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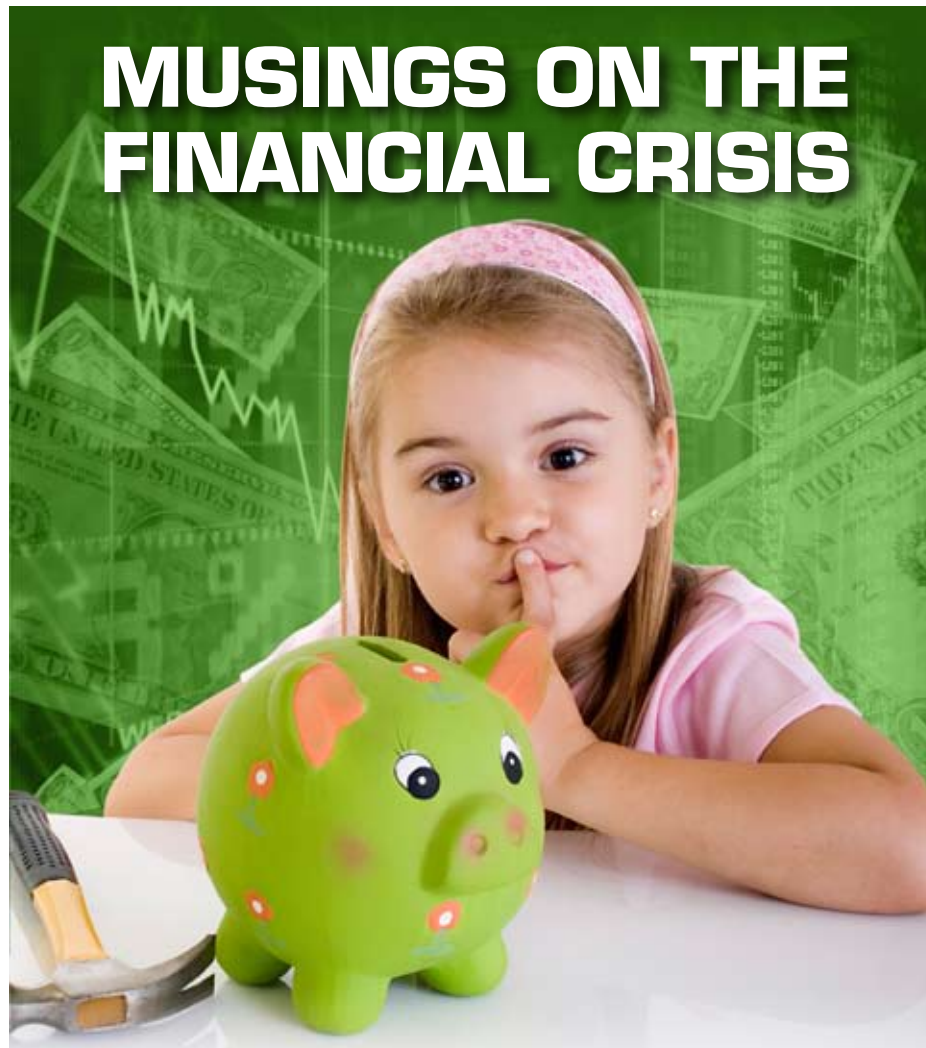
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MUSINGS ON THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

It's easy being angry with the Wall Street "moneybags" for getting us into this mess. But when the steam settles and our vision clears, it's time to think about where we should go from here

by *Pete LaTona*

I must confess that I have been watching far too many news shows covering the financial crisis. It is getting irritating and frustrating, and just when I begin to lose all sympathy, it begins to hit close to home with friends and family, and OMG, me! But the most frustrating thing is that most of us getting hurt are good, law-abiding citizens. Why should we pay for the mistakes of the greedy crooks who caused all this? We should find those responsible, take everything they have, spread it around to their victims, and perhaps dunk a pie in their faces for good measure.

But once the sweet taste of revenge from this kind of thinking begins to fade, it's replaced by another feeling - worry! After all, who's to say that just because the economy has always made a rebound in the past, it will do so this time? It seems like all the bets are being placed on this "inevitable" (as it ap-

pears) solution. But what if people are wrong? What if this is not another regular ebb and flow of economic cycles? What if this requires a very different type of solution?

THEY HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD (BUT DIDN'T SEE THE REST OF THE NAILS)

Actually, many pundits have caught on to the fact that this time, the financial disaster is different: this time it is truly global. But as soon as they say these words, they move on to seek local solutions! The great economic minds of today are confessing that they completely underestimated the interconnectedness of the global economy: they could not foresee that when the liver dies, the body dies; that the part can bring down the whole. That's why they were completely caught off guard. But now they know.

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Editor's Note

THE GLOBAL CRISIS: A SPRINGBOARD TO SPIRITUALITY

The global financial crisis continues to dominate the headlines of all major media. Clearly, it's not over yet, and some say that it's just starting to pick up speed. In this issue of *Kabbalah Today*, we continue to shed much-needed light on the current happenings in the world.

"Musings on the Financial Crisis" will tell you that it's okay to be angry and frustrated at what's happening, but once our emotions subside, we must take a mature look at our world view, and re-evaluate it if we're to change things for the better.

"We Want Change" presents some basic facts that will help you find your footing in a world that has entered a new era: Globalization 3.0.

"Can We Stop Being Scrooge?" traces the surprising parallels between the star of the holiday season, Scrooge, and ourselves. It reminds us of the old lesson that's more relevant now than ever: compassion and consideration for others bring much greater rewards than do egoism and greed.

For the scientist in you, "How to Catch a Case of Happy" will show why the above lesson now has a scientific basis. By expressing a joyful and loving attitude to those around us, we can actually "infect" each other with the most valuable thing in the world - lasting happiness.

Finally, "What's In a Name?" and "A Requiem for Utopian Dreams" will give you a peek into the spiritual world, which is about to open up before us. Once we learn how best to use the system of global interdependency that's becoming apparent through the financial crisis, we will see that today's turmoil is, in fact, a time of great spiritual transformation - a springboard to spirituality.

“...individuals are part of the whole, and the whole is not worth any more than the sum of its individuals.”

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

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Why, then, are countries still trying to further their own initiatives to save their own economies? Why isn't someone stating the obvious – if we are so interdependent, our only choice is to start thinking of the well-being of *everyone* in the world.

According to Kabbalah, the reason we try to avoid this approach is our egoistic nature. As self-centered beings naturally driven to maximize our benefits with minimal effort, we just can't accept such a solution. This is why economists refuse to let go of their outdated world-view, and the problems continue.

This is also why they can't see or accept the fact that this crisis isn't "just another crisis" – not even like the Great Depression.

The fact is that this crisis is different, ushering us into a new global era, where in order to

exist, all members of the human community must start caring for the benefit of the *entire* system, just like the cells in a body. Anyone who does not take this into consideration and continues to care only for himself will become detrimental to the system, like a cancerous cell is to a body. That person (or cell) will make us *all* suffer. The global market collapse is just one example of this – and a very convincing one.

So how can we change our current selfish behavior? This is where the wisdom of Kabbalah comes to our aid.

LEARNING THE NOT-SO-OBVIOUS: HOW TO GIVE

Kabbalists explain that there is a fundamental law in nature that assures the survival of any integral system. According to this law, every part of the system takes only as much as it needs to survive in order to be able to work for the well-being of the entire system. Since the world is now an integral system, we must learn how to keep this law, which guarantees our stability and well-being just like it does for any system in nature.

Hence, the first thing we need in order to emerge from the crisis is a major upgrade of our world view. We must learn how interconnected and responsible for each other we really are – not just on the level of social and economic systems, but on the level of our thoughts, desires, and intentions.

We will then see that the whole world is one family, where every member must look out for the others, not just for himself. Once we begin *thinking* differently, we will be in unison with the laws of nature, and then crises such as the financial one – and all others – will immediately subside.



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

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

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

Q: Is Kabbalah a religion?

A: 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.

Q: Is Kabbalah related to tarot cards, astrology and numerology?

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

Q: What is Kabbalistic meditation?

A: 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.

Q: Are there any amulets in Kabbalah?

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

Michael Laitman's Personal Blog

laitman.com

*Kabbalah
and the
Meaning
of Life*

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“...the place that needs correction is for each and every individual to understand that his own benefit and the benefit of the collective are the same thing.”

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



On January 20, the world will witness American President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration, and the countdown will begin. Will the new leader deliver the promised change and help lead the world out of unprecedented economic turmoil?

by *Eli Vinokur*

Even before he is inaugurated, many are already weighing in what they expect from his first 100 days in office. As the world moves unsteadily through one of the deepest financial crises in history, the soon-to-be-President of the United States does not have the luxury of a traditional “grace period” before the inauguration. He must already begin to deliver more than his personal charisma and hopeful slogans about change.

So, Mr. President, here are five essential Kabbalistic tips that we hope will help you progress from optimistic words about reclaiming the American Dream to actually making it happen.

GLOBALIZATION

By now we've heard this a million times, but let us say it anyway – our world is round (or flat, in the words of Thomas Friedman). In the Globalization Era 3.0, if you want to propose a deal to America or any other country, you must understand that you are doing business with all of humanity. Any rescue program will have to be based on the understanding that all of us are cells in one human body, and that the fate of each country is dependent upon the fate of every other nation in the

world, for better or for worse.

REGULATION OF THE EGO

Almost everyone – including major economists – has recognized that the main reason for the current economic crisis is the swollen egos of the big players. But the truth goes beyond that: it's not just them – it's everyone, from the jaded broker who mocked sophisticated financial tools, to the real estate agent who gave the financially weak home buyer a loan he could never repay, to the buyer who understood his true economic capabilities but went for the American Dream anyway.

Well, it's time to put all that behind us and to realize that we are living in a reality where the selfish decision of one individual can seal the fate of entire nations. Hence, local supervision of a financial system is an outdated solution. In order to create a significant change in the world, you, Mr. President, will have to use every available means to bring this understanding to all the people in the world: each of us must regulate his or her own ego. In this Era of Globalization, concern for others is really concern for yourself. But how in the world can we accomplish this?

A GLOBAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

The recent American presidential campaign clearly showed that wise use of the media is the key to success. Therefore, you should continue to use this tool to create a positive change in the world. You must help the major media networks understand that America's future welfare, as well as that of the world, depends on the quality of the messages the media transmits to the public. They must nurture values and ideas that benefit society as a whole, not just their CEOs' private bank accounts.

Moreover, schools and parents should learn and teach the principles of existence in a globalized world. They must internalize the idea that humanity functions as one body and that our success depends on our active, positive participation in the functioning of that body.

TAKING THE INTERNET INTO ACCOUNT

One of the unexpected stars of your election campaign was the Internet, Mr. President-elect. (And who knows this better than you, who may soon become the first President to bring a webcam into the Oval Office!) Social platforms such as You Tube, MySpace and Facebook have made the difference, and they will continue to do so if you, Mr. President, will forge ahead after the election campaign and continue using them as a tool for positive change. That positive change is most needed when it comes to interpersonal relationships,

and nothing connects people more than the Internet. It enables us to overcome cultural differences, the obstructions of time and distance, and even language differences. What could be more constructive than turning the Internet into a platform that nurtures possibilities for a real human connection? It can become a melting pot, a home, and a social environment that anyone can enter and feel comfortable in, like coming home to one's family.

RESTORING FAITH IN THE SYSTEM

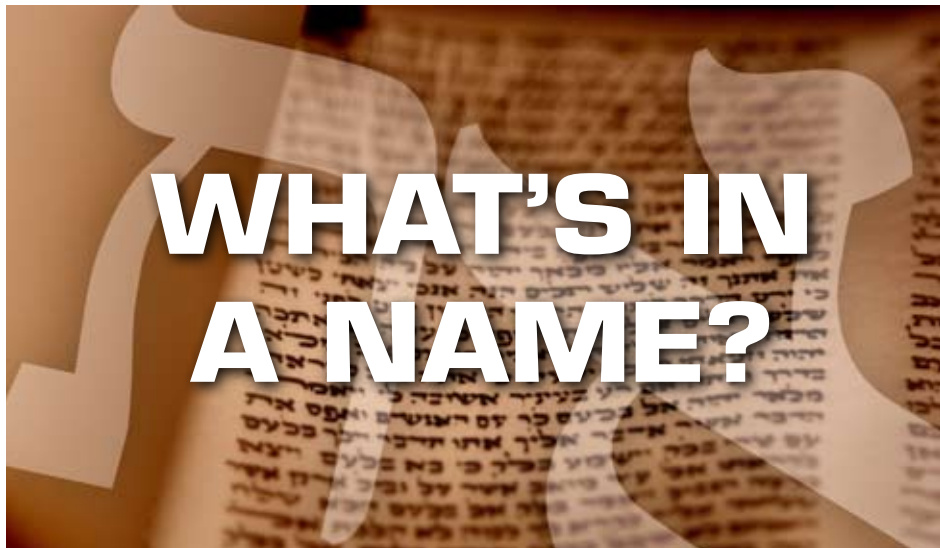
One of the symptoms of the present crisis is the general loss of trust between businesses, states and civilians. Hence, one of the first matters you should attend to is restoring people's trust in the markets, and this trust can only be created by removing the self-serving component from the system. When financial institutions and individuals understand that harming another person or enterprise may boomerang right back to them, it will be possible to establish a healthy system. Trust will be restored because everyone will feel that companies are sincerely concerned for them, and this will guarantee the success of the whole system.

In this unusual time, “the day after” is going to come sooner than usual, Mr. President, so you have no time to waste. The Global Era we have entered requires us to change our approach. From now on, we have to replace the “me” that's at the center of our worldview, with “humanity.”



“...the development of Creation brings everything to completion, gradually climbing the degrees of development, from one degree to the next ... until it comes to the summit, which is its preordained measure of perfection.”

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



Is it any use changing our names to improve our luck? The answer comes from none other than the ancient Book of Zohar, which reveals the secrets concealed in names and letters

by Asaf Ohayon

Have you ever gotten lost browsing through a book of names, trying to find the hidden meaning behind your name, or that of your significant other, your children, or friends? Is this fascination with names, letters and their hidden meanings childish and naïve, or based on real phenomena? And if it is genuine, can we manipulate our names to turn around our fortune for the better, as many people today try to do?

The Book of Zohar sheds light on all these questions in the “Essay About the Letters,” which begins:

When the Creator thought to create the world, all the letters of the alphabet came to Him in reverse order from last (Tav) to first (Aleph). The letter Tav entered first and said, “Master of the world! It is good, and also seemly of You, to create the world with me. For I am the seal on Your ring, called EmeT (truth), that ends with the letter Tav. And that is why You are called truth, and why it would befit the King to begin the universe with the letter Tav, and to create the world by her. The Creator answered: “You are beautiful and sincere, but do not merit the world that I conceived to be created by your properties.”

In this playful, pictorial essay, the ancient text gradually reveals the secrets concealed in every letter. The article proceeds to describe how every letter stood in line, waiting for its turn to speak to the Creator in order to ask Him to be used in creating the world.

Interestingly, the letters come to the Creator in reverse order, from the last letter of the alphabet, *Tav*, to the first, *Aleph*. The Creator patiently hears every letter out and gives it a chance to argue its case. But the only letter He finally chooses for creating the world is none other than *Bet*.

WITH THE LETTER BET, THE WORLD WAS CREATED

The letter Bet entered and said to the Creator: “Maker of the world, it would be good to create the world by me, as by me You are blessed Above and below. For Bet is Berachah (blessing).” The Creator replied to Bet: “Of course, I will create the world by you, and you shall be the basis of the world!”

Why did the Creator choose none other than the letter *Bet* to create the world? And why does the story advance in the reverse order of the letters? And what does this fascinating Kabbalistic story have to do with us?

THE HIDDEN MEANING OF THE LETTERS

Each of the 22 Hebrew letters alludes to a spiritual revelation that a Kabbalist has experienced. All the various combinations of letters – the words, sentences and phrases found in Kabbalah books – depict the entire spiritual reality that was actually felt by the Kabbalists who wrote these books.

This reality is available to each and every one of us. We can advance up the spiritual path leading to the Creator, gradually expanding our understanding and sensation of the inner (hidden) meaning of each letter. We will then uncover layer after layer of the spiritual reality.

It's a bit like climbing a ladder whose rungs are the letters – the qualities of the spiritual world. However, the Creator is positioned at the top of the ladder, whereas we are positioned at the bottom. That's why The Book of Zohar talks about the letters in reverse order, beginning with *Tav* and ending with *Aleph*: it is telling us, from our perspective, how to climb the spiritual ladder to the Creator, from below upwards.

This brings us to the essence of The Zohar's story about the letters: it isn't talking about the letters at all, but is indeed describing a person's inner, spiritual journey. We begin this journey from a state where we are completely remote from sensing the Creator (represented by the last letter of the alphabet – *Tav*). Then, step by step, we go through all the letters (spiritual states) until finally arriving at the full revelation of the Creator's attitude to us: an attitude of perfect love and wholeness (represented by the letter *Bet*).

When we attain this spiritual state, we discover the Creator's love towards us and gain the ability to love Him. Through this newly acquired attitude, we ascend to none other than the level of the Creator Himself.

At that point, we discover one more letter – the letter *Aleph*, which stands at the head of the alphabet.

CHANGE YOUR PERCEPTION, NOT YOUR NAME

Names, words and phrases are combinations of letters, and hence they, too, depict various discernments and degrees of the Creator's attitude toward us. More specifically, they are various degrees of the revelation of His attitude to a person.

The order and connections between the letters in a word or a sentence form a path of alternating spiritual feelings. They are descriptions of how these feelings alternate and replace one another within a person moving up the spiritual ladder toward the Creator. If we keep this hidden meaning of the letters in mind, then reading a Kabbalistic text turns into a real spiritual experience, a true entrance into the spiritual world.

This brings us back to the question of names and their meanings. In Kabbalah, a person's name is determined by the spiritual level he has reached. As we move closer to the Creator, revealing His attitude more and more, we reveal different orders and combinations of the letters. Therefore, our “names” will continuously change according to our spiritual attainment.

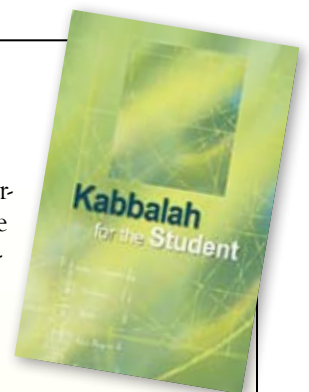
And only at the highest spiritual level does one attain one's real name. This is very different from changing our names “artificially” in an attempt to improve our luck. If we really want to change the course of our lives for the better, and to discover our ideal names, then we must climb the spiritual ladder and broaden our spiritual perception. There, in the spiritual world, we are sure to find the names we seek.

FROM KABBALAH FOR THE STUDENT THE SPIRITUAL LADDER

The wisdom of Kabbalah is divided into two parallel orders, which are identical like two drops in a pond. The only difference between them is that the first order extends from Above downwards, to this world, and the second order traverses from below upwards, precisely by the same routes and make-ups imprinted at the root when they appeared from Above downwards. ...

A revelation of Godliness does not appear at once, but gradually, over a period of time, depending on the cleansing of the attaining, until one discovers all the degrees from Above downwards. And because they come in an order of attainment, one after the other and one above the other, as do rungs of a ladder, they are called “degrees” (steps).

Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), *The Essence of the Wisdom of Kabbalah*



SNEAK-A-PEEK

“...with regard to the souls, all generations since the beginning of Creation to the end of correction are as one generation whose life has extended over several thousand years, until it developed and became corrected as it should be.”

Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), *The Peace*

by Chaim Ratz

From Plato to John Lennon, many great minds have envisioned a perfect society where there is no poverty, war, hatred, exploitation, crime or racism, and everyone lives in peace and harmony.

Today, however, one would need a super-sized portion of Don Quixote naiveté to continue holding on to such dreams.

Are we living in an era devoid of utopian dreams? An era of no hope, no bright future glimmering on the horizon? Not necessarily. From Kabbalah's perspective, this time is the perfect setting for a fundamental shift to take place.

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE FUTURE

“We have been lost in a terrible desert along with all mankind, and now we have found a great, abundant treasure that fulfills our yearning souls and fills us abundantly with lushness and content. Yet the memory of our friends left hopelessly in the terrible desert remains deep within our hearts... For that reason, we have set up this horn to blow loudly so that our brothers may hear and draw near and be as happy as we.”

(Kabbalist Baal HaSulam, “Building the Future Society”)

In this verse, written 60 years ago, Kabbalist Baal HaSulam speaks of the ideological “drought” of our era. He states that it is high time to explain the laws and principles of a properly functioning society – one founded on spiritual principles. Such a society will have inner harmony among its members, as well as harmony with all of Nature around it, because it will be founded on mutual bestowal – the principal law of Nature.

His descriptions do not come from an imagined vision, a poetic idea, or a romantic fantasy. Nor were they derived through philosophic reasoning or a cunning historical analysis. A Kabbalist is one who has revealed the spiritual world – the full picture of reality, and hence has a bird's eye view of humanity's development.

Just as Baal HaSulam accurately saw and described the events that would occur during the 1940s (including World War II and Nazi regimes) as well as today's turmoil, he also saw what our world will be like in its Last Generation. And despite any images of “utopian dreams” his words may elicit in us, they are actu-



A REQUIEM FOR UTOPIAN DREAMS

As we watch the American Dream of a successful, prospering free market vanish before our eyes, it's no wonder that our faith in change has withered, as well. And yet, the future looks much brighter from a Kabbalist's bird's eye view

ally based on practical experience and a most rational approach.

A SPRINGBOARD TO THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

“We find the opportunity to look at the conditions of life in the last generation - the time of world peace. People will use only the form of bestowal and not at all the form of reception. And it is good to follow this form of life so it will serve us as a lesson and a model to settle our minds under the flood of the waves of our lives.”

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

What is so good and unique about a society that's based on spiritual principles, a society whose biggest value is to change the egoistic aspirations and intentions that drive us by nature, to those hitherto unknown to us – bestowal to our fellow man? A society that enables us to give up the endless concern for ourselves by surrounding us with thousands of people who will take care of our needs?

Kabbalists have a name for this familial, warm relationship between the members of a society: “Mutual Guarantee.” This is the magical tool that enables each individual to break out of the mundane existence to a new dimension, and there to discover a completely different level of perception.

And what makes this society different

from other utopias, which have failed time and time again? The fundamental difference is that “the Last Generation” Baal HaSulam speaks of isn't a goal in and of itself, but is simply a means, a “springboard” to the spiritual world.

THE ALTERNATIVE

While the perfect society outlined by Baal HaSulam may seem unrealistic in our day and age, we must ask: Do we really have any alternative? It is clear that humanity is rapidly advancing toward a very shaky future. The banking crisis,

which started in the U.S. and spread to the whole world, has proven for the thousandth time that the Butterfly Effect is much more than a cliché. With every passing year, we gain greater insight into our absolute connection with each other. We gradually discover that we members of the human race are similar to the cells of one body. And what other way is there for cells in a body to interact, if not as Baal HaSulam describes in the Last Generation?

The only remedy for our condition must be general or global, and the model of the Last Generation is designed exactly for this purpose, founded on the reality of our global interdependence and interconnection. It accounts for the fact that the only way for us to succeed and prosper is by living as cells of one body – by the principle of mutual bestowal.

The Last Generation will be like a family whose members divide the common burden among them and invest their best efforts in the common good. Every member of the family has a role, and one is not rewarded for working more hours by getting more food. Rather, the spiritual principle that guarantees equality to all is that everyone aspires to invest the best effort possible to benefit society, and correspondingly, everyone's essential needs will be fulfilled.

The basic principle for the members of a family – and the society of the Last Generation – is the idea of bestowal to the fellow man, where the opportunity to give is the highest reward in and of itself. Why so? Because giving to others makes one equal to Nature at Its highest level.



“...one must reveal his love of his friends to them, for this revelation will also awaken his friends’ love of the others. This results in a further amplification of the love...”

Kabbalist Baruch Shalom Ashlag (Rabash), *The Need for Love of Friends*

HOW TO CATCH A CASE OF “HAPPY”



Mankind has been engaged in the pursuit of happiness for thousands of years, but it still eludes most of us. What can bring us to this longed-for state of well-being, pleasure, contentment, and joy, and help us stay there?

by Keren Applebaum

Experts from Harvard and the University of California at San Diego have just released the results of a 20-year study of happiness, revealing that happiness is... well, contagious. That’s right – just like you can catch a cold from your friends, you can catch a case of “happy!”

In an article called “The Happiness Effect,” *Time Magazine* summarizes this groundbreaking research that has caused a sensation: “Christakis and Fowler explored the emotional state of nearly 5,000

people and the more than 50,000 social ties they shared. ... That led to their intriguing finding of just how contagious happiness can be: if a subject’s friend was happy, that subject was 15% more likely to be happy too; if that friend’s friend was happy, the original subject was 10% more likely to be so. Even if the subject’s friend’s friend – entirely unknown to the subject – was happy, the subject still got a 5.6% boost.”

As it turns out, Kabbalists have known and used this “happiness effect” for thou-

sands of years. But Kabbalah goes much further than analyzing the statistics: it states that we have the ability to mutually “infect” (or energize) each other with happiness in such a way that everyone in the world will be 100% happy!

“But,” you will rightly object, “How can we infect each other with happiness if most of us don’t feel much of it?” That’s no excuse, because there is another technique used by Kabbalists that science has now caught on to, as well: just by forcing yourself to smile (artificially), not only will you instantly feel happier, but others will perceive your smile as real. This will, in turn, make them feel happier and more joyful, and the joy will come right back to you through someone else. If all of us participate in this game of “fake it until you make it,” before we know it, the happiness epidemic will spread to every corner of the world!

SOMETHING GREATER THAN HAPPINESS?

But the wisdom of Kabbalah doesn’t stop there. It tells us that this technique of “infecting” one another with feelings and emotions has even greater potential. That’s right: greater than being able to provide sustainable happiness for all the people in the world. It can actually elevate us all to a new level of perception, one that is above time and space, and beyond our temporal physical lives. This is, in fact, what Kabbalah is all

about – helping us reveal the Upper Dimension of our existence. This dimension is called “the Upper World” – a world that’s infinite, eternal and perfect in every sense, a reality where we all love and care for each other like family members.

Just as it is possible for us all to attain the feeling of sustainable happiness – a goal that is seemingly unattainable at first – so it is possible to attain the Upper World, the sensation of true eternity, unity amongst all of us, and perfection. How?

Obviously, we start out without feeling these things at all, or even having an idea of what they are. But while we still don’t feel them or even realize how great they really are, we can start infecting (energizing) each other with the feeling that *it’s extremely important and worthwhile to attain this higher perception*. We artificially rise (or pretend to rise) above our current perception, cultivating the new spiritual perception among us.

When we are playing this game of a “spiritual perception,” then just like an artificial smile eventually makes us and others happy, the new spiritual perception actually starts to emerge in us.

HARNESSING THE LAWS OF NATURE

Besides teaching us how to use the laws of nature, Kabbalah gives us precise, scientific explanations of how they work. It tells us that the prime agent of change (whether we are talking about mood or the spiritu-

al perception) is our *desire* to reach a better state or higher level of development. This desire evokes something called “Upper Light” – a sort of energy that comes from that future state, from the higher level to which we aspire.

For example, when children desire to be grown-up, they imitate grown-ups and that’s how they grow. Unknowingly, they draw a higher energy – higher because it comes from the next degree of development. This energy comes to them because they desire to reach the next level. This principle works in our world, just as in the Upper World. (“Upper” meaning our next, more advanced state that already exists within us in potential, rather than something found “somewhere out there.” It’s just like an adult potentially exists in a child.)

This is the only method to advance from one degree of our development to the next. Even when we observe the dynamics of growth in vegetative or animate organisms, we witness the same principle: the negation of one’s current state and the desire for the next state are the driving force for change and growth.

Hence, Kabbalah teaches us about real forces of nature, and more important, about how to use them to attain happiness. But beyond the regular notion of happiness, we can attain an unbounded, spiritual perception of joy that will last forever, even when we “die” (physically), because we will feel the eternal part inside each and every one of us. Now *that’s* real happiness!

EXTRAS



A GAME IS A SERIOUS AFFAIR

We are all parts of one whole, but our egoism divides it into separate, disconnected fragments. By desiring to restore this mosaic, I connect with all those who also seek unity, and with our efforts we draw upon us the force that operates in the whole. This force corrects us and binds us together. In doing this, we become similar to Nature.

When we are inside a group of people who aspire to unite, we have to express a warm attitude toward

our friends, even if we don’t actually feel it. We are playing against each other, and together we are playing against our egoism. We have to do everything possible to confuse our egoism and conquer it. This game is not a deceit, but a serious affair that enables us to develop.

From Kabbalist Baruch Ashlag’s article, “About Love of Friends” (Essay 3, 1984)

“...this world seems to us like an open shop without an owner, where anyone who passes through may receive as much as he wishes, free of any charge. However, although you cannot see any shopkeeper here, there is a shopkeeper...”

Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), *The Peace*



How has greedy Scrooge been able to maintain his popularity with young and old, rich and poor, and across all nationalities for over one hundred years? Maybe it's because we can all see our own reflection in him? Or perhaps it's because his story stirs our desire for personal transformation?

by **Riggan Shilstone**

One of the most enduring characters in literature is Ebenezer Scrooge, the stingy, greedy, cold-hearted financier in Charles Dickens' classic tale, who devoted his entire life to the accumulation of wealth. "Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!" the story begins. And although we love to hate Scrooge, there is something none of us care to admit: deep down, this description applies to all of us in one way or another. We all want good things to come our way.

Not all of us may be obsessed with money, like Scrooge, but there are a myriad of other delights that can tempt us: respect, knowledge, power, or even the warm feeling that comes from being a "good" person. The only problem is that, just like Scrooge, many of us get these rewards at others' expense. The great Kabbalist, Baal HaSulam, sums

it all up in the article, "Peace in the World," with these words: "The nature of each and every individual is to exploit the lives of all other people in the world for his own benefit." Thus, Scrooge both appeals to us and repels us because he has become a master at the craft of self profit.

IT'S TIME TO FACE THE SCROOGE WITHIN US

Until now, it was easy closing our eyes to the fact that "Scrooge" is sitting inside all of us. After all, we have managed quite well in this manner for thousands of years. But the current financial crisis is bringing us face to face with our real nature, and sounds the alarm bell that we must now go through a transformation. For Scrooge, that transformation begins when his deceased partner, Marley, pays him a visit. Marley comes to warn Scrooge about the stark future ahead of him if he continues his miserable ways.

After Marley's departure, Scrooge is visited by three Ghosts who show him his past, present and probable future. Slowly but surely, Scrooge is forced to open his eyes to what he is and the impact he has had on those around him. He looks back on his miserable childhood and sees that despite his entire life of accumulation, there were just a few, brief sparks of love and kindness that filtered into his life.

But the Ghost of the Present soon turns Scrooge's attention away from himself, forcing him to consider the rest of humanity. Amidst all the bounty of the holiday season, the Ghost throws back his robes to reveal two children - a boy and a girl - "wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable." These children - Ignorance and Want - are the by-products of the excess Scrooge has "enjoyed" - although clearly, he has never really gotten any real enjoyment out of it. Why not?

Kabbalah explains that all that we receive beyond our necessities transforms inside us into greater emptiness and expands our desire for fulfillment to a level we can never fulfill. Hence, we become even more zealous in our pursuit of excessive and unnecessary fulfillment. And the more we take for ourselves, the less we leave for others. This is the root of the problem that created those two children with all their misery.

Today, we are also receiving a visit from the Ghost of the Present, who is forcing us to confront the consequences of our nature. But this time, the Ghost is named, "the Global Financial Crisis."

I AM NOT THE MAN I WAS!

By the end of the visitations, Scrooge can no longer stand himself. He issues a heartfelt plea: "Spirit! he cried, tightly clutching at its robe, 'Hear me. I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this

intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?'" We, too, are hopeless (or helpless) to change our nature. But Kabbalah tells us that it can be done with the help of an "Upper Force," if only we issue a "perfect prayer."

In plain English, this means that we must reach an inner realization that we cannot continue to live the way we have been, and that we refuse to put up with our egoistic nature any longer. At that point, we will immediately be transformed by virtue of an "Upper Force," which means that our future, more developed and altruistic state, will be revealed within us in response to our inner request.

Scrooge's prayer is answered. He wakes up a new man, full of consideration and compassion for others. As Dickens concludes: "Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more ... He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world."

Kabbalah tells us that in order to build a secure, prosperous, peaceful, and happy world, we must reach the spiritual degree of "Love thy neighbor as thy self." This means that we will be more concerned about the well-being of others than our own, as Baal HaSulam writes in the aforementioned article: "The place that needs correction is for each and every individual to understand that his personal benefit and the benefit of the society are one and the same. This is how the world will attain its full correction."

Right now, while we haven't yet gone through the transformation, it may seem paradoxical that the more we focus on fulfilling others, the more fulfilled we will be - but this is what will occur. Then, the phrase "Bah! Humbug!" will be eliminated from our vocabulary.

FROM HORSES TO SPACECRAFT: A FASCINATING CONNECTION

There's an amusing story circulating around the internet. Some call it a "fable," while others call it a "history lesson." We leave it to the experts to decide how much of it is fact and how much is fiction. One way or another, it touches on a very Kabbalistic notion: **everything** is interconnected.

There are two engines on the new state of the art space shuttle, each engine five-feet wide. Although the space shuttle's engineers wanted to

make the engines wider, they couldn't. That's because the engines were delivered by railroad, and the distance between the rails was only five feet.

Here's why: The American-made railroad was modeled after the British model, and in Great Britain the railroad was modeled after its trolleys, which were modeled after horse-trams. The width of the horse-trams was designed so the wheels would fall into tracks, and the distance

between the tracks in Great Britain is five feet.

And that's because the roads in Great Britain were paved by the Romans to fit the size of their military chariots, which were five feet wide. And that's because the chariots were led by two horses and this was the width of two horses' behinds!

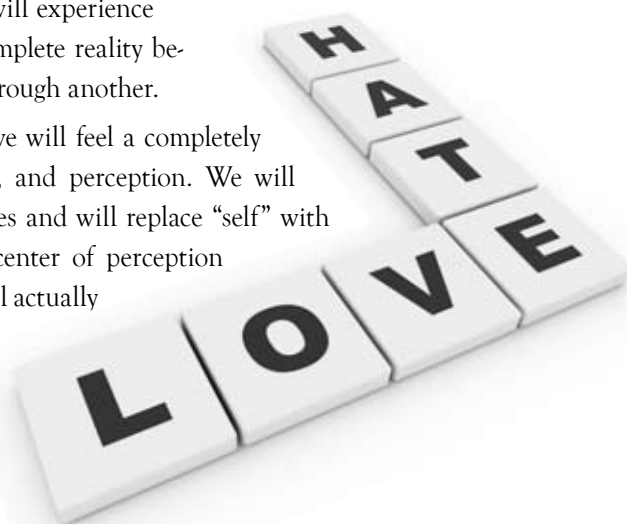
So the size of the spacecraft's engines today actually goes back to the size of a horse's behind 2,000 years ago!

THE THIN LINE BETWEEN LOVE AND HATE

In an article called, "Scientists prove it really is a thin line between love and hate," Steve Connor, editor of *The Independent*, reports: "Scientists studying the physical nature of hate have found that some of the nervous circuits in the brain responsible for it are the same as those that are used during the feeling of romantic love – although love and hate appear to be polar opposites ... the 'hate circuit' shares something in common with the love circuit."

Actually, Kabbalah goes even further and explains that love and hate differ only by one's intention: Is it aimed towards self-benefit or another's benefit? In other words, if we love for our own benefit, meaning that we care for the object of love only because it provides us pleasure, then it doesn't differ very much from hate. On the other hand, if we truly try to acquire the feeling of love, the intention of benefiting others, we will experience a much broader and more complete reality because we will feel the world through another.

There, beyond ourselves, we will feel a completely different flow of time, space, and perception. We will cease to perceive only ourselves and will replace "self" with "other." By transferring the center of perception from within to without, we will actually begin to perceive the Upper World – a sensation of boundless fulfillment and the all-inclusive flow of life.



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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 world-wide 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

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Printing: Eugene Levit

Published by

Bnei Baruch Association
PO Box 1552
Ramat Gan 52115, Israel
E-mail: info@kabbalah.info
Web: www.kabbalah.info
Telephone: +972-3-9226723
Fax: +972-3-9226741

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