

Religious pain

Posted by bright - 28 May 2025 03:20

Between Therapists and Rabbanim: The Missing Middle We Desperately Need

There's a pain that doesn't always have words.

A type of hurt that hides under the surface, even in the most beautiful places.

People sometimes talk about religious trauma.

But what I went through wasn't really about religion itself.

It was about emotional wounds twisting the religion into a prison.

What I went through isn't just about one person's pain — it's about what I see as an unfortunate gap in our system.

And more importantly, it's about what we can start doing to fix it. Let me share my story with you.

I grew up as a serious bochur.

I pushed myself hard.

I learned day and night.

I was a masmid.

I was successful in yeshiva.

People respected me.

I was looked at as someone who was "doing everything right."

But on the inside?

I never felt like I was good enough.

Let me explain.

Before I got married I had already spent years in therapy. I had worked through a lot - including the terribly trauma I had experienced. I made real progress. I grew. I healed. But there was an aspect to my emotional wounds that I didn't even begin to understand. Although I was accomplishing and successful, no matter how much I learned, how much I accomplished

there was a quiet voice always telling me:

“You’re a disappointment.”

“You’re faking it.”

“You’re not really wanted by Hashem.”

Every word of Torah I learned, every tefillah I said, every bracha I made —

I wasn’t doing it because I wanted to.

I was doing it because if I didn’t, I was worthless.

Not just “bad,” not just “slacking” — worthless.

If I skipped a bracha — I was garbage.

If I zoned out during Shemoneh Esrei — Hashem hated me.

I was a faker, a hypocrite, a walking Chillul Hashem.

Judaism wasn’t inspiring.

Judaism was oxygen — but oxygen mixed with poison.

Shabbos was terror.

Every halacha, every minute, was a test I was set up to fail.

One wrong move, and I was trash forever.

Learning wasn't something I loved — it was a burden I was chained to.

If I stopped learning, I was screaming inside:

“You're disgusting. You don't deserve anything good. Hashem hates you.”

I remember learning a schmooze about bitul Torah.

A healthy person might hear, “Try to make your time more meaningful.”

I heard, “You're a rasha who is killing yourself spiritually with every second you're not learning.”

The worst part?

Inside of me, buried under all the fake smiles, there was a rage building.

I would never have admitted it.

I didn't even let myself know it was there.

But deep inside, there was a part of me that hated God.

Hated Him for what He was doing to me.

For setting up a world where no matter how hard I tried, I would always lose.

For making me live in terror.

or killing me slowly, invisibly, with expectations I could never meet. And hating God made me hate myself even more.

Because who hates God? Only a monster.

Only a piece of garbage.

Only someone beyond hope.

And although I had already spent years in therapy, and had worked through my abuse and much more,

There was an aspect to my emotional wounds that I didn't even begin to understand.

I had plumbed the depths of my psyche. I worked through years of suffering with the help of top therapists and explored numerous innovative modalities. Yet I still had not touched the religious part of the pain.

I hadn't even realized it was there.

At the time when everything broke open again,

I was married.

I had beautiful children.

I was learning full-time in a prestigious kollel —

doing well, respected, trusted, admired.

On the outside, my life was a success story.

Inside, I didn't even realize there was still a volcano waiting to erupt.

But then a life-shattering event tore through everything I thought I had built.

It ripped away the thin layer of safety I had been standing on.

And underneath it, all the old wounds, all the buried rage, came flooding back.

Except now it wasn't just emotional pain.

It was spiritual pain.

It was a soul-deep scream.

I couldn't hide from it anymore.

I was furious.

I was broken.

And the truth is — I didn't want to stay anymore.

If I hadn't had a family depending on me,

I would have left Yiddishkeit completely.

Without hesitation.

Without looking back.

I wasn't held by love.

I wasn't held by faith.

I was held by responsibility.

By the brutal knowledge that if I left, I would destroy more than myself.

The pain was so deep.

Way beyond anything I had ever thought I could survive.

I was trapped in a religion I hated.

Trapped in a relationship with God that felt more like a prison sentence than a covenant.

And every step of the way, every prayer, every halacha, every mitzvah —
instead of drawing me closer to Hashem, only made me feel more rage.

I saw Him in everything that went wrong —
every little frustration, every delay, every disappointment.

It all felt like proof that Hashem was out to get me.

I could have written a reverse hashgacha pratis sefer —
not about miracles, but about all the ways I thought Hashem was trying to destroy me.

And I had no one to turn to.

Not because I didn't try.

I spoke to rabbanim — open-minded, compassionate, very chashuv rabbanim.

I reached out to organizations — big, respected ones.

They listened. They cared. But no one knew how to help.

There was no one who really dealt with this kind of pain, an emotional issue with Hashem Himself.

No one was able to get to the root of what I was going through.

And I started to feel completely hopeless.

Like maybe no one ever could help.

I didn't believe therapy could help me.

I had already tried.

So many times.

But thankfully I did.

Because this therapist was different.

He challenged me.

He pointed out how extreme my beliefs about Hashem were —

how black-and-white, how childish, how full of fear and self-hatred. And even more importantly, he introduced me to a unique Rav who is able to portray Yiddeshkeit in a beautiful, yet simple way.

At first, I doubted him completely.

He wasn't just challenging a few ideas.

He was shaking my entire identity.

Of course Hashem demands perfection.

Of course if you sin, you're a rasha.

Of course Hashem criticizes you if you fail.

But he didn't just argue with me.

He gently pushed me toward a different perspective, one that changed my life.

Through conversations, through reading, through listening —

I was exposed to a totally different picture of Hashem.

Not a distant, perfectionistic, judge.

Not a punisher or a relentless impossible--to-please master.

but an unconditional source of love.

and i began to learn how to build an entirely different kind of relationship with him and with His

Torah. A genuine connection, not one built on a divine score card, red tallies and brownie points.

These new ways of thinking and living certainly weren't easy to accept.

They didn't match what I had internalized from my years in yeshiva. (Though I now fully understand that they are in perfect harmony)

It didn't match what the fear in me believed

I fought it.

It sounded too soft, too fluffy, too fake. But over time, I realized:

The God I had hated wasn't real.

He was a projection of my pain — not the truth of Torah.

And the real Hashem — the One who had been hidden behind all that fear —

was waiting for me with love. With more love than I loved myself. Love not for some perfect version of me, but for the real broken, fighting one.

I had to rebuild everything.

My entire Yiddishkeit.

But as difficult as this was, it was the most rewarding thing I experienced. I became alive! I started understanding concepts I had always struggled with. My neurons started firing on all cylinders and I made connections and understood new deep meanings in everything I learned and did.

I stopped learning because I had to.

I started learning because I wanted to.

Because I wanted to understand and connect.

And even though I still sometimes struggle with fear and guilt —
now I know how to handle it.

The rule is that Hashem loves me.

No one dies from a question —
as long as there's a healthy foundation of emunah.

I realized how deep and beautiful the Torah really was. Simcha jumps out at me from every area of religious life. Today, my Yiddishkeit is different.

When I daven, I think:

Hashem just wants to spend time with me.

He wants a small, quiet meeting — just me and Him.

Even if I can't concentrate.

Even if my mind drifts.

He just wants me to show up.

He treasures my effort.

He treasures the fact that I'm there.

Not my performance.

Me.

Before I bench, I don't think, "I have to."

I think:

Hashem moved the entire world to get me this piece of bread.

He loves me that much.

Before every mitzvah, I try to find one point of meaning —
one spark of connection.

And slowly, I also started seeing Hashem inside the world.

When I feel a moment of love —
that's not random.
That's Hashem sending His love to me.

When I experience compassion —
that's a small reflection of Hashem's own compassion toward me.

When someone does a kindness —
that's a little glimpse of Hashem's kindness shining into the world.

The more I open my eyes,
the more I see that Hashem isn't hiding.

He's everywhere.

In the good.

In the beauty.

In the acts of love and mercy that fill this world when we're willing to look for them.

Maybe it sounds fluffy.

Maybe it sounds too soft for some people.

But this is the truth.

This is what saved me.

Not through fear.

Not through guilt.

But through love.

Real love.

Hashem's love.

And for the first time in my life,

I'm not just surviving.

I'm alive.

This is the part nobody talks about.

There are thousands of people carrying this kind of pain —

people who feel trapped inside a broken relationship with Hashem.

But there seems to be nowhere to turn.

Therapists, even the best ones, often don't have the background to fix religious wounds.

And even when they do, the pain is so tangled up with Torah and mitzvos that it's hard for a person to trust them fully — especially someone coming from years in yeshiva.

Rebbeim, on the other hand, may know Torah deeply —

but most aren't trained in emotional trauma.

Even when they recognize pain, they don't always have the tools to address what's really going on underneath.

This isn't a criticism of rabbanim.

And it's not a criticism of therapists.

It's just a reality:

There's a gap between the two.

And for someone stuck in the middle —

emotionally hurting, spiritually drowning —

that gap can feel like a black hole.

Even when someone in this situation asks an emunah question, the answer they need isn't just intellectual.

Because usually, what's underneath the question isn't just doubt —

it's fear. Shame. A belief in a terrifying, angry, impossible-to-please God.

Its not enough to answer, "Why did Hashem bring tzadikim through the camps?" with "svivav nissru meod"

The real question he is asking is:

"How can I possibly love a God who kills even His best children?"

"How will I ever be enough for Him?"

If no one helps the person rebuild their whole picture of Hashem,
then no brilliant answer will help.

This kind of healing takes time, Torah, and deep emotional insight.

And the people who can truly offer that —

who understand the Torah world and the emotional world —

are few and far between, and are so busy they don't have the time for the back and forth that is needed.

We need people who can bridge the two worlds —

people fluent in Torah and fluent in emotional healing.

People who understand what a sugya feels like,

and what trauma feels like.

Not instead of rabbanim. Not instead of therapists.

But a new middle.

Someone who knows the Torah — and also knows the wound.

There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach either as different individuals have different needs and different emotional challenges.

I don't know exactly how and what needs to change.

But I do know this: awareness is the first step.

I've spoken to well-known organizations and rabbanim.

But even they didn't have a concrete thing to do.

That's why I'm writing this.

Because until we start talking about it —
until we recognize this silent struggle —
nothing can change.

But something has to.

P.S. A special hakaras hatov to Rabbi Dovid Aaron who shared with me so much of his time, clarity, and insight which helped me get to where I am today.

If you're struggling with this kind of pain, or if you're trying to help someone who is —
and you want to talk, share, or explore ideas —
you can reach out at haragra14@gmail.com.

You're not alone.

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Re: Religious pain
Posted by markz - 28 May 2025 04:11

"BRIGHT" You Found Light At The End Of The Tunnel

WOW!

My heart goes out to you.

Yes there are professionals that can help.

I'm happy you found.

And yes it's something many Rabbis and Therapist may not be equipped to deal with.

KEEP ON TRUCKING - FULL STEAM AHEAD

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by azivashacheit101 - 28 May 2025 10:27

Golden!

I relate to so much of what is written here, I was also a masmid, top learner in yeshiva and killing myself on the inside. Much of the time I didn't even know it. I don't really relate to the part about hating Hashem because to me it was impossible to hate Hashem who is perfect and all good. Instead it was left to beating myself up more and more on the inside, having a messed up relationship with yiddishkiet, feeling like Hashem hates me and I'm a rashah, I could never be good enough (but that's my fault not Hashem's), I just can't understand Hashem and that's just another reason why I'm bad, and having a dysfunctional relationship with Hashem.

I plan to print out your post and show it to my therapist and maybe my SA sponsor because it puts into words things that I have a hard time expressing.

I'll just add that much of step 2 work in SA is to fix our misconceptions about Hashem and write out inventories on it.

There must be a better solution for the average person who doesn't need SA, but I don't know what that is.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by chosemyshem - 28 May 2025 12:49

Wow.

No words.

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Hashemshouldbentch you with strength and understanding to carry this through.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by Muttel - 28 May 2025 13:01

Wow, wow, wow, unbelievable!! Very apropos for Erev Shavuos, the Yom Tov Hashem took us under the Chuppa.....

Precious words!!

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by captain - 29 May 2025 13:36

Wow! Please make sure to help others, because there aren't that many people who can give this help. I went through something similar, maybe one day i'll share more (though probably not lol). That feeling of helplessness that no one could help (especially no therapist) that we are doomed because we will do something wrong by accident and then go to hell forever (with moshe rabbeinu, except maybe he just got out last week) (though unlike you, in my case besides for my own issues, some of themes you described were actually preached by others). I remember being so hopeless for years, and davening to die rather than go off. In the end I just had to find the answers all on my own while thinking they probably don't exist. (Now you understand why I am quick to correct the many negative mis-applications of chazal that come up here and there.)

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by cleanmendy - 29 May 2025 14:12

Usually on a long post i Skim through, not today. I read every word and then reread it.

Amazing and so so beautiful, a Yid finding his Father, embracing him and truly loving him.

Thank you for this post.

Kol tuv.

Gut Yom Tov

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by markz - 29 May 2025 16:48

[captain wrote on 29 May 2025 13:36:](#)

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Control Tower

Jim: Captain is calling for lift off.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by chaimoigen - 29 May 2025 18:12

Bright,

Wow, thank you for this incredibly important post.

It takes courage to put your deepest feelings out there, (regardless of the fact that you're posting anonymously), and I can't imagine how it much it took out of you to write.

You're incredibly Gebentched that you have found a path forward, and answers, and a relationship with The RBSHO.

This can give **hope** to people who are suffering, I pray.

I realize that there are two distinct parts of your post.

There's your personal story, and the journey that you have taken, the way your understanding of Yiddishkeit has become transformed as part of your healing - this perspective is deeply moving, intense, and so, so valuable.

But the beginning and end of your article focus on a truth that is more encompassing than your personal story- the gap between Rabbanim and therapists and why there is terrible pain that can so often live and breed in that gap.

This is a problem I have encountered, too. Even a Frum, ehrliche therapist is focusing on the work of therapy in his work, as he should. The thoughts, feelings, and conflict that a feeling Jew experiences often relate to his or her Yiddishkeit. And even though a Frum therapist can relate to and understand and thereby help his client in a way that a non-Jew often can't, nevertheless, the focus is on the **therapy**.

However, so many times, the pain, though related, is born of questions and conflict that are **rooted in and is a conflict with his religion itself**. Questions such as: How do I deal with fear of punishment, of spiritual destruction and loss of She'ifos, goals, satisfaction. How a person relates to the Rebono Shel Olam, in Tefilla and so many other areas.. The therapist often avoids

dealing with these issues directly, not wanting to opine on or work on subjects and issues out of his or her wheelhouse. And even when the therapist does try- often the client doesn't take what the therapist says seriously, because he's not an authority on these topics... so the pain continues, and the healing often is incomplete..

Also, therapy is a secular science. There is more to the Nefesh and Neshoma than is to be found in the universe of Freud, Jung, Bowlby, Ainsworth and Burns. Sometimes that "more" is needed to heal the Nefesh and Ruach that's been hurt. That's why speaking to a special Yid who is an understanding Baal Eitza and Baal Nefesh can often help in ways that the therapy can't. We often need the combination.

I don't have solutions either. But I agree that awareness is a huge first step.

So thank you!!

With admiration and incredible good wishes and bracha,

Chaimoigen

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 29 May 2025 20:23

Thank you R Chaim for all your encouragement and warmth. Couldn't have done it without you. And thank you everyone for your kind words. I would like to add a thought. We know that every year the Torah is given anew. what isnt discussed much is why? Dont we already have it from last year? I think the message is that every year there is a new facet, perspective or aspect of the Torah that needs to be given based on who we are and where we can get to. Many in our generation, myself included, need a different perspective, a different language. Its not a deficiency (as some seem to feel,) its our mission.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 30 May 2025 00:19

[captain wrote on 29 May 2025 13:36:](#)

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Definitely. Really, really hard. It was lonely and perhaps the deepest pain Ive ever experienced. From your amazing work here it seems you have found a path forward and I would be honored to hear about it and the insights and the life outlook you picked up along the way. Also if you, or anyone for that matter, would be interested in some resources Ive found helpful and life changing please pm me and i would happily share them.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by captain - 30 May 2025 13:25

[bright wrote on 30 May 2025 00:19:](#)

[captain wrote on 29 May 2025 13:36:](#)

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Obviously it's a lot emotionally, and will take time, but will hopefully try to do so at some point.

Regarding the resources, my pm's (sending them) are not working, so you could please pm me, or even better post them here for everyone to see.

(As for myself, a few years back I posted a list of important sources for a member Demolished who was overwhelmed before Rosh Hashana. I could try to find it.)

An idea I had is people could post what negative feelings they are going through here and we could try to help. It seems like both of us have some experience with this and have some good torah sources as well.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by captain - 30 May 2025 13:30

I found my original post. I will post it below. Unfortunately he erased his post, so there's not much context, but he was overwhelmed about negativity and Hashem being upset with him and out to zap him, especially with Rosh Hashana approaching:

Here's my post:

I suffered with this for many years. I doubt i'll be able to get it all out, but basically there are some problems that can be seen without needing much thought:

1) I end up viewing myself as bad, no matter how hard I try. And that I think Hashem views me as bad.

?2) For me to be "not bad" would take so much effort and even then I probably wouldn't succeed in being "not bad" anyway if we're being realistic.

3) No doubt all bad things will chas veshalom happen because of all my sins.

4) But of course even that won't help me clean up, and the real painful stuff is reserved for going downstairs after 120, chas veshalom.

My understanding is that people with a chassidish background have this problem less, because of their many teachings that go against it. But for those of us who don't have that background, a nice chassidishe vort in an email or book doesn't end up helping because it's not what we grew up with.

These perspectives are not easily fixed. And they are especialespecially hard to fix during yomim noraim. But here are some things to start with, that perhaps can help a little.

For 1 & 2, read The Battle of the Generation (

guardyoureyes.com/ebooks/item/the-battle-of-the-generation), especially Appendix A. It's a good start. Of course a lot more is needed.

For 3, you have to learn about Bitachon, but from the original sources, the rishonim. Read Rabbeinu Yonah on Mishlei perek 3 pasuk 26, Rabbi Avrohom ben Harambams chapter on bitachon in Sefer Hamaspik, and Chovos Halevavos's chapter on bitachon. (The last 2 are available in English, though Chovos Halevavos is the least straightforward and easily understood of the 3.)

For 4, you should read Kiddushin 39b, Sefer Ha'ikrim maamar 3 chapter 29, and the sixth part of Halevavos Shaar Habitachon chapter 4.

Of course, this is just beginning stuff. Very likely you will also benefit from a frum therapist who knows how to deal with this stuff, and uses a style you are comfortable with. And don't look to solve this by this year's yomim noraim, but maybe next year you will be able to come in with a completely different perspective.

I hope this helps. Wishing you much hatzlocha and praying for you.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 30 May 2025 15:27

I appreciate the vulnerability and importance of your post. Here's my personal story and take on what I changed and what people who are struggling need to change.

I grew up learning a lot-sources, seforim, shiurim-I was deeply immersed in the world of Torah from

a young age. Most of my chinuch came through the yeshiva system, where the core message was

clear: learning is everything. Growth was defined almost entirely through effort in learning and a strong focus on self-discipline, with yiras ha'onesh-fear of punishment-as the main motivator.

What wasn't talked about-at all, really, was love for Hashem. Emunah, bitachon, a personal connection with God... those were presented, if ever, as lofty ideals, something maybe you'd get to

after decades of perfecting yourself through fear and control. So I internalized that fear. It became

the lens through which I viewed everything-my learning, my identity, and my worth.

Even when I learned deeper concepts, even when I encountered more elevated hashkafic ideas, the

fear-based lens always filtered the message. Hashem became someone who was mostly waiting to

punish me. And if I ever questioned that-if I ever thought, "This doesn't feel right"-then I felt like I was the one who was wrong or broken.

Looking back, I can see that for someone like me-maybe because of my anxiety, or maybe just because I'm human, that way of thinking caused deep harm. If someone treated a child that way-constantly threatening them, offering no warmth-you'd call it abuse. And yet, somehow, I learned to accept that as a spiritual framework.

But now I see it differently. I don't believe that's who Hashem is. And I don't believe that's what

Yiddishkeit is meant to be.

To be honest, I probably would have continued living that way-fearing Hashem more than feeling

connected to Him, despite years of therapy, self-work, and emotional effort. I was still functioning

within that lens. There were times I was angry at Hashem. Yomim Noraim filled me with dread. The

constant need to perform, to prove I was okay, was exhausting. But no matter what I did, I never passed the bar. There was always more I could have done, always some rebuke about how I wanted pizza or enjoyed something too much. You all know the shmuezzin I'm talking about:)

This wasn't in some fringe environment. I attended one of the oldest, most respected yeshivas in

America. Even in such a "moderate" place, the intensity of the language shaped my thinking. I don't

blame my rebbeim, they were raised in that system too. But I do believe that language no longer works. Maybe it once did, but for many today, it's no longer a path to Hashem. It's a wall.

The real turning point came through a traumatic event that shook everything loose. It forced me to

confront what was working and what wasn't-what was true and what was hollow. I couldn't just keep

functioning under the same assumptions anymore. The worldview I had held onto-the one that was

driven by fear and pressure and constant self-doubt-wasn't sustainable. And it certainly wasn't healthy.

At some point, I had to be honest: this perspective might be fitting for a 14-year-old, but not for an

adult. Not for someone trying to build a real, mature relationship with Hashem. The constant sense

of needing to "pass a bar," to earn some kind of divine approval, wasn't just childish; it was harmful.

There comes a time when we need to move beyond the idea of "doing our mitzvah for the day" or

checking a spiritual box. A real relationship with Hashem has to be thoughtful, meaningful, and rooted in discovery. We need to understand why we're doing what we're doing. What we're trying to

become. What our connection to Hashem actually is, not just what we fear it might not be.

What changed for me was this: I stopped seeing Hashem's love as the exception, and started seeing it as the rule. That shift changed everything. I used to think that if Hashem loves me, I had to

explain the love away, "He loves me, but look what I did..." Now, I hold onto the idea that Hashem

loves me more than I can love myself. From that place, I can ask questions. From that place, I can

revisit everything I learned with a healthier lens.

There are many paths to rediscovering that love. For some, it might be through Chassidus. For others, through the writings of Rav Wolbe. For me, one of the most transformative resources was a

book by Rabbi David Aaron. His teachings helped me rebuild my Yiddishkeit from a place of depth,

warmth, and connection.

It's not easy. There's a lot to unlearn. But it's time we grow up-and grow toward Hashem, not away

from Him. A mature, loving view of Hashem isn't a luxury. It's a necessity.

If there's one takeaway from all of this, it's this last piece, it's that the most transformative shift in my journey was

redefining the klal or the general rule. For most of my life, I lived with the assumption that Hashem

punishes, and anything positive-His love, His kindness, His belief in me-was the exception. Religious Trauma and Rediscovering Hashem's Love

Now, that's reversed.

The rule is that Hashem loves us. We love Him. That's the foundation. That's the lens. And anything

that seems to conflict with that-whether it's a hard pasuk, a scary idea, or a painful experience-is the

exception, and it's our job to gently work through it, to make sense of it in time, and not let it override

the deeper truth of that love.

That shift didn't just change my beliefs. It changed my relationship with Hashem. And it changed me.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by yitzchokm - 30 May 2025 15:43

I never thought of this this way because I grew up Chassidish but I get your point. Thanks for sharing.

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