

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 - 15 Jul 2025 18:59

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[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 - 16 Jul 2025 05:27

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[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 - 16 Jul 2025 05:47

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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 - 16 Jul 2025 12:07

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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 - 16 Jul 2025 19:32

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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 - 17 Jul 2025 17:07

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[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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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 17 Jul 2025 19:46

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Thank you for clarifying. Ill do my best to answer shortly now and clarify later, hopefully. I never answered the question of extreme suffering. I don't know there is an answer we will be able to understand now. The "anachnu chatanu" Jewish guilt piece was what I felt bothered by and I still am bothered by. Never answered it:) With regards to galus, the Nesivos Shalom in the maamarim on Pesach says that its not that our aveiros caused the galus it's that we really needed galus to shape us. We had a few watershed moments in history, such as the meraglim and Avraham by the Bris Bein Habesarim. Those moments could have created an alternative path that wouldn't necessitate galus. But the standard in the world is galus. And now that we missed those opportunities we are in galus for alternative growth. I feel it doesn't fully answer the question, but it at least helps.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by Muttel - 18 Jul 2025 13:02

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[retrych wrote on 16 Jul 2025 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:](#)

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Rabbeinu Saadya Gaon

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by retrych - 21 Jul 2025 18:00

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Thinking it over, it can't be that we sav chatanu so many times becuase we need to keep begging for forgiveness. We have too many sources that forgiveness for honest teshuva comes right away (A rasha who proposes al tanai hes a tzadik, teshuvah right before death, etc.) and anyway if it was a necessary component it would be part of the d'oraisa yom kippur process.

You have to say it's for ourselves. however you explain repitiion in the rest of davening, apply it here

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 21 Jul 2025 19:36

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Some might say look at the Rabbeinu Yona in Shaarei Tshuva where he says your supposed to regret your aveiros forever to get a complete tshuva...

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by chaimoigen - 21 Jul 2025 21:36

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My understanding of Rabbeinu Yona, after learning through the Sefer a few times, is that he means it in a positive way.

along the lines of Rav Sadyaa Gaon.

Constant growth also means utilizing the lessons and galvanizing influence of past mistakes to keep getting higher and closer. See Rabbeinu Yona's poetic intro to the 2nd Shaar, the depth of his paragraph on Yagon, and much more.

Although Rabbeinu Yona's treatment of Teshuva is Charata-centric, which is backwards-facing to some extent (as opposed to the Mabits ????? ??? ?????? ????? pathway), it's all about gaining, maintaining, and enhancing a closeness to HKBH. He uses "Yir'as Shamayim" in a very broad way throughout his seforim (esp Mishlei) - it connects to Bitachon and Romemus- and isn't about cowering in fear.

(the paragraphs in the third Shaar about the Yom Hamisa are designed to scare the living daylight out of the reader, and are not the theme of the rest of the Sefer )

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by trueme - 22 Jul 2025 03:44

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I think that although coming from completely different angles, these two recent vayimaen videos are very helpful to what prompted this thread.

R' Yussie Zakutinsky

[www.torahanytime.com/lectures/382035](http://www.torahanytime.com/lectures/382035)

and

R' Ari Bensousan

[www.torahanytime.com/lectures/382827](http://www.torahanytime.com/lectures/382827)

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 22 Jul 2025 14:46

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[chaimoigen wrote on 21 Jul 2025 21:36:](#)

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(the paragraphs in the third Shaar about the Yom Hamisa are designed to scare the living daylights out of the reader, and are not the theme of the rest of the Sefer )

This is the fascinating piece. I have learned Shaarei tshuva quite a few times. Ive always found it to be extreme and unforgiving. Maybe something for the level of the Rishonim, certainly not us. Other Sifrei RY were much more on the level for me such as pirkei avos and mishlei. Legend has it that he indeed wrote it for himself....Yet R CO learned the exact same Sefer with a radically different maskana... This is precisely the paradox were facing.

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Re: Religious pain

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Posted by captain - 23 Jul 2025 12:26

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I can very much relate to the pain of all our nation's suffering being our fault, and that it feels like there's constant criticism. This was the strongest for me during my (many) struggles with depression. I'm on the other side now bH (hopefully for good, with Hashem's help!), and it bothers me less.

That's one part of it - when dealing with depression, it colors my view and everything and tilts it in a negative way, and there's nothing anyone can tell me to change it.

But on the other hand, even without the depression, there is something of a negative view itself, and I want to address it. I'm actually going to switch over to what's coming up soon (it surely will be coming up on this thread at that time), the days of teshuva (some people here referenced teshuva), as a way of explaining.

During the days of selichos and then on Yom Kippur, in davening we talk repeatedly about how bad we've been and how many mistakes we have made. I would always get the feeling that we're so negative and terrible and Hashem is so mad at us (c"v) and we're just coming so maybe He won't zap us so hard.

But in reality, which I can only see years later with much thought and will being free from the "depressed mind," the focus of these days is that we are in middle of a job - we're trying to clean ourselves off. So of course our focus is on admitting our wrongs and doing teshuva. But we are not saying that we are an overall bad person. We are just focused on cleaning off our wrongs -- not on judging where we are overall. So the focus will temporarily be on the negative, of course. But we must remember that we are not saying we are overall bad, but rather are focused on repenting our sins, so we are talking about those sins. (Obviously, lots more to talk about on this subject and other ideas on it, which I'm sure we'll get to in Elul.)

Let's bring that back to our topic of focusing in davening about all the tragedies happening because of our sins. Again, I don't think this answer will be so helpful to someone whose mind is "tilted" by depression (maybe a little bit), but it is helpful for others to understand.

The truth is that Hashem loves us very much. He is looking only for our benefit, and He even is very proud of our nation overall, for all we've been through and still 3300+ years later we are keeping the Torah, and if you're not sure, just contrast us with the goyim for a minute.

But at the same time, Hashem does have a goal for us, that we accomplish the point of the world and be successful, and be rewarded in this world and the next. So if we miss the boat in certain ways on certain aveiros, there could be punishment (c"v). But it doesn't mean Hashem is looking at us overall negatively or rejecting or hating us or fuming at us. It's hard to see at the moment, because when being punished and suffering, that's what it looks like. But it is the opposite, that He does look well at us overall even at these times (not sure if that's so at a time when everyone goes off the derech, but at the other times at least), and He still loves us and even thinks highly of us even at these times.

There's a lot more to say. And one more point I want to make, about the attitude of the yeshivos

in Europe. But this way long enough, and I didn't write so clearly, and there's already a lot to discuss for today. Maybe tomorrow or Friday I'll get back with the piece about the yeshivos in Europe.

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