

Thoughts on Rediscovering One's True Self

—First-person story by a member of the Jewish ex-gay ministry, JONAH

What does it mean to heal same-sex attractions? It is not about "change" in the sense of merely "retraining" yourself sexually, because the underlying problem is not sexual, but emotional.

Most of us fell into this problematic sexual attraction when we felt (or were made to feel) insufficiently masculine, separate and foreign to other men. The sexual attraction is a mistaken, broken attempt to get the male love and approval we didn't get, or an attempt to fill the gap we feel in our own masculinity with another man's manliness.

But here, too, the healing is not about "change." Because the truth is that we are sufficiently masculine - just as we are. The only thing that needs to "change" - or just be discarded - is our mistaken notion of inadequacy.

Two guys go into a gym: One guy says, I am trying to heal my SSA, and it says in the advice to reconnect with my masculinity and do manly things... so I am going to build up my weak, unmanly body and then I will be sufficiently masculine.

Nope, nope, nope. This guy is still in the mind trap that leads to homosexual attraction.

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Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year. This is the time of "teshuva." Teshuva does not mean "repentance" - in the sense of doing penance, or being consumed by regret. Although these are part of the process of "teshuva" they are not the main thing, or the final goal.

Teshuva means "return" - to our essential self, to who we really are. That is what we at JONAH do all year round. Yes, in the short term JONAH uses some techniques of "habit reformation" and "retraining." Yes, it takes work to cleanse and revise our self-image - and make the new way of thinking a habit. Yes, there must be change in our behavior and that's a struggle.

We are not saying this is easy. Returning means turning - and it's always hard to change course. But none of this work comes to fill a lack - there is no real lack! It comes to restore atrophied limbs in our souls. To reveal and strengthen aspects of ourselves that were always there and

If you think you are too short/skinny/bald/weak/intellectual/sensitive to be truly masculine, then find a busy street corner. Within a few minutes a shorter/skinnier/whatever guy will come along - who doesn't think he's unmanly, and who isn't attracted to other men.

If you think you need to change something about yourself to be acceptably masculine - the only thing that needs to change is that *thought!* That's why ex-gay programs are not about "change" - not that insecure, catching-up or making-over kind of change.

And the second guy? He's also trying to heal from gay attractions. But he says, my distorted self-image kept me from doing sports, from enjoying working out with my male body, and now I am going to restore myself, no I will have the experience, and take pleasure in the activity and the camaraderie that I used to feel distant from.

Sure, his body will change. But this man is not "changing" - he is returning to his real self. That is what JONAH is about. That is our healing path and it is the same healing path that all people use to heal from their troubles, not just those dealing with same-sex attractions.

have always been part of us. It comes to strengthen our will.

In these times, people - especially Americans - are caught up in lot of nip-and-tuck, externally-driven reinvention. Much of it springs from insecurity. It is not growth, but self-obliteration - mask upon mask.

Our way - the JONAH way - is the exact opposite. It is a rediscovery of our true, manly selves, of our healthy, normal connection to other men, and to women. We are here to grow into ourselves, to return to our truest selves. Then we will be able to truly love - ourselves, others, and G-d.