

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 bright - 13 Jul 2025 19:44

Hi everyone, I'm curious what you think.

A big source of pain for me is *Selichos*. What really gets to me is the message that *everything*, all the suffering and tragedies we've been through, is supposedly our fault. That we must have done something so terribly wrong to deserve things like the Holocaust, the Crusades, pogroms, and more.

That's really hard for me to accept. It's hard to think that we, as a nation, are so bad that we somehow earned that kind of suffering. And it's even harder when it feels personal, like *I* am being told I'm that bad too.

Honestly, I don't really believe that. Most people I know are trying so hard to do their best in difficult situations, situations they never asked to be in. To say that tragedies happened because of our sins feels like it lacks empathy for the struggles people are already going through. And I can't believe that Hashem, Who is compassionate and loving, would see us and want us to see ourselves that way.

Maybe it's just the pain talking. But I wanted to share it, because this part of davening has always been very hard for me.

Thanks for listening.

(P.s. I know the Nesivos Shalom about this but it always seemed more)

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by chosemyshem - 13 Jul 2025 21:10

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That's really ~~hard~~ easy for me to accept. It's hard to think that we, as a nation, are so ~~bad~~ good that we somehow earned a life free from that kind of suffering. And it's even ~~harder~~ easier when it feels personal, like I am being told I'm that bad too.

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You're not gonna like this answer. And I kinda doubt this is the emotionally healthy answer too. But as a non-religious-painer I LOVE selichos. The only thing I love more is kinnos.

Beautiful, heart-stirring, sincere, ancient hymns about pain and suffering? And there's rhythm, meter, occasional clever wordplay and guilt? Sign me up! Tisha B'av may be my favorite holiday.

Now, I don't really feel a lot of personal blame. I certainly lack empathy. In general it takes a hefty sledgehammer for me to feel guilty,* and a double sledge for empathy. So it could be I am lacking for not being bothered by what bothers you (obnoxious answer edited into your post aside.)

On tisha b'av I aim to feel a recognition that life is *broken* because of distance from Hashem, which is obviously not something that comes easily. But I can recognize intellectually that the world b'chlal and myself b'frat are utterly destroyed without feeling personally guilty.

Maybe that's a problem. Idk.

I have a harder time with Elul and selichos since it requires change and I do get some of that fear/anxiety. ("How do I deserve death this year? Let me count the ways.") But Tisha b'av is great.

*(Except for self-loathing when it comes to lust. I feel that fine.)

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by mggsbms - 13 Jul 2025 21:46

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There used to be a Taanis on chof Sivan, and there is selichos printed in many sedurim, it has since been mostly dropped, some say the reason is because it's too hard to bare.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 14 Jul 2025 01:22

The chof sivan one is a bit of a mystery. My guess is that it was more of a pious fast as a protective measure from previous things that happened near parshas chukas. The taanis was then eliminated as people stopped taking on individual fasts dues to piety. Either way its not the fast or three weeks that's the problem. It's the "we have sinned" over and over again. I think if we saw a kid running after his father making intense apologies all the time, we would say either the kid has issues or the father does. If all mercy from parents' source is Hashem's mercy, it should follow that he would hold to the same standards. I cant say why some things affect one person over the next. Most of my chaveirim that weren't affected by this type of thinking either

are very easy going when it comes to these things, basically take it with a grain of salt, or they never thought about it, or they are apathetic or they found their own way in yiddeshkeit were they don't accept anyone's opinion but their own.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bennyh - 14 Jul 2025 02:18

[bright wrote on 28 May 2025 03:20:](#)

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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.

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I pushed myself hard.

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I was looked at as someone who was “doing everything right.”

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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

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“You're faking it.”

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

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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.

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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.

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I couldn't hide from it anymore.

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

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I would have left Yiddishkeit completely.

Without hesitation.

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

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Like maybe no one ever could help.

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I had already tried.

So many times.

But thankfully I did.

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He pointed out how extreme my beliefs about Hashem were —

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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.

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But this is the truth.

This is what saved me.

Not through fear.

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And for the first time in my life,

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This is the part nobody talks about.

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But there seems to be nowhere to turn.

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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 —

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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 —

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that gap can feel like a black hole.

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

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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.

This post was enthralling from beginning to end. The credits are rolling but I'm still staring at the screen, eyes wide open.

GYE should have a blaring siren alert system to notify me when posts like this go live. Every word is such a diamond and every sentence lands with a triumphant *thwack!*

The problem you're exposing is so widespread that you only have to lift the log just a crack to see the swarming maggots underneath. I hear it from friends, from family members and from random dudes chilling in the coffee room by nishmas.

No one knows how to reach us, and we don't have who to turn to. We each think we're walking this path alone. Little do we know how much miserable company we have around us.

Glad you came out on the other side.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by stopsurvivingstartliving - 14 Jul 2025 02:19

I don't really have an answer for you but reading through your posts I definitely feel for you and wish you the best getting through these hardships.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by vehkam - 14 Jul 2025 02:29

[bright wrote on 14 Jul 2025 01:22:](#)

The chof sivan one is a bit of a mystery. My guess is that it was more of a pious fast as a protective measure from previous things that happened near parshas chukas. The taanis was then eliminated as people stopped taking on individual fasts dues to piety. Either way it's not the fast or three weeks that's the problem. It's the "we have sinned" over and over again. I think if we saw a kid running after his father making intense apologies all the time, we would say either the kid has issues or the father does. If all mercy from parents' source is Hashem's mercy, it should follow that he would hold to the same standards. I cant say why some things affect one person over the next. Most of my chavirim that weren't affected by this type of thinking either are very easy going when it comes to these things, basically take it with a grain of salt, or they never thought about it, or they are totally apathetic or they found their own way in yiddeshkeit were they don't accept anyone's opinion but their own.

If saying selichos brings someone to feel more distant from hashem, it is possible that he should not say them or only say part of them. For myself it was necessary to first repair my relationship with hashem and develop a picture of hashem who loves me unconditionally before I could sincerely appreciate any part of davening.

Once that understanding of the relationship is rock solid davening and even selichos for me are my longing to connect to hashem and the repetition just helps increase the intensity of that longing.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by mountainclimb - 14 Jul 2025 15:58

I think Dr. Ben Zion Sorotzkin did a nice amount of writing on religious pain. I think he is a powerhouse in this area.

Can someone please post the link to his websiwebsite? As u can see my safetelesafetelecom phone isnt equipped.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by BenHashemBH - 14 Jul 2025 16:10

[mountainclimb wrote on 14 Jul 2025 15:58:](#)

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Can someone please post the link to his websiwebsite? As u can see my safetelesafetelecom phone isnt equipped.

This looks like it. Thank you for sharing.

<https://drsorotzkin.com/>

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by youknowwho - 15 Jul 2025 13:39

[bright wrote on 13 Jul 2025 19:44:](#)

Hi everyone, I'm curious what you think.

A big source of pain for me is *Selichos*. What really gets to me is the message that *everything*, all the suffering and tragedies we've been through, is supposedly our fault. That we must have done something so terribly wrong to deserve things like the Holocaust, the Crusades, pogroms, and more.

That's really hard for me to accept. It's hard to think that we, as a nation, are so bad that we somehow earned that kind of suffering. And it's even harder when it feels personal, like *I* am being told I'm that bad too.

Honestly, I don't really believe that. Most people I know are trying so hard to do their best in difficult situations, situations they never asked to be in. To say that tragedies happened because of our sins feels like it lacks empathy for the struggles people are already going through. And I can't believe that Hashem, Who is compassionate and loving, would see us and want us to see ourselves that way.

Maybe it's just the pain talking. But I wanted to share it, because this part of davening has always been very hard for me.

Thanks for listening.

(P.s. I know the Nesivos Shalom about this but it always seemed more)

Bright, I am genuinely wondering, based on what you've learned in your recent re-calibration, is it within the bounds of an Orthodox Jew to say "I don't really believe that" to things that make you uncomfortable?

Maybe we really *are* kinda suffering through a bitter exile, destruction of our Temple, Crusades, programs, Holocausts, general pain and suffering because of our sins? Yeah, we need to constantly be begging for forgiveness. Yeah, we're trying, but it's not good enough. Isn't that largely what we see in the Pesukim? Our Tefilla structure? The sources in Gemara that speak about sin being the cause of our suffering?

Worded differently: Do we as Jews have the right to *choose* the perspectives that assuages our feelings, and aligns with our personality/trauma, be it a view of a loving G-d and not believing "negatively toned" concepts, or be it the discussion of sex-positivity on a different thread as a good example. The sources are *all over the place* - can we really prove one perspective over the other?

My question is coming from a place of confusion, not the proverbial soapbox.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by mountainclimb - 15 Jul 2025 15:21

It would be much worse if we suffered for no reason.

I understand the feeling of feeling as if u r bad because u r being punished or that u r not loved because u r being punished that is separate from deserving/undeserving the punishment.

That Hashem loves us and only wants what's best for us is true, but sometimes as my Rosh Yeshiva says, the love is not enough to deter us from doing wrong. We need to feel Hashem's stick which he keeps in the closet, otherwise we would get farther and farther away from Hashem and never come back as we enjoy the pleasures of this world and sin without any push back.

The understanding is that Hashem punishes us because he wants to bring us closer and cleanse us from our sins. As I pointed out in an earlier post, my Rosh Yeshiva said that part of Bitachon is believing that even the punishments in the next world will be for our benefit.

But actually Bright's idea has some merit. My Rosh Yeshiva said that sometimes someone

suffers and he cannot find a reason why he suffered in such a way. In that case sometimes Hashem makes us suffer so that we can deserve the reward later, like an entitlement program, so that we will feel deservant of G-d's handout. For example I think in Israel Holocaust survivors receive a stipend (the example my Rosh Yeshiva gave).

I heard a shmooze that the reason why the 11 tribes got land in Israel and shevet Levi didn't, is because shevet Levi didn't suffer in Egypt.

Again Dr. Ben Zion Sorotzkin has done incredible writing on religious pain.

www.drsorotzkin.com

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by retrych - 15 Jul 2025 15:50

It sounds to me bright's issue isnt the existence of punishment, but the degree. Like, how can we deserve this much suffering, and how could a loving Father bring so much pain even if deserved.

Which I dont think we can answer from our perspective down here. I can intellectually understand the effects aveiros have and why it needs to be fixed this way (by our choice, in a few ways). I cna understand that in the next world we'll be so much bigger and it'll seem like a toddler being given a shot. But while physical beings i dont think we have the capacity to go beyond how we perceive pain here, and the emotional reactions we have to it. There is some comfort that people who wrote about the reasons and meanings of suffering, often went through it themselves and if they themselves can see that there is justice and mercy behind it, there must be.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by retrych - 15 Jul 2025 15:57

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Well, some of us need that constant repetition over several weeks just to concentrate and maybe mean it one time.

Really, you can ask the same thing about all tefilla, and many other things in and out of religion. Same things, again and again. heck, many of the cleanliness method son these boards use similar repition. I dont think thats it's Hashem wanting us to constantly apologize, for one thing, its not doraisa. For me, it gives me a hance to actually absorb what im saying

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 15 Jul 2025 18:50

[youknowwho wrote on 15 Jul 2025 13:39:](#)

[bright wrote on 13 Jul 2025 19:44:](#)

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Great question. Being in a slightly better state of mind, I can say that I very much struggled with this when I started to shift my perspective. Its part of the hardship. Am I just fooling myself with sugar coated messages, Hashem is really a monster from my current perspective, but maybe Im just a stupid American who cant handle the realities of life. I just want a teddy bear, when the reality is a demanding king who can do no wrong and knows better than me what I need and laughs at us from his ivory palace for being so foolish. Compounding this are my formative years where I absorbed these messages as gospel. (Whether they were meant to be given over that way or not, that's for you R CO) That's what makes this so tough for me and others. We truly need permission and endorsement to consider an alternative path. As well as empathy and an understanding of whats really behind the questions we are having.

To answer your question as best I can, I think that there are certainly multiple perspectives that

are true. The Chofetz Chaim made an analogy to the eitz hachaim btach hagan, the tree of life is in the middle and can be approached from many ways. (He was specifically referring to Chassidus) However, I think that there are truths and deeper truths within yiddishkeit. For example, running after an eternal reward or from the fires of gehinnom is a very shallow way to live life, although it is certainly true, its in the ani maamins. But, as the Rambam says living a life with such a shallow belief system is only fit for children. But the deeper truth is that the reward is connecting to Hashem not a better steak. And the fire is there for purification not punishment and is sourced from our distancing ourselves from Hashem. Even deeper than that is the concept of a Neshama, which doesn't see itself as separate from Hashem and only wants to connect. Then we hopefully start identifying the Neshama as us. This can keep on going. Now this is from a belief perspective, from a motivational perspective we sometimes have to look at a truth but only partial perspective. For example, it may be useful for some to motivate themselves to not say Lashon Hora by seeing their Torah as not going up to heaven (whatever that means) as it says in Chofetz Chaim. However if a person was nichshal, would anyone tell him to not learn? No, they would say Torah breaks through everything, you'll do tshuva etc. Neither perspective is even 1% false but neither are the whole truth. And really...both are true without compromising the other. We focus on the part of truth that motivates us properly. So if fire and brimstone isn't working, certainly focusing on ahavas Hashem is ideal.

There is more to it though. We have to figure out what is the rule of our relationship with Hashem and by default, the Torah. Is it all about details, perfection, goals, and consequences and we have to accept as a gzeiras hakasuv that Hashem loves us? Or is the opposite true? Maybe the rule is that Hashem loves us more than we love ourselves. He created us because he loves us and is proud of our every accomplishment. He is the Infinite good and the source of all good we have ever experienced. The general rule and principal of the Torah is love and connection. And all that contradicts it and all the times I don't feel it is a gzeiras hakasuv that we may or may not ever understand. Maybe it comes from an unhealthy place, or we have created worldly comparisons in our minds that don't exist. But we can live with questions because nothing will shake the faith in the love he has for me. I wont belabor any one anymore with sources but you can guess which side Im on. And I think even the most cold Jew when pushed against the wall (perhaps at gunpoint) will agree.

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