

KABBALAH TODAY



FREE

JANUARY 2008, #11 | A PUBLICATION OF THE BNEI BARUCH ASSOCIATION FOUNDED BY RAV MICHAEL LAITMAN, PHD | www.kabtoday.com

THE DESIRE GROWS— HUMANITY EVOLVES

The motivating force behind everything we do

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A KABBALIST, A GENETICIST, & THE MEANING OF LIFE

Kabbalist Dr. Laitman and Geneticist Prof. Ebstein talk about our genes and our freedom of choice



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THE FREEDOM BLUES

Is there really such a thing as a perfect dream vacation?



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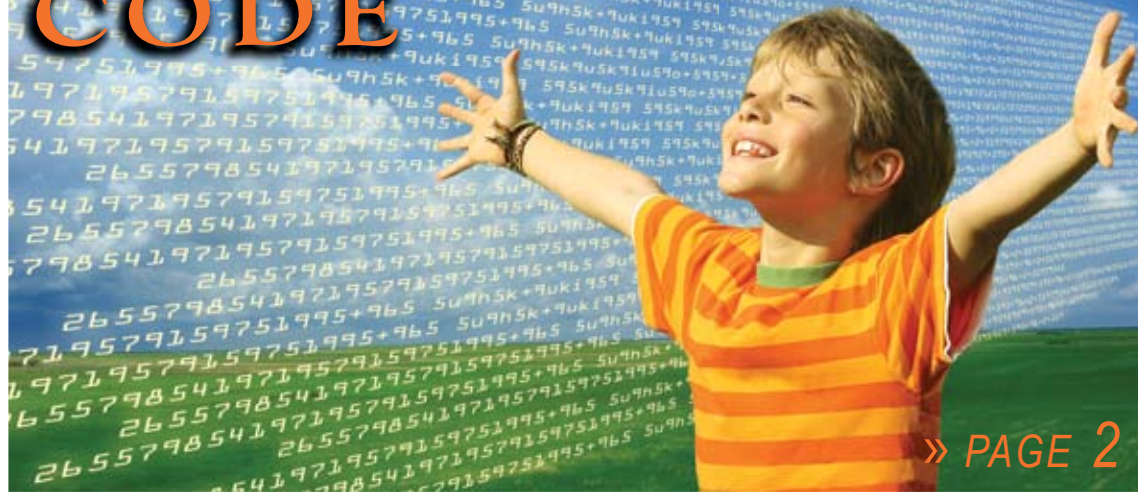
2008 INTERNATIONAL KABBALAH CONGRESS

February 3-6, Tel-Aviv, Israel



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CRACKING THE HAPPINESS CODE



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Editor's Note

*“Ohhh... So That's
What Kabbalah's
Been Talking About!”*

Working on this issue, our editorial staff was amazed to find that anywhere we looked, we found people talking about Kabbalah's 5,000 year old principles, with- out even being aware of it.

Take happiness—a major subject of interest lately. Modern psychologists and economists, turned “happiness researchers,” are saying that something about the way we try to receive pleasure doesn't let the pleasure last. Read “Cracking the Happiness Code” to find out why Kabbalah (“reception” in Hebrew) is precisely the wisdom that teaches us *how to receive* lasting pleasure.

Researchers in other scientific fields—the brain sciences and Genetics—have also discovered one of Kabbalah's principles: that in one way or another, all human thoughts and actions are predetermined. In “A Kabbalist, a Geneticist and the Meaning of Life” you'll see what happens when Genetics meets Kabbalah, and “The Freedom Blues” will show you how Kabbalah beautifully comes in to complement the modern scientific findings and point us to where we *can* find freedom.

On a different front, there's the Internet—today it's hard to imagine life without e-mail or Google. But did you know that over seven million people are running an *entire life* in a virtual world called “Second Life”? In “Better than the Virtual World!?” you'll see how this fits right into humanity's general course of development toward a much better world—the spiritual world.

Finally, we'd like to invite you to our 2008 International Kabbalah Congress—check out the details on the last page.

BETTER THAN THE VIRTUAL WORLD!?

by Chaim Ratz

He sits back in his comfy chair, types the address on the keyboard and goes out for a night on the town. He makes his way to a club—one unlike any club you know. There are no concrete walls, neon lights or parquet dance floors. This club exists in virtual space only.

And yet, people behave just the way they do in any other club in the western world: they listen to loud, modern music, dance shoulder-to-shoulder on a crowded floor and enjoy plenty of drinks at the bar. And all this time, they are sitting before their computer screens in different corners of the world.

The screens flicker with 3-D virtual characters—designed, dressed and named by the users who operate them. And behind every image is a real person who is located somewhere on the globe.

At the moment, for instance, the screen displays an architect from Milano, a middle-aged lawyer from South Dakota, and a marketing manager from

YOU CAN FIND ANYTHING HERE, OR AT LEAST ANYTHING THE HUMAN MIND CAN THINK OF. AN ENTIRE WORLD OF 3-D FIGURES LIVING A VIRTUAL LIFE IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND. ALL YOU NEED IS A MOUSE, A MONITOR, AND LOTS OF IMAGINATION. BUT WHAT'S REALLY THE DEAL WITH THIS “VIRTUALITY” TREND? WHAT LIES BEHIND THE PASSION FOR THE VIRTUAL?

New York (well, at least that's who they say they are). They are joined by Dan—a false name, of course (his real name is encrypted and kept secure on the server). We tag along with him for a tour, and watch him order a virtual beer at the virtual bar, which costs him ten virtual dollars.

The participants refer to each other by mysterious code names: The Black Fairy, The Prince of Light, Leonardo da Vinci... But there's nothing strange about this—in their world, you can be whoever you want. The four of them already know each other from previous “meetings,” but they know only what each has chosen to tell the others.

And so begins another typical evening in Dan's second, and often secret, life...

Living Inside a 19-Inch Screen

“Dan” is 33, married and has two picture-perfect children. He lives with his family in a duplex in Palo Alto, California. Four years ago he graduated as a computer engineer and soon became a senior manager at a hi-tech company that successfully entered the stock market trade last year.

Like many of us, Dan is a regular internet user—he browses through the news headlines in the morning, monitors his various investments at mid-day, and, like any self-respecting professional who values his time, pays his bills online every month. So far, so good, as far as life goes: mundane, efficient, and very normal.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



KABBALAH FOR BEGINNERS

“Kabbalah teaches us how to discover the force that guides us, and in doing so, receive infinite joy and pleasure.”

CRACKING THE HAPPINESS CODE

by Tony Kosinec

“Quick: think about what would make you really, really happy.”

This was the opening line of the cover story in the May, 2007 issue of *Newsweek*, dedicated to the subject of happiness. Top international psychologists, sociologists, biologists and economists tried to answer the eternal question: “What is the secret of happiness?” or more precisely, “What would it take to make us happy?”

The Dollar Is Always Greener on the Other Side

“Maybe money?” the researchers asked. “If I had the money,” claims the typical happiness fantasizer, “I could have, or do, anything I want: travel around the world, buy anything I please, be independent, and take charge of my life... In short, money is bound to make me happy, isn’t it?”

Surprisingly (or not), many recent studies show that once we have enough to meet our basic needs, money ceases to make us happier. One famous study showed that even lottery winners who were very, very happy when they won soon lost their euphoria. After a while, their moods were exactly the same as they had been before their big win.

In fact, once we have more money than we need for our basic needs, our ability to enjoy it becomes overshadowed by questions like, “Am I keeping up with the Joneses?” because no matter how much we earn, it always seems as if our neighbor’s dollar is a shade or two greener.

Happiness Economics

What about free time? If we worked less and rested more, would we have our longed for happiness?

The happiness researchers flatly dismiss this hypothesis as well. On the “World Map of Happiness,” recently published by the school of psychology at England’s Leicester University, the hard-working USA takes a whooping 23rd place, while vacationing France staggers behind in 62nd place.

One by one, the happiness researchers revoked the most common theories about the road to happiness. They concluded that in the long run, things like a successful career, a happy marriage, and even good health will not make us happy.

So what *would* make us happy? That’s precisely the question that leaves researchers dumbfounded. Somehow, it’s easier to identify the factors that *do not* make us happy, than to offer a practical formula for true happiness.

“Happiness is everywhere—on the best-seller lists, in the minds of policymakers, and front and center for economists—yet it remains elusive,” concludes Rana Foroohar, *Newsweek*’s senior economics writer.

So how do we grab hold of that fleeting happiness?

The Mechanics of Happiness

To crack the happiness code, we must start by realizing who we really are, what our nature is. And that is something very simple: we are the desire to be happy. In other words, we all want to receive pleasure, to enjoy, or as Kabbalah calls it, we are “the will to receive.”

“... The will to receive pleasure constitutes the entire matter of Creation, from its beginning to its end. ... all the myriad types of creatures and their varieties are but rates and modified values of the will to receive.”

Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam),
“Preface to the
Wisdom of Kabbalah”

Perhaps this sounds like something you already knew. But our nature, the will to receive, is more sophisticated than what we might think. It’s not just a constant desire that’s always nudging us to find happiness. This will to receive actually motivates *everything* we do, down to the smallest actions we make, and even every thought we have.

The will to receive seeks satisfaction at every moment and makes sure that we don’t rest until we fulfill its demands. It also constantly determines how we feel: if we satisfy it, we’re happy, we feel good, life’s a song;

if we don’t, we become frustrated, angry, depressed, and even violent or suicidal.

Perhaps you also guessed this. But the thing that so often escapes our notice—and the key to cracking the happiness code—is the fact that once our “will to receive” is fulfilled, the pleasure we feel disappears.

The great Irish author, Oscar Wilde, certainly knew about this when he wrote, “In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst; the last is a real tragedy.”

Kabbalah explains the mechanics of this process: initially, we want something and make efforts to acquire it. The moment we get what we fervently desired, we feel pleasure, joy and delight. Or, in Kabbalah’s language, the first encounter between the desire and its filling is the peak of the pleasure.

So far so good—but the process isn’t finished yet. The moment we get the thing we wanted, the desire abates. In other words, we gradually stop *wanting* what we attained, and as a result, our pleasure starts fading... until it disappears completely.

For example, you know what it’s like when you’re really hungry: you could eat a steak so big it needs its own area code (vegetarians: consider that a tofu loaf). But what happens when you start eating?

IN KABBALAH—THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS—HAPPINESS STOPS BEING A MYSTERY. THIS ELUSIVE NOTION CAN BE BROKEN DOWN INTO COMPONENT PARTS AND UNDERSTOOD. AND JUST LIKE E=MC², THERE’S A FORMULA FOR LASTING HAPPINESS

The first bite is pure ecstasy, and the next bite is wonderful. The next bite is good, and the next bite is... okay, and the next is whatever it is. And the next one is: “not another bite, I’m gonna be sick...”

This happens with everything, not just food. We can spend years dreaming about a fancy sports car and when we finally get it, we’re thrilled—well, at least for a few moments or days. But soon we find ourselves enjoying it less and less until it stops giving us any pleasure. And then every time we look at the car, the only thing we feel is the weight of the gigantic loan we have to pay back for the next ten years!

Economics Professor Richard Easterlin of the University of Southern California, a pioneer of happiness research, calls this phenomenon “hedonic adaptation,” which means, “We get a new car, and we get used to it. We get new clothes, and we get used to it again... We adjust very quickly to the pleasure we get...”

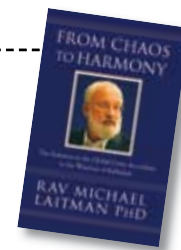
But that can’t be the end of the story, can it? After all, even as we describe this, we all long for lasting pleasure. Did Nature place us in this vicious circle to remain forever unhappy? Could happiness be just a fairy tale, a Santa Claus story that will never come true?

The Happiness Formula

Thankfully, Kabbalah explains that Nature is not cruel at all; in fact, its only desire is to bring us the happiness we seek. If our aspiration for happiness was not meant to be realized, we wouldn’t have it to begin with.

FROM CHAOS TO HARMONY

“We should know that Nature’s altruistic force is a single force. There are no divisions in it.”



Nature’s purpose is to let us independently attain a feeling of complete and total happiness—not “sort-of” happiness or “most of the time” kind of happiness, but the kind that is absolute, perfect, and eternal.

And we’re actually closer to it than we think. In fact, the recent trend of happiness research and our growing realization that we are never satisfied have actually brought us closer to true happiness. We are beginning to identify the pattern: happiness has nothing to do with how much money we make or how good

our marriage is—in fact, it has nothing to do with any other kind of pleasure we try to receive. We’re starting to uncover the fundamental fact that happiness can only be felt using a different *principle* of enjoyment.

At this point, Kabbalah helps us solve the happiness problem at its root. We’ve already explained why we never feel lasting pleasure from anything: because the minute the pleasure meets the desire, the desire becomes neutralized. And since our desire is neutralized, we can no longer enjoy the pleasure.

So the secret of happiness, Kabbalah explains, is to add another ingredient to this process, the ingredient of “intention.” This means that we keep wanting just like before, only we put a different spin on our desire: we direct it *outward*, as if we are *giving* to someone else. In other words, this intention turns our desire into a “passageway” for the pleasure. Thus, the pleasure we feel won’t stop; it will keep going through our desire, following our intention. And our desire will be able to keep receiving continuously, without ever being quenched.

And that’s the formula for endless pleasure, or lasting happiness. When a person applies this formula, he actually goes through a profound transition and begins to feel different *kinds* of pleasures. Kabbalah calls them “spiritual,” and these pleasures are endless.

In Conclusion— a Short Summary

What is happiness? It’s what we feel when we fulfill our “will to receive.”

Why does it go away? Because the pleasure neutralizes our desire, and without a desire, we can’t feel pleasure.

What’s the formula for feeling endless pleasure? Adding an “intention of giving” to our “will to receive,” so the pleasure will keep flowing through our desire, endlessly.

True happiness is just around the corner, waiting for us to learn how to feel it, how to add an intention to our desire. Studying Kabbalah, we naturally acquire this new, spiritual intention and start receiving the way Nature wants us to—perfectly. This is why “Kabbalah” is Hebrew for “reception”—it’s the wisdom that teaches us *how* to receive.

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■ Sneak-a-Peek @ the book *From Chaos to Harmony*

THE DESIRE GROWS—HUMANITY EVOLVES

WHETHER IT IS THE TINIEST MOVEMENT OF OUR BODY, OR HUMANITY’S ENTIRE EVOLUTION, ALL WE DO IS MOTIVATED BY ONE THING ONLY—THE DESIRE FOR PLEASURE

In his essay, “The Peace,” Baal HaSulam states, “It is well known to researchers of nature that one cannot perform even the slightest movement without motivation, meaning without somehow benefiting oneself. When, for example, one moves one’s hand from the chair to the table it is because one thinks that by putting one’s hand on the table one will thus receive greater pleasure. If one would not think so, one would leave one’s hand on the chair for the rest of one’s life without moving it an inch, and all the more so with great efforts.”

Man’s uniqueness, compared to the rest of Nature, is not only in the power and quality of his desires. It is also in the fact that man’s desires constantly increase and change, both during the lifetime of an individual, and throughout the generations. Examining the evolutionary history of other species, such as primates, indicates that several thousand years ago, primates were practically identical to those living today. While it is true that primates, too, change, as does any element in Nature, these are biological changes, like the geological changes occurring in minerals. Humankind, however, has gone through substantial changes over time.

The evolution of the desire for pleasure caused man to sense a constant need to develop, to invent, and to dis-

cover new things. A greater desire means greater needs, which yield keener intellectual and perception abilities. The growth of the will to receive generated humanity’s evolution in the following ways:

First, the will to enjoy manifested in physical desires, such as the desire for sustenance, reproduction, and family. These desires have existed since the dawn of humanity. But because man is a social being, additional desires evolved within us, called “human desires” or “social desires,” such as the desire for wealth, honor, sovereignty, and fame. These desires changed the face of humanity, introducing social classes, hierarchical systems, and changes in the socioeconomic structures.

Subsequently, there came the desire to enjoy knowledge. This desire manifested in the evolution of science, education systems, and culture. Its traces first appeared during the Renaissance and continued through the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions, and into the present day.

The growth of the Enlightenment Movement and the secularism of society were further manifestations of the desire for knowledge. This desire required that man understand all about his surrounding reality. Therefore, he sought more and more information, and wanted to research and control everything.

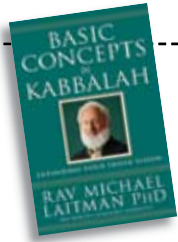
If we observe human evolution in culture, education, science, and technology in light of the understanding that desires lead all these processes, we will conclude that evolving desires also created all our ideas, inventions, and innovations. All of them are merely “technical” tools, “servants” that have evolved to fulfill the needs that these desires created.

This process of desire-evolution happens not only in the whole of

humanity throughout history; it happens in the private lives of each of us as well. These desires surface in us one-by-one in a variety of combinations, and direct the course of our lives.

In fact, the internal engine that propels us forward and induces the processes that unfold in human society is actually our *desire to enjoy*. The evolution of our desires is ceaseless, and designs both our present and our future.





BASIC CONCEPTS IN KABBALAH

“Just like a person who is building a house first makes a plan and works on specifications according to the final goal, all one’s actions are determined by the final, predetermined goal.”

A KABBALIST, A GENETICIST, & THE MEANING OF LIFE

by Asaf Ohayon

The research journal, *Genes, Brain and Behavior*, recently published results of a study at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, showing that people with a specific set of genes were 50% more likely to be generous with their money.

The leading scientist on this research team, Prof. Richard P. Ebstein, met with Kabbalist Dr. Michael Laitman to discuss the new findings and their implications. During their fascinating conversation, Dr. Ebstein explained that our genes are partially responsible for all our behavior. Why partially? Because whatever isn’t determined by our genes is determined by social influence. However, all this came as no surprise to Kabbalist Dr. Laitman.

Prof. Ebstein: We started checking specific genes to see if they influence altruism, and we used a rather a simple game to do it: a person is given an envelope with some money. He can either take all the money or give any part of it to another person, without knowing anything about that person and whether he needs it—he can be a millionaire or penniless.

When I gave this paradigm to some people, they said: “Come on, what kind of sucker would give away any part of the money? Anyone would take all the money and go home. What’s the motivation to give the money away?”

But it turns out that only 20% of the people took all the money, and almost a third of the people gave half of it to someone else, without knowing if that someone really needed it.

Dr. Laitman: So what was their motivation to do it?

Prof. Ebstein: This is not clear to us. The economists say it is altruism.

Dr. Laitman: Well, at this point Kabbalah disagrees. Kabbalah says that we are all made of an egoistic substance, and that the “altruists” are, in fact, egoists as well. They only have a different motivation, since there is no action without motivation.

If I give something to someone, I must have the “fuel” or energy, the motive power to do so. In order to perform an action, I have to “justify” it—my body or my “self” has to know that it will profit from the action. I can profit by taking something or by giving something.

Either way, inwardly, it is of course an action of receiving; however it may seem altruistic on the outside.

Prof. Ebstein: Some might say that even if a person gives money to someone, he receives some kind of reward, at least in his brain, and this is the motivation for doing it. So the person would not have done it without being given this reward.

...say, a person born with "bad genes" had an alcoholic father and had a history of violence in his family, then stabbed someone to death in a bar incident at age twenty five—was he guilty?

In terms of brain sciences, the reward is a chemical substance that is released. So in that regard, you are right, there is no altruism without receiving some reward, otherwise the person wouldn’t be motivated.

Dr. Laitman: So there is some kind of mechanism inside a person that releases a substance that brings him pleasure, and hence he is able to give, right?

Prof. Ebstein: Yes.

Dr. Laitman: And within each person it happens to a different extent—in some people more, and in others less—but it is predetermined within a person, so there are no “egoists” or “altruists” here, but everything is determined according to one’s natural development. It is how one was born.

Prof. Ebstein: Right, but the genes don’t determine 100% of the action. Most people today agree that social influence also plays a role.

Dr. Laitman: How?

Prof. Ebstein: Well, it’s much easier to characterize genes than to understand the influence of society and how exactly a person was influenced since birth. But researchers do examine this subject.

For instance, today we know a gene exists that supports violence, which can

partially explain why a person would have a criminal record or be a felon. Researchers found that this gene’s effect depends on whether one was exposed to violence as a child. In other words, the gene can make you violent only if you experienced violence as a child. But without the social influence, the gene remains neutral.

Dr. Laitman: So something else has to allow this inclination to come out and be actualized....

Prof. Ebstein: Yes, a combination of our education, parents, school and society determines our actions. But the genes are also very significant: they are about 50% responsible for the things we do. This is what we call “hardwired” into us.

Dr. Laitman: Let me ask you a question: considering everything that is happening in the world today and everything we have discussed, does this give us any hope of improving man, making him more altruistic in order to benefit human society? Perhaps we can use the external influences to arouse altruistic genes to emerge and become more active?

Prof. Ebstein: In truth, my personal opinion is that genetics cannot help here, even though I am a geneticist myself. I believe that the most effective way to change a person’s behavior is through education and society.

Dr. Laitman: Kabbalah says that we have to uncover the general process that humanity is going through: that man’s ego steadily grows from one generation to the next, and is now reaching dimensions which pose a real danger to humankind. Like how we lately feel our terrible influence on the environment.

If this process becomes evident to us, then society will start getting this message through the media, and this will influence each and every one of us personally. Because, naturally, what society accepts as a standard is also accepted by an individual. We only need to explain the causality



KABBALAH REVEALED

“The Hebrew word for Creator is *Boreh*, and contains two words: *Bo* (come) and *Re’eh* (see). Thus, the word, “Creator,” is a personal invitation to experience the spiritual world.”



SO YOU THOUGHT THAT GENEROSITY CAME FROM GOOD WILL AND CARING FOR OTHER PEOPLE? THINK AGAIN.

NEW GENETIC RESEARCH SHOWS THAT IT MAY JUST BE A MATTER OF GENES.

FROM KABBALAH’S VIEWPOINT, HOWEVER, THIS IS HARDLY NEWS. THAT’S WHY WE WERE SURE THAT A MEETING BETWEEN GENETICIST PROF. EBSTEIN AND KABBALIST DR. LAITMAN WOULD BE EXTREMELY FASCINATING



Michael Laitman Ph.D.

Kabbalist, Professor in Ontology and the Theory of Knowledge, Ph.D. in philosophy and M.S.c. in Medical Cybernetics. President and founder of the Bnei Baruch Kabbalah Education & Research Institute. Has authored over thirty books on authentic Kabbalah.



Richard P. Ebstein Ph.D.

Director of the Scheinfeld Center of Human Genetics for the Social Sciences, Hebrew University and Head of the Research Laboratory, Herzog Memorial Hospital, Jerusalem, Israel. Has published over 200 articles and discovered the “novelty-seeking” gene.

of things and their purpose—why Nature is arranged the way it is, and where it is taking us.

At this point, *Kabbalah Today’s* reporter Oren Levi, who was listening all along, decided to interject and ask a few questions.

Oren Levi: I am sitting here listening to your fascinating conversation, and I just have to ask a few questions. Prof. Ebstein, you said that genes determine man’s behavior, so if genes determine our behavior, is there any room left for choice?

Prof. Ebstein: I was once asked in a BBC Radio interview whether the “gene alibi” is accepted in the court of law. The answer is negative, they don’t accept it. But if you ask me personally if, say, a person born with “bad genes” had an alcoholic father and had a history of violence in his family, then stabbed someone to death in a bar incident at age twenty-five—was he guilty?

In a way, from what I understand from genetics, sociology and anthropology, I would have to say that this man did not have much of a choice. Maybe at the last moment he could have decided not to draw the knife and kill someone, but think of his entire world—it was going in a bad direction, all the cards were against him, the die was cast pretty early in his life. Yet on the other hand, society cannot forgive him.

Oren Levi: Earlier you mentioned that what a person does is 50% influenced by his genes. What about the other 50%?

Prof. Ebstein: That comes from society, the education one receives from his parents or his school.

Oren Levi: Okay, so if this adds up to 100%—50% genes and 50% society—then where am “I”? What do we have left of the person himself?

Prof. Ebstein: That is the question.

Oren Levi: And what does Dr. Laitman say about this, from the perspective of Kabbalah?

Dr. Laitman: What can I say—there is no free choice. The point of free choice is not to be found here. The wisdom of Kabbalah says that there is no free choice in our world, we are not free here. We as individuals choose nothing we are born with, including our environment, our family, our school or anything else in life. And when we become grown, say at the age twenty, we have nothing of our own—everything was instilled in us. So this isn’t really “me,” as we have no “I” yet.

And when we start conducting our lives according to the media and society that influence us, we never express our “I.” We may not even sense that we have the potential to rise above this kind of existence.

Kabbalah explains that a person feels the “I” through an inner urge to reveal Godliness—to transcend one’s human nature and discover the spiritual world and the Upper Force. There we find free choice. But in our world, there is certainly no free choice.

Oren Levi: So is Kabbalah saying that modern human beings haven’t yet reached the last stop of our evolution or development?

Dr. Laitman: I believe that Prof. Ebstein and I both agree that we still need to develop more. The human level is not at its peak, we do not yet see all the good that can emerge from it.

According to Kabbalah, man has to achieve the level of the Upper Force, to include all the Higher Forces of Nature within himself. This means that man has to attain and understand all of reality. We are talking about man’s actual development—not just what man understands, thinks, and researches—but how man *himself* develops.

I hope we will see a time when scientists will independently understand that without inner change, they will not be able to penetrate deeper into matter and research the force that operates behind matter and the very laws within matter. They will have to identify them somehow, and it’s impossible to do so using our egoistic minds and matter. We will have to become

similar to Nature instead of opposite to it. Eventually we will have to acknowledge that Nature is altruistic, and hence created life.

We can learn about this from our own cells and the way they act in the body. If they didn’t work in perfect harmony, the body wouldn’t exist. Each and every cell takes care of the whole body’s well-being. And all of Nature works that way. We are the only part of Nature that creates an imbalance, and we will have to recognize this and correct ourselves. This is what Kabbalah is about.

Let’s hope that through science, actually, we will discover that we have no possibility of attaining the real laws of Nature unless we change ourselves accordingly.

Prof. Ebstein: I agree with you. However, I don’t think that science is going in that direction. I think that there is some kind of pride among scientists; some think that they can understand the universe better with their own minds and tools.

Dr. Laitman: Well, let’s hope that we’ll find the way out of the turbulence that the modern world has gotten itself into, and that both from the side of genetics, and from the side of Kabbalah, everything will connect into one Divine Science.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ZOHAR

“... as we advance and work in contact with the Creator, we begin to understand the Creator and enter Infinity and Perfection.”

THE FREEDOM BLUES

DID YOU EVER WONDER WHY YOU LIKE GOING ON VACATION? WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN ANOTHER PLACE THAT YOU CAN'T FIND AT HOME? KABBALAH EXPLAINS THAT WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR IS ACTUALLY RIGHT IN FRONT OF US, OR RATHER, RIGHT INSIDE OF US



by Seth Bogner

Looking for a Getaway

Freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of information, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to create, freedom fighters, academic freedom, economic freedom, free time... In the 21st century, it appears that almost everyone can make up his own *kind* of freedom.

But is there such a thing as absolute, unconditional freedom? Not freedom of something, but simply limitless, unbounded freedom in every imaginable sense? Is there such a thing as simply, freedom?

Kabbalah says there is, but it's very different from what we usually imagine. For most of us, freedom means getting away from the daily grind and the troubles of day-to-day life. We want to be liberated from the worries, the pressures, the boss at work and the overdrawn bank account. In short, we'd like a bit of escape from real life so we can catch our breath.

So we work hard all year and save money, so as to finally get a few moments of mercy on a sandy beach.

And between you and me, something always doesn't work out quite the way we wanted. One time it's the hotel, another time it's the flight, and if it's nothing else, then the kids decide that now is the perfect time to get sick... Somehow or other, most vacations don't end up being exactly what we dreamed of.

And even when we get lucky and go on that perfect vacation, every passing moment reminds us that it will all be over soon and before we know it, we'll have to plunge back into "real life."

If you stop and ponder this for a moment, some interesting questions will pop up: Does getting away from the routine really make us freer? What if there were a way to live differently so we would not want to escape our lives in search of freedom? And is there such a thing as an endless, perfect dream vacation?

Freedom—Beyond This World

Actually, there is. But in order to find our way there, we should stop looking for it in the framework of this world.

The wisdom of Kabbalah explains that in our world, a person is everything *but* free. Think about it: you did not choose your family or your natural talents and qualities. As a child, you were constantly influenced by your parents, teachers, and other educators.

And when you grow up a bit more, society and the media dictate practically everything in your life: what to wear, who to be, what to aspire to, how to think, what to eat and whom to love. Even the notions of what is beautiful or ugly, right or wrong, proper manners, patterns of speech or behavior—all are instilled in us by society.

Naturally, it isn't easy to accept the idea that there is no freedom in our world. But here's the funny thing—*once you realize that there is no freedom in this world, you'll begin asking about the meaning of it all, and then, Kabbalah explains, you're on your way to real freedom.*

“... if we set our hearts to answer but one very famous question ... It is the tiny question, asked by the whole world, which is: What is the point of our lives?”

Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), “Introduction to Talmud Eser Sefirot”

Kabbalists tell us that the answer to the question, “What is the meaning of life?” holds the key to our freedom. And there is not a single human being on earth who has not asked this question at least once. Deep down, in a place only we know, we have all asked: “Why are we here?” “Where did we come from?” “Is there a purpose to our personal and global experi-

ences?” “Where are we headed?” “And what is the point of all this?”

Kabbalists explain that it is only natural for us to ask such questions. But the problem is that we do not think that they can or were even meant to be answered. Therefore, whenever such a question comes to mind, we avoid trying to give it a real answer.

We have also created a society that makes it convenient for us to ignore such questions. After all, it is much more socially acceptable to get swept away by the currents of life than to ask about the meaning of it.

“... and all the more so in our generation, where no one wishes to even think about it. Nevertheless, the question itself still stands, bitterly and vehemently, and sometimes it comes upon us uninvited, and picks at our minds, and casts us down to the ground before we can find the familiar ploy, that is, to flow mindlessly in the currents of life, as yesterday.”

Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), “Introduction to Talmud Eser Sefirot”

Even the fancy entertainment industry we have developed arises from our attempt to escape the search for life's meaning. We keep ourselves busy with innumerable activities—gulp down loads of unnecessary information, stare at the TV screen for hours on end, wander the net, watch movies, go to Disneyland, and whatnot—anything to keep ourselves distracted. The very idea of being left without something to keep us busy seems frightening, because we'd be left alone with the question of life's meaning.

And yet, ironically enough, Kabbalah explains that *we are actually repressing the very question that leads us to the freedom we thirst for.* That instead of trying to escape our lives by going on vacation, we can turn life

itself into a completely different experience—like an endless, perfect vacation, where the pleasure we feel only increases from one moment to the next...

Does this sound like something that doesn't exist in this world? Well, you're right, it doesn't. But it *does* exist in another place, and Kabbalah explains *where* it is and *how* to get there.

How Do We Get There?

“One should scrutinize and study his essence and the purpose for which he came into this world.”

Kabbalist Baruch Ashlag (Rabash), *Shamati (I Heard)*, Letter 18

It starts with one simple decision—to stop running away. Let the question of life's purpose break free from its hiding place.

Then you will see that this question has nothing to do with improving life in this world or escaping it—it asks only about the true source of life. In fact, questioning the meaning of life is the beginning of your connection with its source, the Creator. In other words, answering this question and connecting to the Creator is one and the same.

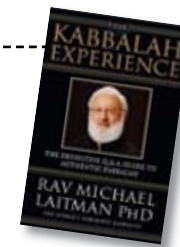
Kabbalists explain that connecting to the Creator is a gradual process that takes place within. And *the more you connect to your life's source, the freer you become*, because this source is absolutely, unconditionally free—it does not depend on anything to sustain it.

So in order to reach freedom we need not climb mountains, travel to the other end of the world or try to escape our daily life. All we have to do is let that simple, inner question awaken and guide us. Then, the path to perfection will unfold before us and we will be on our way to true, eternal freedom.

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THE KABBALAH EXPERIENCE

“As of now, our souls are in a state called “this world,” where the Creator is not felt, but is concealed and hidden from them.”



» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

BETTER THAN THE VIRTUAL WORLD!?

The change in Dan's life occurred about a year ago when he first entered the virtual world. He was suddenly exposed to an experience that was very different from anything he'd ever known. His ordinary life was suddenly filled with excitement, something he had long yearned for, and he was immediately swept into this new world. Since then, he's been a regular participant, along with seven million other users, in a new virtual world that exists beyond time and space, called “Second Life.” (For more details, see “What is Second Life?”)

The Virtual Attraction

So what attracts seven million people to a virtual world where they start a whole new, different kind of life?

According to Kabbalah, the “Second Life” phenomenon and all other virtual engagements are not coincidental. They're symptomatic of the change humanity is undergoing. This is part of a process of development where we are gradually becoming independent of the physical level of existence. In other words, humanity is preparing for its next level of existence—the spiritual world.

If you zoom out on this process, you'll see that our attraction to the virtual reality began long before the recent “Second Life” trend. As modern technology has developed, most professions began relying on the information it could access—and information is virtual by its very nature. This virtual commodity—information—has become vital to us. Tycoons and giant corporations rely on it, process it, invest fortunes to secure it, and eventually sell it for astronomical figures. (Did somebody say YouTube?)

Another factor that has made virtual reality an essential part of our lives is our increasing need to become global. For instance, we can store photos and videos on the net and share them with Aunt Sharon in LA and Uncle Frank in London—simultaneously. With internet communications, we have managed to easily and cheaply overcome the differences in time and distance between continents. It's as if we are beginning to transcend the boundaries of the physical world.

Considering this ongoing “virtualization” process, it's only natural that seven million people (with the list getting bigger as we speak) are leading an *entire virtual life*, in addition to their physical life.

Fleeing to the Virtual World

However, Kabbalah explains that there is another aspect to this process: Our attempts to find refuge in other dimensions also stem from the fact that our “real” lives have become rather difficult and wearisome, we long for escape to another world.

Everywhere, humanity is experiencing an escalating crisis, highlighted by drug abuse, depression, breakdown of education systems, disintegration of the family unit, social gaps, and the list goes on.

Since we are beginning to lose hope that things will improve on the physical level, we seek another dimension, a place where we can forget all our earthly problems. Hence, we find ourselves building more and more frameworks that provide quick distraction, excitement and tranquility—everything we don't find in our routine, physical lives.

The Next Step

So what's next? Will we all move to the virtual world, drink virtual beer, and hang out with Dan and his virtual buddies? Probably not. However, “Second Life” is not a bad prelude to humanity's next step.

As already mentioned, our present attraction to the virtual world is not coincidental. Kabbalah explains that it is an expression of our deeply rooted urge to actualize the spiritual level of our existence—a level that is perfect, eternal and boundless.

According to Kabbalah, this latent urge has been developing in humanity for millennia. However, while in the past we could settle for our limited experiences in the physical world, today the urge for spirituality is surfacing in more and more people, and demanding its realization. We can no longer be truly satisfied solely by whatever the physical world has to offer.

Therefore, our attraction to the virtual world actually indicates great progress in human evolution. It plays an important role in humanity's preparation for spirituality. In fact, all our virtual dealings are preparing us to detach from matter, disconnect from our corporeal identity and transcend the limitations of time, space and motion.

It happens even if we are not aware of it; just by sending an e-mail—the most commonplace activity of today, we eliminate the distance between us, and connect one end of the world to the other.

However, the virtual world is no more than preparation.



WHAT IS “SECOND LIFE”?

Second Life is not a computer game. It is a website enabling visitors to enter a huge 3-D virtual world with millions of participants. At every given moment, you can enter this virtual world as any character you wish to be, and there you can meet many other characters. The experience resembles a 3-D movie where you are both the spectator and the actor.

Everything in this world is run by the players, whose average age is thirty-one. They make business transactions and trade a total of three million real American dollars a day! Of course, they do it using the local currency, called “the Linden Dollar.” (270 Linden Dollars amount to one American dollar), which is traded in the local (virtual) stock market based on a fluctuating rate.

They chat, shop, hang out, purchase homes and land, build malls, get married (then divorced), watch movies, attend lectures, party at clubs, loiter at coffee shops—you name it.

And all of this, ladies and gentlemen, is pure virtual.

Kabbalists explain that as the desire for spirituality continues to unfold within us, we will feel more and more that we cannot exist simply on the physical level. And eventually even our virtual getaways will not be enough for us—we will have to learn how to actually enter the spiritual world and live in it.

Fortunately, the means to do so is already here. The wisdom of Kabbalah is patiently standing by, waiting to be used by anyone who feels ready.

Kabbalists explain that as soon as we commence on our spiritual path, we will discover an abundance of Light that shines brighter than any high-resolution hue.

But this Light won't flicker briefly on the computer screen and then disappear when you go back to “real life.” It will be Real Life—one that's endlessly filled with the Light of eternity and perfection.

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2008 International Kabbalah Congress

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BNEI BARUCH IS HAPPY TO INVITE YOU TO THE INTERNATIONAL KABBALAH CONGRESS - "UNITY & DISSEMINATION"

What Is an International Kabbalah Congress?

An International Kabbalah Congress is a gathering of Kabbalah students who meet from all parts of the world to participate in lessons with Kabbalist Rav Michael Laitman, PhD, discussions, seminars, workshops, Yeshivot Haverim (Friends' Gatherings), meals, songs and other activities with the aim of increasing the spiritual connection between one another, and humanity at large.

What Does "Unity & Dissemination" Mean?

The aim of Kabbalah is to attain spirituality—to reveal Nature's complete picture, achieve world peace, eternal life and unbounded fulfillment—while living in this world. Thus, "unity" stands for the aim to increase this spiritual connection among the friends attending the congress, and "dissemination" stands for the means of spreading this unity to increase the spirituality of humanity as a whole.

**For information and registration -
www.kabbalahgroup.info**



KABBALAH, THE CREATOR AND THE UNITY OF MANKIND

Although we often feel like isolated individuals and see a world of schisms, Kabbalists say that we are all interconnected and interdependent. Much like the cells of a living body, we are all parts of a single entity called "the collective soul."

Our individual souls are bound together by an Upper Force that can only be described as complete, unconditional love and bestowal. This force not only connects us together, but all other parts of Creation as well—it is Nature's all inclusive force, "the Creator."

Those who have developed the ability to perceive this force and the collective human soul are called "Kabbalists." They explain that this ability lies within each of us, but remains dormant until we develop it. And from their perspective, it is evident that in the coming phase of human evolution, all people will discover that they are unified, will connect to the Upper Force that unites them, and will thereby find true happiness.

To help us get there, Kabbalists gave us the wisdom of Kabbalah—a method by which we can develop our ability to perceive humanity's collective soul, and connect to the Creator—the Upper Force that enlivens the whole of Creation.



About Bnei Baruch

Bnei Baruch is a non-profit organization committed to sharing the wisdom of Kabbalah in order to raise humankind's level of spirituality. Its founder and president, Kabbalist Rav Michael Laitman, PhD, was the disciple and personal assistant to Rabbi Baruch Ashlag, son of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (author of the *Sulam* (Ladder) commentary on *The Book of Zohar*).

Bnei Baruch provides individuals of all faiths, religions, and cultures with the precise tools they will need to embark on a fascinating journey of self-discovery and spiritual ascent. Its teaching method focuses primarily on the inner processes that people experience, each at his or her own pace.

In recent years, a massive worldwide search for the answers to life's questions has been gaining momentum. Society has lost its ability to perceive reality as it is, and in its place, superficial and often misleading concepts have appeared. Bnei Baruch reaches out to all those who are seeking awareness beyond the ordinary, who wish to understand their true purpose for being here.

Bnei Baruch's approach to understanding our experience of life on earth is both practical and reliable. By studying Ashlag's method, based on authentic writings, we can overcome the trials of everyday life, and initiate a process by which we will move beyond our present boundaries and limitations.

In addition to *Kabbalah Today*, Bnei

Baruch offers a variety of avenues for further study. Among them are: Kabbalah TV (www.kab.tv), the Online Kabbalah Education Center (www.arionline.info), and www.kabbalah.info, the largest, most comprehensive Kabbalah site on the Internet.

Bnei Baruch welcomes people of all ages and lifestyles to engage in this rewarding process.

About Kabbalah Today

In 1940, Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam) published the first and, as it turned out, the last issue of his Kabbalah paper *HaUma* (*The Nation*). Its aim was to introduce the ancient wisdom of Kabbalah in a contemporary style and language. The paper was shut down by the British Mandate authorities after having received malicious (and false) information that the journal propagated communism. Nevertheless, the goals for which *The Nation* was published are even more valid today than ever.

Kabbalah Today continues the spirit of *The Nation*. It is a Kabbalah paper that shares the ancient wisdom of Kabbalah in a contemporary style, and aims to reach people from all walks of life. Its sections provide readers with a wide variety of content, presented in different styles and approaches, while guaranteeing that the material is true to authentic Kabbalah texts such as *The Book of Zohar*, *The Tree of Life*, and the writings of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag.

No prior knowledge is required to read *Kabbalah Today*.

It is our hope that you will enjoy reading *Kabbalah Today* as much as we enjoy making it.

Sincerely,
Kabbalah Today editorial staff

If you wish to share your comments and feedback with us, please write to:

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Through Kabbalah we can reveal nature's complete picture, achieve world peace, eternal life and unbounded fulfillment, all while living in this world. All efforts of the Bnei Baruch Association are aimed solely at achieving these goals.

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