

KABBALAH TODAY



FREE

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A PROPHET IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

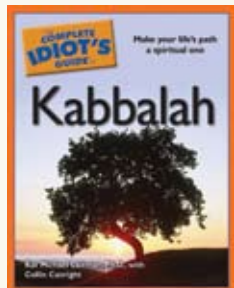
Jonah, the prophet who symbolizes the mission of the Jewish people



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Editor's Note

All Together Now

No time is better suited for introspection than the Jewish holidays. In essence, a holiday is a spiritual state—intrinsic by nature—and the beginning of the Jewish year is especially so. The three adjacent holidays—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot—denote a spiritual process of ascension on the spiritual ladder.

Kabbalah teaches that the Creator is a force, or quality, of love. Hence, the Jewish tradition of the holidays' self-scrutiny and examination of one's relations with others bears a much deeper

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THE SPIRITUAL ROSH HASHANAH

by Ron Gilboa

The Torah tells us that the world was created in six days. These days represent shifts between spiritual states called "light" or "darkness." On the sixth day, *Adam ha Rishon* (Adam) was created, but right before Shabbat (the Sabbath) he sinned and was driven out of the Garden of Eden.

According to the wisdom of Kabbalah, Adam represents the state of unity of all the souls. When he sinned, his soul split into myriad pieces, which became individual souls. These detached from one another and, most importantly, became alienated from the Creator and from each other.

Each of us contains a piece of Adam's soul, and our task is to reunite these fragments into the single soul of *Adam ha Rishon*. By doing so, we will be correcting his sin and thus be able to reenter the Garden of Eden. The time of

WHEN KABBALISTS DISCOVERED THE SPIRITUAL LAWS THAT AFFECT OUR WORLD, THEY ESTABLISHED CUSTOMS THAT SYMBOLIZE THE SPIRITUAL STATES WE WILL ALL EVENTUALLY EXPERIENCE. THESE CUSTOMS ARE THE JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Rosh Hashanah (the beginning of the Jewish year) reminds us that we must begin with the process of correcting our souls and restoring their initial unity.

The Ten Penitential Days

The ten penitential days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) symbolize ten spiritual states. During the spiritual correction process, these days occur when we discover the gap between our present spiritual state and the original state from which our souls declined. Seeing the immensity of the gap makes us ask for the strength to correct our souls, to repent. In spirituality, this state is called *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement.

From Rosh Hashanah to Simchat Torah

Following is the list of the spiritual states we will encounter along the correction process:

1. From *Rosh Hashanah* to *Yom Kippur* is when we discover what we must correct.
2. *Yom Kippur* is when we ask for the strength to help us correct.
3. On *Sukkot* we receive the power to actually make the correction.
4. And on *Simchat Torah* we gladly complete the reuniting of Adam's pieces, the correction.

Because these are internal states unrelated to a phys-

ical calendar, a Kabbalist may experience a full year's cycle within a mere two days or less! The pace of internal changes will determine the length of the spiritual process, and a Kabbalist may experience a (spiritual) state of holiday on any given day of the year.

Each Kabbalist (and we will all become Kabbalists) connected to the spiritual world will experience a fixed number of spiritual states, called "6,000 years." These are not 6,000 physical years, but a number of spiritual states we must experience before we complete the correction of our souls. When the 6,000 years (states) are completed, so will the spiritual correction. This releases us from incarnating into this world, and our souls need no longer descend into this world.

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KABBALAH FOR BEGINNERS

"...as long as egoism has the upper hand, society will always... disappoint its own members. Eventually, all egoism-based societies will exhaust themselves along with the egoism that created them."

HAPPY NEW YEAR

THE COMING YEAR MAY WELL BE THE TIME WHEN THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL UNDERSTAND WHY THEY WERE NAMED "THE CHOSEN PEOPLE." WHEN THAT HAPPENS, WE WILL NO LONGER HAVE TO FEAR WAR OR THREATS

In recent years, the popular attitude towards Kabbalah has shifted dramatically. People are no longer intimidated by it. Instead, they are much more willing to put their reservations about Kabbalah behind, as they discover that its wisdom is nothing like they originally thought it to be.

Kabbalah is not about charms or mysticism; it does, however, contain an intrinsic code that is tightly connected to everyone's future. Using it, we can change our future and realize ourselves as complete spiritual beings. This is what makes Kabbalah worth examining.

The beginning of this revolution dates back to 1995. In that year, something happened in the world, something shifted, and the ideas of Kabbalah began to appeal to many. Even people who did not know it and did not claim to understand it, people who were physically remote from Israel, began to take an interest in Kabbalah. Today, Kabbalah has become the center of attention for many people and has achieved new levels of popularity.

The great Kabbalist, Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), author of the Sulam commentary on The Book of Zohar, writes that the lights of

each holiday can bring us much closer to the purpose of our lives. This is why introspection in Elul, the last month of the Jewish year, can be very helpful.

According to Kabbalah, the whole of humanity is in a very special phase: it is approaching a state of "global introspec-

Human egoism has increased to a point where each of us feels totally isolated, despite the seven billion people around us

tion." People are beginning to realize that thousands of years of evolution have not produced anything of true merit; they are growing tired and despaired. Even the younger generation is bored and tired before their lives have really begun. Seeking new stimulation, they decline to drug abuse and want to forget about life.

But this is precisely the kind of state that can create fertile ground for poignant introspection, beginning with the question, "What am I really living for?" Today, we no longer chase every goal society declares "worthwhile," or pursue goals offered by our teachers or suggested in books. Instead, we find ourselves increasingly alone with ourselves.

This process is occurring because human egoism has increased to a point where each

of us feels totally isolated, despite the seven billion people around us. Hence, introspection can now become extremely effective for us.

Our current questions concern not only mundane issues, such as what careers we should pursue, but relate to the very

reason for our existence. We are no longer talking about success, but about why we should stay alive! Hopefully, this time our self-examination will be genuine, yielding lasting results.

The people of Israel determine everything that happens in the whole world. Although there are fears and anxieties of war and anti-Semitism, we actually have nothing to fear. If we do our duty and bring correction to the world, the ominous clouds on the horizon will dissolve, not just for us, but for all of humanity.

We needn't focus only on our own problems, but must think first and foremost of our responsibility to fostering world peace. This is the criteria by which we are judged from Above.

All the suffering and afflictions we feel—health problems, financial concerns, economic and security problems, and

the pressure of the nations—are forces operating on us from Above to impel us to do our duty. The people of Israel are judged with respect to the collective, to the whole world, not just with respect to themselves. If we understand that and address it seriously, we will discover that life on Earth is literally heaven on Earth. But this outcome will depend on our actions and commitment.

At the end of the day, our success depends on Israel's level of awareness of its duty toward the world. If we can bring this knowledge to people in a way that they can understand, we will literally change the world. The coming year can be a time of revelation of the awareness and the purpose of creation. It can be the year of the revelation of our duty to the world, of what makes us "the chosen people," and what we must bring into the world to carry out the commandment of being "a light of the nations."

May the coming year bring with it the dissemination of the genuine wisdom of Kabbalah, on which our good future is dependent. ■

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meaning than their social aspects. It reflects our similarity with the quality of love, the Creator.

In Kabbalah, the goal is to achieve the Creator, to become like Him. And the means to do it is to love our fellow person, as reflected in the verse, "love thy neighbor as thyself." If we keep in mind that the goal is to become similar to the Creator, the coming holidays will introduce new meaning to the ceremonies, something that will continue with us all year long.

As part of the effort to promote the goal of love of man, Rav Michael Laitman, PhD, founder and president of Bnei Baruch and publisher of this paper, co-authored The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah. Immediately following the holidays, he will begin a month-long tour in North America promoting the message of the book: egoism is humanity's only enemy, love of man is the only cure, and the wisdom of Kabbalah is the only means to achieve this love.

In the spirit of love of man, we dedicate this issue of Kabbalah Today to the internal, spiritual meaning of the holidays, and to a special interview with Rav Laitman describing the message of his new book. We hope you will enjoy reading Kabbalah Today and feel the love with which it was produced.

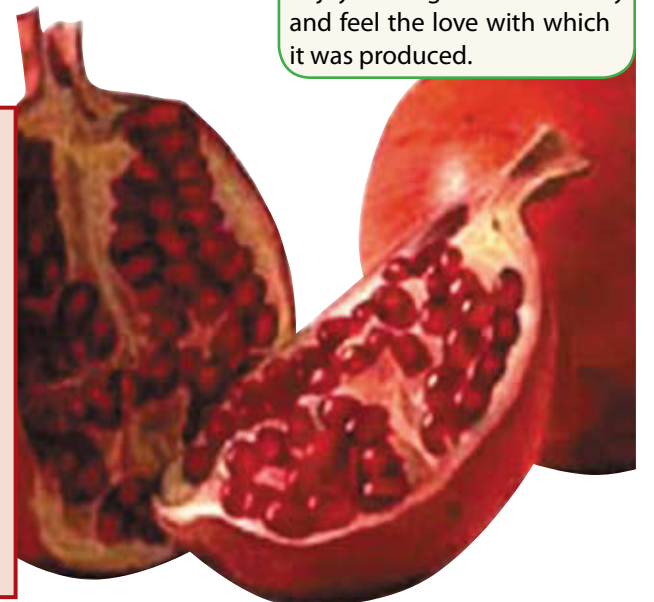
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POMEGRANATE

The pomegranate is filled with seeds, which symbolize the human soul, comprising 613 desires. The correction of each desire is called "making a *Mitzva*," and our task is to correct our 613 desires from aiming to benefit ourselves to aiming to benefit others. Once we have corrected all 613 desires, we are said to be "as filled with *Mitzvot* (good deeds) as a pomegranate."

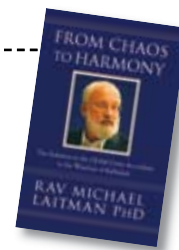
APPLE IN HONEY

The apple that we eat on *Rosh Hashanah* (The Jewish New Year's Eve) represents the correction of the sin of *Adam ha Rishon* (Adam). The sourness of the apple represents the sour taste of sin—Adam's fall into egoistic desires. If we correct the sin by learning how to receive pleasure in order to bestow upon the Creator—altruistically—the sour apple becomes as sweet as honey.



FROM CHAOS TO HARMONY

“If things had appeared before us as solid facts, clear and unequivocal, it would rob us of the ability to choose freely, our only means of realizing our unique potential.”



A PROPHET IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

by Eli Vinokur

Many of us attend shul on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), but for some of us, it is our only exposure to the Temple that year.

Traditionally on *Yom Kippur*, we read the Book of Jonah. *Yom Kippur* is a very special day to Jews, perhaps the most important day of the year. Why, then, has it become customary to read a seemingly marginal story on such an important day? Is there a connection between the story of Prophet Jonah and his message to the people of Nineveh—who were not Jewish—and the Day of Atonement?

The hero of the story is Jonah, son of Amitai. The Creator instructed Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and tell its people that “their wickedness is come up before Me” (Jonah, 1:2). In an unusual step for prophets, Jonah avoided his mission and chose to leave Israel. He mounted a boat at Jaffa Port and escaped to Tarshish, an ancient city on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

In the Midst of a Whale

While at sea, “the Lord hurled a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken” (Jonah 1:4). The sailors fought the wind and the swirling waters, but, clearly losing the battle, were on the verge of despair. In their distress, they tried to learn who was responsible for their plight. The crew cast a lot to see who was to blame for the storm, and the lot fell on Jonah, the only Jew on board. He was thus found guilty for creating the storm.

In reply to their questions, Jonah told them he was a Hebrew and that he was trying to es-

cape from God. The sailors then asked Jonah, “What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us” (1:11)? Jonah, in a burst of courage, told them to throw him off the boat into the sea. Although the sailors tried to



find a less harsh manner to calm the storm, they finally despaired, and threw him off the deck.

At sea, Jonah was swallowed by a whale and remained inside it for three days and three nights. Inside the whale’s stomach, Jonah prayed to God with gratitude and pleaded forgiveness: “But I will sacrifice unto

Jonah’s story is an allegory of the mission of the people of Israel: to save humanity from the path of pain and bring it to a life of peace and happiness

Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; that which I have vowed I will pay” (2:10).

The Creator heard his plea and pardoned Jonah, let him out of the whale, and instructed him once more to go to

Nineveh and warn its people. This time, Jonah obeyed the Creator and delivered a message to the people of Nineveh. He told them that forty days hence, their city would be ruined. The people and their

king wisely heeded his warning and repented. Thus the city was saved.

Like Jonah, Like Israel

This is the Biblical story. To understand its deeper meaning, we went to Kabbalistic resources and learned about the profound meaning of this “pictur-esque” chronicle.

Jonah was a prophet, and according to Kabbalah, a prophet is one who has risen to such a high spiritual degree, he or she can “speak” to the Creator. Such a person discovers the Upper Force that operates in reality, and understands the overall design of Nature.

Jonah’s story is an allegory of the mission of the people of Israel: to save humanity from the path of pain and bring it to a

life of peace and happiness. As a prophet, Jonah was instructed to go to Nineveh to explain to its people how they could progress toward the purpose of Creation in the safest, simplest way.

However, instead of going to Nineveh as instructed, Jonah decided that this would be impossible. He examined the mission the Creator had assigned him with his own logic and decided that it was too difficult to accomplish; no one, he believed, would listen to him. Hence, he tried to escape.

But Jonah was a Jew and as such, he had a special task: to follow the mission he’d been given. He did not know it then, but it is impossible to escape from keeping the laws of the Upper Nature.

To force Jonah back to his mission, Nature’s (the Creator’s) Forces assumed the form of a stormy sea that Jonah could not escape. The forces that were seemingly meant to help him—the sailors and the captain—failed to do so, and Jonah realized that nothing would help him. His physical drowning symbolized his spiritual decline.

In fact, the only thing that could save him was to carry out the mission he’d initially been given—to correct Nineveh. If he placed the importance of his mission above all else in his life, he would successfully accomplish his mission.

The story of Jonah is an allegory to the Jewish people still trying to avoid their duty and hence still suffering. This is precisely why, on *Yom Kippur*, a day of introspection, the

people of Israel must understand and accept their mission. Regrettably, we, like Jonah, are sluggish in carrying out our mission. We are hopelessly trying to sail away to different “havens” on the planet, and we continue being rejected, just like Jonah.

On the Day of Atonement, we are judged by whether or not we have been carrying out our mission. This is why our sages said that on this day, we should read the story of Jonah.

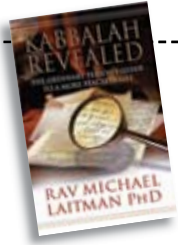
Our spiritual root is leading us to the troubles we are facing and to growing anti-Semitism, as it is written, “No calamity comes to the world but for Israel” (Yevamot, 63)

The people of Israel have yet to complete Prophet Jonah’s mission, and just as it happened then among the sailors, many nations today are realizing that the Jews are responsible for all their troubles.

Our spiritual root is leading us to the troubles we are facing and to growing anti-Semitism, as it is written, “No calamity comes to the world but for Israel” (Yevamot, 63).

Eventually, we will realize that we have no alternative but to fulfill our mission. We must use the wisdom given to us by our fathers—the wisdom of Kabbalah—to achieve wholeness and peace, and to disseminate this wisdom among other nations so that they, too, can perform the same process. This is our vocation as a “chosen people,” our role in reality. ■

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KABBALAH REVEALED

“Everything we do in life is determined by the pleasure and pain principle: we run from pain and chase pleasure. And the less we have to work for the pleasure, the better.”

THE FREEDOM TO KNOW

by Chaim Ratz

In recent years, Kabbalah has made a name for itself in the United States. But its fame has not always done justice to the ancient lore that was kept secret until only a few years ago. Now, with the publishing of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah* and his upcoming North America book tour this October, we at *Kabbalah Today* editorial staff decided it was an excellent time to interview Rav Michael Laitman, PhD, co-author of the book.

When we knock on his office door, he hollers, “Come in!” We enter a small, barely furnished office with a large, plain looking desk occupying the bulk of the room. The only noteworthy object on the table is a large LCD computer screen displaying his latest book or article. Rav Laitman, a man of average height in his sixties

There are two words that Rav Laitman considers key to his work: authentic and dissemination

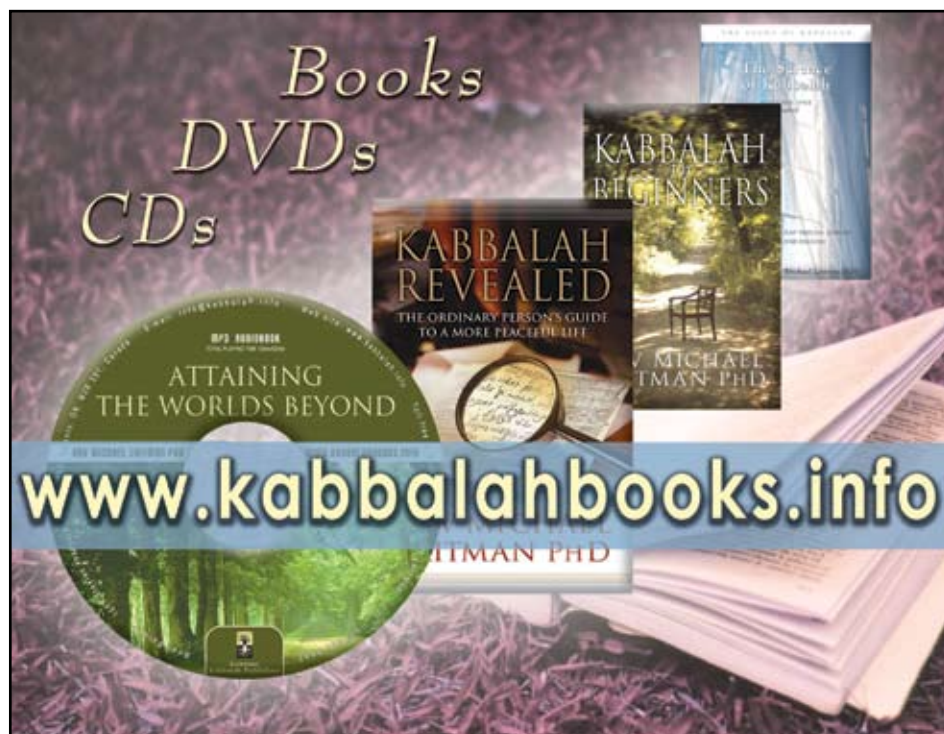
with vivid eyes and a hint of a smile, ushers us in and gets right to the point: “What do you want to know?” he asks. His direct gaze leaves no room for doubt—there is no small talk with this man.

Since 1991, the year his teacher, Kabbalist Rabbi Baruch Shalom

HaLevi Ashlag (the Rabash), passed away, Rav Laitman has written over thirty books on Kabbalah and published hundreds of articles. For Laitman, disseminating authentic Kabbalah is his life's goal.

Appearance can be deceiving, however, behind his casual appearance and the simple room hums a Kabbalah-dissemination empire. Since last *Rosh Hashanah* alone, Laitman's organization, Bnei Baruch, has printed and given out 11,000,000 (eleven million) free copies of Kabbalah papers in four languages: Hebrew, English, Spanish, and Russian, and sold 100,000 Kabbalah books the world over.

In addition, Laitman's daily lessons are broadcast live on Channel 98 in Israel, a free channel that reaches every home in Israel where there is a television. Additional Kabbalah programs are broadcast at different hours every day except on Shabbat. And to cover all the angles, www.kabbalah.info, Bnei Baruch's website, has over 500,000 unique visitors monthly, many of whom are regular students benefiting from the free live broadcasts of all the lessons, or downloading the materials at their convenience. Here, too, all the materials are provided gratis.



KABBALAH IS THE METHOD THAT REVEALS THE FORCE THAT CREATES AND GOVERNS ALL LIFE. WHAT COULD BE MORE PRACTICAL THAN TO LEARN WHAT CREATES AND GOVERNS ALL OF REALITY, TO LEARN HOW IT DOES IT, AND TO EVENTUALLY BE ABLE TO DO THE SAME? IF YOU KNEW THIS WAS POSSIBLE, WOULDN'T YOU WANT IT?

There are two words that Rav Laitman considers key to his work: *authentic* and *dissemination*. And these words bring us to the reason he has written *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah*, the subject of this interview.

Q: Rav Laitman, you are a disciple of the Rabash—the firstborn son and successor of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag

I don't work alone; the whole organization is dedicated to this one goal—disseminating Kabbalah. What we can, we offer free. What we can't, we sell at cost

(Baal HaSulam), author of the *Sulam* (Ladder) commentary on *The Book of Zohar*. How on earth did you come to write *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah*?

A: We [there are a lot more “we” in Laitman's words than “I”] were approached by Alpha Books, who said they wanted us to write their guide to Kabbalah.

Q: Whom do you mean by “we”?

A: Bnei Baruch. I don't work alone; the whole organization is dedicated to this one goal—disseminating Kabbalah. What we can, we offer free. What we can't, we sell at cost. We finance our dissemination efforts with our own money and donations from people who care about our goal as much as we do.

Q: Getting back to the book, do you know why Alpha Books chose you? It is highly unusual to approach a non-native American to write for such an American product as *The Idiot's Guide*.

A: They were looking for the real thing. When we told them we did not intend to write about mysticism, charms, mascots, holy water or red strings, but only about *genuine* Kabbalah, they became all the more enthusiastic. On the one hand, keeping the material authentic made the writing a little more challenging, but with the help of

co-author Collin Canright, I think we managed to put together a book that is both communicative and true to the authentic sources.

Q: I must say that I read the book and it is indeed communicative. However, there are some very unorthodox (if you will) ideas there that I'll get to in a moment. But first I'd like to understand something that seems to be at the core of your, and Bnei Baruch's actions: dissemination. Why are you so keen on spreading knowledge of Kabbalah so extensively?

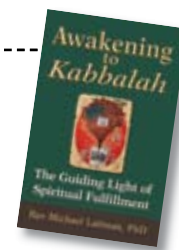
A: For twelve years I never moved from the side of my Rav, the Rabash. If there is anything that I can call his legacy to me, it is this—disseminating the wisdom of Kabbalah. And it didn't start with Rabash. There is not a single Kabbalist who did not wish for it to happen because they all knew (and wrote) that this is what the world needs to be happy, especially today.

I want to read you something; it's by Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel and a great Kabbalist. [He opens a little red book, called *Lirot Tov*, which roughly translates as *Good Sight*, and reads.] “The sublime, spiritual questions, which were previously known only to the greatest and the highest, must now be known, to various degrees, to the whole nation. Sublime matters must be brought down from their high tower to the lowest and most common level.” And there is more: “This requires great wealth of spirit and constant engagement, as only then will the mind expand and the language be made clear enough to express the most profound matters in an easy and popular manner, to revive thirsty souls.” This book contains hundreds if not thousands of quotes by the greatest Kabbalists throughout history, explaining the importance of Kabbalah and of spreading it.

As you can see, this is my life's goal: to engage, as Rav Kook says, in expressing the most profound matters in as

AWAKENING TO KABBALAH

“If we remove the outer shell from the Torah, we will see an entirely different picture, detached from this world.”



Rav Michael Laitman, PhD

easy and as popular manner as I can, to revive thirsty souls.

Q: Let's talk about the book. The last part deals not with Kabbalah, but with the global crisis and what we should do to resolve it. Why did you dedicate so much space to this topic?

We have to watch over them, so they don't fall. What if you suddenly discovered that everything you do, and everything that happens to you, is governed by a hidden force, and that you can work in sync with it just like you work in sync with gravity?

Well, such a force does ex-

For twelve years I never moved from the side of my Rav, the Rabash. If there is anything that I can call his legacy to me, it is this—disseminating the wisdom of Kabbalah

A: There is actually nothing closer to real Kabbalah than the last part. Kabbalah is a practical science, meant to be implemented in our day-to-day lives. Succinctly, Kabbalah is the method that reveals the Force that creates and governs all life. What could be more practical than to learn what creates and governs all of reality, to learn how it does it, and to eventually be able to do the same? If you knew this was possible, wouldn't you want it?

Think of it this way: You know there is a force called "gravity" and you act accordingly. But babies don't know it; that's why

ist, and the science that studies it is called "Kabbalah." You can choose to study it and discover how to master your life, or you can remain in the dark; you have the freedom to know, or not to know.

This Force creates all that exists, hence its name, "The Creator." There is no mysticism here, just plain reality. We use physics to study this world, and we use Kabbalah to study the spiritual world.

Q: This brings me to another topic: reality. In Chapter Three you write that reality doesn't really exist outside of us, but is a reflec-

tion of what happens inside of us. Can you explain that in a few words?

A: In his "Preface to The Book of Zohar," Rav Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam) explains that reality is created when we "project" our inner states, called *Reshimot* (records), on an imaginary screen in our minds. Therefore, the world seems corrupted and bad when I am corrupted and bad, or good when I am corrected and good.

If you examine how our senses work, you will see that this is really how we already operate. Our ears don't actually hear sounds; they react to stimuli that affect the auditory nerves. If you stimulated these nerves in some other way, such as with electric pulses, you would "hear" the pulses as though they were sounds.

The topic of perception of reality is of paramount importance in Kabbalah. If you understand it correctly, you will see that you don't need to change the world around you. All you need is to change your inner makeup to perceive the world correctly. This would save us tremendous amounts of energy and resources that we currently spend on relief efforts, all of which will eventually prove futile. With the exception of life-saving efforts, trying to better our world will always fail unless we correct ourselves first.

Q: I'd like to ask about the tour. This October, you will spend almost a month on the road touring the U.S. and Canada. Is there a special reason for focusing such efforts on North America?

A: Of course there is a special reason. Whether we like it or not, the American culture is the predominant culture the world over. A celebrity in America is a celebrity almost anywhere else. This is very important from my standpoint: if we succeed in spreading authentic Kabbalah in America,

it will be well received in Israel and in many other places. The predominance of American culture places a heavy burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the American people, perhaps more than they realize, because if authentic Kabbalah is successful in America, this will help not only America, but the entire world.

We must remember that when we disseminate Kabbalah, we are not spreading a mystical teaching, but a new research tool that the world so desperately needs today. If you found a cure for every ailment and pain in the world and hid it from humanity,

would you not consider yourself a criminal? Kabbalah offers a cure not only for this life, but for all generations. It is the key to understanding, mastering, and perfecting reality today, tomorrow, and for all time. How can we not disseminate it?

Q: What do you wish for the coming year?

A: That every person, all over the world, will find the wondrous wisdom that I have been so fortunate to discover, so all people will tell themselves next *Rosh Hashanah*: "last year was our first year of true joy and fulfillment." ■

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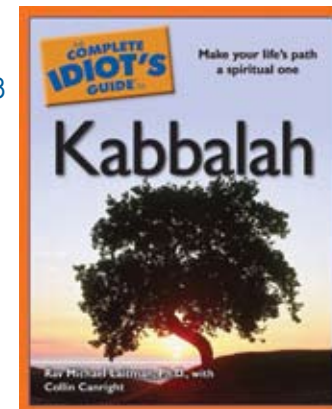
Rav Laitman's Public Appearances on the Tour

North America

- Los Angeles: October 9,10
- San Francisco: October 12,13
- Chicago: October 14,15
- Toronto: October 16,17
- Miami: October 18,19
- Atlanta: October 21,22
- Philadelphia: October 23
- NYC: October 24,25
- St. Louis: October 26,27

Mexico

- Mexico City: October 28-31 – Media interviews & public lecture
- Monterrey: November 4-8 – Media interviews & public lectures as member of the World Wisdom Council (WWC) partaking in the 2007 Monterrey Forum





ATTAINING THE WORLDS BEYOND

“The spiritual cannot be divided into separate parts; we can comprehend the whole only a part at a time, until we comprehend it all.”

FOUR SPECIES AND A SUKKAH

by Dudi Aharoni

The measurements and physical setup of the *Sukkah*, or huts that correspond to those used by our ancestors in Sinai Desert, were given to us, like all other *Mitzvot*, by Kabbalists. *Mitzvot* (commandments, precepts) are the laws of the Upper World passed on to us in this realm. Every *Mitzva* (singular for *Mitzvot*) we keep in this world reflects a spiritual law from the Upper World. Kabbalists keep them in the spiritual realm of their souls and feel the holidays as a higher, eternal, and more complete form of existence.

A spiritual act can occur only after we have acquired a *Masach* (screen)—the ability to transcend our self-centered desires—and have achieved the ability to receive a unique kind of pleasure, called “the Creator’s Light.” Each time we act with the pure intention of giving, we have committed a “spiritual act.” Conversely, when that same act is performed for self-gratification, it is considered corporeal and egoistic.

FROM A SPIRITUAL STANDPOINT, THE HOLIDAY OF SUKkot DESIGNATES THE FIRST ENTRANCE OF LIGHT INTO THE SOUL. THIS LIGHT IS CALLED “TORAH,” AND BEING FILLED WITH IT YIELDS JOY. THIS IS WHY THE HOLIDAY FOLLOWING SUKkot, WHICH MARKS THE RECEPTION OF THE TORAH, IS CALLED SIMCHAT (JOY OF) TORAH (LIGHT)

The Spiritual Sukkah

In spirituality, a *Sukkah* is the structure of the *Kli* that can receive spiritual Light. Put differently, the *Sukkah* symbolizes the soul. To receive the Upper Light, we must build a spiritual system within us, called *Sukkah*, reflecting our reciprocal relations with the Light.

As the soul goes through the correction process, it is unfit to receive the full measure of the Upper Light.

Instead, this Light remains “around” it or outside it, hence its name, “Surrounding Light.”

In order for the Light to enter and fill it, the soul must equalize its qualities with those of the Light. Because the quality of the Light is love, to

equalize with it, one must transcend one’s egoism and become similar to the quality of the Light—loving and giving.

The laws for building a *Sukkah* represent the way the soul acquires qualities similar to those of the Light. If we wish to advance in

do not ask for the pleasure emitted off Him. Building the thatch is symbolic of our work on building the screen that will shield us from the self-centered pleasure we receive when we sense the Creator’s Light.

To the extent that our request will focus only on our ability to love and bestow upon others, the Surrounding Light will correct our souls, granting us the power to transcend all egoistic desires. The power of the thatch enables us to receive the Upper Light into our souls. In such a state, our qualities become equal to those of the Creator and we can unite with the Creator in eternal love. This is the real joy—the joy of the Torah, *Simchat Torah*.



spirituality, we ask for only two things: unity and love with the Creator. We

The Four Species

The four kinds represent four states that we experience along the path of spiritual growth. Each of these is distinguished by having a scent and a flavor, having only a scent, having only a flavor, or having none at all.

The scent denotes the mind and the taste denotes the heart.

- Sometimes spirituality seems delightful to both mind (scent) and heart (taste). Kabbalists call this state *Etrog* (the citron).

- Sometimes one finds that spirituality is exciting but hard to understand. In that state, it is considered “tasty,” but scentless. Kabbalists call this state *Lulav* (palm branch).

- Sometimes, spirituality is fragrant but tasteless, or the state of *Hadas* (myrtle). Its importance is very clear, but while the heart cannot sense it, the mind is able to grasp it.

- Finally, when one cannot feel any flavor or fragrance in spirituality, this state is called *Aravot* (willow).

To advance in spirituality, we must persist toward the Creator even when our current state feels tasteless and scentless. Eventually, uniting all the states into a single aim will grant us the ability to receive true spiritual pleasure under any circumstances. ■

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THE MEANING OF YOM KIPPUR

by Avi Ventura

Yom *Kippur* is the day when the construction of the spiritual vessel is completed. Reality consists of Light and vessel. The Light is the Creator, or the pleasure, and the vessel is the creature, the soul, or *Malchut*. The Light is in complete rest and never changes. Its only purpose is to delight His creatures and bring humankind to eternal bliss.

The entire process of building the spiritual vessel, from its current, lowest state to the highest, eternal, and complete is expressed in this world in the “Ten Penitential Days” between the New Year and the Day of Atonement. During these ten days, the soul, which originally consisted of nothing but a desire to receive, gradually acquires the qualities of the Light. This occurs from

the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* (the first day of the year) to the Day of Atonement. During this time, the soul changes in ten ways, or ten *Sefirot*, the foundation of the soul’s correction.

At the end of the ten days, the soul completes its correction and is ready to receive the Light. On the tenth day, the Day of Atonement, it is forbidden to display any desire to receive, emphasized by the prohibitions against eating, drinking, and the other limitations on this day of fasting. That day completes the final correction.

After the Day of Atonement, preparation begins for the reception of the Light by the (by now) totally corrected soul. The reception of the Light is executed on the seven days of *Sukkot* by

the performance of the *Mitzvot* of the *Lulav* (palm branch), the *Etrog* (citron), and the other *Mitzvot* necessary to extend the Light into the vessel.

Finally, the holiday of *Simchat Torah* (Rejoicing of the Torah) sums up the process, and the Light of the Creator completely fills the ready vessel. The Torah symbolizes the Light, and the *Simchah* (joy) symbolizes the reception of the Light in order to bestow upon the Creator.

This correction doesn’t have to be on these precise dates; in spirituality, it can happen at any time. We only denote this process in our world on specific times of the year. ■

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Questions & Answers

What Are Reward and Punishment?

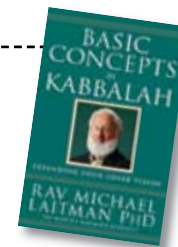
The terms “reward” and “punishment” are defined by the goal we want to achieve. In spirituality, a reward is anything that promotes us towards the spiritual goal, and a punishment is anything that separates us from it. When we feel closer to the goal, we say that we have been rewarded, and when we feel we have been kept away from it, we refer to this as “punishment.”

How Do I Discover My Soul?

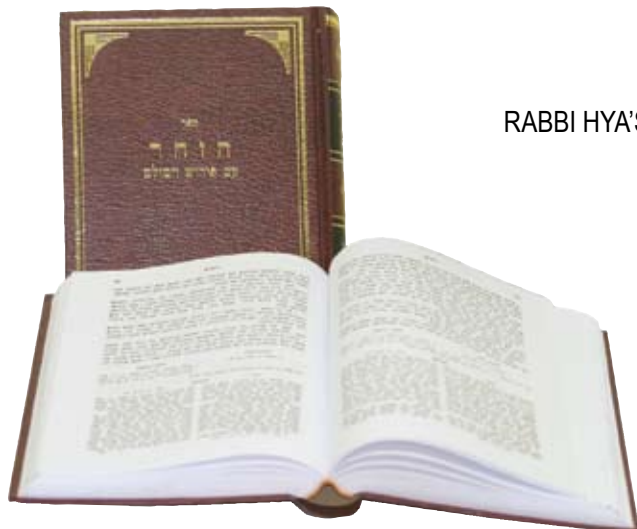
Each soul is a part of a puzzle, called “the common soul,” or “the soul of *Adam ha Rishon* (Adam).” To discover your soul you must first bond with all other souls and find your role in the common soul.

BASIC CONCEPTS IN KABBALAH

“Every soul is surrounded by spiritual Light. Although beginners in Kabbalah may not understand what they are studying... their powerful desire to understand evokes the Upper Force that surrounds them ...and thus elevate them.”



Unraveling The Zohar



by Aviram Sadeh

“Rabbi Hya fell to the ground, kissed the dust and wept, and said...”

The Book of Zohar, Introduction, item 49

There is a story about Rabbi Hya, one of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai's prime students, the same students with whom he wrote *The Book of Zohar*. The story begins with a question that Rabbi Hya asked about his teacher's soul.

From the height of his spiritual attainment, Rabbi Hya saw that souls return to their root, their highest spiritual state, only after they correct the egoistic desires within them. For this reason, Rabbi Hya asked how a soul as high as Rabbi Shimon's could not complete its correction, but had to wait until all the other souls completed their correction, too.

Rabbi Hya couldn't comprehend how such a great Kabbalist, through whom Light emits

to the whole world, could not correct himself before the last person completed his or her spiritual vocation. *The Zohar* says that this question put Rabbi Hya in such turmoil that he fell to the ground, wept, and said: “Dust, o dust, how obstinate you are, how insolent? You consume all the pillars of light in the world; how impudent are you? The holy Light that emitted to the world, Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, whose merit sustains the world, was swallowed in you.”

According to the wisdom of Kabbalah, a person reincarnates in this world to correct his or her soul. The correction process begins with the Creator's desire to grant all the abundance and goodness He possesses. For this reason, He created a creature called, “the common (collective) soul.”

Subsequently, the creature was shattered into many fragments called “souls.” These

RABBI HYA'S VISION

RABBI HYA'S VISION IS THE ZOHAR'S SUBTLE WAY OF TELLING US ABOUT MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY

souls lost their contact with the Creator. They drew farther away from Him, ultimately arriving at the lowest state of existence, called “this world.” From that state, people should begin to correct their souls and reunite with the Creator.

The wisdom of Kabbalah explains that the correction process must happen while the individual is still alive in this world, clothed in a flesh and blood body. The purpose of the process is to allow souls to independently achieve contact with their Creator, but this time they must do it consciously and of their own volition.

Prior to their descent into this world, souls were connected in the spiritual world through ties of love and giving. The decline into this world symbolizes the detachment of souls from one another to the current point of their inability to sense their interconnectedness. It is our task to reconstruct those connections while living in this world and gradually return to our initial, complete state. At the end of the process, called *Gmar Tikkun ha Pratti* (Individual End of Correction), each soul corrects itself and returns to the spiritual world. The state in which all the souls correct themselves is called *Gmar Tikkun ha Klali* (Collective End of Correction).

The “dust” on which Rabbi Hya fell in the story symbolizes the uncorrected souls that, in their state of corruption, hinder higher souls from achieving *Gmar Tikkun*. Rabbi Hya could not accept the fact that this process detained the soul of Rabbi Shimon, who was seemingly forced to wait for the Collective *Gmar Tikkun* to correct his soul. This is why Rabbi Hya demanded to “see” Rabbi Shimon, meaning to rise to a state where he could understand the order of the correction of the souls and thus receive an answer to his question.

Yet, Rabbi Hya's request was turned down because he was still not worthy of climbing to that sublime state. In response, Rabbi Hya decided to “fast for forty days.” In Kabbalah, this act represents the acquisition of the quality of *Bina*, represented by the Hebrew letter Mem (whose numeric value is 40). After Rabbi Hya's request was turned down for the second time, he continued to fast for yet another forty days, correcting himself even more and rising to a higher spiritual degree. Only then was he elevated to the “Supernal Seminary,” a state where all the corrected souls are bonded in love, attached to the Creator and filled with the Upper Light.

When Rabbi Hya climbed to that spiritual degree, he seemingly observed himself from the outside and discovered that his soul was already there, among the corrected souls, in the state of *Gmar Tikkun*. This amazed him even more: how could his corrected state exist before he, Rabbi Hya, had completed the correction of his soul?

The Book of Zohar uses the story of Rabbi Hya as a vehicle to explain that the whole of reality already exists. We are already included in the state of *Gmar Tikkun*, in our fullest glory and splendor. This world, however, is only a false picture that we experience in our present state of development.

The Zohar reveals a new perspective on life: that all the troubles and suffering we experience are intended to make us realize our own imperfections. To rise to the perception of the complete reality, we need to prefer the internal to the external, to find opportunities to incorporate the wisdom of Kabbalah into our lives. When we do that, we will rise, like Rabbi Hya, to a higher spiritual state, to the reality we truly do exist in. In that state we will be like all the Kabbalists before us, and discover the reality where all the souls are united in their perfect state. ■

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extras

EXILE 2007

Exile, in Kabbalah, means not being able to love others. This is what detached us from the Upper Force and eventually caused the ruin of the Second Temple. Today, even though the land of Israel is physically in the hands of the Jewish people, the Jews are still in exile. The only way to come out of exile is to learn how to truly love others.

SEFIROT

Sefira, singular for *Sefirot*, comes from the word “sapphire,” a shining light. A complete structure of the soul comprises ten *Sefirot*: *Keter*, *Hochma*, *Bina*, *Hesed*, *Gevura*, *Tifferet*, *Netzah*, *Hod*, *Yesod*, *Malchut*. These ten *Sefirot* constitute the qualities of the soul, and each *Sefira* senses the Upper Light in its own way.

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QUOTES OF GREAT KABBALISTS

The wisdom of truth teaches us the global unity, the equal side in the whole of existence, to the highest elevation—the similarity of form with its Creator—and how to walk by its Light without failing.

—The Rav Kook, Orot Kodesh (Sacred Lights)

We must chase with our hearts and souls and might after the wisdom of faith, which is the wisdom of the path of Kabbalah, which is the path of truth.

—The Baal Shem Tov

The sublime, spiritual questions, which were previously known only to the greatest and the highest, must now be known, to various degrees, to the whole nation. Sublime matters must be brought down from their high tower to the lowest and most common level.

This requires great wealth of spirit and constant engagement, as only then will the mind expand and the language be made clear enough to express the most profound matters in an easy and popular manner, to revive thirsty souls.

—The Rav Kook, Ikvey HaTzon (The Footsteps of the Flock)

Concerning Adam Kadmon, I was startled to see how a physical form was ascribed to the Kabbalistic concept of Adam Kadmon, which is a purely metaphysical concept... We must not allow ourselves to materialize such sacred concepts, even in the course of studying.

—The Rav Kook, Igrot (Letters)

All of Israel must study this book of Torah by Rashbi (Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai): "a Gaon (genius), a great Rav, a sage, a commoner, and a young."

—Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, Tikkunei Zohar (Zohar Corrections)

There is a strict condition during the engagement in this wisdom, to not materialize the matters with imaginary and corporeal issues. That is because by that they breach, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness."

—Rav Yehuda Ashlag (Baal Ha Sulam)
"Introduction to the Study of the Ten Sefirot"

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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Editorial Staff

Editorial Board: Chaim Ratz, Oren Levi, Eli Vinokur, Lior Gur, Michael R. Kellogg, Josia Nakash

Copy Editor: Claire Gerus

Graphic Design & Layout: Gia Basilaia, Olga Ohayon, Eugene Nemirovsky, Alex Khodos, Baruch Khovov

Distribution: Ilya Ioffe

Printing: Eugene Fridkin, Eugene Levit

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Bnei Baruch Association

PO Box 1552

Ramat Gan 52115, Israel

E-mail: english@kabbalah.info

Web: www.kabbalah.info

Telephone: +972-3-9226723

Fax: +972-3-9226741

There is a huge variety of Kabbalah texts, written in different periods. Which are the most effective texts to study nowadays?

Thousands of genuine texts have been written since Kabbalah's first appearance. In each period, Kabbalists composed texts, adapted to the degree of spiritual evolution of their contemporaries. Raziel HaMalaach (The Angel Raziel), written by Adam ha Rishon (Adam), Sefer Yetzira (The Book of Creation), written by Abraham, the Torah (Pentateuch), by Moses, and Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai's The Book of Zohar, all hold within them the secret to the universe and the method to correct the ego. All these books can bring one to know the Upper Force and achieve wholeness and bliss.

But as we've said, all the Kabbalists wrote in a way that suited their time. Hence, the most effective Kabbalists for our spiritual growth and corrections are the writings of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, a.k.a. Baal HaSulam, as well as the writings of Baruch Ashlag (The Rabash), both of whom lived and worked in the twentieth century. The bulk of Baal HaSulam's work focuses on interpreting the words of the Ari and the writings of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, adapting them to the spiritual state of the souls in our generation.

Other suitable books for study in our generation are the writings of Rav Kook, the Vilna Gaon (GRA), Ramchal, and the writings of the Ari. We can understand these writings in depth to the extent that we acquire the basics of the wisdom of Kabbalah through the works of Baal HaSulam and the Rabash.

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