

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 traumatic 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 - 24 Jul 2025 04:01

Great stuff...

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Re: Religious pain
Posted by captain - 24 Jul 2025 12:08

Sorry, don't have time to write about the Europe stuff today. Hopefully tomorrow.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by captain - 25 Jul 2025 12:41

I decided that it is too dangerous to post the stuff about European yeshivas in a public setting, as it could be misunderstood. But if anyone suffers with religious pain and feels like this might be relevant for their healing, they should PM me and I will send them my original post on this.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by youknowwho - 25 Jul 2025 13:55

[captain wrote on 25 Jul 2025 12:41:](#)

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For some reason, my entire PM option is gone. Would love to hear more

- youknowwho300@proton.me

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by captain - 25 Jul 2025 13:55

I'm still going back and forth on this, whether it should be put up publicly. If someone wants to convince me to post it publicly, do so here. (You might want to read the post first, so PM me for it.)

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by youknowwho - 25 Jul 2025 14:00

[captain wrote on 25 Jul 2025 13:55:](#)

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Public. On a public forum, some will like what you write and some won't.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by captain - 25 Jul 2025 14:18

[youknowwho wrote on 25 Jul 2025 14:00:](#)

[captain wrote on 25 Jul 2025 13:55:](#)

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True! But I'm more concerned about:

1) having a bad impact on a reader (making him angry at the system, or at rabbanim, etc. I've found this to be very damaging overall.)

2) It perhaps being understood in ways that don't contain the proper respect for incredibly great people.

Of course, some people do need to hear this. The question just is what the impact of making it

public will be, and if there is anything negative, is it justified by the benefits to those who will gain from it being public.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by kavey - 25 Jul 2025 16:57

Perhaps a compromise is to give marei mekomos?

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by trueme - 25 Jul 2025 17:15

[captain wrote on 25 Jul 2025 13:55:](#)

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This is a public forum, we have the right to discuss whatever we want, albeit in a respectful manner. Truth be told when someone clearly wants his thread to be geared toward a certain direction, makes sense that if you want to veer from that direction, start your own thread. Up for debate.

Either way, I dont know why this point is being considered in such a (almost fearful) manner. Let's start with this. Would a Sefardic businessman in Aleppo attempt to understand the code of the way husyatiner chassidim understand the proper way to daven ashrei? Or in more general terms, would a student firmly entrenched in the world of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch delve into the Hashkafa of Rav Baruch Ber? If they would it would probably classify as a hobby, perhaps an interesting intellectual pastime.

Practically?

They are very different.

The world of Europe was very very different then our world. In so many ways. From nearly every

angle.

Each generation has its unique character and its own nisyonos. The concept of mesorah can help with halacha and even minhag but when it comes to chinuch and general self growth it obviously needs to be translated both to fit the needs of the generation and **even more specifically - the individual.**

Without delving, what difference does it make what they did in Europe?

What we do know is that if someone attempted to recreate Navardok or Kelm nowadays should probably open up a mental institution because at least over there it's regulated and official. (Yes, the two above are extreme examples, but the general point is the same)

We might stem from Litvish Yeshivos, Chassidic courts, or other schools of hashkafa and their are certain principles that we glean from them and are unchanging. But practically? We need to do what works and brings us closer to Hashem, we are not busy needing on earlier generations that frankly, probably is mostly speculation (if even that) without any real clue what we are talking about.

I am NOT criticizing captain, (and I did NOT request his write up), or anyone else in this post. I am just pointing out what I think is the proper attitude.

The only thing I think could be gained is someone, and I truly feel bad for this type of person, who has been so traumatized that he must replicate and personify the old European system (which he has no clue about) that he must learn what he can just for the sake of practical differentiation.)

Please excuse me if my tone was sharp, I only meant it to be blunt, and nothing personal to anyone.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by captain - 25 Jul 2025 17:48

I was referring to what was done by great people in Europe that 1) still impacts many yeshivos today, and 2) could be (inaccurately but very likely to happen) viewed as disrespectful to them

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by eerie - 25 Jul 2025 18:05

Personally, I think anything that you see clearly the possibility of people walking away with disrespect for gedolei Yisroel, don't share

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by captain - 25 Jul 2025 18:26

I can't initiate PMs, but if you send me one I can send it to you

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by vehkam - 25 Jul 2025 19:06

[captain wrote on 25 Jul 2025 17:48:](#)

I was referring to what was done by great people in europe that 1) still impacts many yeshivos today, and 2) could be (inaccurately but very likely to happen) viewed as disrespectful to them

Not worth the danger in an open forum.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by alex94 - 26 Jul 2025 19:21

[trueme wrote on 25 Jul 2025 17:15:](#)

[captain wrote on 25 Jul 2025 13:55:](#)

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