Seminars and utilize appropriately trained reparative therapists for couples therapy in their follow-up work, reported favorable results.

Today's politically correct notion that homosexuality is merely an alternative lifestyle can complicate the healing process, particularly when the family member or spouse incorrectly believes the struggler was born that way or has a so-called "gay gene." **Therefore, we must redouble our efforts to educate the entire community that homosexuality is a treatable condition.**



Elizabeth Moberly expressed the importance of family in treating the homosexual condition. In a 1985 lecture given to the Royal Society of Health, she said, "The homosexual condition – although often an occasion for sexual expression – is in itself a state of unfulfilled developmental needs. For this reason, homosexuality may best be evaluated, not by comparison with sexuality in general, but by comparison with the parent-child relationship and facilitating of human maturation."

JONAH recognizes that support groups (for spouses, parents, family, and friends of those wishing to heal from SSA) are critical to the struggler's healing. Each group faces unique problems as they confront past issues which may have led to their loved one's homosexual attractions, and as their loved one accomplishes the human maturation Moberly spoke about.

#### 4. Individual Psychotherapy

JONAH wishes to make clear that we only work with members who either seek to grow out of their same-sex attractions or are ambivalent about them. Should prospective members request to become more comfortable with their homosexual attractions or with the gay lifestyle, we will refer them elsewhere and make no value judgments about their choice.

However, for those who seek assistance, JONAH maintains a global referral list of therapists, both for in-person therapy and for phone therapy. Therefore JONAH is always seeking therapists who agree with and are skilled in reparative and directive therapy and will adopt the gender-affirming healing processes advocated by JONAH. Those who are interested in being part of our referral service should call (201) 433-3444 and leave a message.

We believe that the type of therapist who can best help these men is not the classical emotionally-detached therapist. Such therapy, in the words of NARTH co-founder Joseph Nicolosi, "reactivates memories of earlier frustration from the cold and distant father." (*Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, p.20) Nicolosi continues: "Withholding personal involvement merely frustrates the homosexual client, who particularly needs intimate male connectedness, and whose healing comes primarily through the therapeutic relationship."

We believe that gender identity determines sexual orientation and that one sexualizes or eroticizes that with which he does not identify. To successfully treat someone with a homosexual condition, our experience shows that a directive and activist therapy program is critical in assisting a client to internalize his gender identity, demystify his romantic attractions to the same sex, and satisfy his unmet developmental needs for attention, affection, and approval from others of the same gender **without sexualizing these needs.**

#### 5. Jewish Spiritual Development

Although JONAH is an outreach organization that works with all Jews, from the strictly observant Orthodox to the most secular of Jews, we stress certain aspects of our religious teachings. We blend lessons from the Torah (what Christians refer to as the Old Testament) with other Jewish sources in order to help individuals access their inner souls and thus recapture their G-d given inherent heterosexuality.

Part of the reason for this emphasis is to provide the person struggling with SSA with the ability to distinguish a moral right from a moral wrong in today's culture war. The Torah's eternal values integrate the principles of deferred gratification and the exercise of restraint in sexual activity into the human psyche. In doing so, we note how this view is antithetical to today's prevalent moral relativism in which the only factor to restrain human behavior is mutual consent. Simply stated, this attitude can be summed up as follows: "If two or more consenting adults want to \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank), then no one else need be concerned."

When we understand that the homosexual cohabitation prohibited by Lev.18.22 and explained in the Talmud (Nedarim 51a) is a mistaken response to an unfilled emotional need, we are able to remove an oppressive guilt from the person who was mistakenly led (most often by forces initially beyond his/her control) into such activity.

By understanding the root causes, and the unfilled needs for which the behavior (or fantasy) attempts to compensate, a program of remediation becomes achievable. We find it is helpful to employ a combination of both the Jewish concept of "teshuvah" (a process of transforming one's inner being, commonly translated as "return" or "repentance") and the secular understandings of gender affirming therapies.

Jewish law creates a delicate balancing act: accepting the individual as a human being who deserves love and compassion, but rejecting the homosexual activity in which he/she may participate. But this "love the person but not the behavior" principle is equally true of any illicit sexual behavior, whether it be heterosexual or homosexual. For example, we accept the community philanderer as a person but disapprove of his/her sexual brokenness. It is incumbent upon the community to understand the mentality and inner development of the persons who perpetrate the act and find a way to assist them in their healing.

JONAH makes special efforts to reach the Jewish community through synagogues and the large network of Jewish organizations in order to spread this message of hope and healing.

#### 6. Masculinity Development and Empowerment



True healing requires a resumption of the journey into manhood. The boy who physically grew into an adult male but missed out on certain developmental stages will need to go through them now. Nicolosi points out, for example, that the pre-homosexual boy who missed out on rough and tumble play with his father and, later, did not take part in the physical competitions characteristic of his age, often ended up removing himself from such competition and thereby diminished his own sense of masculinity (*Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, p. 193).

To help SSA individuals take ownership of their G-d given masculinity is a formidable task, but we at JONAH have developed several tactics to assist in this regard. The person with same-sex attraction must learn how to experience trust and how to bond with other men in non-sexual ways. As discussed in the experiential weekend strategy section, The New Warrior Training Adventure (or the Sterling Men's Group) is particularly helpful in this regard.

To illustrate a program employed to assist men with their masculine development, it is useful to cite the two-hour sports activity we developed following each support group.

Men who are not able to attend our group meetings find that having a coach or a friend teach them a team sport, such as baseball or basketball, is also invaluable in developing their masculine identity. We do not seek to make any of these men into athletic stars but rather use this exercise to reinforce their connection to other men. They are doing things that men do. In the process, they discover their own masculine strength.

Since masculinity is connected to the use of the body, when men are not using their body, they often disconnect from it. Playing sports heals the disconnection with body from which our members suffer. Members report that playing sports and learning the skills helped them heal that disconnection while simultaneously increasing their sense of masculinity. As David Matheson, an associate of Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, said to one of his clients who is also a member of JONAH, "Doing something you think you can't do is empowering. Gaining mastery over fear, ineptitude, and inadequacy is empowering."

In addition, playing sports helps our members overcome the problem of passivity. Men learn that "the ball is not going to come to them" unless they are in a position to catch it. Healing from SSA will not happen unless the person does the work required to overcome it.

There is another aspect of engaging in sports activities as part of the strategy of resuming the growth into manhood. Many of our members report that their fear of sports stemmed from early childhood same-sex peer wounds and that learning how to play sports in a safe environment per-

mitted them to overcome these wounds. They found themselves able to bond with other men, many for the first time in their lives.

## 7. Mentoring

Individuals trying to heal from SSA need role models and guidance from heterosexuals of the same sex in order to heal the wounds caused by defensive detachment from the same-sex parent and peers. If the struggler is lucky enough to have parents willing and able to help, and if he is able to reconnect with the same-sex parent, this is the obvious first choice for a mentor. For those whose parents are unavailable, mentors can be sought from among clergy, teachers, members of social groups to which the struggler belongs or any other appropriate group. Some of our members report that the New Warrior experience (or the Sterling Men's group, a similar organization) provided them with a mentor with whom they could bond.

The importance of healthy male-to-male mentoring cannot be emphasized enough. The mentor is the role model that takes the mystery out of masculinity and supports the struggler's journey to his own masculine power.

Closely related is the need for same-sex non-sexual friendships. Nicolosi speaks of the importance of this relationship when he stated, "same-sex friendships have shown themselves to be therapeutic" (p.194). These friendships come both from other men in recovery and from men who never had SSA.

## 8. Networking, Support Groups, Daily Internet E-Mail Listserv.

**Networking:** Leaving behind one's same-sex attraction and achieving heterosexual attraction can be a long and difficult struggle. Essentially our gender-affirming process enables members to create a totally new support structure in many different facets of their lives.

Before finding our group, these strugglers often felt isolated and alone in their struggle. Alternatively, they felt that the gay lifestyle provided them with a circle of friends they could never find in the "straight" world. Thus, to create a feeling of belonging, we believe it is critical for our members to network with others in the process of recovery or with those who have completed their journey to gender wholeness (often through the group support meetings, the daily E-mail listserv, mentoring or networking).

Members report that fellow journeyers on the road to recovery help them by sharing experiences, understanding their fears, and providing accountability and support. The benefits are immeasurable. The group support sessions and the daily E-mail listserv provide methods to make the



connections so that strugglers can bond with others sharing similar concerns.

Although some therapists believe networking between those in recovery to be risky, Nicolosi encourages individuals within his support groups to network with each other outside the group sessions. Within the JONAH support network, to date we have never had a sexual liaison take place between our members. Instead we find the members provide each other with a social camaraderie that clearly outweighs any perceived risks. Our experience is thus similar to other self-help groups, where affected individuals assist others who have not progressed as far as the person providing the assistance.

The person who was active in the gay lifestyle often found a sense of belonging among other gays which overcame his sense of alienation and loneliness. We believe that the therapist who works individually with his patient and who does not recommend getting involved in group support and networking is doing his client a disservice. Our observation is that strugglers leap forward when they maintain communication with others who have healed or are in the process of healing from SSA, and establish relationships with empathetic mentors--- some in the process of recovery and others who have never had an SSA problem.

An interesting footnote to this process is the fact that many of our members who begin to help others heal found that they were able to strengthen their own healing process. Many have reported a greater sense of self-confidence and affirmation of their own value because their own past experiences helped others heal. In a spiritual sense, they felt good about the ability to perform the "mitzvah" (commandment) of helping others.

In addition to networking, our member support groups and daily E-mail listserv are additional tools to accomplish this goal.

**Men's Support Groups:** JONAH's men's support groups run weekly or bi-weekly for approximately 2 hours with discussions being led by facilitators who are well-versed in the issues involved in healing homosexuality. Our goal is to increase the number of groups for men (and parenthetically to do the same for women and family members).

For men who do not live near the three groups currently operating (See "more about JONAH" at the end of this article for group locations), we initially arranged teleconferencing into our in-person support groups. We found, however, that these combined groups were not as effective as unmixed in-person or teleconferenced groups. By separating the groups, we found that each group standing by itself can better maximize interpersonal relationships and significantly reduce the isolation and loneliness of the members. Teleconference support groups presently operate.

**Daily Internet E-Mail Listserv:** Men and woman from six different countries post messages on a private confidential JONAH listserv (hosted by Shamash.org, a service of the Hebrew College) and report how welcome they feel in our ever-growing healing community. Postings range from loving support of another's personal struggle to deep discussions on issues directly relevant to SSA.

The Daily E-Mail Listserv is an excellent method to reach strugglers with special needs: those in geographically isolated locations; those unable to afford private therapy; those who have just learned that a healing process for SSA is possible and seek to learn more about the "GAP" process; those who require daily support in their struggle.

## 9. Overcoming Shame and Narcissism

Special mention should be made of four interrelated underlying issues which some therapists have identified as pivotal to healing homosexuality but which traditional therapy has somewhat ignored. They are shame, narcissism, guilt, and grieving. Each of these issues contributed to the homosexual condition and each of our strategies has a component which addresses certain aspects of these issues.

Overcoming shame has become a major focus of faith-based groups dedicated to helping men heal from homosexuality. Phrases such as "coming out of shame" or "going past your shame" are consistently utilized by these groups when they develop their healing strategies. They have intuitively understood that shame underlies much of SSA.

According to therapist Andrew Morrison, "Because shame is so often unspoken, many therapists have not appreciated its importance in analytic and therapeutic work. Frequently it is hidden behind the clearly defensive manifestations of distress, and these are usually investigated alone - often from the perspective of intrapsychic conflict and related dynamics - without appreciation of the underlying or accompanying shame." (See, "*Shame, the Underside of Narcissism*" pg. 5.)

A key to appropriate treatment, according to Morrison, is the relationship narcissism bears to shame, for he believes that "shame, in some form, is always present in narcissism and its various manifestations."

Gay activists preach that the way to overcome the issue of shame is to come out of the closet and loudly proclaim and affirm one's gayness. However, we believe there is another and preferred door leading from the closet of homosexuality. It is the door of healing - a healing which recognizes the shame and how it relates to the narcissism which underlies homosexuality.

Richard Fitzgibbons recognizes that "narcissism is a very



powerful disorder that fuels the homosexual behavior in many people. This personality weakness is not easily overcome because of the reluctance to give up a life of unchecked, irresponsible self-indulgence." When the therapist properly treats shame and narcissism (and when its recognition and overcoming is encouraged through support groups and networking), then a person's healing can progress. Fitzgibbons points out that when narcissism is not treated, "this clinical disorder is the major reason for failure in recovery from homosexuality." (See, *The Truth About Homosexuality* by Father John Harvey, Appendix I, by Fitzgibbons.)

Our experience has been that as men look at the circumstances in which they found themselves during the process of growing up, they come to realize that they adopted a False Self (often originating from the "good little boy" syndrome) in order to cope with their situation. Much of the struggler's life was spent seeking a way to gain approval from others or trying to gratify and please.

In childhood, these men erected emotional barriers or walls which protected them from what they perceived as a harsh and unfriendly world. When they become adults, these same walls acted to imprison them, trapping their feelings, and preventing them from completing their journey into manhood. As men take down these walls and work through the profound grief they feel for never having been "seen" for the individuals they truly were, they can understand and mourn the loss of the "True Self" and move forward in their healing.

A therapeutic strategy needs to penetrate the two defenses of narcissism and the False Self. The client needs to be focused on fully feeling and expressing the "shamed-defective self." If he can't feel it, he can't heal it. But when he feels his inner emotions, says Nicolosi, the adult struggler discovers that "he need not fear the primal threat of abandonment-annihilation, and he can begin to surrender the defenses of homosexuality, narcissism and the False Self." (See interview conducted by Linda Nicolosi in article entitled "Grief Work" at [NARTH.com](http://NARTH.com)).

Exercises to address these issues are being incorporated within the various experiential weekends referred to earlier and by our support group. However, the front line of treatment of these issues needs to come from the therapists who are conducting individual private therapy.

## 10. Receiving Healthy Touch and Affection

Many who struggle with SSA experience touch deprivation, an issue often overlooked in therapy. Ashley Montagu writes in his groundbreaking book *Touching*: "the communications we transmit through touch constitute the most powerful means of establishing human relationships, the foundation of experience."

As a result of defensive detachment, many men with SSA never received the healthy touch that can come from being in a healthy relationship with one's father and peers. Because many of these men never received healthy touch or did not receive the physical affection they needed from their fathers, the idea of receiving a non-sexual hug from a man as a sign of affection makes them uncomfortable.

We also have had members tell us that once they decided to stop their homosexual acting out, they missed the warmth or affection of another human being's touch. Others, even when they had opportunities to receive healthy touch and affection, such as non-sexual hugs or pats on the back, were confused as to the healthy boundaries for touch. Others whose condition of SSA consisted of fantasy and pornography reported a lack of physical contact over a period of years.

Many presently feel touch-deprived because they did not receive physical affection in their childhood and other emotional needs remained unfulfilled. We found several members who previously expressed an unquenchable need to sexually touch others or to be sexually touched either by others or by themselves (to a level where masturbation may become addictive). Such touch is the means for them to literally feel or fantasize their connection with other men, something they had yearned for all their lives.

The question of human touch is exacerbated when emotional or sexual abuse lurks in the background of a particular individual. For those who were sexually abused, intimacy stimulates painful memories. In order to avoid emotional intimacy, many sought physical gratification through anonymous sexual encounters.

Our experience in JONAH has been that as men bond with other men in a healthy non-sexual atmosphere, particularly through attendance at the experiential weekends, both the resistance to healthy touch and the need for inappropriate sexual touch dissipate. Healthy touching can be controversial, particularly if the situation is not well-controlled and the boundaries not clearly set forth. If a man has properly progressed in his healing processes and understands the proper boundaries of touch, we will then strongly encourage non-sexual hugs and affectionate gestures (like pats on the back) in our groups.

One advantage of our team sport events is the reinforcement of the cultural acceptability of victory celebrations by the players when they openly embrace and hug one another. Another culturally acceptable method of gaining appropriate touch is through regular therapeutic massages.

In order to experience safe and healing touch from another man, our members have used a number of therapeutic bodywork techniques. Among these are massage, shiatsu and Feldenkrais. Men report touch therapy useful in



releasing negative feelings and emotions stored within their bodies. The Feldenkrais method, for example, founded by the Israeli physicist Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, has also helped men focus on how their bodies move. Through directed movements given by a practitioner, men learn new ways to use their bodies. Consequently, Feldenkrais has helped men feel better connected to their bodies, improve their coordination and become more self-confident.

Having set forth the issue and the need for solutions, we believe that overcoming touch deprivation is an area in need of further development. We continue to examine practical ways of overcoming touch deprivation which exists for so many of our members.

### Summary

These aspects of JONAH's healing paradigm are presented here to encourage the reader to explore the complex process undertaken when men and women begin to heal their same-sex attractions. There is no "magic bullet" for healing even though it is frequently wished for by those suffering from a same-sex attraction disorder (SSAD).

JONAH's multi-dimensional approach can be viewed as encompassing four processes which, if worked in tandem, can help facilitate in-depth healing. In our opinion, true healing occurs when an individual is able to heal at four different levels:

- Cognitive: Head
- Experiential: Body
- Emotional: Heart
- Spiritual: Soul

An incomplete healing occurs when fewer than the four levels are accessed.

While individual psychotherapy is critical to help individuals heal from SSAD, participating in private therapy, without these other experiences, may increase the time

required for the healing process to occur. Obviously, it takes a longer period of time to access all four levels when a therapist is able to work with his client for only an hour or two a week. By increasing the time on task in a cost-effective manner, the struggler can accelerate the time needed for healing. Moreover, by employing the multi-dimensional paradigm described in this paper, and thereby enlarging the daily and weekly amount of time in which a member delves into his head, heart, body, and soul, our reports indicate an important acceleration of the healing process.

Our purpose in setting forth our experience and findings is to share what we have learned from our members. JONAH happily acknowledges that many therapists and faith based groups have independently used parts of this model (including some of the live-in programs). Hopefully, for those readers from the therapeutic community who have not adopted aspects of this program they will see the benefits of this more comprehensive approach to healing SSA and will incorporate them within their treatment plans.

*\*\* The authors wish to acknowledge the input of Martin Pressman, a facilitator in the JONAH program, for developing several of the concepts set forth in this article and for his help in editing this article.*

### More About JONAH

JONAH's current services include: referrals to therapists around the globe: men's support groups presently meeting in the following locations- Jersey City, New Jersey; Miami, Florida; Jerusalem, Israel; a daily E-Mail Listserv with men and women resident in 6 different countries; a web site and online library (Jonahweb.org); a Speaker's Bureau; and educational community outreach programs.

If you wish to contact JONAH or inquire about any of our services, please call 201-433-3444, or write us at JONAH, PO Box 313, Jersey City, New Jersey 07303, or email us after viewing our website at [Jonahweb.org](http://Jonahweb.org).

## Attention Therapists!

Desert Stream is a Christian ministry that equips local churches to minister to the sexually and relationally broken.

We frequently receive phone calls from those who struggle homosexually and who are looking for therapists that believe that homosexuality is changeable.

We're always looking for more local, Southern California psychotherapists who share this point of view.

If you are interested in the possibility of being on our therapist referral list, please contact me:



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E-mail: [mpertuit@desertstream.org](mailto:mpertuit@desertstream.org)