

KABBALAH TODAY

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THE SECRET OF HARRY'S MAGIC

Like the school of wizardry, the spiritual world has its own deliverers—Kabbalists.



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THE SOUL IS AGELESS

For a real change in education, we must look to the future, and start with explaining life's purpose to the young.



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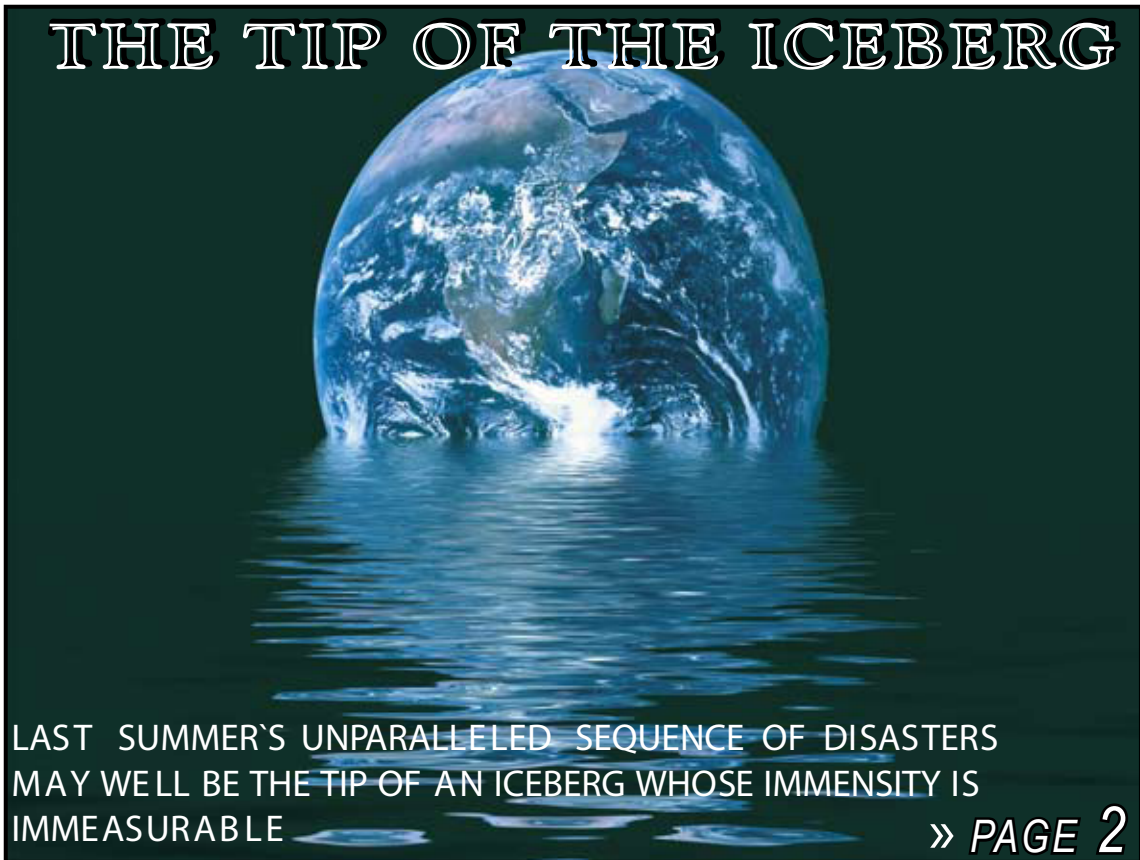
IT'S ALL ABOUT PLEASURE

To Kabbalists, the emergence of the desire for spirituality is "the birth of the soul."



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THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG



LAST SUMMER'S UNPARALLELED SEQUENCE OF DISASTERS MAY WELL BE THE TIP OF AN ICEBERG WHOSE IMMENSITY IS IMMEASURABLE

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AT ODDS WITH NATURE

Correct diagnosis of an illness is half its cure. Hence, to resolve humanity's problems, we first need to understand their causes. The safest place to start is by understanding human nature and the nature of the world. If we understand our own nature and the laws affecting us, we will know where we are erring and what we must do to end the predicament we're in.

The inanimate, vegetative, and animate levels of Nature are all driven by inherent instincts. Their actions are not considered good or bad; they simply follow the rules imbued within them, in harmony and reciprocity with Nature and with each other.

However, if we observe man's nature, we will find that it is essentially different from the rest of Nature. Man is the only creature that can take pleasure in exploiting others and in seeking

sovereignty over another. Only man receives pleasure from being unique, apart from, and superior to others. Thus, man's egoism is at odds with Nature, breaching Nature's balance.

But eons of egoistic evolution have not brought us sustainable happiness, or even a minimal guarantee of a good future. We are bewildered, and this bewilderment is at the basis of the crises and the challenges that plague us.

Moreover, the human predilection to seek self-centered pleasures at the expense of others has intensified over time. Today, people are trying to build their successes on the ruin of others. Intolerance, alienation, and hatred have reached new and terrifying heights, jeopardizing the very existence of the human species.

But when we observe Nature, we see that all living creatures are built to follow the principle of altruism—caring for others. Cells in organisms unite by

reciprocal giving for the sake of sustaining the whole body. Each cell receives what it needs for its sustenance, and spends the rest of its energy tending to the rest of the organism. At every level of Nature, the individual works to benefit the whole of which it is part, and in that finds its wholeness. Without altruistic activities, a body cannot persist. In fact, life itself cannot persist.

Today, after researching many different fields, science is arriving at the conclusion that humanity, too, is actually one whole body. The problem is that we, humans, are still unaware of it. We must understand that our current problems are not coincidental; they cannot be resolved by any means we know from the past. They will continue to grow until we begin to function in accord with the comprehensive law of Nature—the law of altruism.

Editor's Note

Going to Extremes

These days, everything seems to be going to extremes: computers are faster, storms are stronger, terrorists are more brutal, and people are more bewildered than ever. Moreover, these changes are not only happening more quickly—they seem to be gaining speed by the hour!

Indeed, a major shift is happening. Below are a couple of studies that demonstrate just how confusing and uncertain our world has become.

According to this statement from the United Nations released September 3, 2007, "The United States leads the world in labor productivity." The report also added that, "The average U.S. worker produces \$63,885 of wealth per year, more than their counterparts in all other countries."

However, an August 14, 2007 report by the US Census Bureau reveals, "The nation's international deficit in goods and services decreased to \$58.1 billion in June from \$59.2 billion in May."

Does that make any sense? How can the country that produces far more wealth than any other country in the world also have by far the greatest deficit? Is America a poor country, or does it just sound that way?

This isn't the only area where the extreme is becoming the norm. According to the Archives of General Psychiatry, "The number of American children and adolescents treated for

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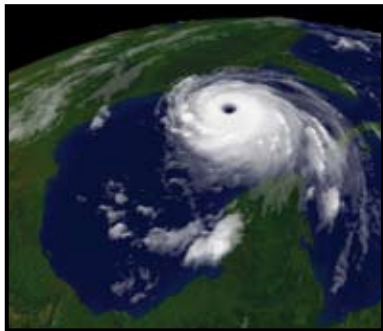


In all this havoc of egoism, we are forgetting the roots of creation: we are all one soul.

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah



THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG



by Avihu Sofer

Where it wasn't scorching hot in North America this past summer, it was flooded. But it wasn't just in North America. Large parts of Europe and Asia seemed to be either blazing (literally) or submerged under flash floods, mudslides, or overflowing rivers. And where harm didn't come from the sky, it came from beneath the ground: Peru is recovering from a deadly earthquake, and in Japan the biggest nuclear power station was shut down after a quake triggered radiation leakage.

These disasters, as many scientists already admit, are merely the tip of an iceberg whose immensity is immeasurable. The occurrence of another monstrous catastrophe is more a question of *when* than of *if*. Could it be that we're beginning to feel, as environmentalist James Lovelock titled his book, *The Revenge of Gaia* (Earth, in Greek mythology)?

On August 29, 2005, after many unheeded warnings, Hurricane Katrina battered the southeast shores of Louisiana, devastating New Orleans, Biloxi, and other neighboring towns, killing almost 2,000 people, and costing more than any other storm in history. Today, more than two years after the deadly storm, the scars of Katrina are far from healed, and the tormented Big Easy is farther from being at ease than ever.

Moreover, a quick survey of worldwide natural disasters in the two years since Katrina struck reveals a pattern of events of escalating

severity and frequency. The catastrophes that struck this summer alone are enough to make any sane person shudder. Floods killed hundreds of people in North Korea; hundreds more were killed in an earthquake in Peru; thousands died in China's monsoon-triggered flashfloods. Fires in Italy and Greece set aflame tens of thousands of acres, including numerous settlements that were simply turned to smoldering ashes. These villages, once picturesque, will be uninhabitable in the foreseeable future.

On the other side of the ocean, numerous areas in the American Midwest were sodden with ceaseless rains that caused rivers to rise far above their flood levels. As a result, thousands of Americans were displaced and lost their homes. So many disasters occurred this summer, it's hard to keep track of them all: the California fires and the tornado that flattened Greensburg, Kansas are just two examples. Perhaps the term "severe weather warning" should be changed to "hostile climate threat."

Climate Is in Vogue

Even Hollywood has taken this topic to heart. Two blockbuster documentaries—Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth*, and *The 11th Hour*, narrated by Leonardo DiCaprio—are prominent examples of this trend. Sections on the environment can be found in any serious paper, and climate related topics make daily headlines. It seems that nearly 250 years after the industrial

revolution, we have finally begun to acknowledge its consequences. If in the past we were mostly concerned with the survival of certain species, today the survival of *all* species is at risk, including our own. If we don't revolutionize our modes of thinking, nature will do it for us, and will charge extremely high tuition for its schooling.

A New Eye on Nature

According to the wisdom of Kabbalah, the cause of the present crisis lies in the rules that govern nature and how we, humanity, relate to them. As science now knows, nature maintains itself in constant harmony and balance. When this balance is threatened, nature utilizes mechanisms to restore it.

The most fundamental of these is the principle of interconnectedness and unity. This principle determines that all parts of nature work not to sustain themselves, but to sustain the *system* as a whole. In other words, as uncanny as it may seem to the human eye, each element in nature cares for all other parts of nature, not for itself. This is the (real) natural way.

Unlike humans, the drive to maintain balance is an inherent trait at all levels of nature: still (inanimate), vegetative, and animate. Humans are the only exception to the rule. Hence, in the entire universe, human-kind is the only disruptive element. Therefore, mending human nature will automatically mend all other parts of na-

ture, whereas continuing to disrupt nature's balance would inevitably prolong and intensify our troubles. Kabbalah teaches us that the only thing we can do to help ourselves and our world is to "work" on ourselves, to replace our desire for self-gratification with a desire for "system-gratification."

Dog Eat Dog

Day by day, we are growing more egoistic, increasing our alienation from one another and from nature's unity principle. Man not only exploits other humans, animals, plants, and minerals, but also enjoys building himself on the ruin of others. In doing so, we consistently breach nature's most fundamental law of unity. But nature cannot be changed; its rules are constant. Each breach of nature's rules triggers its balancing mechanism into action and prompts inevitable repercussions. And the more egoistic we are, the more powerfully we activate nature's actions to restore balance. This is why we feel that nature is taking revenge. But it is not; it is simply trying to correct the harm we're causing it.

Nature does not, and cannot make concessions. We can keep burying our heads in the sand, but if we do we are likely to find our heads buried in the sand through nature's unsolicited act. Today, the clock is ticking and time is almost up. We can still pull ourselves out of the mud, but we must resolve to do it *together*. This will be our first attempt

to operate like nature—for system-gratification.

The Alternative

As we previously mentioned, humans are the only species without the inherent drive to maintain balance, harmony, and reciprocity with the environment. Instead, we take what we want for ourselves. But since nature's rules are predetermined and unchanging, we have no choice but to "choose to unite and reciprocate voluntarily." This actually holds a benefit that is uniquely reserved to human beings: the ability to understand how and why nature works as it does, instead of blindly following its rules.

The wisdom of Kabbalah offers a time-tested method of self-study and self-transformation. At its base is a coherent explanation of nature's laws, repeatedly tested by Kabbalists for almost five millennia. While the Kabbalistic terminology has changed over the years to adapt to the needs of the students at each time, its principles have remained as fixed as nature itself, since nature is what these principles describe. And while nature did not equip us with inherent capabilities for reciprocity, it did provide us with the means to acquire it through our own free will. Moreover, in doing so, the reward that nature guarantees to those who "graduate nature-school" is nature's omniscient and omnipotent capabilities. All it takes is our will to learn. ■

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The more conscious we become of our egoism, the more we will want to use the method of Kabbalah to change our nature to altruism.



The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah

THE SECRET OF HARRY'S MAGIC

by Eli Vinokur

Over the last ten years, an unprecedented literary phenomenon has emerged. Its name is “Harry Potter.” To date, the series, comprising seven books, has sold over 325 million copies worldwide. The Harry Potter series has been translated into 65 languages, some of which are truly esoteric, such as Latin and Zulu. The last book in the series sold eight million copies in a mere fortnight, and in the United States alone, thousands of copies are sold every hour. To understand the level of its success, consider this: the only book that sold more copies than the Harry Potter series is the Bible.

What's the Fuss Over?

Harry, the amiable, bespectacled youth who attends the *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry*, must fight wicked

We can find the enchanted world humanity has been searching for... not in another life, but simply in another intention

witches and monsters. But Harry's struggles are not a unique phenomenon. They are the culmination of a globally increasing attraction to the mystical, hence young Potter's success.

Along with Harry came other cinematographic hits such as *The Matrix* and *The Lord of the Rings*. We can point out many more examples but the idea is clear: we fancy fantasy. What is it that attracts us to mysticism? What are we trying to find there that we cannot find elsewhere? Do we really believe that such enchanted places and magic powers exist, or are we

AS CHILDREN, WE OFTEN WONDER WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE COME FROM. BUT AS WE BECOME “RESPONSIBLE” GROWNUPS, WE BURY OUR QUESTIONS UNDER LIFE'S UNRELENTING COMMITMENTS. OUR INCREASING INTEREST IN MYSTERIES ARISES BECAUSE THE UNCERTAINTY OF OUR LIVES AT PRESENT REAWAKENS OUR DESIRE FOR A MORE APPEALING ALTERNATIVE.

merely trying to escape our bleak reality?

A Journey into Wonderland

Deep within us is an inherent yearning to discover a deeper level of reality—complete and free, unbounded by time and place. Beneath the threshold of our consciousness there is a drive to understand the forces that govern the picture of reality we see before us.

To an extent, fantasy novels address this need in us and provide us with a temporary substitute for the deeper reality we are seeking. They usher us into alternative worlds, enchanted and mysterious, and tell us of other dimensions, governed by great legendary powers that can change our world.

Childhood is a good time for us to ask about life's meaning. Often, with childish innocence, we try to clarify for ourselves who we are and where we come from. When someone dear to us passes away, we are prompted to ask about the meaning of life and death.

Fantasy novels offer magical responses to questions we find hard to answer; we drift on their pages to remote des-



Deep within us is an inherent yearning to discover a deeper level of reality—complete and free, unbounded by time and place

tinations, where untold adventures happen, and from which we always return home safe. The problem is that as we grow, life becomes dull and dim, like the charmless Muggle community of non-magical ancestry.

As we grow and become “responsible” adults, we forget our questions about life, and bury them under our unrelenting commitments to our grownup world. Our increasing interest in fantasy novels arises because the complications of our lives

in the 21st century reawaken our desire for a more appealing alternate reality.

Platform to Infinity

Remember Platform Nine and Three Quarters at King's Cross Train Station in London? Young Potter was told in the letter from *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry* that there he would embark the train to the world of wizardry. But to get to the plat-

form, Harry had to cross a very solid looking wall, the barrier between our (Muggle) world and the wizardry world. Without the help of the plump woman, he would never have known what he had to do to get across.

Quite similarly, in one of his letters, Baal HaSulam, the greatest Kabbalist of the twentieth century, told his students a story about the first entrance into the spiritual world. He, too, describes it as a wall, but instead of walking straight through it, all you need is to acquire the right intent and the wall will vanish. Replacing the plump woman are Kabbalah books and Kabbalah teachers, which describe what we need to do to acquire the right intent.

The Magic Word Is “Love”

Like the school of wizardry, the spiritual world has its own “owls”—Kabbalists. In their books, they have been “sending out invitations” to the spiritual world for several centuries now, describing the abundance we will find if we only follow their lead. Yet, so far the majority of us did not seek entry. Either we were unaware of the existence of Kabbalists, unaware that we were invited to join the magical world of the spirit, or we simply turned down their invitation.

The wisdom of Kabbalah stands ready to usher us into that wondrous world of wisdom. It can teach us how to prevail over life's hardships, challenges, and dilemmas

Nevertheless, the wisdom of Kabbalah stands ready to usher us into that wondrous world of wisdom. It can teach us how to prevail over life's hardships, challenges, and dilemmas, and it can help us bond in love for one another. Kabbalah books can restore the charm we lose at adolescence and show us that we were meant for greatness.

We can find that the enchanted world humanity has been searching for in Alice, Narnia, Oz, and in the Harry Potter series is actually right around the corner, not in another life, but simply in another intention. The real magic is within us, and the word that turns this magic on is “love.” ■

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If we are detached from reality, whether through drugs, alcohol, workaholism, or any kind of addiction, we lose the chance of progressing to a higher level of reality.



The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah

by Chaim Ratz

In times when the education system is being criticized for its inability to turn children into mature, confident adults, Kabbalist Rav Michael Laitman, PhD, believes that now is a unique time to introduce a new concept into our schools—the wisdom of Kabbalah.

According to Rav Laitman, to bring about a true and lasting change in our education system we must look two generations into the future, and begin today by explaining life's purpose to the young. "If we do that," says Rav Laitman, "many things will change for the better."

Kabbalist Rav Michael Laitman, PhD is a scientist and a Kabbalist who has been studying and teaching Kabbalah for the past thirty years. He is certain that the challenges our education system is facing can be solved, and solved well. "The surprising thing about it," he adds with a smile, "is that the solution is right in front of our eyes."

The Power of Education

"To correct the world means to correct the education."

-Janusz Korczak

Q: Rav Laitman, how do you, as a Kabbalist and a scientist, regard the purpose of education? What values do you believe we should bequeath our children?

A: Education is not about "stuffing" the child's brain with knowledge and data. Education should connect children to the unique process called "life." Where does life come from? Why do things happen the way they do? What are we living for? Where do we have freedom of choice in our actions and thoughts, and where do we not? All these questions should be answered as part of the education process of our youth.

To provide our children with practical tools for coping with the reality we

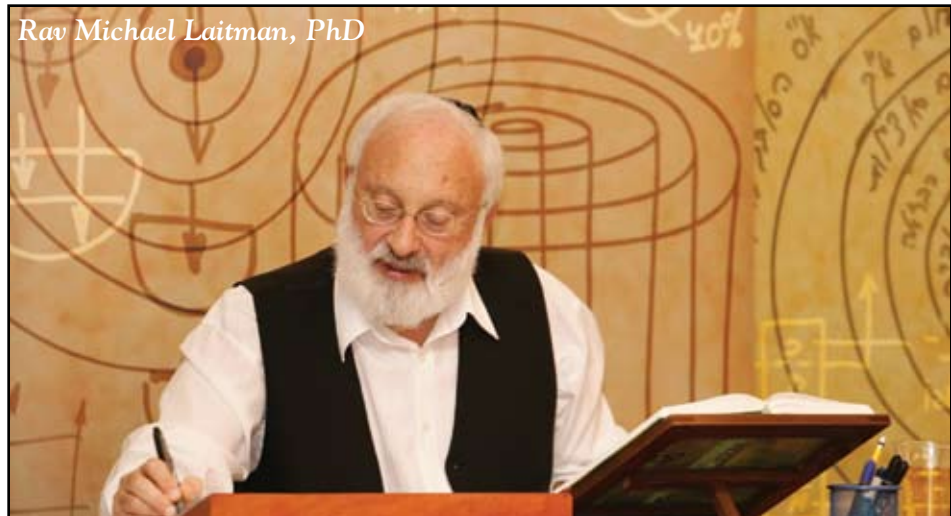
To bring about a true and lasting change in our education system we must look two generations into the future, and begin today by explaining life's purpose to the young

live in, we must teach them the rules that govern nature, and where nature is leading us. In other words, we should be teaching our children the purpose for which nature has created humans.

Q: Indeed, what is that purpose?

A: We already know that nothing is created aimlessly. There is a reason for everything. But what about people? Why were *we* created? Could it be that humans, the height of creation, were created with no purpose? Of course not.

Rav Michael Laitman, PhD



The only problem is that we cannot recognize our own purpose.

If we explain to our children the purpose of creation, it will change their attitudes towards life. They will see that when they go against one of nature's objectives, they will suffer. Next time, they will know how to avoid it.

We have many such examples from our own lives: if you put your hand in the fire, if you jump off a high building, you will suffer; there are no two ways about it. The additional benefit in Kabbalah is that it explains to us that besides the rules we already know, there are rules we cannot see, and at present, cannot discover. So let me ask you, what could be better than to show our children how to guarantee their best future right at the beginning of their lives?

Q: In days when students' grades are dropping, when drugs and alcohol consumption soar, it is hard to find people who still believe in the possibility of change. Where do you feel we should start?

A: Kabbalah explains that humanity is progressing in such a way that each generation is more evolved than its predecessor. Put differently, the new generation has new desires, higher aspirations, and new dreams. According to Kabbalah, the level of egoism in the youth is always higher than in their parents. This is why the values that predominated in the parents' generation are cast away in the next. The old values seem empty and meaningless since they do not fulfill the new and greater needs of the youth. This is also why they reject

the education we provide them and find no interest in life.

The problem is that we have yet to acknowledge this process and learn how to cope with it. Only if we adapt our education system to the level of evolution (egoism) of our children will we be able to change today's poor state of our youth.

Kabbalah for Kids

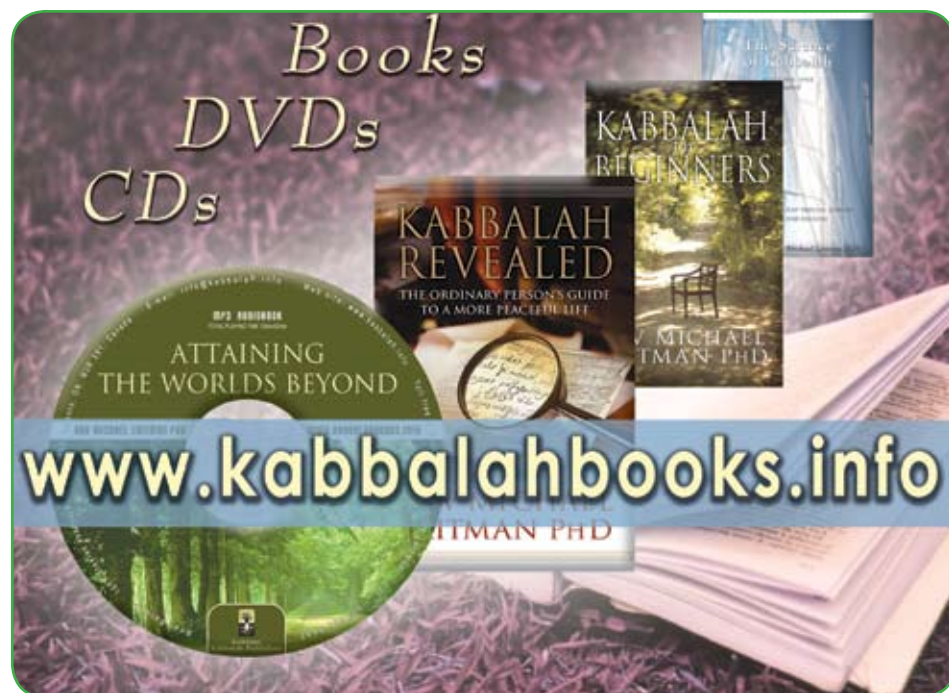
"If my generation had listened to my voice they would begin to study the book of Zohar at the age of nine."

-Rabbi Isaac from Kamarna, Notzer Chesed

Q: Everything you've said so far sounds like a fine theory; but how do you accomplish it? How do you reach today's young?

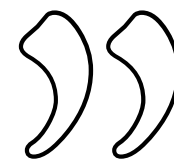
A: The message of the wisdom of Kabbalah should be adapted to suit each generation. It can be conveyed through games or stories. If we begin to explain to children how things work beneath the surface, they will feel that they are being taught how to succeed and how to better understand their own world. They will feel that they are being exposed to new channels and new avenues in life.

You don't need to talk to them about spiritual matters or about abstract issues, but simply hand them the right approach to life, teach them how to see life on a slightly deeper level. They will get the message naturally and easily. In truth, it is not at all difficult to explain that behind the scenes of this life lies something hidden from our senses, that





The Creator has no intention to detach us from reality, only to use reality in such a way that we are compelled to ask questions about life and about ourselves.



The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah

AGELESS

there are subtler forces in our world than the ones we perceive, and that we should consider them. As they live their normal lives, children will begin to sense the existence of an inherent tier to nature, one which we, adults, have grown accustomed to overlook.

Q: And what will happen to them once we teach them?

Education is not about “stuffing” the child’s brain with knowledge and data. Education should connect children to the unique process called “life”

A: Children will still live their normal lives, except now they will know that there is a higher, systemic order, and this will give them a fuller consciousness, a broader outlook on life. They will no longer be frustrated and disoriented, and they will not need pop stars as role models. Instead, they will grow up finding their *own* paths to self-fulfillment.

Q: Do you believe that children really can understand such a complicated and abstract concept?

A: I have no doubt. Kabbalists through the ages have instructed us to teach Kabbalah to children. As I have already said, children accept Kabbalah very naturally; they understand it more easily than us. From my own experience, I can tell you that in 1979, when I began to study with my teacher, Rabbi Baruch Ashlag (the Rabash), I tried to explain what I was learning to my seven-year-old son. I was amazed to see how effortlessly he caught on. He would ask me questions about things that I didn't even notice, much less knew how to connect. Now that he is a grownup with a family of his own, he retains the approach to life that he had received back then.

The same thing happened with my two daughters. In fact, children naturally feel that life doesn't begin or end with the present physical existence. They sense that there is something beyond. Their enthusiasm for fantasy novels and science-fiction films such as *The Matrix* testifies to their readiness for this message.

Q: How would you recommend that parents begin?

A: We must understand that the soul is ageless, that there is only one means to correct it, and that that means is authentic Kabbalah books. This means, called “Surrounding Light,” is evoked to promote one's soul as one reads these books. It is the topic itself, not necessarily understanding it that enhances our spiritual development.

Even if we do not understand what we are reading, the spiritual force hidden in the writings guides our souls toward the perfect state.

To provide our children with practical tools for coping with the reality we live in, we must teach them the rules that govern nature, and where nature is leading us

While there is still a need for books that will explain wisdom in a manner suitable for children, and while it may seem confusing or intimidating for children, this is not the case. Contrary to what happens to some grownups, children will not be deterred; they will absorb the knowledge naturally and directly. When parents read to their children from the Kabbalah books and try to explain it to them, they will see how effective it is. Therefore, I would advise parents to take greater interest in Kabbalah, visit our site, www.kabbalah.info, read our material, and watch lessons. And by the way, all the material is free.

There is immense power to this wisdom. From the moment one begins to engage in it, this power takes effect and changes our lives for the better.

Q: As an ending, can you summarize your vision in a sentence?

A: We need to provide our children with a “ticket to life,” and Kabbalah can help us do that. When our children understand the processes they are experiencing, many things will change for the better in their lives. They will discover a new world, a new dimension of existence beyond the physical, and they will grow in an atmosphere of confidence and love. I am certain that if we begin, we will succeed. ■

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■ Editor's Note

Going to Extremes

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bipolar disorder [manic depression] increased 40-fold from 1994 to 2003, researchers report in the most comprehensive study of the controversial diagnosis,” *The New York Times* reported on September 4.

Why is this happening? In the wealthiest, most productive country in the world, life could be heaven on earth... but it isn't. To be what America could be, another element should be added—unity.

In this issue of *Kabbalah Today* we will try to address some of the above problems and offer solutions. The alienation of youth, described in the article “You Have a New Message,” the climate change, discussed in “The Tip of the Iceberg,” and the Harry Potter frenzy, presented in “The Secret of Harry's Magic,” are all signs that in every realm of life, we are at the edge of our rope.

On the positive side, there is an

answer to the problems we are facing, and it is found within these articles. For the most part, the answer to each challenge is similar: if we are united by one goal—the discovery of life's driving force—the Creator—we will find the underlying unity behind the extremes of the life we face in the 21st century. If we do not unite, our emotional, social, and financial systems will become dysfunctional and we will be facing a national, if not global, breakdown.

Each article presents this solution in its own way, but the spirit of bonding is present throughout the paper. We truly hope you will enjoy and benefit from reading and contemplating the message, as this is the goal of *Kabbalah Today*—to unite all of humanity through the discovery of the one Source of all wisdom: the Creator.

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CHOOSING NAMES

There are many names in the Torah: Pharaoh, Benjamin, Moses, Ahab, Haman, Adam, and so on. Is there special meaning to a name? That is, if I change my name, would that change my life, too?

The answer is “Absolutely not.” Changing one's name cannot affect one's spiritual evolution. A name change can affect a person, but it is merely a psychological effect. According to the wisdom of Kabbalah, there is no way to affect one's soul or spiritual growth using any bogus means such as a name change.

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If we are surrounded by people who are negative towards society... we will inevitably begin to think like them. ...to make sure we progress in a positive direction, we must surround ourselves with people who are on that direction, too.



The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah

IT'S ALL ABOUT PLEASURE

by Dudi Aharoni

We all want to enjoy, or as Kabbalists put it, to receive pleasure. For some, a juicy piece of steak is the ultimate pleasure, for others, it is winning a game of checkers or the victory of one's favorite sports team. You may want to win the lottery, while your friend will be happy only when she loses those extra five pounds she recently gained. Although we enjoy different things, we all share a common need to fulfill our desire for pleasure.

Elusive Delights

There is only one problem with this "pleasure issue": if we honestly examine our lives, we will discover that memories are all that remains of what we have done so far. We chase pleasures, but as soon as we have them, they slip between our fingers.

When we are in kindergarten, we want to be in grade school. We think of it as such a fun place to be, where older kids "have a great time" and learn new and exciting things. But once we get to school, we can't wait to get to high school. At high school, the new goal is college, and in college, it is a successful career. The next phase always seems better and more appealing. But is it really so?

And there is another issue: once we get what we want, the pleasure slips between our fingers and leaves us as thirsty as wanderers in the desert dreaming of a glass of water. And even if we find water, we savor that first sip, but the more we drink, the

less we enjoy it. In the end, we even forget that we were ever thirsty.

In short, we spend our whole lives chasing phantoms of delights. And even when we catch a phantom, it takes no more than a minute for it to slip away once more.

sex are defined as physical desires, and exist in animals as well. Even when a person lives alone, he or she will still need food, health, and satisfaction of sexual needs.

The desires for wealth, honor, and power, however, are considered "human desires." These desires evolve in us as part of our

In recent years we have witnessed the awakening of the point in the heart in many people. This is the reason for the current popularity of Kabbalah. People are turning to it to find how they can satisfy this newly awakened desire in them.

Filling the Void

A person whose point in the heart has awakened seeks spiritual pleasures, which Kabbalists describe as "complete and eternal fulfillment and satisfaction." As we have said above, we can satisfy the desires for our earthly and human needs with fulfillments we already know, but when the desire for spirituality awakens, we no longer know how to satisfy it.

Moreover, many people are frustrated because they have not yet realized that the desire for spirituality has awakened in them. They are unaware that this is the reason for their dissatisfaction and discontent. The inability to fulfill the desire for spirituality evokes sensations of helplessness, desperation, frustration, and purposelessness. This is considered the main reason for the ongoing increase in drug and alcohol abuse, as well as other means of escape from reality.

As children, many people ask themselves, "What am I living for?" But as the years go by, we are inundated by desires and temptations that divert us from this question, and our need to find a genuine answer withers away.

Nevertheless, the point in the heart will one day awaken, and with it the questions. Those who insist on finding the answers come to Kabbalah, where they find spiritual fulfillment and thus satisfy the need in their point in the heart. Fulfilling the spiritual desire imparts a sensation beyond the physical existence. Hence, a spiritually connected person can experience life as eternal and whole. This is such a powerful sensation that when one's physical body expires, he or she does not experience separation from life, as that person has already sympathized with the highest fulfillment that exists—the point in the heart. ■

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Five Levels of Desires

Kabbalists discovered that there are five levels of desires within us, arranged in order of intensity and complexity, according to the phases of their evolution:

- The first, and most basic desire, is that for survival, including food, health, sex, and family.
- The second level of desires is the yearning for wealth, which we believe assures our survival and a better quality of life.
- The third level of desires is the craving for honor and power, so we can control others as well as ourselves.
- The fourth level initiates a desire for knowledge, as we believe that having knowledge will grant us happiness.

• It is only at Level Five that we understand there is something higher than our awareness that controls our lives. We begin to realize that it is with this "something" that we need to connect.

The needs for food and

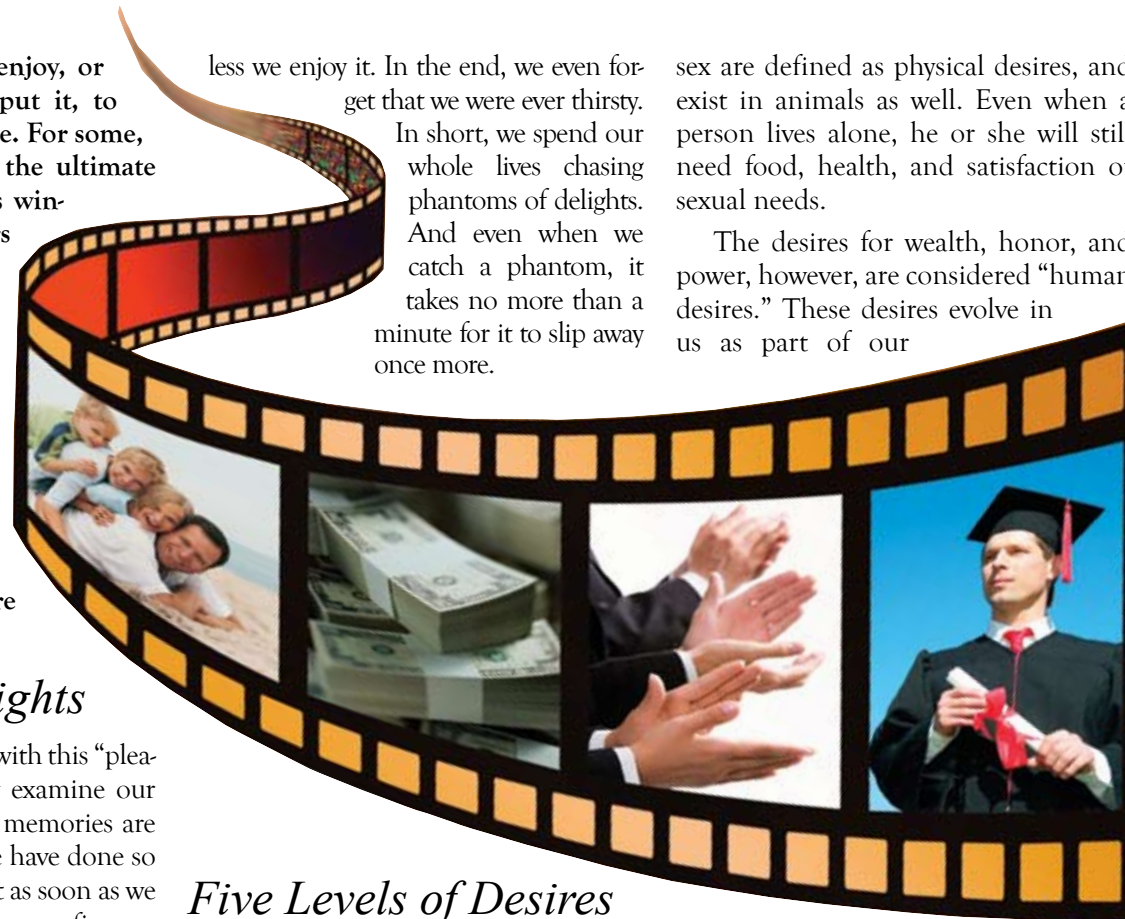
participation in the human society, and we satisfy them only through our contacts with other people.

Yet, when the fifth level of desire awakens, we have no clue as to how to satisfy it. Kabbalists call this desire, which aims higher than this world, "the point in the heart."

The Point in the Heart

Kabbalists refer to the sum of our desires as "the heart," and to the desire for the higher, spiritual realm as "the point in the heart." This desire makes us feel that life is meaningless and creates a deep need to search for a purpose in our lives. Someone whose point in the heart awakens suddenly asks, "What is the meaning of my life?" And no answer that relates to the material world will answer that question.

You can offer such a person lots of money, honor, power, and knowledge, but he or she will remain frustrated nonetheless. This desire stems from a higher degree than the level of this world; hence, its satisfaction must come from that degree, as well. The wisdom of Kabbalah explains how we can satisfy this desire.





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ASK THE KABBALIST

Below are questions presented to Kabbalist Rav Michael Laitman, PhD, on his weekly TV show, *Ask the Kabbalist*.

Q: My mother suffered from cancer for many years. When her illness worsened I was advised to go to all kinds of Kabbalists to receive their blessings. My father, being a rational man, didn't believe it could help, so we didn't go. But since my mother passed away I've been asking myself if Kabbalists really could bless someone success, health, wealth, and so on.

A: I have known many Kabbalists in my time. But none of the Kabbalists I knew had ever given blessings, mascots, charms or anything of the kind. However, there are people who can understand human nature and the human anatomy, and can therefore help others.

The power of thought, exercises, and talks can relax people and restore their chemical and hormonal balance. This balance results in a positive feeling and healthy functioning. So if one feels that folklore healing, treatment with energies, rocks or any other objects are helpful, there is no harm in using them. However, there is no connection between these remedies and Kabbalah.

Kabbalah deals solely with one's spiritual evolution—the correction of the soul. It has nothing to do with

the correction of the body. Kabbalah teaches how one can transcend one's ego and acquire the quality of love and giving. The spiritual world is indeed the reason and the root for everything that happens in this world, and ascension to the spiritual world does affect one's corporeal problems. However, this does not mean that corporeal, physical objects have any spiritual powers to them. They do not.

Q: Why aren't there leaders like there used to be? There seems to be a feeling that today's leaders care only for their own interests and for those who are close to them.

A: Humanity is rapidly advancing towards the recognition of evil. In other words, we are quickly coming to realize that we are governed by our growing egoism. Social systems that were originally built to help connect people are collapsing, since they are all based on egoism, in opposition to nature's system.

The growing ego is the reason leaders seek fame, fortune, and power instead of the well-being of their electorate. Although it is presently difficult to see, this state is a natural and positive development of humanity. The failing social structures will allow us to search for the real leaders.

A real leader is one with a complete picture of reality—corporeal and spiri-

tual. The leader's corrected state allows him or her to understand that the goal of leadership is to serve the public and work for their interest. Yet, we will only be able to find such a leader after we realize that today's leaders do not serve the public's interest, but their own.

Previously, there were visionary leaders who led humanity and devoted themselves to society. But the ideals they served were earthly ideals, meant to improve our lives on earth, not to promote our contact with the Creator—the quality of bestowal; this is why they eventually failed.

Q: What should happen for a real leader to come to power?

A: Kabbalah teaches that there is no

leader without a parish. Put differently, if there is no need among the people for a genuine leader, no such leader will arise. There should be a correspondence, or similarity, between people's will and the qualities of the spiritual leaders that they choose. If we understand how low we have stooped, and if we truly seek a way out of our plight, the right spiritual leaders will come and guide us to the height of existence.

Being a genuine leader is not something you can major in at college. It depends on the inner structure, on the root of one's soul. Let's hope that we will soon have a true need, and the true leader will appear and will guide us to prosperity and progress in the spiritual world and in this world, too.

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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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Kabbalist Rav Laitman, a PhD in Philosophy and Kabbalah and an MSc in Medical Cybernetics, was the prime disciple and personal assistant to Kabbalist Rabbi Baruch Ashlag, firstborn son and successor of Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, author of the authoritative *Sulam* (ladder) Commentary on *The Book of Zohar*. Laitman has published 30 books and numerous essays on science and Kabbalah. He is a sought-after lecturer in the United States, Europe and Asia, whose lessons are broadcast daily on Israeli TV and on the Internet.

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