

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 - 09 Jun 2025 04:18

Just to be clear before I begin:

I'm not criticizing anyone personally, and certainly not the sincerity behind what was shared. I'm responding to the way certain ideas are often used in these conversations, sometimes with the best of intentions, but in ways that can unintentionally minimize pain. I'm sharing my own experience and reflections, not trying to argue.

[p]I want to say something a little vulnerable. Honestly, I am very intellectually oriented, and my first instinct was always to give the "right" answer, the one that checks all the boxes. It's taken

me years, and I'm still learning, to understand that the deepest response to pain is not always explanation, but empathy. You'll probably even see that matter of fact tone in some of my earlier posts.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 09 Jun 2025 04:30

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 09 Jun 2025 05:21

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 09 Jun 2025 05:28

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I want to say something a little vulnerable. Honestly, I am very intellectually oriented, and my first instinct was always to give the "right" answer, the one that checks all the boxes. It's taken me years, and I'm still learning, to understand that the deepest response to pain is not always explanation, but empathy. You'll probably even see that matter of fact tone in some of my

Pain is real, and so is feeling for others. That, to me, is the depth of the Mishnah: “Al tenachem adam b'sha'ah shemeiso mutal lefanav.” There's a time to listen, not explain.

What I believe true me is saying, and is understandably really hard to hear, is that there is a system.

Hashem's system.

And while things were and may still be painful, hurting and dark, and it feels as though we have been let down by those who we trusted, this is all part of Hashem's plan for us to grow into the light-filled, happy, successful neshamas we have the potential to be.

Yes, and I understand that view. But sometimes, part of Hashem's plan includes our outrage at injustice, and our compassion for those who were hurt. That is how His middos are expressed in this world.

Just to be clear, I'm not critiquing you personally or your belief, I'm responding more broadly to how these ideas are often used in ways that unintentionally silence pain. I really do appreciate that you're engaging thoughtfully.

The Gemara tells us Hashem feels our pain with us. The Nefesh HaChaim adds: even more than we do. Hashem is the source of all reality. If he feels our pain it must be that pain, empathy and emotions are also emes. Objective reality is not the only thing that exists, subjective pain has its place on the landscape of truth.

We were put here to fix what's broken, within ourselves and, when possible, in the world around us. That's not a contradiction to bitachon, it's part of our avodah.

It is not our job to sit silently on the sidelines while people are destroyed or hurt.

It is our privilege to bring clarity, truth, and light into the world, wherever and whenever we can.

I think that while the importance of this point cannot be understated, there is a great need for trust between the two parties in the conversation for the message to be received at all, let alone well and effectively.

I hear you. But to clarify, I wasn't reacting from misunderstanding. Like R' Yitzchok pointed out earlier, the message simply wasn't relevant to my post. I wasn't criticizing “the system,” I was pointing out when people misuse it.

If we refuse to acknowledge abuse or misuse and instead sugarcoat it under the banner of “the system,” then we unintentionally validate that behavior as part of Torah. And that's dangerous.

There are many Torah concepts that people cling to in the form they first heard them, often as children, and never revisit. The Alter from Kelm, in his Piskei Baal HaBatim, already lamented this, people holding on to a cheder-level understanding of Ma'aseh Bereishis.

Sometimes what we heard wasn't deep enough, or wasn't even accurate. We repeat these phrases as if they're sacred, but they've lost context and content.

True kavod haTorah means revisiting our ideas and letting them grow with us. That takes honesty. It takes asking:

- What does this actually mean to me?
- Where do I see it in my life?
- And, scariest of all, is there a part of me that struggles with it? And why?

That's not weakness. That's maturity. I hope to explore this particular concept more in a future post

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 09 Jun 2025 05:36

[SisonYishecha wrote on 09 Jun 2025 03:26:](#)

WOW.

Just made it here and I'm blown away by the clarity and stinging truth of what's been written thus far.

I've been klopped, bopped, smashed, and a lot more, by the system for as long as I can remember.

There has been times that my survival method was flight and I would kinda find my own corner of society, and there's been times when I hacked it and was a very active part of unzere velt.

So I can very much relate to some of what's been written.

Just to try and bridge the gap a bit between @bright and @trueme, it hit me as follows.

What we each experience on a personal level can very much be used as a growing experience.

More than that, what we experience is **meant to be a tool** for us to increase our self awareness, to discover reservoirs of strength and resilience that we never knew or imagined that we had.

In that vein, pointing fingers at any external cause, be it the system, the weather, or the POTUS, we are not only missing the lesson - but we are losing an opportunity.

A golden opportunity.

But when we look back or when we contemplate how the system is affecting others, then we are entitled to point out potential flaws, in a productive manner.

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And on that note, it has long bothered me the extent that the current Yeshiva system seemingly has no awareness for the Eibeshter.

We have an abundance of Torah, Lomdus, maybe even a tad of Hashkafa.

But who speaks about Hashem?

Does your average Mesivta Bachur even know that there is a concept of having a personal keshet with our Father in heaven?

Beis Medrash Bachur?

Kollel Yungeleit?

Why is the Yeshiveshe Oilam seemingly so uncomfortable about discussing the Eibeshter? About openly admitting that "I talk to Hashem on a personal level, even not

during davening.

Something seems to have gotten lost along the way, and with all of our zeal for Toirah, Un Nor Toirah, I think we may have forgotten some of the most basic tenets of Yidishkeit.

Sorry if I offended anyone.

I'll stop here.

Oh, one last point that came to mind and I can't resist.

When we have awareness of a keshar with Hashem from a young age, then that keshar is unwaverable even once we leave Kollel and are no longer in a matzav of ?????? ????????, wouldn't that be just amazing if that could take place?

What? You mean you can get a job and be a tzaddik?!? Phooey, you think moshe Rabbeinu and reb Chaim Katie sky would hold of such a person? Every second of toira is precious, he's wasting his life! Ay ay yay yuy. Talking to the ribbona shel Olam you think you are on aza madreige? We would be lucky if we just feared the eternal fire of gehinom! Having a Keshar with the ribono shel olam is for bts and hippies. It's fluff! Oh gevalt. Shoymu shomayim! I must petition from the gedolim to close this whole thread! Let's see how many haskomos I can get to pasel them!

I had to get that out of my system sorry.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 09 Jun 2025 05:39

Just to be clear the above article is to be read with an eicha nigun....

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by SisonYishecha - 09 Jun 2025 05:54

I had to get that out of my system sorry.

All needs are valid.

There is no subjective reality as you taught us

No need to apologize

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by Muttel - 09 Jun 2025 13:17

Just to share with the Oilam, I learned by a Rosh Yeshiva known to be from the greatest lamdanim of the generation and a close talmid of R Aaron. I went to a shmooz from him (I was married) before RH, and he said over from R Avigdor Miller that everyone should tell Hashem "I love you". He openly admitted that he never thought in those terms and felt very enlightened.

Just thought I'd share...

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by alex94 - 09 Jun 2025 19:22

[bright wrote on 09 Jun 2025 05:28:](#)

my first instinct was always to give the “right” answer, the one that checks all the boxes. It’s taken me years, and I’m still learning, to understand that the deepest response to pain is not always explanation, but empathy. You’ll probably even see that matter of fact tone in some of

my earlier posts.

Boy do I relate to this. Within myself, running to the correct "answer" and not giving the emotion the space to be, and only then gently responding at the right time.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by bright - 09 Jun 2025 19:30

I just want to be clear that this isn’t a criticism of rabbanim. The truth is, the rabbanim of our generation are incredible people. They give up so much of their own lives for the tzibbur. They care deeply, they work tirelessly, and they genuinely want to help.

Some of them have helped me tremendously. They’ve been there for me, and I’m deeply grateful for that.

The struggles we’re talking about are new. This is a new generation, with a new set of challenges, and naturally that brings confusion and growing pains. Every shift in generation comes with a process of trying to find the right balance.

I’ve been in touch with several rabbanim, and I truly believe many would be more than happy to be part of the solution. This isn’t about pointing fingers. It’s about coming together with achrayus and love to support every Yid in the best way we can.

I also want to take a moment to give a heartfelt shout-out to the incredible people at Guard Your Eyes. The moderators especially are truly amazing. Many of them have been through deep and difficult challenges, and they bring real-life experience, wisdom, and compassion to everything they do. They give up so much of themselves to help others, often behind the scenes with no recognition.

Someone mentioned the idea of having "daas Torah" moderate the platform, but honestly, I believe these moderators are the best form of daas Torah in many ways. They live what they give over, and their guidance comes with heart, humility, and real-world clarity. They've helped so many, myself included, and I'm endlessly grateful for them.

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by fighterwithfire - 12 Jun 2025 08:59

I don't know if I have ever, EVER, read something that strikes such a deep chord within me (and I generally try to avoid using strong terminology). You perfectly described a feeling I carried for so long (and, to a much lesser extent B"H, still feel sometimes), and all the while I thought was the only one who felt it.

Contextually, I've struggled with OCD and anxiety for almost a decade. To say that this made (and, again to a much lesser extent B"H, still makes) Yiddishkeit incredibly stressful at times (and, in even worse times, absolute misery and indescribably painful) would be putting it mildly. In 10th grade, I was literally unable to Daven Shacharis in the morning for fear of thinking inappropriate thoughts while Davening, and would sometimes rush out of Shiur an hour before Chatzos just to put Tefillin on so I could "feel like I'd at least done SOMETHING." The great irony was externally appearing to others to be a masmid, an illuy, albeit a weird out-of-the-box one who for some reason didn't show up at Shacharis multiple times a week and was somewhat socially off.

All the while, my self-esteem (what was left of it anyways) evaporated. I hated myself, and as embarrassed as I am to admit it, I hated "God" more. Why, WHY DID HE CREATE SOMEONE LIKE ME? WHY IS EVERYTHING I DO SO, SO HARD IF IT'S GOOD? WHY CAN'T THE PAIN JUST STOP? WHAT AM I DOING WRONG? WHEN WILL THIS END? Simultaneously, I destroyed myself on the inside. "You're a fraud, a hypocrite, a loser, a hopeless nebuch with no future or friends, a lonely socially off nut job doomed to failure and a pointless, painful

existence. You're a pathetic, lazy loser, hated by all and convincing himself that he can really do it while he takes 25 minutes to get Maariv out of his mouth and then watches porn when everyone else is asleep. What a stupid, pathetic lowlife." A life of fear, anxiety, stress, self-hatred, depression and anger bubbling under the surface. There were times when I would stare out my bedroom window (on the 3rd floor) wondering what it would be like to just jump. Mental torture every waking second, 24/7.

Chasdei Hashem Yisbarach, today I am married to my wonderful, incredible Eishes Chayil, living a beautiful, productive life, with more ????? ???? and ???? ???? than I ever thought possible. I really consider myself to be the most ?????? person I know, and it stems from the realization and clarity that Hashem loves me, wants me more than anything, has given me everything I have, and every single ounce of pain, hurt, shame, filth and self-hatred I went through was in order to get me to where and who I am today, to help me grow, understand, empathize and become a better person, one who smiles when he sees himself in the mirror. I'm so fortunate, B"H.

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!

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by trueme - 12 Jun 2025 12:20

FWF, very inspiring post, thank you.

OCD is hell on earth, I have had it - though got it under control relatively quickly (Less than a year once I realized something is really wrong) although I've suffered before and still have some mild aftershocks but BH, under control.

Anyone that goes through OCD and comes out managing is a survivor.

Anyone that grows like you is a hero.

Keep on inspiring.

P.S. I often wish there would be an anonymous forum for OCD struggles in the frum community for itself and also because it can lead to all sorts of negative behaviour, such as P and M.

FWF what do you think?

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by yitzchokm - 12 Jun 2025 15:49

For struggles with P&M due to OCD, why not open a thread here on GYE for those that are struggling?

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Re: Religious pain

Posted by trueme - 12 Jun 2025 18:20

[yitzchokm wrote on 12 Jun 2025 15:49:](#)

For struggles with P&M due to OCD, why not open a thread here on GYE for those that are struggling?

That's a good idea. I really mean a forum for the general pain of OCD. P & M is one of the terrible "side effects".

Its really a true lack, I suffered alot from the lack of such a forum and the support it engenders.

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