

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 SisonYishecha - Today 03:04

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The Issur of ?? ???? ?? ???? ???? would seemingly imply that the ????? your referring to is somewhat of a Darga, and not necessarily demanded of the ???? ??.

But I may be totally wrong in my understanding.

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Re: Religious pain

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Posted by yitzchokm - Today 03:12

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Forgiving someone for the wrong he has done to us doesn't take away from the fact that what he has done is wrong and we should still label it as wrong. Also, although perhaps we should forgive someone who hurt us physically, emotionally or financially (after he paid), I am not sure that it applies to someone who hurt us spiritually.

Trauma and abuse doesn't seem to be the topic of discussion but since you brought it up I heard from someone who was sexually abused that he received a psak that he isn't obligated to forgive. I wonder whether this holds true for everyone who was sexually abused and whether it also holds true for those who were physically abused.

According to psychologytoday.com psychologists tell their clients who were abused that they aren't obligated to forgive. Psychologists also say that it causes a lot of harm when people push those who were abused to forgive when they aren't at a stage where they are capable of forgiving. Psychologists will suggest forgiveness at a late stage of therapy if and when it is feasible.

I also don't know of an obligation to forgive someone who didn't ask for forgiveness but there seems to be a source to go over to the person who hurt you and tell him that you were hurt so that he can ask for forgiveness. Obviously, this would only be in a case where there is a chance that he will regret what he did and he will have true remorse. It definitely wouldn't apply in a case where you would get hurt even more by talking to him. In my experience, abusers are in denial of their actions let alone to have them admit that their actions were hurtful to others and they were wrong.

I agree with everything ChaimOigen wrote about the system. I also believe there are more things at play in many cases that the system failed than the system itself. I am not taking responsibility off of the system but what I am saying is that you have to look into every failure of the system, and look at all the components that were at play so that you can get a full picture. Sometimes there are people aside from the educators that are at fault when a child gets hurt in the system. Sometimes it can be parents. Sometimes it can be a third party that interacted with the child the wrong way. Sometimes it can be that a child was placed in the wrong school. Even when it is the system it is usually an educator or principal who did a poor job and not a general problem with the system.

When I was in school, both in elementary school and Beis Hamedrash it felt like the principal

and Mashgiach were out to get me. There were only a few Rebbes in elementary school that showed me that they cared about me and in high school and Beis Hamedrash none of the Rebbies showed me that they cared. I was a very sensitive child so this made a great impact on my personality. Perhaps I should have went to different schools where they give personal attention but then I might not have grown up as strong in Yiddishkeit as I did. My father beat me until I was 15 years old. I could have easily ended up thinking that Hashem was out there to get me but for some reason it didn't happen. For some reason I grew up believing that Hashem loved me, perhaps because of the love I received from my mother, or perhaps because of the mercy and compassion I had for others.

I heard from someone professional that the relationship a person has with Hashem is usually based on the relationship he has with his father. For some reason what my father did hasn't affected my relationship with Hashem but when someone feels that Hashem is out there to get him it would be worthwhile for him to check his relationship with his father. Of course someone could have the inverse of my experience where the father is a wonderful person and the child still feels that Hashem is out there to get him. My point is just that it can sometimes be because of the father and not because of the system.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by yitzy148 - Today 03:14

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[SisonYishecha wrote on 01 Jul 2025 03:04:](#)

The Issur of ?? ????? ?? ????? ????? would seemingly imply that the ????? your referring to is somewhat of a Darga, and not necessarily demanded of the ????? ??.

But I may be totally wrong in my understanding.

3 comments:

1 - I think that there is a machlokes Rishonim if the issur of Lo Sisna is only "bilvuvecha"

2 - Regardless, the mitzva of v'uhavta takes out some of the punch of your comment, no?

3 - The "bilvuvecha" aspect would require the wronged party to confront the one who caused

him pain, no?

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - Today 04:57

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[trueme wrote on 01 Jul 2025 01:57:](#)

First of all I respect all here and I appreciate the topic.

I get that anyone suffering trauma and doesn't want to forgive shouldn't be judged.

No compelling **obligation**? Nu nu. I think there is a compelling reason and argument.

What is tefillas zakah about? Dont we ask straight out that Hashem should put it into the hearts of those we have wronged to forgive us - is that talking only if you asked them forgiveness (Hold on guys, pause the davening I gotta go ask, aww shucks he lives chutz l'tchum...) ? And that we forgive everyone as well - only if they asked us forgiveness!?

Forget that.

Dont we say (at least some of us anyway, I wish I was one of them:wink:), **the tefillah of ribono shel olam I am mochel each night to forgive anyone and everyone**...who here has a nightly line of the people waiting to ask forgiveness????

A holy wise jew once told me that when someone wrongs someone that is "himmel zachen", even though we are perplexed by bechira, no one can harm you, it's all Hashem's plan. If the fellow is a bona fide rasha, that is a different story, '???? ?????? ???, ????? ?' ????? ?? ???...but most Jews are not like that even if they do very wrong things. (eh...like me, why else am I here...)

Im not saying it's easy or hard or what not.

The parsha of Yosef is a difficult parsha to say the least and it's very difficult to say that the same Yosef who said that the shevatim didnt do this, Hashem did this, and **pacified the shevatim(!)** Also at the same time never forgave them. I was always taught, and I believe there are strong sources for this, I apologize I don't have them offhand, that because Yosef didn't say with words I AM MOCHEL YOU - that is why we still suffer from that ????. (Hence why many people are particular to get an explicit, verbal, forgiveness) But It could be it was overlooked then



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To me, it's clear: the derech Yisrael is *not* to be mochel automatically before real teshuvah has occurred. Of course, one may choose to forgive anyway, and that can be a high level. But it's not demanded or expected halachically. And it comes after a lot of inner work.

The **nightly tefillah** you mention, from **Megillah 28a**, "?? ????? ?? ??????? ???", is a *midas chassidus*. We don't know if mar zutra was referring to those who apologized or not. Even if he meant all offenders, it likely referred to daily interpersonal friction, not serious and repeated abuse or trauma.

As for **asking mechilla erev YK**, it likely fits more in the spirit of Yom Kippur, a day of achdus and cleansing. See levush... With regards to tefilla zaka the hope is that with the spirit of the day one will be able to utter those words and mean it. But it's not a chiyuv and again the mashmoas is on aveiros that are not known (besides for the chutz) The emphasis in halacha is on asking for forgiveness so *that* others may forgive. The halachic obligation is still for the offender to seek mechilah, not for the victim to offer it unconditionally.

Ultimately, this discussion is less about whether forgiveness is good, of course, ideally, we want to reach a place of peace. It's about whether there's an *obligation* to get there prematurely, without an attempt for reconciliation, and whether pushing that can cause more harm than healing. Specifically the thought process some bochurim come away with; that Hashem wont forgive them unless they forgive is very harmful and a real chillul Hashem.

Each person has their own journey. I fully agree with you that there is *tremendous* healing and bliss in true acceptance and emunah, but that can't be rushed or forced on someone still in the thick of their pain.

And we have to be real with ourselves and realize if we are still angry that we are allowed to be human.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by chosemyshem - Today 14:40

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[bright wrote on 01 Jul 2025 04:57:](#)

That's precisely my point.

This widespread "turn the other cheek" idea — where forgiveness is preached as the automatic and ideal response — is, in my view, mistaken. Not only that, but the phrase "I'm moichel you," which is tossed around so casually today, likely accomplishes very little, halachically or emotionally.

And we have to be real with ourselves and realize if we are still angry that we are allowed to be human.

Disagree on the halachic aspect. If you verbally forgive someone without actually forgiving them and letting go, all you're doing is setting yourself up to be oiver on lo sisna. That is to say, just like being mafkir your car will make your car hefker no matter what you are thinking in your head in all likelihood forgiveness works the same way. A declaration is binding.

And of course once you're moichel someone and lose your halachic right to be angry, continuing to hate them will be a violation of lo sisna.

I'm agreeing with your well said recognition of the essential need to be honest with ourselves and to accept that we're human and allowed to be hurt. Denying or rejecting that is only making the problem worse.

As Rav Gad'I Eisner would say in a similar context, "people want to be angelic and the first thing they do is become inhuman."

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Re: Religious pain  
Posted by yitzchokm - Today 15:30

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You see clearly from the Rambam that there is an obligation not to hate your brother in your heart but rather you should go over to him and reprimand him for hurting you, and if he asks for forgiveness you are obligated to forgive him. There is no mention of forgiving the person before he asks for forgiveness. As I mentioned, abusers are usually in denial and they won't admit what they did, let alone admit that what they did was wrong and harmful so there usually wouldn't be an obligation to reprimand them. In addition, due to the trauma you may be inflicting upon yourself unbearable pain by going over to your abuser and I don't know whether the obligation to reprimand him applies under such conditions. A Rov can be consulted

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