

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 - 15 Jul 2025 18:59

[retrych wrote on 15 Jul 2025 15:50:](#)

It sounds to me bright's issue isn't 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 don't 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 can 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.

Spot on! I think youre totally right! We don't have the proper "glasses" to see what Divine punishment looks like, and our minds needing something to grasp, creates an image of suffering plus. (Sort of like walmart+ without the free delivery) I think that is certainly true. And yet when you read about physical punishment in the tochacha, I think we have a right to ask.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by retrych - Yesterday 05:27

[bright wrote on 15 Jul 2025 18:54:](#)

[retrych wrote on 15 Jul 2025 15:57:](#)

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

. As far as your response, Rav Nissam Gaon said his vidui daily. He probably concentrated.

Which Gaon was it who did teshuvah each day for being on a somewhat lower level the day before? I'm not worried about that.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - Yesterday 05:47

That was him. (He wasnt a gaon from the generation of gaonim by the way) My question wasn't on you, its on the objective system.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by BenHashemBH - Yesterday 12:07

Shalom Brother bright,

I don't want to misunderstand your thoughts.

Can you expand on your initial share of not believing (that YKW brought up) vs the end of your response that we can live with the questions?

It seems like the former is what you don't want or can't accept, while the latter is davka about acceptance, but you write very deeply and maybe I missed your point.

Thank you and Kol Tov

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - Yesterday 19:32

Sorry but can you elaborate the specific question? The first paragraph was my understanding were YKW was coming from (Hogwarts of course). The second part was what, IMHO, is the response.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by BenHashemBH - Today 17:07

[bright wrote on 16 Jul 2025 19:32:](#)

Sorry but can you elaborate the specific question? The first paragraph was my understanding were YKW was coming from (Hogwarts of course). The second part was what, IMHO, is the response.

I will try.

You seem to be saying that the horrific suffering that we've endured appears to be over the top punishment for sins of people genuinely trying to do their best in tough situations. It doesn't make sense that we deserve that extreme of a response. In a moment of weakness, a good child stole a candy and so he got his hand chopped off. Or a child that did nothing wrong was raised in a dysfunctional/abusive home. It doesn't track, it's unjust, and I can't accept that this child should feel that the punishment fits his crime.

Did Bnei Yisroel deserve to suffer in Mitzrayim because they were bad, or was it a complex tikkun and there was a bigger picture necessitating that event for G-dly reasons?

I don't know why bad things happen to good people, or how the degree of punishment and suffering is calculated. But that doesn't mean it's incorrect.

To say that I don't believe it sounds like there is an error in the system itself, as opposed to living with questions which is acknowledging and accepting that there are errors (or missing information) from my perspective.

So to me it seemed like your response didn't align with your original post. Which is why I was thinking maybe I misunderstood what you meant in one (or both) posts.

We are a living paradox, both a spark of the divine, higher than angels, and a spec of dust whose end is maggots and worms. I need to feel both. Ahavah and yirah. Maybe that's what you elaborated on in your response, that there are multiple, seemingly opposite approaches that ought be mutually exclusive, yet both are parts of the same truth.

I don't know if it entirely rests upon whether I deserve it or earned it. Hashem decided that it is fitting, and He wants me to reflect, but out of love and with higher purpose. He cares. Even when it hurts me, He still cares, probably even more.

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