
Beyond Therapy: A Process of Gender Affirmation

By Arthur Goldberg, J.D.

Co-Director of Jews Offering A New Alternative To Homosexuality and Member of the NARTH Board

It has been said that what a struggler does outside the therapy room is as important, if not more important, than what goes on inside the therapist's office. Understanding the significance of this concept is essential to clarifying why I refer to the overcoming of same sex attraction (SSA) as a process and more specifically refer to it as a "Gender Affirming Process" or GAP. This symbolic acronym represents the psycho-sexual and psycho-social developmental gap faced by these strugglers. Therapy alone can rarely achieve the desired result.

Alan Medinger's book, *Growth into Manhood*, sets forth a truism that boys who found the process of growth into manhood too difficult or too painful often check out of the growth process altogether. Freud referred to this a "developmental arrest." Other therapists simply recognize that many of these boys are stuck in "perpetual adolescence."

So, what does one need to do to overcome homosexuality? Hear what Alan Medinger advises: "Now, 15, 20 or 40 years later, if you want to resume your growth, you will have to venture back out into the world of men and boys. Essentially, you are going to have to develop your manhood the same way that young boys do, through a process of learning, testing, failing, getting back up and testing again, and finally succeeding. We grow into the fullness of manhood by doing the things that men do."

To truly heal, in my judgment, a struggler must engage in a holistic strategy involving a broad range of activities designed to change one's emotional response patterns. This holistic approach to intervention results in accessing a client's inner drives, dismantling his defenses, intensifying his affective involvement in the overall treatment plan, identifying the transference patterns and projections as they arise, and unblocking the unconscious patterns of behavior.

Many men desirous of overcoming homosexuality often become frustrated or discouraged when they find their fantasies, arousals, or behavior doesn't change either as quickly or as substantially as they had hoped. My judgment, based upon nearly a decade of involvement and close observation of these men, leads me to conclude that their frustration and discouragement occurs



Arthur Goldberg

because their efforts at change often are insufficiently comprehensive.

What do I mean by "insufficiently comprehensive"? I mean that regardless of their intensity and sincerity, their work was not broad enough — it did not cover enough areas of life to bring about real change. A struggler, for example, may work on either connecting in the first instance or reconnecting with G-d on the assumption that

G-d will heal his wounds. He prays for the "silver bullet." However, G-d often works through human messengers. Thus, the more appropriate prayer, in my opinion, is to ask G-d to provide the struggler with the strength to face his fears, walk through his pain, and come out whole on the other side. Thus, simultaneously with the necessary spiritual healing he must undertake, attention must be paid to healing his underlying emotional wounds by identifying his unfilled earthly needs and fulfill them in healthy non-sexual ways. Simply repressing unfilled needs never works. Core needs are non-negotiable. Another example involves the situation where a struggler focuses on the cognitive causes of his wounds and intellectualizes what he ought to do but then spends little time focusing on his emotional needs and on building healthy relationships with other men.

Rebuilding Masculine Sufficiency

Feelings of same-sex attraction did not develop overnight nor did they occur from a single event. Rather, it involved a gradual process of one experience compounding upon another, a confluence of factors, which in turn deepened the negative emotional patterns that gradually took away the struggler's sense of masculine sufficiency — to the point where he began to feel same sex attractions. As these attractions intensified, the longings began to be felt in a sexual way. A person's envy of other men became eroticized or sexualized. At some point in their life, many of these men begin to act on those feelings...in some way, whether in thought, in self-sex, or through sexual behavior with other men.

(Continued on next page)

It may be helpful therefore to set forth several facets of the multiple healing strategies we have developed at JONAH in order to treat men with homosexual attractions. It is a holistic program.

Bibliotherapy

To begin, it is important to provide an intellectual framework for the person struggling with SSA. As Dr. Joseph Nicolosi points out in his classic work, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach* (p. 204), the therapeutic utilization of books, reading materials, web sites, tapes, video cassettes and other educational sources permits the individual struggling with SSA to gain beneficial insights.

The knowledge gained from biographical information of recovered homosexuals lends credence to their own struggle and hope for recovery. We find that our members are inspired when they can relate their own experiences to those who have successfully resolved the underlying emotional issues that 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 basic of the therapeutic process, thereby enabling them to apply this new-found knowledge to their own situation.

So many strugglers reading (or listening) to this material are shocked to see their own lives profiled. They come to realize the commonality of the causes that the strugglers reflect.

Importantly, bibliotherapy, in the words of Joe Nicolosi, can offset the "demoralizing confusion created by gay propaganda and the popular media of our culture." (p. 204)

Bibliotherapy is a vital part of the healing process. It is valuable not only for the struggler but equally as important for spouses, siblings, and parents. Families need to be brought into the healing process. We encourage family and friends to likewise get involved in bibliotherapy.

The material can provide a psychological framework and encouragement for the struggler. An added benefit occurs when the struggler is working with a therapist who is unfamiliar with the principles of GAP. Often the materials may help a struggler better educate his own therapist who may not be as familiar as we are about appropriate strategies to overcome homosexuality. Among the many books we recommend are:

- *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality* by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi
- *Coming Out Straight* by Richard Cohen,
- *Growth into Manhood* by Alan Medinger,
- *Willpower is Not Enough: Why We Don't Succeed at Change* by Dean Byrd and Mark Chamberlain,
- *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* by Jeffrey Satinover
- *My Genes Made Me Do It!* By Neil and Briar Whitehead
- *You Don't Have to Be Gay* by Jeff Konrad
- *Desires in Conflict: Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity* by Joe Dallas.

Because there are almost no books written from a Jewish point of view, I wrote *Light in the Closet! Torah, Homosexuality, and the Power to Change* (2008) that fills a major void in the literature.

Websites highly recommended include www.jonahweb.org, www.narth.com, www.peoplecanchange.com, www.comingout-straight.com, www.pathinfo.org

Individual Psychotherapy

Of course, individual therapy is an essential component of GAP. It is pivotal to healing, particularly when:

- The struggler is ready to explore previously hidden emotions and motivations;
- The therapist believes in (or is willing to learn) the principles of GAP;
- The client and therapist can establish rapport and trust;
- The client is emotionally and intellectually ready to seriously look at his emotional responses to life's challenges, and
- The client is willing to do the work necessary to change.

We believe that the type of therapist who can best help these men is not the classical psycho-analytic 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 for 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." Thus, Nicolosi concludes, the therapist must be emotionally involved with his client, create a directive approach, exude an air of masculinity, "and, within therapeutic guidelines, permit dependency." There are many forms of therapy that work well for SSA including, for example, psychodynamic models, cognitive-behavioral, multi-modal paradigms, EMDR for trauma issues etc.

JONAH works with those who either seek to grow out of their same-sex attractions or are ambivalent about such attractions. Should a prospective client 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 we advocate.

We believe that gender identity determines sexual orientation and that one sexualizes or eroticizes that with which he does not iden-

tify. 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.

Networking, Support Groups, Daily Internet E-Mail Listserv Networking

The process of gender affirmation encourages strugglers to create new support structures such as facilitated or peer support groups. These programs can dramatically change old negative emotional patterns. Before agreeing to involvement support groups, many of these strugglers often feel isolated and alone in their struggle. Or, alternatively, for those who have been active in the gay world, they find a circle of comrades they believe they could never find in the "straight" world. Thus, to create a feeling of belonging and comradeship, 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 sexual wholeness. (This is accomplished through group support meetings, a 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. Group support sessions and daily E-mail listservs provide opportunities for strugglers to make connections and bond with others sharing similar concerns.

Although some therapists believe networking between those in recovery to be risky, others encourage individuals within their support groups to network with each other outside the group sessions. I wholeheartedly agree. Within the JONAH support network, to date we are unaware of any sexual liaisons taking 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.

Remember the person who was active in the gay lifestyle often found a sense of belonging among other gays that overcame his sense of alienation and loneliness. To replace that sense of belonging, it is critical for mentoring and networking to take place. Without these opportunities, it is difficult to establish non-sexual intimate relationships. We believe that the therapist who works individually with his patient and who does not recommend getting involved in support groups and networking is doing his client a major disservice. Our observable experience is that strugglers leap forward when they maintain communication with others who have healed or are in the process of healing from SSA and are able to establish relationships with empathetic mentors.

An interesting footnote to this process is the fact that many of our members who begin to help others heal found that they strength-

ened their own healing process. Many report 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.

The gender-affirming process enables a person to step into a totally new support structure. It provides both encouragement and direct assistance while the member travels the road to recovery. An important aspect of his masculine empowerment is the ability to connect to his brothers in recovery, thus overcoming the detachment and alienation he experienced from the world of men. Two other important tools to accomplish this goal are support groups and a daily email listserv.

JONAH runs several facilitated support groups. They include a young men's group, an older men's group, a married men's group, a parents, spouses, and friends group, and a group for those beginning the dating process.

For men who do not live near the existing support groups or where there is an insufficient number of individuals in a particular location, 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.

Daily Internet E-Mail Listserv: Men and woman from all over the world 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. People Can Change also runs several non-denominational support groups on the Internet. 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.

Experiential Healing Weekends, Seminars, and Training Events

We refer our members to several experiential weekends, some of which contain a generic spiritual component involving a Higher Power unconnected to any particular religion. Our own JONAH weekends involve Sabbath services.

Weekends may consist of discussions, psychodrama, journaling, and individual "guts work" which enable participants to reach feelings not usually accessible in the short time frame of the typical therapeutic session. Because of the intensity of these weekends, it may well be equivalent to six months of weekly therapy.

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

- *Journey into Manhood* (web site: peoplecanchange.com),
- *New Warrior Training Adventure* (web site: mkp.org),
- *Love, Sex, & Intimacy Seminars* (web site: gaytostraight.org),
- *Adventure in Manhood Training Retreat* (web site: www.adventureinmanhood.com),
- *Call of the Shofar, Dare to Soar*,
- *Sports Camp*,
- *Love Won Out Conference*,
- *JONAH Shabbatons*

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." (People Can Change 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 experience trust and bonding with other men in non-sexual ways process deep feelings related to their pasts, themselves and their relationships with others, experience at least an initial release of those feelings that may be blocking growth into heterosexual masculinity, and become ready to embrace a new way of seeing themselves and of being in the world, particularly in the world of men.

Adventure in Manhood is an outdoor, activity-based experiential training in which the struggler dealing with unwanted SSA attends with a male mentor who is not SSA. Together, the participant and the mentor experience a weekend of teamwork, bonding, education, and adventure at a wilderness location in Arizona.

Love, Sex, Intimacy Healing Seminars are intensive weekend seminars in which the struggler and his family members may participate. The training includes experiential processes such as visualizations and psychodrama to help participants touch authentic emotions and open themselves to healing.

Sports Camp is sponsored by Courage, the Roman Catholic faith based ministry, usually in the spring of each year. It is a weeklong camp to help men overcome fear of athletics and sports and is open to men of all faiths. Call of the Shofar, Dare to Soar are religious based men's weekends. The former is for observant Jews, the latter for Christians.

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 take 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 have an opportunity to staff these weekends, they find the experience to be even more powerful than the initial weekend because of the leadership role they are able to assume.

Overcoming Body Image and Sports Wounds

At its core, male homosexuality is a matter of undeveloped manhood. 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)

A basic issue in healing SSA involves reconnecting the individual from the alienation he experienced from his own gender. To help SSA individuals take ownership of their G-d given masculinity is a formidable task, but we 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.

To illustrate a program we employ to assist men with their masculine development, it is useful to refer to a two-hour weekly sports activity we developed following certain support groups. We utilize knowledgeable coaches to lead these activities. We receive outstanding feedback from group members as to the effectiveness of the sports therapy. They learn teamwork, including how to trust other men and to bond with other men who play with them.

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 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 within themselves a masculine strength, which they had previously believed was lacking and receive external affirmation of their inherent masculinity.

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. They empower themselves by doing something they think they can't do, gaining mastery over fear, ineptitude, and inadequacy.

(Continued)

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. This insight is a lesson of life. 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 permitted them to overcome these wounds. They found themselves able to bond with other men, many for the first time in their lives. And, as Nicolosi makes clear, central to the repairing of homosexuality is the establishment of nonsexual intimate relationships with men (Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality, p.194). Being involved in traditional men's activities, such as sports, is a direct way to heal those wounds.

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. Such role models become mentors. Qualities needed by a mentor include compassion, empathy, a non-judgmental attitude, and most importantly, knowledge about how to help others heal from SSA, or at least a strong desire to learn.

Many men transitioning out of homosexuality find real healing synergy when they enter into mentoring relationships with heterosexual men they respect and who are willing to give them time, affirmation, and teaching. If the struggler is lucky enough to have parents willing and able to help, and the struggler 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. The man in transition is effectively "refathered" by a father figure or a big brother figure, particularly when dealing with the question what does it mean to enjoy heterosexual masculinity, or to learn what it means to feel "man enough" within his inner being.

The mentor and the participant do "guy stuff" together, stuff that the man in transition may have never experienced such as going to a ball game together or even watching it on TV, but having the mentor explain the game; enjoying activities together such as touch football, soccer, or bowling; working together on home improvement projects. Simply spending time together may be important so that the mentee may feel comfortable sharing things that he may never have felt comfortable about either doing or speaking about before.

The importance of healthy male-to-male mentoring cannot be emphasized enough. It is not uncommon for strugglers to suffer from feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. The mentor is the role model that takes the mystery out of masculinity and supports the struggler's journey to his own masculine power.

Multiple mentors are better than a single mentor. Different individuals may assist in disparate areas: a spiritual coach, a masculinity coach, someone who can help on issues relating to dating women, a personal sports coach, etc. The importance of having multiple coaches is the lessening of a reliance and emotional dependence on a single individual. Also, from the mentor's point of view, it lessens the amount of time that a mentor may either have available or is willing to provide.

Friendships

In his book, *Coming Out Straight*, Richard Cohen reasons that the most efficient way for a male struggler to build a completely new social network is to start with a basic mix that contains at least one male representative—but preferably several more than one—from each of four distinct categories of relationships.

We have already mentioned the first category, that is, the mentor, an elder who can teach him the ways of men. We have already likewise discussed the need to relate to fellow strugglers on the journey towards healing.

There are however two categories of friends that need to be brought into the picture. The need for same-sex non-sexual friendships is very important: one of which involves a friend(s) who is secure in his gender identity, is supportive, and knows about his struggle. The other is a friend(s) who is secure in his gender identity, is supportive, and is unaware of his struggle. By learning to be open and honest with these men brings about positive energy that is critical to the healing process. Associating with other men who are secure in their gender identity, reinforces, rather than undermines, the struggler's own sense of masculinity. 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.

Healing of the Family System

I believe 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 found 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.

(Continued on page 20)

(Transsexuality, continued from page 8)

matter how successful the procedure and continued hormone replacement have been, it seems that each patient still feels that something is lacking -- that though they were now a woman, it somehow isn't enough.

However, after some minor attempts at surgical assistance by surgeons and endocrinologists, the surgeons finally refuse to do any more. In their judgment, nothing further should or could be done.

Typically, the surgeons were all pleased initially with the success of their transformation of a man into a nice--if not a beautiful--young woman. Now, the medical staff becomes dissatisfied with the patient's dissatisfaction, and they turn the case back to the psychiatric division to "solve" the problem.

The Problem Is Psychological, Not Organic

At this point in the process, I, along with other psychoanalyst colleagues, must tell the surgeons that the disturbed body image was not an organic at all, but was strictly a psychological problem. It could not be solved by organic manipulation (surgery, hormones), no matter how well-intentioned or brilliantly successful it was done.

In psychologically evaluating any patient, it is always important to understand how the patient sees himself. There are certainly

age variations as well as gender and cultural elements involved in this evaluation. However, when an adult who is normal in appearance and functioning believes there is something ugly or defective in their appearance that needs to be changed, it is clear that there is a psychological problem of some significance.

The more pervasive and extensive is this misperception of oneself, the more significant is the psychological problem. The more the patient is willing to do extensive surgical intervention (especially when it is destructive), the more serious is the psychological problem. It may not be psychosis. It may not require psychiatric hospitalization. But the significance of the psychological difficulty should not be minimized by a patient's seeming success, socially and professionally, in other areas. This principle of isolated significant psychopathology indicating serious psychological problems (despite the patient's ability to function in all other areas of life) is well known psychiatrically, historically, and by the judiciary.

This conclusion became so well established at Wayne State University that the program was eventually discontinued. The much larger and more extensive program at Johns Hopkins University and medical school in Baltimore, Maryland was discontinued for the same reason.

The psychological problems that are focused on issues related to gender need to be better understood -- not denied.
