

Religious pain

Posted by bright - 28 May 2025 03:20

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## **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](mailto:haragra14@gmail.com).

You're not alone.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 13 Jun 2025 06:28

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Honestly, I've tried starting mental health conversations in the past, but they haven't taken off. Maybe you will have better luck...That said, I did reach out to the heads of GYE about making mental health challenges more of a focus, especially because, as you hinted, dealing with porn and masturbation from the perspective of someone who's suffering often needs a different kind of response than what's typically written or said. Or at least more tailored support.

They mentioned they were working on something, but I would encourage you to reach out to them as well. The more voices they hear it from, the more they'll recognize the need. And they really are amazing people, warm, open to feedback, and genuinely trying to help, so there's no reason to shter:)

**Warning: Spoiler!**

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by gevura shebyesod - 13 Jun 2025 16:35

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This was posted 14 years ago. It was one of the first posts I saw when I joined, and it still brings tears to my eyes.

[TheJester wrote on 03 Jun 2011 10:05:](#)

*Moved from my forum - it really belongs here. Or perhaps it doesn't.*

**Dear G-d, From a Very Far Place**

You know, G-d,

You're very big.

Like, huge kinda big.

But I can see you.

Those who nurse in your bosom?

Well, they can see your chest, I guess.

It took us 5000 years to prove the Earth is round -

After all, we walk on it. We're close to it.

I? I'm far from you. So far, my G-d.

I can see you.

I can see you better.

Can you see me?

I am nor your prophet,

Nor your poet,

Nor his son.

Nor your priest, nor your prince.

I am your speck,

Your grain,

Your fluff.

Your son.

I don't ask where you are - I see you.

I see your shadow, your hand, your shape in my heart where you should be,

Your eye, your heart and your will.



But I?

I am far, my G-d.

And this thing is very close indeed to me,

This knowledge,

This vision.

But I am far from you.

\* \* \*

You asked me to walk to you.

I don't want to walk to you.

Well. I do.

But I walk away, around, over and under.

I am walking to you. Slowly. I cannot not.

But I can't walk to you. I'm busy.

I'm busy with all the things you told me not to do.

I know what not to do - I do what not to do.

It's easy. Easier.

Can you comprehend distance from you?

Have you ever been distant from yourself?

Some people say you have, but even I don't believe them.

Why would you do that? I wouldn't, were I you.

Silly people.

But some people far away with me think that.

I don't blame them - they're too far to see you properly.

Did you make us walk here, so far, or was it us?

\* \* \*

When I run from you, you run beside me.

When I crawl from you, you lay grass beneath my knees.

When I lie broken, you trickle water into my mouth.

Why can I not run where you can't help me?

Why are you always here?

I am further from you, now.

And so I can see you better.

I know what you are.

\* \* \*

I don't feel you as much as

I feel your absence.

I have a special place for your absence, my G-d.

It's in the pit of my stomach, against my spine and my navel.

When I feel its hollow shape, I curl around it.

Do you curl around my hollow shape?

Do you curl around all the hollow shapes of me and my friends?

I think you curl a lot.

Do you hurt as much as we do?

I think you do.

Any father would.

Do we even hurt in comparison?

Your capacity for hurt must be infinite, but ours is limited.

Please remember that.

Can you feel dirty like I do?

I don't think you can. What is dirt to you?

But dirt clings to us. I'm caked in it.

Do you feel pity when I look at you with a muddy face,

Or scorn?

Does knowing I could clean it make it worse?

Does knowing that I know I'm dirty make it worse?

Do you even notice?

I know you do.

I even feel you do.

I just don't feel it.

\* \* \*

I don't cry for you, my G-d.

I'm too far away.

Do tears really wash us?

Perhaps tears leave streaks in our muddied faces,

Allowing more grime to stick.

Do you wash us?

Even when we don't ascend to your washroom,

When we thrash against the soap,

Curse you as you sting our eyes,

Are we washed?

We still feel dirty.

Some of us are scared of the water.

Well, we're not scared - we even enjoy it.

We just avoid it.

You know.

Because we do.

We're very far, you see.

\* \* \*

My G-d, please.

Don't answer me.

I ask because I need to ask.

But your answer would make me cry, whatever you say.

I don't want to cry.

Just leave me curled in the ditch of the field of my dreams,

Far from you, so far from you.

Here, I'm safe.

Feeling might hurt too much.

I'm scared and alone.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 13 Jun 2025 20:52

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Not that there aren't challenges. There are rough days where I still find Shacharis difficult. My self-esteem still gets damaged by mistakes (including past ones!) more easily than it should. I occasionally catch myself slipping back into a "people-pleaser" mindset, of saying the most accepted, pareve answer so that everyone will "just be happy", of going with the flow and the "norm" so as not to stand out, of worrying what others will think and say. And in this crazy, insane, delusional world we live in, which invariably has affected Klal Yisrael (as Golus always has), I encounter narrow-minded, shallow, callous, one-dimensional robots (interpret this as you will) more often than I'd like. Not a good feeling. It takes work not to feel hurt or second-class, to not second-guess myself, and to remind myself that Hashem loves me, wants me, and feels everything I'm feeling, and He's proud of me regardless of whoever I encounter. He knows just how hard I've worked and how much I've fought to get to where I am today. He loves me, and I love Him, forever and always.

If I could, I would frame your post and hang it on the dining room wall (not sure my wife would go for it though...). Beautifully and perfectly written. Thank you. Keep BRIGHTening (sorry, sorry, couldn't resist) up the world!

Wow you have certainly come very far. Dealing with OCD is really tough, especially because the public seems to think its the lowest on the totem pole of the numerous mental health issues that they cant fathom but must deal with. "Youre not committing suicide, egh deal with it." "So what davening takes a bit longer, big deal." "You weren't molested were you?" They don't understand the constant war of the minds the agonizing back and forth, the violent black tornado that follows you around every day and leaves you no respite. The never ending effort you put in to each mitzva and can never seem to get it right. How it feels to build your very own pisom and raamses, with stones made from your emotional sweat and tears. How this slowly builds a distance from all that you strive for to avoid another krias shema or retzifus made in hell. And how that silent cry festers into a scream of anger at the One putting you through it all. I am so happy to hear that you've gotten to the light at the end of the tunnel and it wasn't one of heavens angels waiting to smite you:) Keep on bringing light and hope into the world like you are doing. Any BRIGHT light needs a FIRE. (besides LED see kovetz halachos:).

And yes there are many times I feel low and put down or just downright disgusted by the shallowness of some "respected" people. But then some thing happens, be it a moment of chesed, of gadlus, or just genuine empathy that I feel taka mi kaamcha yisroel. There are issues and I don't want to belittle them chas veshalom, and people, especially "bnei Torah" whom the public holds in high regard, should take responsibility for their actions and learn not to run away in terror from their shortcomings. Yes. But come to think of it, would I not have acted the same way or worse if I wasn't put in the situations I was in? So who am I to judge?

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by trueme - 13 Jun 2025 21:08

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Bright wrote:

Wow you have certainly come very far. Dealing with OCD is really tough, especially because the public seems to think its the lowest on the totem pole of the numerous mental health issues that they cant fathom but must deal with. "Youre not committing suicide, egh deal with it." "So what davening takes a bit longer, big deal." "You weren't molested were you?" They don't understand the constant war of the minds the agonizing back and forth, the violent black tornado that follows you around every day and leaves you no respite. The never ending effort you put in to each mitzva and can never seem to get it right. How it feels to build your very own pisom and raamses, with stones made from your emotional sweat and tears. How this slowly builds a distance from all that you strive for to avoid another krias shema or retzifus made in hell. And how that silent cry festers into a scream of anger at the One putting you through it all. I am so happy to hear that you've gotten to the light at the end of the tunnel and it wasn't one of heavens angels waiting to smite you:)

Just to clarify a point which I think you mean as well, R' Bright. (By the way I appreciate your rawness.)

Religious OCD is a feeling of a never ending sheer nightmare.

For me it included waking up in middle of the night in cold sweats and always thinking I had made something treif and I owe someone money and Im going to hell or coming back as a cat. Imagine feeling that - in a very real way - throughout the day.

It's hell on earth.

Thank Hashem I'm on the other side now but this is an incredibly painful expirience - not just about doing mitzvot right or building pisom v'ramseses - but the (constant) fear of frying in hell, the fear of coming back as a gilgul, and the fear that your marriage or divorce wasn't correct halachically. These are real life examples, not theoretical possibilities. It is sheer tourture and I have not heard anyone belittle it or rank it low on the mental health totem pole, but someone )

It can basically reduce a person to often curling in a fetal position in fright (when no one is looking) and feeling nauseous and about to pass out. And being productive? Forget about that.

The good news is that therapy is incredibly effective, especially if caught early on. For some, medication helps/compliments as well.

It is very treatable, but you gotta get help. ASAP.

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