

FAQ – Frequently Asked Questions on the Torah Declaration

Question #1: How do we know that G-d did not create someone with a homosexual orientation that can not be changed?

Question #2 - What about individuals who claim that they have sincerely tried to heal through reparative therapy but were unsuccessful?

Question #3: Why is *teshuvah* necessary? What if a person never acted on his desires?

Question #4 - Why don't we hear more from people who have successfully gone through the process of reparative therapy?

Question #5 - If people are not born homosexual, what is the cause of their homosexual inclinations?

Question #6 - There are some that claim that Halacha only prohibits one homosexual act and that everything else is permitted. Is this true?

Question #7 - Why should Jewish people care about homosexual issues such as gay marriage for non-Jews?

Question #8: Is the Torah Declaration implying that one who has gone to therapy will never struggle with this issue again?

Question #9: How does the Torah Declaration define the words "Change" and "Overcome"?

Question #1: It states in the Declaration, "The concept that G-d created a human being who is unable to find happiness in a loving relationship unless he violates a biblical prohibition is neither plausible nor acceptable. [Difficult struggles are part of this world, but] ...Impossible, life long, Torah prohibited situations with no achievable solutions are not."

How can you know for sure what G-d's plan is for someone? People have all kinds of difficult lifelong struggles, how can you be sure that being an "unchangeable" homosexual is not part of G-d's plan? Perhaps Hashem wants such a person to have a difficult life and nevertheless obey His commandments and stay celibate his entire life? How do you know that this is not one of the many difficult *nisoyens* (trials) that G-d sets out for people?

Answer #1: This is a very crucial question because it touches upon our core understanding of Hashem's relationship with us. It also brings up the question of how much we can actually understand about suffering in this world. In order to have clarity

on this issue we have to define the kinds of suffering we are talking about and break them into separate categories.

Let us start with two categories:

#1 – Difficult situations where there is no desire that would violate Torah law, even if one falters due to his or her difficult circumstances.

#2 - Difficult situations where if one falters there is a direct Torah violation.

Examples of **situation #1** would be someone who was born blind, without a leg or perhaps has cancer (*Hashem yerachim*). Those are truly tragic and difficult circumstances that can affect a person's entire life and greatly limit some of the things that many of us take for granted. However, as difficult as such a life may be, there is no inconsistency with living a Torah lifestyle. In fact there are special dispensations within halacha to deal with the blind, disabilities and the terminally ill that take into account their circumstances and to guide them halachically.

In these situations there is no question of a compulsion to violate Biblically prohibited law. All the special circumstances are dealt with in a halachic framework. (I.E. doing a *melacha* (prohibited work) on Shabbos for a person with a medical emergency is not a Torah violation but rather a mitzvah, etc.)

Situation #2 would encompass someone born with a nature that will only be satisfied by committing a Biblically forbidden act. That could be someone born with an unchangeable murderous bloodthirsty nature or hypothetically if we say a person is born homosexual and can not change, then in both situations the person seemingly can ONLY find satisfaction by violating a Biblical prohibition.

We know this to be factually not possible based on the following *Gemaras*:

T.B. Avoda Zora 3a. “Because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not deal imperiously with His creatures.” The *Gemara* explains that Hashem does not play cruel tricks on His creatures and create impossible situations that would cause Torah violations.

The Chofetz Chaim uses this *Gemara* as an example why someone can not say that their desire for *loshen hora* is so strong that it can not be overcome. Hashem does not create impossible Torah situations that lead to violations.

So how do we explain someone who was born with a bloodthirsty nature? How is that not a cruel trick being played on a person? The following *Gemara* explains how that works:

T.B. Shabbos 156a

If one was born under Mazal Mars, he will spill blood;

Rav Ashi: He will be a bloodletter, bandit, slaughterer or Mohel. (He can channel his disposition for something neutral, for *Aveiros*, (negative) or for *Mitzvos* (positive).)

“**The Vilna Gaon** in Even Shelaima 1:7, building on T.B. Shabbat 156a, implies that every [inborn] drive has some form of outlet that is acceptable within Torah.” [This Vilna Gaon quote is from Nishma.org]

The following is a direct quote from a public letter written on July 4th 2008 by **Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky** regarding homosexuality:

“Our Sages teach us that every human being is capable of changing for the better. Those who make the false claim that human beings cannot change their tendencies are comparing them to animals. Indeed it may be very difficult to change one’s nature, but it is definitely possible if one so desires.”

From these sources we see that situation #2, where someone is born with an inborn unchangeable drive to violate Biblical law is not possible. Hashem does not play tricks by saying something is forbidden, and then creating people with a drive that only can be expressed with what He has forbidden to them. However, other struggles like situation #1 are possible and do not cause impossible Torah situations.

Question #2 - Can everyone change their homosexual inclinations? What about individuals who claim that they have sincerely tried to heal through reparative therapy but were unsuccessful?

Answer #2: Not everyone succeeds with their current therapy, but everyone is **capable** of healing. This statement is true for most struggles that humans deal with. Whether it is drug or alcohol addiction, weight loss, anorexia, depression or any other human struggle. There will always be individuals who don’t succeed with their therapy, but it’s not because they are not capable of healing, rather they may just not be in the right space to achieve healing yet. For some it requires hitting rock bottom to be in that space. For others they may just not have yet been in a space to release certain blocks.

This is not about blame in any way, but rather the reality of why some people succeed and some people don’t. The fact that a person has not yet achieved healing, even after major effort, is not proof that they can’t eventually achieve healing, or that they should stop trying.

For example there is one individual who was 100 pounds overweight for most of his life. He struggled for 40 years with diets but was never able to successfully keep any weight loss beyond a short period of time. Then at 50 he finally lost the 100 pounds and 10 years later he has still kept the weight off.

This individual sincerely wanted to lose weight all his life. His not succeeding for 40 years does not mean he is not capable of success. It means that he was not in the right emotional/mental space to fully deal with the blocks that he had that were preventing success.

Each of these situations are unique and may be different than Same-Sex Attraction (SSA). However, all issues that require healing or therapy have in common that many people succeed in achieving their goals and others don't.

To bring it back to SSA, one person struggled through therapy for SSA for seven years before achieving success. Can he have said after 5 years of major struggle that he is one of those individuals who can never change? At what point can we say that a person can't deal with SSA successfully and should give up therapy? Perhaps an extended break is warranted or trying different techniques, but how can we tell the world that it is okay for some people to give up trying? How can there be any other message than **everyone** is **capable** of healing?

When it comes to homosexuality from a Torah perspective there is no other option other than healing. The Torah commands us to seek health and wellness and to repair, refine and elevate any aspect of ourselves that conflict with the Torah. For some it may be a short term struggle, for others a longer term struggle. Either way no one is exempt from continuously striving for healing and living a kosher Torah lifestyle.

Question #3: The Declaration states that the process of healing is therapy and *teshuvah*. However, someone who has same-sex attractions but has never acted on it has done nothing wrong. Doesn't including *teshuvah* imply that he has done something wrong, just by having those feelings?

Answer #3: The Declaration is very sensitive to this concern and specifically worded it very carefully. The main focus in the declaration of the concept of *teshuvah* is as a holistic process of reintegration. Within the concept of *teshuvah* it is a two part process. The first as it states is, "turning away from **any** transgression or sin." If someone has committed a transgression then the first step is to stop that activity. If someone has not committed any transgressions then this part does not apply to him at all.

The second and most crucial part of teshuva is healing as the document states about the process of *teshuvah*, "This includes refining and reintegrating the personality and allowing it to grow in a healthy and wholesome manner." *Teshuvah* is about a process of returning to ones true self and that is what is emphasized in the declaration. This applies to anyone who has same-sex attractions, regardless if they have acted upon it or not.

This fits well with Rabbi Yosef Serebryanski's explanation of the roots of *Teshuvah*:

"The word T'shuvah is composed of two words, "Tashuv" and the letter "Hey". This means returning to Hashem. It has nothing to do with negative or bad, it is simply each person restoring their open connection and flow directly with Hashem - the source of all life and existence."

We asked over twenty individuals who have struggled with this issue how they feel about the "Process of healing" paragraph and not one had an issue with it. They understood that

this is not about “blame” but rather about a process of personal reintegration and returning to one’s true nature.

In fact in the final section we specifically stressed that someone struggling with this is an “innocent victim.” As the Declaration states, “The key point to remember is that these individuals are primarily innocent victims of childhood emotional wounds.”

Question #4 - Why don’t we hear more from people who have successfully gone through the process of reparative therapy?

Answer #4 - In the Torah Observant world there is a whole network of frum individuals who have gone through reparative therapy and have overcome their same-sex attractions. Many of these brave individuals are now married with their wives full knowledge and support and are upstanding members of *Klal Yisrael* living lives filled with *kedusha* and consistent with the Torah. These individuals are just like everyone else. Why would they want to publicize a difficult and private struggle in their lives?

Despite this, many of these brave souls know how important it is to bring awareness to this subject and are willing to privately share their personal struggles, the healing and therapeutic techniques and the joy and equanimity that successful change has brought to their lives. They have agreed to speak privately with anyone who is either struggling themselves with this issue or with a Rabbi, teacher, or community leader who needs more information about this issue.

If you fit into either of these two categories and would like to speak to someone who has successfully overcome their SSA, please email us with your specific situation and we can have someone contact you to discuss it further.

Question #5 - If people are not born homosexual, what is the cause of their homosexual inclinations?

Answer #5 - The Gemara in Nedarim 51a states that *To’eivah* (abomination) translates as *To’eh attah bah* – you are mistaken or being misled with this (in our case with homosexual inclination).

The most widely accepted theory, among those with the most experience in helping individuals heal, as to the root cause of homosexuality is that something has gone awry in childhood development. There are many possibilities and combinations of factors that may lead to same sex attraction. From emotional or sexual abuse, to having a sensitive nature while not being able to properly bond with a father figure or male peers. There may be other issues as well, but the underlying factor is that this developmental deficiency with male bonding may manifest in a desire to connect with males in an inappropriate sexualized way.

One of the standard lines from homosexual activists is that they would never choose this voluntarily. They are correct in the sense that it was not a conscience choice to develop same sex attractions, but it is a conscience choice whether one chooses to heal from the underlying issue. No one consciously chooses to be overweight, but it is a choice and a possibility to lose weight and to deal with the emotional factors that lead to overeating. Just because one does not consciously choose a struggle or difficulty, does not mean that one can't choose to heal from it.

For more information you can watch this excellent 16 minute video that gives a detailed and easy to understand explanation of some of the root causes of homosexuality and how it develops in childhood.

www.Homosexuality101.com

Question #6 - There are some that claim that Halacha only prohibits one homosexual act and that everything else is permitted. Is this true?

Answer #6 - According to the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch prohibited homosexual activity includes any non-platonic physical contact; even yichud (seclusion) with someone of the same gender is forbidden for homosexually active individuals.

Rambam Hilchos Isurei Biah 21:1,2; 22:1,2. See also Shulchan Aruch Even HoEzer 24

Question #7 - Why should Jewish people care about homosexual issues such as gay marriage for non-Jews?

Answer #7 - Homosexuality is forbidden for all people, including non-Jews, by the Seven Noahide Laws. The Rambam (Maimonides) is explicit that the prohibition of sexual immorality in the Noahide laws specifically includes homosexuality.

Rambam, Mishneh Torah, in Sefer Shoftim, Hilkhoth Melakhim u'Milhamotheihem 9:7-11

9:7 – “There are six types of sexual acts forbidden to a ben Noah: Intercourse with one's mother, with one's father's wife (who is not one's mother, i.e.: step mother), with another man's wife, with one's sister who has the same mother, with another male, with an animal...”

Another Torah source that explicitly mentions homosexual marriage is the Midrash Rabba which states that homosexual marriage was the ‘straw that broke the camels back’ and brought the Great Flood to the world:

“Rabbi Huna said in the name of Rebbi: The generation of the flood were not wiped out from the world until [men] were writing marriage contracts to males and to beasts.”
(Midrash Rabba Breishis 26:5)

Question #8: Is the Torah Declaration implying that one who has gone to therapy will never struggle with this issue again?

Answer #8: Deeply ingrained psychological or emotional issues are the root cause of people acting out in various unhealthy ways, be they addictions, alcoholism, obesity, or homosexuality, all of which are difficult to overcome. Being committed to healing the underlying issue with the help of therapy and supportive family and friends is a major step in the healing process.

However, ALL psychological issues, even after successful therapy, require continued emotional health and stability to maintain. As a person goes through life and he or she is subjected to trying or difficult times, some of those feelings may resurface. That is why, for example, an alcoholic may attend a support group or have a personal “sponsor” even after being sober for 10 years.

Paying proper attention to our emotional and mental health, which includes appropriate dietary habits, sleeping patterns and a network of supportive friends and family, is important for everyone and particularly crucial for those who have undergone therapy for major life issues. Without a commitment to continued mental and emotional health and well being, anyone who has undergone therapy for ANY issue is at risk of recidivism.

The following relevant excerpt comes from Dr. Bentzion Sorotzkin Psy.D. web site:

“The fact that overcoming SSA [Same-Sex Attraction] is indeed difficult and is often only achieved imperfectly is also cited as evidence of the unchangeable nature of sexual orientation thus making the apparent change not authentic. This claim is absurd! All psychological problems are difficult to change. Is it easy to help someone improve his self-esteem? Or to develop confidence? Or to overcome years of abuse? When the person makes progress, do we belittle his progress because he is still struggling? And if he improves with his issue 90%, do we not see this as a tremendous success even though vestiges of his problem remain? Why is the treatment of SSA held to such ridiculous and illogical and dramatically different standards than other areas of psychotherapy? Only because of a political agenda, it seems.”

Question #9: How does the Torah Declaration define the words “Change” and “Overcome”?

Answer #9: In terms of the word “Overcome” the following is the dictionary definition:

Overcome

1. Succeed in dealing with (a problem or difficulty).
2. To get the better of [a difficulty] in a struggle or conflict

"To succeed in dealing with" or "to get the better of" any kind of struggle does not necessarily mean that the issue with which one is dealing has been wiped away forever. The definition of the word “overcome” does not contradict that one may still have to deal

with the issue in difficult times throughout life. How one is able to "overcome" an issue is totally dependent upon the depth of the initial wounds and his/her ability to take care of him/her self in the future. In this context, the word "overcome" simply means that with therapy people can overcome their block in an area of life that would otherwise prevent them from achieving their goals. Moreover, it will enable them to live a Torah-true lifestyle, with a supportive spouse and children.

The same applies to the dictionary definition of the word "Change":

Change

1. Any variation or alteration; a passing from one state or form to another; as, a change of countenance; a change of habits or principles.
2. To be altered; to undergo variation; as, men sometimes change for the better.

Reparative therapy or Gender affirming processes involves changing one's inner sense of gender identity and changing the response patterns that may lead to a desire to act out in ways that are forbidden by the Torah.

Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky explains that "everyone is capable of overcoming an inclination that is prohibited by the Torah." (*Hakirah: The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought*, Volume 12, Fall, 2011, p. 33.) The Rosh Yeshiva went on to explain the concept of "change" and how two separate and distinct types of "change" relevant to *mishkav zachar* [homosexuality] may occur:

- (a) virtual elimination of the thoughts, feelings, and behavior, or
- (b) significant decrease of the desire, combined with knowledge of the tools necessary to redirect one's feelings if the desire returns.

He recognized that every person faces challenges of one sort or another but as humans we have been given by our Creator the capacity to overcome them. (*Hakirah*, p. 33)

In other words, changing one's life does not necessarily mean that one will never struggle with this issue in the future. It doesn't mean that one has to resolve all his/her inner gender conflicts before he/she can be considered "changed." That process may take time, patience, and continued work. What does change more immediately, however, is one's outlook on life and one's ability to maintain healthy heterosexual relationships.

To sum up, an alcoholic who has been sober for a number of years has **overcome** their destructive patterns and **changed** their lifestyle to a productive and healthy one. The same understanding applies to obesity, other addictions and same-sex attractions.
