

KABBALAH TODAY

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is not what
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ANYTHING BUT SURVIVAL

**THE GAME SHOW, SURVIVOR,
IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF
HOW NOT TO BEHAVE IN ORDER
TO SURVIVE IN OUR WORLD. BUT
ARE WE—PEOPLE OF THE WORLD,
STRANDED ON PLANET EARTH—
REALLY THAT DIFFERENT FROM
THE CONTESTANTS
ON SURVIVOR?**

by Riggan Shilstone

“In simple words, the nature of each and every person is to exploit the lives of all the world’s Creations for one’s own good. And everything that one gives to another—is only due to a necessity ... And all the difference is in people’s choices: One chooses to exploit others by attaining low passions, the other by attaining governance, and the third by attaining honor.”

Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag
(Baal HaSulam),
“Peace in the World”

“Survivor.” At one time, this word evoked thoughts of someone heroically rising above adversity in order to live. We talk about survivors of the Holocaust or Russian gulags; there are cancer survivors and survivors of natural or man-made disasters. Today, however, the word brings to mind images of exotic beaches where skimpily clad women and men battle each other for a \$1,000,000 grand prize. In 2002, *Survivor* was the top-rated series on American TV.

On the show, 16 to 20 people are divided into tribes and stranded in a remote location. They compete against each other in “challenges” and

each night one member of the losing tribe is voted off the show. The numbers dwindle until only one tribe is left, and its members fight to be the last person standing—the grand prize winner.

In order to make it to the coveted final spot, alliances are forged and broken. As one player put it, “It’s a game of loyalty and deception.” Competitors lie, scheme, and steal to solidify their positions in the tribe. They will do almost anything to their “friends” to win that tempting \$1,000,000 dangled before them.

Fiction or Reality?

So what is the appeal of the show, aside from the buxom beauties who grace the beaches? Viewers seem to relish seeing how low the contestants will sink in order to win. At the same time, there is an overtone of admiration for the one who proves most capable at manipulating events to his or her advantage. Is it possible that we are reacting to something deep within our own nature, something only partially concealed by the thin veneer of “civilization”?



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As distasteful as it may sound, *Survivor* exaggerates our own tendencies and presents them under the trappings of “entertainment.” This is hardly surprising, as our culture is all about competition, where the ends justify the means. Look at the way we operate in every area, from sports to business to politics. Are we that different from those competitors on *Survivor* chasing after elusive prizes of money, power or fame?

“Partnering” has become a common buzzword in the business world. Airlines go into partnership with hotels to offer the best mileage programs, thus ensuring customer loyalty for both parties. Now ask yourself this: How long would these partnerships last if the airline saw no benefit from the partnership?

Companies encourage employees to be team players and support the company. Yet, when there is an economic downturn, these companies will not hesitate to fire the same employees who contributed to their success. No matter what it may be called, there is no partnership here—it is all about using others to gain personal advantage, just like the “alliances” formed on *Survivor*.

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Editor's Note

**MORE REAL
THAN REALITY TV,
MORE CONNECTED
THAN THE INTERNET**

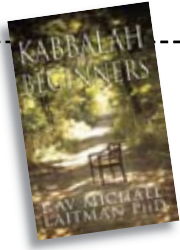
Looking at the cover of this issue, you might find yourself thinking: “What on earth is the connection between the authentic 5,000 year-old wisdom of Kabbalah and the reality game show *Survivor*!” And that’s a really good question.

Surprising as it is, this issue of *Kabbalah Today* focuses on something close to us all: the modern entertainment industry. It offers Kabbalah’s perspective on today’s most popular television shows and Internet services. Why? Because in one way or another, they are all reflections of our inner world.

In “Anything but Survival” you’ll see how the game show *Survivor*—one of the most top-rated series’ on American TV—teaches us a great deal about our true, inherent nature and the change it has to undergo. “Tom and Jerry and Our Children” will show you how our egoistic development affects even the good ol’ *Tom and Jerry*, and of course, our children who watch them.

“Facebook—What’s All the Fuss?” continues to explore the issues raised by the above articles. As its name implies, this article explains the popularity of virtual social networks, revealing that it’s caused by our underlying desire to discover a new realm where we can connect to each other beyond all our differences, and even beyond time and space.

This issue will also give you some new food for thought on profound themes such as life and death, the illusory nature of our world, why love is connected to pain, and why we are so attracted to the elusive phenomenon of light.



KABBALAH FOR BEGINNERS

“If we wish to become corrected—altruistic—we need to know which social changes will promote correction, and follow them through.”

TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

by Keren Applebaum

Death is one of the most unsettling, yet fascinating, phenomena we all face. At one point or another, it touches the lives of each of us, forcing us to ask profound, seemingly unanswerable questions. Children begin wondering about this phenomenon from very early on. Whether the curiosity is brought about by the passing of a pet or a relative, children begin asking their parents why people die, where one goes after death, and if one ever comes back from “the other side.”

Adults are no less intrigued by death. Many of us love to see an exciting horror flick, with gruesome scenes of the dead rising from their graves in the midst of a dark and chilly night. Lately there are many psychological dramas on this topic, such as movies where a deceased loved one is still present in the protagonist’s life.

Such scenarios are not restricted to the cinema alone. Many people make a handsome living by “communicating” with the dead. And anyone who has studied the Bible knows about

“...to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression—and with all this yet to die. It seems like a hoax.”

(Ernst Becker, *The Denial of Death*)

BUT MORE THAN A HOAX, KABBALAH SHOWS THAT LIFE AND DEATH ARE COMPLETELY NOT WHAT WE THOUGHT THEY WERE

the “resurrection of the dead” that’s expected to occur with the coming of the Messiah.

“Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves ... And I will put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live...”

Ezekiel 37:12–14

In fact, not only the Bible, but the greatest Kabbalistic text, *The Book of Zohar*, talks about such a resurrection. “*The dead shall rise with their flaws*,” reads the mysterious text (*The Book of Zohar*, “Emor,” 17). Are these verses trying to say that we will actually witness a “horror film” scene in real life? Will we be the witnesses—one dark night, beneath the full moon—to the dead emerging from their graves and joining the rest of us in celebration of the Messiah, who will come in riding on a white horse?

Shattering the Myth

In his article, “Introduction to the Book of Zohar,” Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), author of the *Sulam* (Ladder) Commentary on *The Book of Zohar*, lifts the veil from the *Zohar*’s text, uncovering the true meaning behind “the resurrection of the dead.” He writes, **“Bear in mind, that the entire wisdom of Kabbalah is founded on spiritual matters that neither occupy time nor space.”** (*Talmud Eser Sefirot*, chapter 1, item 1)

In other words, any Kabbalistic text, including the Holy Scriptures, should be read with the understanding that not a word of it deals with the physical categories of time, space or any physical objects. So how are we to understand the Biblical description of the “resurrection of the dead”?

First, we must relinquish the outdated myth that “the dead” (that is, a collection of bodies in advanced stages of decay) will rise to their feet, break through their marble tombs and invade the world of the living. Like all descriptions contained in holy books, the “resurrection of the dead” is a process that deals with people’s souls, not their bodies.

A Spiritual Language

In Kabbalah and holy books such as the Scriptures, words like “brain,” “bones,” and “flesh” do not refer to our physical bodies. As surprising as it may sound, they actually name the spiritual vessels that constitute our souls. Hence, “the resurrection of the dead” is a spiritual process where

we revive our spiritual “bodies”—our souls.

Baal HaSulam explains that each of us will go through this spiritual process during our lifetime in this world. To understand this, we must learn about the process our souls went through before reaching their present state.

“Behold that before the emanations were emanated and the creatures were created, the Simple Upper Light had filled the whole existence and there was no vacancy, such as an empty atmosphere, a hollow or a pit, but all was filled with Simple Boundless Light”

Isaac Luria (the Ari),
Tree of Life

In the above quote, the great 16th century Kabbalist, the Ari, describes the state that preceded our existence. The “Upper Light” refers to the Creator, whose only quality or desire is to bestow upon the Creatures. The Creator’s thought instantaneously caused the emergence of the human soul—a spiritual entity that consists of innumerable individual souls, seamlessly interconnected and intertwined.

Since the Creator’s only wish is to delight the Creatures, He endowed them (us) with the ability to receive all the delight and abundance that He wishes to give. This means that He created us with a nature totally opposite to His—the desire to receive pleasure.

As soon as the Creator created this will to receive, or “the soul,” He filled it with infinite abundance, called “Light.” In this state, the soul resembled a fetus in its mother’s womb, where all its needs were provided for, and it was surrounded by warmth and nourishment. However, just like a fetus, the soul was unaware

of the processes it was undergoing or even its own existence.

Since the soul was not yet aware of its existence, the pleasure it could feel in this initial phase was limited: Though it was enveloped by the Infinite Light, it could not truly enjoy it since it never had the chance to desire that Light. Just as we cannot enjoy a delicious meal without first developing an appetite, so Creation could not feel all the abundance that the Creator wished to bestow upon it.

In order to advance from this state, the soul went through several processes to develop its awareness. It became detached from the Source of pleasure, the Creator, because only then could it develop a true desire for Him. This detachment from the Creator, the absence of Light within the soul, is what we feel as “this world.” It serves an important purpose, giving us the opportunity to develop our desire and freely choose to return to the Creator. Thus, we will acquire the awareness we need to feel the Light in its entirety. Only then can we consciously feel how the “Upper Light” surrounds and fills us with its endless warmth and love.

Death and Resurrection

The state of “this world” is what we presently feel after the Creator detached the human soul from Himself and distanced it from His Light. This is a temporary phase whose purpose is to enable us to find our way back to the Creator through our own free will.

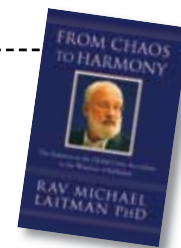
This detachment from the spiritual world is also called “spiritual death” because we do not feel our lives in the spiritual world, where we are connected with the Creator.

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FROM CHAOS TO HARMONY

“The ego is like a tyrant who sits within us and subjugates us to its demands.”



facebook

Profile edit Friends ▾ Networks ▾ Inbox ▾

home account privacy logout

WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS?

THE OBSESSION WITH FACEBOOK EXPRESSES A DEEP ROOTED DESIRE WITHIN EACH OF US— TO FEEL CONNECTED WITH EVERYONE. BUT DOES THE LARGEST VIRTUAL COMMUNITY REALLY DELIVER THE NEW AND IMPROVED SOCIAL WORLD WE SEEK?

▼ more

by Asaf Ohayon

So much has already been said about Facebook: that it's the world's most successful social network, that millions around the world are already using it, that it's officially worth over \$15 billion, that Microsoft paid \$240 million for a 1.6% share of the website, and much more.

But underneath the big numbers, the success, and all the fancy words, there's a question that isn't so easy to answer: Why?

Why do people prefer to socialize using instant messages, SMS, videos and pictures on a website, instead of going out and actually meeting each other in person?

Passing Fad or Social Trend?

Facebook is definitely the talk of the net. Everyone is adding friends, playing with new applications, sharing videos, and uploading pictures. Many internet users honestly admit that they're hooked on the network and spend many hours socializing there.

However, very few understand why. Think about it: Why spend so many hours on something that offers you no benefit in the real world? Is it because Facebook serves our need to expand our social circle? Is it an “incognito” dating service? Or perhaps it's a spring board for business relations?

None of these questions can be unequivocally answered. But one thing is certain: Facebook is yet another easy getaway from the reality of everyday life. It lets us escape to a ready-made, imaginary world—a world where you have hundreds or even thousands of friends, a world of games, and a world where there's no social friction (not yet, anyway). All day long, you can send and receive gifts, flirt, browse through people's personal pictures... and the most painful thing that can happen to you is that someone decides to “poke” you, which means that a silly little icon will appear on your screen. Ouch.

But the question arises: Is Facebook actually becoming a substitute for socializing in the real world? Is it that hard for us to interact with each other in real life?

The Ego That Wants it All, the Soul That Wants Unity

As it happens, we, humans, are social creatures. And as such, we love caressing our egos by showing everyone how beautiful, smart and clever we are—and of course, how popular we are. We love to see and to be seen, and a social networking website like Facebook gives us the perfect opportunity to do so:

We can see the whole world and have the whole world see us, with our best foot forward, larger than life.

We present ourselves with our coolest pictures, many compliments and a lot of interests—which might all be covering up a deeper need—one that we all share, which Kabbalah calls “unity.”

We'll Be In Touch

Like Facebook, Kabbalah also has a lot to do with the connection between human beings. Kabbalists explain that deep down, we are all connected within a single, common soul—a mighty entity made up of myriad individual souls. On that level, we exist in reciprocal, continuous connection with each other, seamlessly intertwined as one integral system.

But at some point in our evolution, we lost our perception of that universal soul and stopped feeling our interconnectedness. The loss of this perception left us with a sensation of emptiness, a feeling that something is missing between us. Ever since, we've been searching for ways to compensate for this, to somehow restore the sensation of wholeness and unity that we once felt.

In fact, it is that subconscious “memory” of our connection within the common soul that motivates millions of us to stream into social networks like Facebook. Here we can connect with each other beyond time, space or any other differences. However, this is only a weak semblance of our true, spiritual connection, and it can't satisfy our need for real unity.

Connection Through Disconnection

The thing that blocks our perception of the common soul, making us feel alienated from each other, is the growing human egoism. While egoism has grown all throughout human history, in recent years it has reached its peak. And while this record-high egoism has brought about unprecedented technological progress, it also prevents us from reuniting with each other. As a result, we begin to feel the deep void in our hearts that yearns for the connection between us to be restored.

But until we do so, the ego will continue making us feel that we have to be bigger and better than others. It drives us to take advantage of each other, and even to harm each other for the sake of personal gain. But most of all, it prevents us from seeing that behind all the schisms, we are all internally connected.

The ego is what makes us hate the thought of being connected to others. We find the idea of “mutual dependence” or “togetherness” uncomfortable, burdensome, and even repulsive. This is why we deny the connection that binds us.

But even as we attempt to deny it, the looming crisis in every realm of our lives, the growing process of globalization and even the dramatic occurrences in nature itself, are forcing us to agree that we are, in fact, interconnected and interdependent.

Today, we are caught between two trends: On one hand, we want to be together with everybody, yet on the other hand, we don't want to get too close. So the virtual networks offer us

the perfect solution: We can socialize with thousands of people while “staying apart” behind our computer screens.

Thus, our vast technology doesn't really connect us, but instead allows us to feel connected while remaining disconnected. However, the feeling of disconnection that deepens over time uncovers a real need for connection—one that cannot be made through wires or virtual media.

In order to satisfy the real need for connection, we have to “upgrade” our social network—from one based on wires to one that is based on our hearts.

Unlimited Band Width

These times are a unique phase in the development of mankind. We are closer than ever to rediscovering our innate unity, and thereby attaining the purpose of our existence. The wisdom of Kabbalah is precisely the method to restore the unity that exists among all of us—a unity that exists on a deeper level of nature, within the heart of every human being.

But to rediscover that unity, we must undergo a fundamental change in the way we perceive reality. This means that we must transform our egoism to the quality of unconditional love and giving. And by so doing, we will experience a new, spiritual level of reality.

Then we won't need to hide behind our computer screens, trying to grope for that connection with each other. Instead, we will have a crystal clear sensation of that unity among us—this time, through our hearts.

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ATTAINING THE WORLDS BEYOND

“Spiritual ascent occurs slowly, like a healing from an illness.”

TOM AND JERRY AND OUR CHILDREN

by Tony Kosinec

Modern psychological research shows that a child's cognitive development and patterns of behavior begin to form very early on.

The acclaimed Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, showed that soon after birth, a baby begins to learn through observation, adopting mental concepts from the environment. The incoming sensory data that the child receives, even as a toddler, has a major effect on his development. Later on, the child only continues developing and perfecting what he had absorbed from his surroundings during the early years.

In light of this, just imagine how sophisticated we must be in order to give our children the right examples, literally from the age of zero. On the other hand, how can we give them positive examples when even the children's entertainment industry feeds them countless negative values and images?

To cite just one example, here is the latest description of *Tom and Jerry*, as it appears on the *Cartoon Network* website: “Tenacious cat Tom is forever on the tail of his elusive nemesis, Jerry the mouse, and no tricks, traps or cast-iron frying pans will stop him in his timeless pursuit.” And that, dear parents, is what our toddlers learn from.

But apparently, our children are not the only victims of their environment. Society doesn't ask any of us, “What would you like to want?”—it rather dictates to us what to want, from dawn to dusk. Whether it's *Coca Cola*, *Nike*, *iPod* or *Benz*—“you just gotta have it!” But when it comes to our children's education, it's up to us, the parents, to choose the values and patterns of behavior that will influence our children.

The Oldies and the Newbies

Take a look at the games our children play or the movies they watch. Chances are, you'd be hard pressed to find even

one cartoon that doesn't use elements of violence, scorn and degradation. There will always be someone who suffers—and someone who enjoys it. Systematically, the cartoons' plots revolve around the pleasure derived from deriding and abusing one or more of the characters.

On the other hand, think of the oldies—they, at least, had a touch of goodness. So what happened? Let's go back to our beloved *Tom and Jerry*: They started off with the tiny, likeable mouse struggling to escape the big, bad cat, who was always eventually punished for trying to pick on the harmless creature. But over the years, along with the scriptwriters' steadily growing egos, the little mouse also gained some nerve. Today, he's a real snake, plotting how to best snare the sleepy, silly cat, and revels in making that cat suffer! Anything less than that is already boring for the mouse, and for us, too.

TODAY, EVEN TOM CAN'T HELP US TEACH GOOD VALUES TO OUR CHILDREN. NOT TO MENTION JERRY...



Time to Grow Up

The fact is that this is how we were created—as self centered creatures. However, today, Nature demands that we grow up. Even as we keep encouraging our egoistic tendencies, reality is forcing us to realize that we are all part of one, big, integrated whole, and we have to start acting like it. Otherwise, we won't survive the 21st century.

For millennia, Kabbalists have been telling us that Nature's higher law is one of love, reciprocity and unity.

But even more vital for us to know is that this law of Nature treats us the same way we treat our children: When they are young, it's OK for them to make mistakes, but when they grow bigger, they have to learn how to play by the rules.

So today, let's do ourselves a favor and start changing our values, if not for ourselves, at least for our children.

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extras WHY DOES LOVE ALWAYS HURT?

“When one is in love, one always begins by deceiving oneself, and one always ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance.” (Oscar Wilde)

Love always hurts us, because in our world, love is based on the needs of the ego. Whether we are aware of it or not, our love always comes with the calculation: “Is it worthwhile for me or not?” Even when one is so head over heels that one literally “gives one's life away” for the beloved, the underlying calculation is still ego-based. This is because the ego constitutes our entire nature, and we can never transcend it on the level of this world—not even for those we love the most.

For instance, take the most “altruistic” kind of love in our world—the love that a mother feels for her child. When taking a closer look, it's obvious that this love is closely related to the mother's self interest, since she loves only her own child, and will never feel the same way toward the neighbor's child. And it's the same among spouses, relatives, friends, or even the whole world—our relationships are all based on “What's in it for me?”

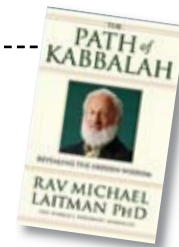
Yet, when we're looking for love, we really *do* wish to find love that's pure and unconditional. But since this is beyond our nature, love always ends up hurting us.

However, if we start looking beyond our nature, we will discover that there *is* such a thing as true love—and Kabbalists can show us how to find our way there. The wisdom of Kabbalah directs us towards this unconditional kind of love—love from another world. If one wants to feel true love for another, one must see the other person as one's partner on their mutual journey to a higher, whole and eternal purpose. Then one will see that partner as higher, whole and eternal.

In other words, it takes a true, eternal purpose to create a true, eternal love.

THE PATH OF KABBALAH

“You, the readers, are already taking part in the conduct of the Upper World by the very fact that you have begun to think, analyze, and argue, agree or disagree with what you are reading.”



ANYTHING BUT SURVIVAL

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

It's all strategy, like, nothing but strategy. If anyone comes up to you it's like: "Hey, what's your favorite music?"— They don't care what that answer is. The next question is: "What's the alliance? Who's next?" ... For me, the game *Survivor* is the greatest game ever: It's like "Ah, I **feel** that evil." It's just fun for me.

Contestant Johnny Fairplay, *Survivor, Micronesia*, CBS Broadcasting Inc.

A presidential election in the United States looms just ahead—a perfect opportunity to observe the current political maneuverings. Democrats and Republicans usually vote along party lines to defeat each other. At election time, however, party cohesiveness disintegrates. In order to become the Democratic nominee for President, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama will go to almost any lengths to attack each other. Once the nominee is decided, the party will again close ranks around the victor to try to combat the Republican nominee.

The whole system operates on a "What's in it for me?" basis. As long as I benefit, I'll team with anyone. Once the benefit is gone, watch out!

It may be hard to admit, but this attitude permeates all of our relationships, including personal ones. How do I identify someone as a friend? Well, a friend is someone I enjoy being with, someone who makes me feel good. In other words, it is a relationship where I benefit from being around the other person. As soon as the relationship stops making me feel good, it ends.

However, this is not a condemnation—it is merely an observation that we are being true to our nature as human beings. Unfortunately, this egoistic nature has also given rise to the hatred, competition and brutality that we find in the world today.

The Lucifer Effect

"If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "The Gulag Archipelago"

In 1971, social psychologist Philip Zimbardo conducted an experiment at Stanford University to examine the psychological effects of imprisonment. He and his staff selected 24 normal, well-adjusted male students who had no criminal backgrounds. Then, these students were randomly divided into two groups: One group would role play as "wardens" and the other group would be the "prisoners."

Both groups were put into a simulated prison environment. The experiment was supposed to last two weeks, but it was stopped after only six days because the "wardens" turned sadistic and cruel and the "prisoners" experienced nervous breakdowns.

More than 30 years later, Zimbardo decried the circumstances that led to the maltreatment of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers. American politicians tried to give excuses

for the abuse, claiming that those responsible for the maltreatment were only a few "bad apples" in the military.

In a sharp response, a book titled *The Lucifer Effect*, Zimbardo claimed the opposite, saying that under the right conditions, this could happen to any of us. In fact, the surprise would be to find a few "good apples" who could resist the evil inherent in us as human beings.

Cleansing the Human Condition

Given this depressing assessment, what kind of future can we, as humans, expect? It appears that our animalistic nature is getting stronger every day, while values such as compassion and love are losing ground. Are we destined to use each other until only one is left standing, as in *Survivor*?

In the early 1900s, Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag, author of the *Sulam* (Ladder) commentary on *The Book of Zohar*, foresaw the results of Zimbardo's experiment and many of the other atrocities happening in the world. He recognized that man is egoistic and driven by the desire for pleasure, even when that pleasure may be detrimental to someone else.

Ashlag assured us, however, that there is a solution. The science of Kabbalah, which has existed for over five thousand years, shows how we can actually transform our present nature—from egoism to altruism. Ashlag took this ancient wisdom and divided its teachings into three main stages:

In the first stage (which we are just now entering), we must

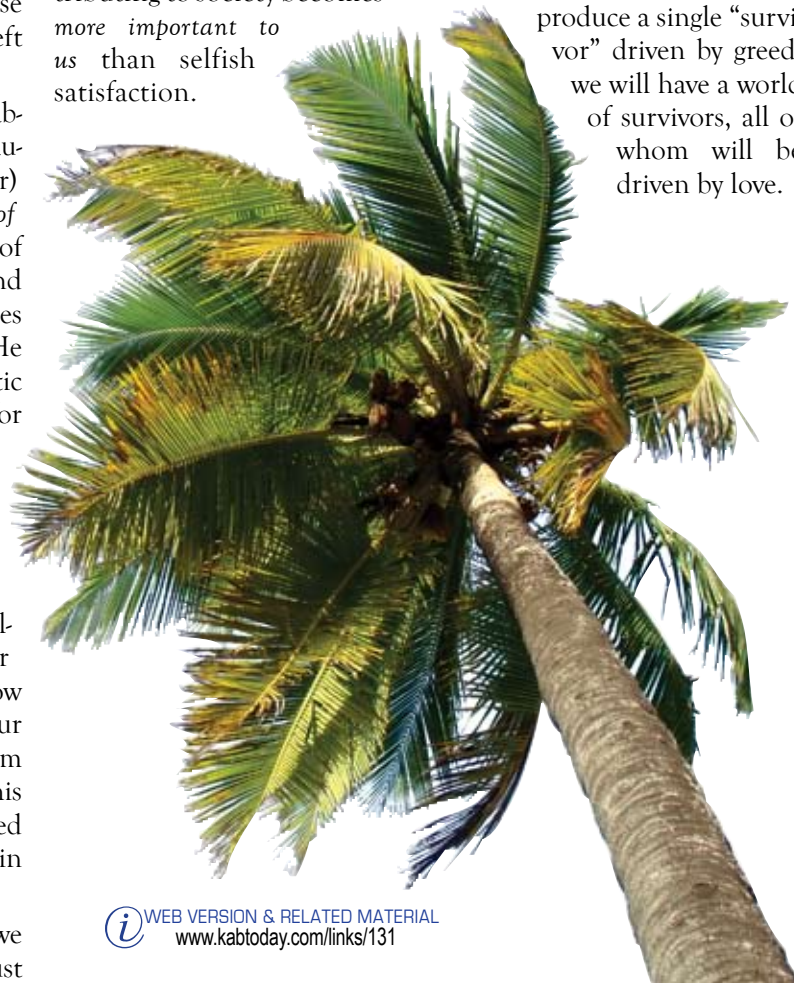
uncover the egoism within each and every one of us, which keeps us isolated from each other and prevents us from experiencing true love. Furthermore, we must recognize how our egoistic nature can drive us to perform despicable acts simply to get what we want. Once we clearly see the connection between our egoism and all the evil in the world, and once we can no longer deny it—it is in our power to begin creating change.

In the next stage, we must change the hierarchy of values in society. We must transform ourselves from a society that worships the ego to a society that values giving to, and loving, others.

In fact, we all try to teach our children to share and care for others. However, our efforts are quickly overshadowed by the values our children meet in reality. We must begin to live what we teach our children. And this can be done only when contributing to society becomes *more important to us than selfish satisfaction.*

Once we complete the first two stages, we will begin to recognize that we are all integrated parts of one, inclusive system. We will realize how interconnected and interdependent we are. Our new perceptions will grant us the ability to actualize one of Kabbalah's central principles—*Arvut* (Mutual Guarantee). This means that one's concern about the happiness and well-being of others becomes greater than one's self-concern. Correspondingly, we will experience the same kind of love and concern returning to us from all others. Then, we will raise each other up, rather than trample over others on our way to "success."

Achieving this seems far away because we are at the beginning stage of our journey. What we currently don't see is that this dynamic between us is rooted in nature. However, as we learn and grow in wisdom, we will find that there is nothing more natural in the world than love. At that point, rather than letting the future produce a single "survivor" driven by greed, we will have a world of survivors, all of whom will be driven by love.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ZOHAR

“There is only the simple, absolutely amorphous light around us. However, in our inner properties we single out in it such pictures as the still, vegetative, animal, and human levels of nature.”

Light

THE KABBALISTIC MEANING

THE WORD “LIGHT” BRINGS ALL KINDS OF POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS TO MIND. BUT IN KABBALAH, LIGHT IS HIGHER THAN ANYTHING WE CAN IMAGINE—IT IS, IN FACT, A QUALITY OF THE CREATOR HIMSELF

by Cheryl Hall

“And God said, ‘Let there be light, and there was light.’” “The light at the end of the tunnel,” “You are the light of my life,” “I saw the light.” If you recorded the amount of times you heard “light” referred to each day, you would find hundreds of references to it in one form or another.

Phrases like “in light of,” “shed some light on,” “illuminated” and “radiance” are metaphors often used to describe thoughts about wisdom, hope and goodness. We usually say “an enlightened person” to describe someone who is wise or is able to see the world in a unique way.

We enjoy the light of the sun and we plan vacations in places where we can relax and enjoy its radiance. We are at-

tracted to the warmth of fire-light and we gather around the light of campfires. As human beings, we often relate to light in an emotional, almost sensual way.

It’s hard to imagine that after thousands of years of research, scientists are still not exactly certain about the nature of light. There is, however, no argument that light is the wellspring of life on earth.

A Spiritual Source

It is no coincidence that just the thought of light produces such profound sensations. The wisdom of Kabbalah teaches us that there is, in fact, a “spiritual Light” that affects us, even though

we are not aware of its presence. This Light is the quality of the force that created us—the Creator.

The great 16th century Kabbalist, Isaac Luria (the Ari), wrote in his book, *Tree of Life*:

“Behold that before the emanations were emanated and the creatures were created, The Simple Upper Light had filled the whole existence. And there was no vacancy, such as an empty atmosphere, a hollow or a pit, But all was filled with Simple Boundless Light.”

What is the nature of the spiritual Light? Just as physical light fulfills us in physical ways, making us feel warm and comfortable, so the spiritual Light fulfills our spiritual needs, the needs of

our souls. Kabbalists explain that while living in our world, one can fill one’s soul with spiritual Light and thereby experience boundless joy and fulfillment.

As one’s soul becomes filled with Light, one begins sensing an internal realm called “the Upper World” and perceiving phenomena completely beyond what we know from the physical world.

How is the Upper World different from our regular sensations? In this world, all of our perceptions evolve naturally through our five senses. And yet, we are obviously affected by many forces of nature that are invisible to us. The oxygen we breathe, for instance, is invisible, but without it we could not survive in the physical world.

In the same way, the Upper World is an area of reality that is imperceptible to our five senses, but we begin to feel it as our souls become filled by the spiritual Light.

Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, one of the scientists who made the movie, *What the Bleep Do We Know!?*, explains this from the viewpoint of quantum physics: “Quantum theory shows that there is something working beyond mere mechanism, outside the physical world.”

This is why Kabbalah is also called “the wisdom of the hidden”—because it discloses that part of reality that is hidden from our five senses. It is a method enabling us to fill our souls with Light, and simultaneously feel both the Upper World and our world.

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TO BE OR NOT TO BE? » CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

In other words, “spiritual death” is the state where our nature is so opposite to the spiritual nature, we don’t even feel the spiritual world’s existence.

The method of Kabbalah was specifically designed to help us transform our nature so we could climb back up to the spiritual level of the Creator. Only then will we experience the “resurrection of the dead”—meaning the resurrection of our souls and our ability to sense His Light.

The method lies in replacing our egoistic intention with the intention of loving and giving—the Creator’s qualities. Through the entire process of correction and ascent, one finds oneself in the midst of a battle between two qualities or forces—the force of receiving, on the one hand, and the force of giving, on the other.

Gradually, one reveals one’s egoistic nature, of which one was not aware, and starts to identify this state as “spiritual death.” One be-

gins to feel how all his desires are driven by the quality of self reception, and feels increasingly repelled by this quality. Eventually, one reaches a point where one clearly identifies the egoistic inclination which prevents him from ascending to the spiritual world and reconnecting to the Source of life—the Creator.

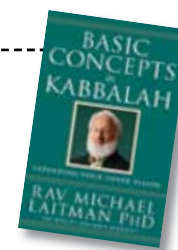
At this point of awareness, a person is utterly repelled by the egoistic intention, while at the same time feeling the greatest yearning to resemble the Creator. As one turns to the Creator with a plea from the bottom of one’s heart, the Creator is revealed to the person, endowing him with the quality of true, unconditional love and bestowal.

When one attains this spiritual quality, one breaks free of his egoism and enters the spiritual world. One’s soul is “revived” or “resurrected,” and one feels the spiritual life just as he did when he was first created.

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BASIC CONCEPTS IN KABBALAH

“There is nothing redundant or unnecessary in our world. Everything is created for the good of humanity, both directly and indirectly.”



LIVING THE SPIRITUAL DREAM WORLD

by Mike Kellogg

We all begin our lives perceiving and living in this corporeal world, until one day we discover a unique desire for something new and different, mostly called “spirituality.” We try to imagine what is going on *there*—in the spiritual world—and attempt to picture how different life would be if we *felt* spirituality, if it wasn’t concealed from us. “What’s it like?” we wonder, “What is really going on there?”

Kabbalists tell us that there are hints in the corporeal world that can help us better understand what spirituality is. One such hint, which can help answer our questions, is our dreams.

“We were as dreamers.”

Psalms 126

Kabbalists, those who feel the spiritual world, tell us that prior to their spiritual attainment, they were “as dreamers.” But what can this teach us about spirituality?

We have all had dreams, and we know that they can be happy, sad, exciting, dull, full of pleasure, terrifying, and so on. Dreams cover the full gamut of possible emotions, and sometimes they feel so real that to us that we could swear they happened in real life.

It’s Just One of Those Dreams...

But how real are dreams? If we have missed dinner one evening and gone to bed hungry, we may dream about eating a huge, delicious feast. We gorge to the point of oblivion, unable to take another bite—yet in the morning, when the alarm clock sounds and we stir from this wonderful experience, we find our stomachs growling with hunger. So the feast was only a dream, while in reality our stomachs were empty.

Now think of someone who leads a very modest life, pinching pennies to make ends meet. One night that person dreams of winning the lottery: He’s worth millions, and the life of abject poverty is now a distant memory. All day long, he enjoys leisure and bliss...until suddenly he wakes up.

What if your current life was nothing more than one of those dreams? Kabbalists say that the real you is the soul and the real world is spiritual, but the dream you are having seems utterly real—believing that you are the physical you and the world you are living in is the corporeal world.

This is what Kabbalists mean by their “hint,” when they compare how they felt prior to their spiritual attainment to a dream. This analogy indicates that our corporeal lives are like a dream, and everything that happens to us, our entire corporeal existence, is not our real life—but a temporary dream of our soul.

The soul has many dreams, and each dream is what we feel as a corporeal lifetime. But when the soul wakes up, we discover that there are no lifetimes and no time at all, but only an eternal spiritual realm.

Stop Hitting the Snooze

What does it take to wake us from our regular dreams? Most of us wake up to the annoying sound of an alarm clock that squeals loudly enough to break through any dream. In spirituality, instead of alarm clocks, there are desires.

Just as the ring of an alarm clock comes from beyond our dream world existence, so the spiritual desire within us is not part of this dream called “corporeal life.” One day it calls to us from our true, spiritual existence, beckoning us to awaken.

“HE FELT THAT HIS WHOLE LIFE WAS SOME KIND OF DREAM AND HE SOMETIMES WONDERED WHOSE IT WAS AND WHETHER THEY WERE ENJOYING IT”

DOUGLAS ADAMS,
THE HITCHHIKER’S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

And just as some of us are in the habit of pushing “snooze” until the last possible minute, many of us feel our spiritual desires as a mere annoyance, not nearly strong enough to shake us out of our spiritual sleep. Yet the stronger the spiritual desire becomes, the more it demands that we pay attention to it.

But here is where corporeal dreams and spiritual dreams (called “corporeal life”) begin to diverge: In our corporeal dreams, a quick jolt is all we need to awaken to reality, whereas in order to awaken from our spiritual dreams, we must actually help that desire along by developing it ourselves.

How can we do this? We do it by reading authentic texts written by those who have already awakened, by seeking out a genuine, spiritual guide, and by studying with friends who are on the same path. In other words, we speed up our process of awakening—instead of waiting for it to prod us until it becomes unbearable.

And what is that special desire, the “alarm clock” that calls to us from the spiritual world? It is a simple desire to wake up and feel our true, spiritual existence. It is the clarion call from our spiritually awake state, beckoning us to come back to consciousness and return to *real* life.

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extras OUR WORLD IS AN ILLUSION—SEE FOR YOURSELF

As much as Kabbalists may tell us that our world is an illusion, we won’t believe them. And we won’t even agree with modern science when it says the same thing. In fact, this is perfectly natural because we’ve never seen the world differently from the way we now see it—we’ve never had the opportunity to be “outside observers” of our world.

So, basically, we have two options for responding to such a challenging statement. We can say “That’s impossible” and go back to our normal business, or we can go ahead and try it out for ourselves. That is, we can develop the necessary qualities or senses that will allow us to perceive something new that we’ve never felt before. Then we will feel the spiritual world that Kabbalists describe—and reach our own conclusion that our world is an illusion.

Today, many scientists already agree that we can’t see or understand anything without having the necessary *inner* models for it. So how do we build those models? The inner qualities required to feel the spiritual world gradually form in us as we study the authentic texts written by those who already have these qualities. Then, we can understand the Kabbalists’ invitation to us: “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

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THIS IS NOT
KABBALAH

KABBALAH: USER MANUAL

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

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

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

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

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

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the relationship between Kabbalah, red strings and holy water?

There is no relation whatsoever. Red strings, holy water and other products are a lucrative commercial invention created in the past two decades.

Is Kabbalah a religion?

No. Kabbalah is a science—the physics of the overall reality. It is a wisdom that reveals the comprehensive reality that is normally hidden from our senses.

Is Kabbalah related to tarot cards, astrology and numerology?

No. Tarot cards, astrology and numerology are mystical practices which were mistakenly associated with Kabbalah during the past one hundred years.

What is Kabbalistic meditation?

There is no Kabbalistic meditation. Kabbalah teaches a person how to transcend egoism and connect to the quality that prevails in Nature—unconditional love and bestowal.

Are there any amulets in Kabbalah?

No. In our world, there are no physical objects that bear any spiritual contents. Amulets can only help a person as a psychological support.

■ Sneak-a-Peek @ the book *Kabbalah Revealed*

REDISCOVERING OUR UNITY

Originally, all people were internally connected. We felt and thought of ourselves as a single human being, and this is exactly how Nature treats us. However, despite our initial oneness, as our egoism grew we gradually lost the sensation of unity and became increasingly distant from each other.

Kabbalah books write that Nature's plan is for our egoism to keep growing until we realize that we have become separated and hateful to one another. The logic behind the plan is that we must first feel as a single entity, and then become separated into egoistic and detached individuals. Only then will we realize that we are completely opposite from the Creator, and utterly selfish.

Moreover, this is the only way for us to realize that egoism is negative, unfulfilling, and ultimately hopeless. Our egoism separates us from each other and from Nature. But to change that, we must first realize that this is the case. This will bring us to want to change, and to independently find a way to transform ourselves into altruists, reconnected with all of humanity and with Nature—the Creator.



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:

info@kabbalah.info

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

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