KABBALAH CHRONICLES

The Rambam (Maimonides) wrote that when the whole of humanity was deep in idol worship, one man could not go with the flow. His name was Abraham. He pondered and searched until he found the truth: that the world has only one leader. When he discovered this, he realized he had discovered life’s eternal truth and ran to tell the world. Since then, the world has had a method that reveals this truth. Today this method has a different name—“Kabbalah”—but it is essentially the same. If we open our hearts to it, it will teach us why things happen, and how to make them happen better.

Past

In Chapter One of The Mystic Hand, The Rambam (Maimonides) describes how there was a time when people knew that there was only one force governing the world. He explained that once they all forgot it, no one knew this truth, and people believed that there were many forces in the world, each with their own responsibilities—for food, reproduction, wealth, health, etc. But one man just couldn’t grasp how all these forces followed the same cycle and obeyed the same rules of appearance and disappearance, life and death. Through his research of nature, this man, whom we now know as Abraham, discovered that there was really only one force, and all other things are partial manifestations of it.

Once he discovered this, he began to open the world. Challenged by having to explain a concept that contradicted everything his contemporaries believed, Abraham was forced to develop a teaching method that would help him reveal it to them. This was the prototype of the teaching method we now call “Kabbalah” (from the Hebrew word Lekabel, to receive). Today, Kabbalah teaches us how to discover the single guiding force, and by doing so, receive infinite joy and pleasure.

But Abraham’s discovery was no coincidence; it was perfectly timed to counter an outbreak of egoism and selfishness that threatened to destroy the state of love and unity that humanity had been living in up to that point. This is what the Bible means by the words “And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech” (Genesis 11:1).

Unity, or altruism, is a powerful force—it can make us invincible. Up to the time of the Tower of Babel, this was

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THE BOOK OF ESTHER—a Miracle Inside

In Hebrew, The Book of Esther is called Megillat Ester. Megillah comes from the word Gishá (disclosure), and Ester comes from the word Hoster (concealment). In other words, The Book of Esther is about disarming what is concealed.

But let’s take this disclosure one step at a time. First, we must remember that the wisdom of Kabbalah explains that in the whole of reality there are only the Creator and a creation that perceives Him. The Bible and all other ancient Hebrew texts, are actually written in different “languages” that explain the same spiritual concepts as the wisdom of Kabbalah.

In The Book of Esther, the King is the Creator, obviously, but none of the other protagonists is a separate entity; actually, each character is an aspect of the Creator’s single creation. This is a key concept to remember because it shifts everything from a mortalistic take about how the good eventually defeats the bad, to an allegory about our personal relationship with the Creator. According to the Kabbalah, Esther, Haman, and Mordechai are all within us, and the Creator is the authority of beneficence that we need to acquire if we want to unite with Him and be happy.

The story begins with establishing the character of the good guy, Mordechai. He discovers that two of the king’s servants are plotting to assassinate the king. But the king’s reaction is far different from what we expect; he actually promotes Haman instead of Mordechai!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

SNEAK A PEEK

Dessert — the Engine of Change

THE SPIRITUAL GARDENER

Our secular gardening passions reflect our own spiritual roots, and we can relate to them by sheer reflection using the wisdom of Kabbalah.

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INFO

Editor’s Note

THE ORDER OF THE DAY

In the Land of Israel of the 1940s (then called Palestine), a Kabbalah paper was truly an unusual undertaking. For almost two millennia, the wisdom of Kabbalah had been kept hidden and was only revealed to a chosen few. But on June 5, 1940, one of the two great Kabbalists of the twentieth century, Rabbi Yechezkel Ashlag (1884-1934), decided it was time for a change. Rabbi Ashlag, also known as Baal HaSulam (Owner of the Ladder) for his authoritative Sulam (Ladder) commentary on The Book of Zohar, published The Nation, the first Kabbalah paper in history. The Nation was intended for everyone, but despite Baal HaSulam’s efforts, its language and style were too complex for most readers to understand. Even today, 66 years after the publication of The Nation, Baal HaSulam’s actions seem highly unorthodox, if not revolutionary.

But Baal HaSulam was not alone. Rav Avraham Kook (1865-1935), Israel’s first Chief Rabbi, supported Baal HaSulam’s statements that his generation was ripe and ready for the wisdom of Kabbalah.

Baal HaSulam envisioned a global society, founded on sharing and mutual giving, in accord with the Upper Force. In Kabbalah, the Upper Force is synonymous with “nature’s comprehensive law of giving,” and Ashlag believed that the more we put off the founding of such a society, the more troubles will befall humanity. Yet, he also assured us that if we consciously applied nature’s rule to the human society, we would reach unimaginable heights; we would become eternal, whole, and balanced with the Upper Force.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

KABBALAH ICONS

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yocheid—author of The Book of Zohar

FREE

KABBALAH TODAY

MARCH 2007, vol. 1, No. 1 AUTHENTIC WISDOM FOR A BETTER FUTURE

PUPPET ON A STRING

Clearly, Saddam Hussein’s death isn’t going to stop the violence. From a spiritual perspective, Saddam was a puppet on a string.

TO UNDERSTAND MEANS TO FEEL

When the Light touches the soul, it evokes a sensation of warning...
KABBALAH CHRONICLES

The natural way of life. Every one knew about the one force and were united with it. People experienced it as part of their lives, and didn't need to work on their unity because they had no egoism separating them. This is what the Bible means by "one language" and "one speech."

But as soon as they began to develop egoism, they wanted to use their most powerful tool—unity—for their own benefit. This prompted the Creator's concern: "The Lord said, Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language, ...and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them" (Genesis 11:6).

Unity, or altruism, is a powerful force—it can make its users invincible.

To save humanity from its own egoism, the Creator, the single force discovered by Abraham, could do one of two things: dispense humanity and thus prevent a catastrophic clash of self-interest, or teach people how to overcome their egoism. The latter option had an important benefit: by learning how to unite despite their growing egoism, people would gain deeper awareness of both themselves and their Creator. They would have to study the Creator because their present level of unity had collapsed under their new egoism. Therefore, they would have to obtain a greater "portion" of bonding straight from the source—the united force of nature, or the Creator. To do that, they would have to enhance their knowledge of Him. This is why the Creator revealed Himself to Abraham. This is also why Abraham was such an enthusiastic disseminator of his method. He knew that time was of the essence: either he taught his people how to unite, or they would be dispersed.

As we learn from both the Bible and the ancient Hebrew text, Midrash Raba, Parasha 38, the Babylonians—sponsored Abraham's offer. They fled from Babylon and began to teach while roaming "from town to town and from kingdom to kingdom, until he arrived at the Land of Israel" (Maimonides, The Mishely Hand, Idiacity Rules, Chapter 1).

Despite many hardships and challenges, Abraham's teachings gained some support, and those who supported him helped him share the knowledge with others, filling the ranks with "new recruits. In time, one lone fighter for truth had grown into a nation whose name symbolizes the one thing they had in common: "the nation of Israel." Israel, as the great Kabbalist Rashbi explains in his Commentary on the Writings, is a combination of two words, Yisroel (straight) and El (God). The people of Israel are those who have one desire in their hearts: to be like the Creator, united by altruism, as opposed to their Babylonian contemporaries.

The collapse of the Tower of Babel was not, however, the end of the story, but only the beginning. Humanity's egoism continued to grow because the Creator still wanted people to overcome it, and thus gain a deeper awareness of themselves and the Creator. For those who wanted to remain egoists, this would mean even greater alienation. New forms and new technologies created new weapons. These were intended to guard nations from each other or to subjugate them. But for those who wanted to overcome their egoism and unite despite it, an upgrade of their method was necessary.

This was Moses' cue. As in the case of Babel, the solution to the intensifying egoism was to escape it. But Pharaoh wasn't simply evil king. He actually brought Israel (those who want the Creator's closer to the Creator. In Kabbalah, Pharaoh is the epitome of egoism, and the only way to escape him is to unite since, as we've seen before, unity makes you invincible because it makes you closer to the Creator. To defeat Pharaoh, Moses returned to Egypt after his escape, united the people around the same idea that Abraham promoted many years previously, and once again helped the people to escape.

But this time, Israel defeated a much more powerful enemy. Pharaoh was not like Nimrod, King of Babel; he could not be defeated by one determined man. Defeating Pharaoh would require a whole, united nation to overcome him. And because this would require a systematic teaching for a whole nation, Moses wrote five new books (The Pentateuch), which are basically an adaption of Abraham's teachings for an entire nation.

But this did not complete the Creator's will. He wanted the whole world to know that there was only one force: this is why He taught it to Abraham, who then brought it to his fellow Babylonians. While Moses' Torah was a big step forward, since it elevates a whole nation into contact with the Creator, it was not yet the end of the road. The end of the road will only come when the entire world is in touch with the Creator, experiencing the unity that the ancient Babylonians did, before the first outbreak of egoism. Therefore, the end of the road will only be achieved when all of humanity depicts what it once had, and then lost. This realization is very important, since you can only reclaim something when you know what it is. This is indeed the goal of creation: to teach us what the Creator is, and to have us reclaim Him./It.

Present The "present" started about two thousand years ago, when The Book of Zohar was written and filled the ranks of Israel with the Creator's will. Just as Moses pro claimed, the entire nation (The Book of Zohar is intended to explain Moses'/words to the entire world. This is why it is written in so many places that The Book of Zohar is destined to appear in the time of the Messiah, at the "end of days." This is also why Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, the great twentieth-century Kabbalist, wrote a little more than a century previously, that The Book of Zohar is proof that the days of the Messiah are here.

As always, the only antidote to intensifying egoism is unity. And the greater the egoism, the more important is it for people to unite. While, at first, uniting Abraham's family was enough, when Moses fled from Egypt, he then had to unite a whole nation in order to succeed. Today, we need to unite the whole of humanity. Egoism has reached such an intensity that without uniting the whole of humankind, there will be no salvation for humanity.

The middle stage in the process of humanity's recognition of the Creator was very different from the first. It was a time of subtle growth, when the tool to unite humanity—the book of Kabbalah—was being refined and improved in dimly lit rooms and in small, inconspicuous groups. This is why the two most significant works of that period, Rashi's Zohar and the Ari's Tree of Life, were hidden as soon as they had been completed. They resurfaced many years later, and in the case of The Zohar, even centuries later.

The future The "future" started in the 1980s. Baal HaSulam (Owner of the Ladder) of the author's era, predicted that the last stage in the spiritual evolution of humanity would begin in 1995. Similarly, the Vilna Gaon (GRA) wrote in his book, The Voice of the Testimony, that this stage would be the time to finally defeat egoism and unite as one.

To solve our problems, we need an inclusive solution, and such a solution can only be found when we transform human egoism into altruism.

Humanity's entire history consists of battles against egoism and attempts to unite despite it. Many philosophers agree that man's self-centeredness and misunderstanding of nature's rules are the causes of all that is wrong with our world. Baal HaSulam wrote about it in the 1930s and 40s, but in those days, he was a voice in the wilderness. In recent years it has become evident that without changing ourselves, the world is not change for the better. In fact, we are ruining our planet and our society in so many ways that humanity is not separately will not be possible.

To solve our problems, we need an inclusive solution, and such a solution can only be found when we transform human egoism into altruism. In his article, "Peace in the World," Baal HaSulam writes that if we unite, every single member of humankind would personally experience the Creator in the deepest sense of the word, for it is written that, "they shall all know Me, from the east of them unto the greatest of them" (Jeremiah 31:33). The wisdom of Kabbalah has been prepared as a method that can do just that: unite, and experience the Creator. In his "Introduction to the Book of Zohar," Baal HaSulam wrote that if we integrate Kabbalah in our day-to-day lives, we will complete the goal of creation, and we will be "of one language and one speech" and at one with the Creator, never to part again.

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March 2007 Vol. 1 No. 1 www.kabbalah.info
M ore than 3,000 American soldiers have already died in Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians were killed by their own countrymen. In both cases, the numbers are increasing even as you are reading these lines. Iraq is a sad reflection of the current state of the world.

According to Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (1884-1954), this is not accidental. Many of the problems we face today are the result of events that took place in this world many, many lifetimes ago, and the way one still needs to face them is the same, no matter how much the world has changed.

The human ego continually develops—the greater the ego, the harder the test. With each test we pass, we become a cheerful playground. Realizing how do kabbalah explain supernatural phenomena such as healing or out-of-body travels?

Kabbalah enables you to live in the spiritual world and in this world simultaneously. It helps you feel, see, and understand your spiritual growth. By studying kabbalah, you will learn to see your past, present, and future, and you will know how to lead your life more wisely.

In his book, The Kabbalah Experience, Michael Laitman writes about supernatural phenomena: "Those phenomena are not spiritual, but are natural physiological phenomena of which people remote from nature are simply unaware. Kabbalah, however, speaks of a spiritual body, about what happens with the soul."
Kabbalah

In the 2nd century CE, a single man was granted the spiritual knowledge that Kabbalists had accumulated for 3,000 years before his time. Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai (Rashbi) put it all on paper and then hid it, as humankind was not ready for it. Today, we are ready for the revelation of The Book of Zohar.

Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, author of The Book of Zohar (Zohar), was a Tana—a great sage in the early Common Era centuries. He was also Rabbi Akiva's direct student. Rashbi's name is tied to numerous legends, and he is mentioned constantly in the Talmud and in the Midrash, the sacred Hebrew texts of his time. He lived in Sidon and in Meron, and he established a seminary in the Western Galilee.

Rashbi was born and raised in the Galilee (a mountainous region in today's north of Israel. Even as a child, he was not like other children his age. Questions such as, "What is the purpose of my life?" Who am I?" and "How is the world built?" plagued him, demanding an answer.

In those days, life in Galilee was very harsh: the Romans persecuted Jews and continually invented new laws to make their lives miserable. Among these laws was a decree that prohibited Jews from studying the Torah (then synonymous with Kabbalah).

Despite the Romans' prohibition, however, Rabbi Shimon immersed himself in the Kabbalah and Rabbi Akiva's subtle teachings. He felt that beneath the Biblical stories lay a profound and hidden meaning, which held the answers to his persistent questions.

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Studying with Rabbi Akiva

Rabbi Shimon was an avid, devoted stum (student). Burning with desire to discover the spiritual ladder, he studied with Rabbi Akiva for thirteen years, and remained there for thirteen years. During that time, they delved in the secrets of the wisdom of the hidden. Their efforts succeeded, and they discovered the entire system of creation.

After thirteen years in a cave, Rashbi heard that the Roman emperor had died. He could finally heave a sigh of relief. After leaving the cave, Rashbi gathered nine students and went with them to a small cave in Meron, known as The Idra Rabba (Great Assembly). With their help, he wrote The Book of Zohar, the most important book of Kabbalah.

Gradually, Rabbi Shimon came to realize that he had to find a teacher who had already been through the spiritual path, gained experience, and could guide others up the spiritual ladder. He decided to join the group of the greatest Kabalist of the time—Rabbi Akiva—a decision that turned out to be the turning point in Rashbi's life.

The Cave at Piq'in

Legends have it that Rashbi and his son fled to the Galilee, hid in a cave at Piq'in, a village in the north of Israel, and remained there for thirteen years. During that time, they delved in the secrets of the wisdom of the hidden. Their efforts succeeded, and they discovered the entire system of creation.

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Studying with Rabbi Akiva

Rabbi Shimon was an avid, devoted student, burning with desire to discover theUpper Force. Before long, he was one of Rabbi Akiva's top students. He studied with Rabbi Akiva for thirteen years, and reached the highest degrees on the spiritual ladder.

The Bar-Kokheva revolt abruptly ended the great days of Kabbalah's Akiva's assembly. Almost all of his 24,000 students died in plagues, and in fierce battles against the Romans. Of the 24,000 students, only five survived, and Rashbi was among them.

Rashbi was among the leaders of the Bar-Kokheva revolt against the Roman rule in the land of Israel. His resistance became even more fierce and unforgiving when he learned how his teacher, Rabbi Akiva, had been ruthlessly executed.

The Talmud writes that once, when Rashbi spoke against the Roman rule, another Jew heard him and alerted the Roman authorities. In consequence, Rashbi was tried in his absence and was sentenced to death. The Roman emperor appointed a man to search for him, but to their disappointment, Rashbi seemed to have vanished into thin air.

The Secret of Reincarnation

Rashbi is an incarnation of a unique soul, which coordinates and connects the Upper Force to every creation. This soul comes down into our world and incarnates in the patriarchs of Kabbalah. This is the order of its appearances: Abraham, Moses, Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, the Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria), and Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam). Each incarnation of this soul promotes humanity to a new spiritual degree and leaves its mark in Kabbalistic books, which serve the generations that follow.

An example of this process can be found in special sections of The Zohar called Raia Meheimna (The Loyal Shepherd). In these parts, Rashbi speaks from a state of clothing in the Moses' soul. Another example of this is the book, Shaar HaGilgalim (Gate of Reincarnations), where Rashbi speaks from a state of clothing in the soul of the Ari.

The Book of Zohar is undoubtedly unique and one of the world's most renowned compositions. Since its writing, thousands of stories have been linked to The Zohar, and the book is still revered in modern day. The fascination around it is so great that even though the book is incomprehensible to our generation without proper interpretation, millions of people diligently read it.

Rashbi's Departure

According to tradition, Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai passed away in the presence of his friends on Lag Ba'omer (the 33rd day of the Omer count, which starts on the first day of Passover) of the year 160 CE, and was buried in Meron. With his death, the soul of a giant Kaballist completed its task in our world.

Rashbi fulfilled his destination. Hundreds of thousands visit his gravesite yearly, trying to sense some of the Light that he had brought to the world. The greatest Kaballists praise his composition as repeatedly calling the Book of Zohar is destined to bring redemption to the world.

Each incarnation of this soul promotes humanity to a new spiritual degree and leaves its mark in Kabbalistic books, which serve the generations that follow.

Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, writes about the Zohar (Ohr Yaka): "This composition, called The Book of Zohar, is like Noah's Ark, where there were many kinds, but those kinds and families could not exist unless by entering the ark. ...Thus the righteous will enter the secret of the Light of this composition to persist, and thus is the virtue of the composition, that immediately when engaging, with his desire for the love of God, it will draw him as a magnet draws the iron. And he will enter it to save his soul and spirit and his correction. And even if he is wicked, there is no fear should he enter."
In our story, Esther represents the collective soul, the whole of creation. The two rivals, Haman and Mordechai, represent the soul’s two inclinations—the evil inclination, egoism (Haman), and the good inclination, altruism (Mordechai).

These roles are the reason why the king promotes Haman, instead of Mordechai. To choose altruism and thus unite with the Creator, one must first realize that egoism is bad. We are made of a desire to receive pleasure. To make the shift to altruism, we must realize that egoism is bad for us, and subsequently want to change it. But the only way we can want to change it is if we evidently see that it is bad for us. How is that done? By giving Haman (egoism) a bait and the Creator the opposite (altruism) in order to make him want to change it.

Today, there is a surge of people asking the same question Adam asked himself nearly 6,000 years ago. Moreover, the increase in depression cases, suicides, and violence (domestic, racial, and international) are largely attributed to our inability to answer the question: “What is the meaning of my life?”

In that regard, Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag writes in one of his most important compositions, The Study of the Ten Sephirot, that his book is intended for any person who is asking, “What is the meaning of my life?” Bial HaSulam explains the only reason the wisdom of Kabbalah appeared in this world was to help us answer this question.

A Light That Reforms

In the introduction to The Study of the Ten Sephirot, Rabbi Ashlag asked why Kabbalists stated that every person must study Kabbalah. He answered that anyone who reads the books of Kabbalah, even without understanding them, draws a Light from above that shines in one’s soul. This Upper Light is really a different name for the force that created all our souls, the force that will correct us and eventually fill us with pleasure.

When the Light first “touches” the soul, it evokes a sensation of wanting to correct “my evil desires.” This is why this Light is called “the Light that reforms.” But in the beginning, we don’t really know what is evil about our desires. As we continue to work this way guaranteed that we will reveal the Creator, but the rewards that Mordechai received, as well: “Then King Ahasuerus raised them up on his horse, and arrayed them with his royal apparel, and arrayed Mordechai with the royal apparel, and seated him on the throne of his princes, and commanded him to wear his crown: Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delights to honor.”

Moreover, Mordechai’s final reward is Haman’s greatest wish: “And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordechai.”

So the good, the bad, and the beautiful (queen) are all within us. To discover them, just ask (of the Creator) and you will receive.

TO UNDERSTAND MEANS TO FEEL

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Desires – The Engine of Change

Desires don't just pop out of the blue. They form unconsciously within us and surface only when they become something definable, such as, “I want a pizza.” Before that, desires are either too hot or, at most, felt as general restlessness. We’ve experienced that this sense of wanting something but not quite knowing what it is. Well, it is a desire that has not yet ripened.

Plato once said, “Necessity is the mother of invention,” and he was right. Similarly, Kabballah teaches us that the only way we can learn anything is by first wanting to learn it. It’s a very simple formula: having something, we do what it takes to get it. We make the time, muster the energy, and develop the necessary skills. It turns out that the engine of change is desire.

The way our desires evolve both defines and designs the entire history of humanity. As humankind’s desires developed, they urged people to study their environment so they could fulfill their wishes. Unlike minerals, plants, and animals, people constantly evolve. For every generation, and for each person, desires grow stronger and stronger.

This engine of change—desire—is made of five levels, zero through four. Kabballahists refer to this engine as “a will to change” or “the will to change.” When Kabballah first appeared, some 5,000 years ago, the will to receive was at level zero. Today, as you might have guessed, we are at level four—the most intense level.

But in the early days when the will to receive was at level zero, desires were not strong enough to separate us from nature and from each other. In those days, this oneness with nature, which today many of us pay good money to relearn in meditation classes (and let’s face it, not always successfully) was the natural way of life. People didn’t know any other way. They didn’t even know that they could be separated from nature, nor did they want to be. In fact, in those days, humanity’s communication with nature and with each other flowed so seamlessly, words were not even necessary; instead, people communicated by thought, much like telepathy. It was a time of unity, and the whole of humanity was like a single nation.

But then the change occurred; people’s desires started to grow and they became independent of one another. People began to want to change nature and use it for themselves. Instead of wanting to adapt themselves to nature, they began wanting to change nature to fit their needs. They grew detached from nature, separated and alienated from it and from each other. Today, many, many centuries later, we are discovering that this was not a good idea. It simply doesn’t work. Even since that split, we have been confronting nature. Instead of correcting the ever-growing egoism to remain as one with nature, we have built a mechanical technological shield to protect us from it. The initial reason we developed science and technology was to secure our shielded existence away from nature’s elements. It turns out, however, that whether we are aware of it or not, we are actually trying to control nature and take over the driver’s seat.

Today, many people are already growing tired of technology’s broken promises of wealth, health, and most important, safe tomorrows. Too few people have attained all these today, and even they cannot be certain they will still have them tomorrow. But the benefit of this state is that it forces us to reexamine our direction and ask, “Is it possible we’ve been treading the wrong path all along?”

Particularly today, as we acknowledge the crisis and the impasse we are facing, we can openly admit that the path we’ve chosen is a dead-end street. Instead of compensating for our self-centered oppositeness from nature by choosing technology, we should have changed our egoism to altruism, and consequently to unity with nature.

In Kabballah, the term used for this change is Tikkun (correction). To realize our oppositeness from nature means that we must acknowledge the split that occurred among us (human beings) five thousand years ago. This is called “the recognition of evil.” It is not easy, but it is certainly advantageous and most important, it is the first step to true health and happiness.

TO UNDERSTAND MEANS TO FEEL

To Understand Means to Feel

When we study Kabballah, we must become completely detached from everything we have known so far. We should be open to a whole new set of concepts because this is the only way we will be able to walk on the path Kabballah has prepared for us. For example, Kabballalists often add a little suffix to their sentences: “and understand that well.” When they write that we should understand something, they don’t mean that we should understand it with our intellect. They mean that we should experience and feel the reality they are describing, live it.

The Benefit of Studying Kabballah

But Kabballahists say that the study shouldn’t be restricted only to those who are exploring the meaning of their lives, and those who want correction. On the contrary, they opened it to everyone. They explain that whatever your desire, the Upper Light shines on anyone who is reading a Kabballahistic text. Even if a desire for spirituality has not awakened in you, as you read, the Light shines and subconsciously moves you closer to the Creator.

Our goal in life is to become like the Creator, and becoming like the Creator is what Kabballah teaches, studying Kabballah will “fast-forward” us toward this end, and hence spare us hardships. In fact, simply studying the material makes dilemmas and problems dissipate before they even surface in your awareness. At the end of the day, every dilemma is about life’s purpose. Therefore, when you work directly toward this end, all other problems simply vanish.

Question and Answers

DOES STUDYING KABBALAH REQUIRE RETIRED FROM DAILY LIFE?

“There is no requirement to fast or to mortify yourself. One does not have to leave everyday life or abandon family duties. Nor does one float in the air or practice breathing exercises in order to attain tranquility.

“Quite the contrary, students build their egos and turn them into vessels to help them attain the sublime goal. To study Kabballah and understand how the Upper World operates, one must be at the center of that world and act from within it.

“Therefore, one must perform all one’s mundane duties. The attainment of the spiritual reality must be in one’s corporeal senses, closely connected with one’s natural life.”

I KNOW MANY METHODS AND TEACHINGS TO ACHIEVE SPIRITUALITY. WHY CHOOSE KABBALAH?

The difference between all the teachings and the Kabballah, as I understand it from the perspective of the Kabballah, is that they are built on the nullification of desires, or at least on their complete suppression. Kabballah, however, states that the Creator can be sensed precisely by expressing the desire for Him (certainly not by nullifying it), but inverting the aim of its use. Which way should a person choose to advance? That is an individual choice.

The Books

In our generation, the books that draw the greatest “Light that reforms” onto their readers are the books of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag. His books, which interpret the writings of these giant Kabballalists, can help us study Kabballah in a way that draws the most powerful Lights to us. Because Ashlag keeps us focused and aware, his books help our generation avoid becoming complacent and act from within it.

TO UNDERSTAND MEANS TO FEEL

In Kabballah, the term used for this change is Tikkun (correction). To realize our oppositeness from nature means that we must acknowledge the split that occurred among us (human beings) five thousand years ago. This is called “the recognition of evil.” It is not easy, but it is certainly advantageous and most important, it is the first step to true health and happiness.
Surprising as it may be, our leisurely gardening pastimes reflect our own spiritual roots, and we can relate to them by sheer reflection using the wisdom of Kabbalah.

And God said: 'Let the earth put forth grass, herb-yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind.'

-Genesis 1:11

The symbol most associated with the wisdom of Kabbalah is the Tree of Life. Kabbalah and all the ancient writings are replete with examples from the plant kingdom. Ancient Hebrew Scriptures used the spiritual roots of vegetation to explain human spiritual growth processes. They used it as a learning tool, and we can benefit by using it to “touch base” with our souls.

The works below are based on a letter written by Kabbalist Rabbi Baruch Ashlag, the firstborn son and successor of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, also known as Baal HaSulam. In his letter, Rabbi Ashlag explains to his students that the works of the field reflect spiritual processes, and how we can experience them.

Adam and the Tree of Life

In Kabbalah, the terms, “nature” and “Creator” are considered synonymous. The term, “life” is defined as being in contact with nature and its Creator, and the word, “tree” can either symbolize “life,” meaning contact with the Creator, or “knowledge,” understanding why the Creator works the way He does. Actually, the degree called the “Tree of Knowledge” is the highest spiritual degree a person can achieve.

The first person to discover the Tree of Life was Adam. He was an ordinary person who felt inclined to research and discover what lies beyond our world. When Moses described what happened to Adam, he used the image of a tree to describe Adam’s relationship with the Creator. The Creator told him he could eat of every tree in the garden except for the Tree of Knowledge, reflecting the fact that only and only degree Adam couldn’t reach.

The Creator knew that if Adam discovered the knowledge contained in that tree, he would want to leave the Garden, since he would know as much as the Creator. That, in turn, would detach him from the Creator—life—which is why the Creator forbade him to eat of that tree. We all know what happened: Adam ate, and as a result, we are all denied of Adam’s promised eternal life.

But all has not been lost. The Creator also gave us ancient writings that teach us how we can return to the Garden of Eden. He also gave us examples, which Kabbalah calls “branches.” These branches can indicate how things really work. If we study the writings along with the right explanations, we will understand the spiritual processes that manifest in every plant, and we will learn to emulate them in our souls.

What Moses Meant

By the sweat of your face you will eat bread.

-Genesis 3:19

In Moses’ time, spirituality was a tangible reality. Everyone experienced the spiritual world, just as we experience the physical world today. At the time, there wasn’t the rift that exists today between us and spirituality. People then didn’t have to learn spirituality, they lived it. When Moses wrote his Torah (Pentateuch), he used the spoken language of his time so people would understand him. The difference between Moses’ contemporaries and people today is that they knew he was using mundane words to explain spiritual concepts, while we think he was actually referring to our physical world. Indeed, how can we think otherwise? We no longer feel spirituality the way our predecessors did.

This is why Kabbalists refer to the language of the Bible as “the language of roots and branches.” Our world is only the outermost layer of the spiritual worlds; it is only a shell, the farthest branch of a great tree.

“Just like a tree, to be ready to bear (spiritual) fruit, you and I need to experience the same work we do on trees and plants. If we graft, powder, fertilize, and weed those parts in our souls requiring cultivation, our spirituality will enhance and fill our lives with joy. If we nourish our souls, we will be “like a tree planted by streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, and whose leaf doth not wither” (Psalms 1:3). It only takes a few ground rules to tend to our inner plants.”

Fertilize

Like plants, human beings can’t grow without fertilizers. In Webster’s dictionary, “a fertilizer is a substance (as manure or a chemical mixture) used to make soil more fertile.” In plants, the fertilizer needs to be brought from the outside. We already have plenty of “manure” within us; we needn’t bring it from the outside, but rather correct what is already within us. For that, we need to recognize which of our qualities are improper (manure) and correct them (turn them into fertilizers) using the method of Kabbalah. This is the essence of spiritual gardening.

When Kabbalists speak of improper qualities, they speak not about socially indecent qualities, but of spiritual qualities, those which relate to our relationship with the Creator. In the end it does make us treat each other better, but we must keep in mind that the final goal of Kabbalah is to return to the Garden of Eden, to the spiritual world.

“Spiritual Gardening

For is the tree of the field a man.

-Dauberonomy 20:19

Just like a tree, to be ready to bear (spiritual) fruit, you and I need to experience the same work we do on trees and plants. If we graft, powder, fertilize, and weed those parts in our souls requiring cultivation, our spirituality will enhance and fill our lives with joy. If we nourish our souls, we will be “like a tree planted by streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, and whose leaf doth not wither” (Psalms 1:3). It only takes a few ground rules to tend to our inner plants.”

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We are born completely self-centered; and between our world and the spiritual world. This means covering with powder or dust. It implies a struggle, however, because our inborn nature objects to being Creator-centered and sends us thoughts that our connection with Him is not a worthwhile goal. Therefore, we must “powder” these thoughts and cover them with our conviction of the importance and the merit of our goal.

Remove Excess Leaves
While we are studying Kabbalah to rediscover the Creator, the “leaves” are our efforts and desires to discover Him. Once we establish this connection, these efforts and desires become “fruits.” We do not change who we are, only our focus of attention: “spirituality” means focusing on the Creator, while “corporality” means focusing on ourselves.

Leaves are very important. They are beautiful, provide shade, and protect the fruits while they are growing. There shouldn’t be too many leaves that they exhaust the tree’s water and energy, but we do need to have enough leaves to help the fruits grow lush and plentiful. Similarly, when you are learning how to become spiritual, don’t worry if you haven’t made contact with the Creator quickly. Your attempts are your “leaves.” Even if you’re unaware of it, they are protecting the fruits already growing within you, hidden among the foliage.

Powder
“Powdering,” in Hebrew called LeAbbek, means covering with powder or dust. It also means struggling. To connect to the Creator, we have to bridge the barrier between our world and the spiritual world. We are born completely self-centered; and to connect to the Creator, to nature, we need to become “Creator-centered.” This implies a struggle, however, because our inborn nature objects to being Creator-centered and sends us thoughts that our connection with Him is not a worthwhile goal.

Water
And God said: “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the water, and let it divide the waters from the waters.”—Genesis 1:8

We’ve saved the best for last. Water exists above—in Heaven—and below—on Earth. It is the ultimate solvent and the prime ingredient of everything alive. Not surprisingly, water also represents the Creator, specifically His quality of mercy. As the Creator is omniscient, water, too, retains information about everything it touches. Plants can use this quality in water, which tells them when to bud and when to blossom.

To grow, a plant needs only water and a few minerals, which it often takes from the water itself. No other substance can replace water as the sole cause of evolution and growth. The hydrological cycle allows water to connect the “higher” worlds (air or sky) with the “lower” worlds (earth), just as the Creator does in spirituality. Knowing when and how much to “water” one’s soul with the quality of the Creator is therefore the single most important piece of information a seeker of spirituality needs.

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About Bnei Baruch
Bnei Baruch is a nonprofit organization that is spreading the wisdom of Kabbalah to accelerate the spirituality of humankind. Its founder and president is rabbi Michael Luzzan, Ph.D., who was the disciple and personal assistant to Rabbi Baruch Ashlag, the son of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, author of the Sefirot of Abba commentary on The Book of Zohar.

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THE SPIRITUAL GARDENER