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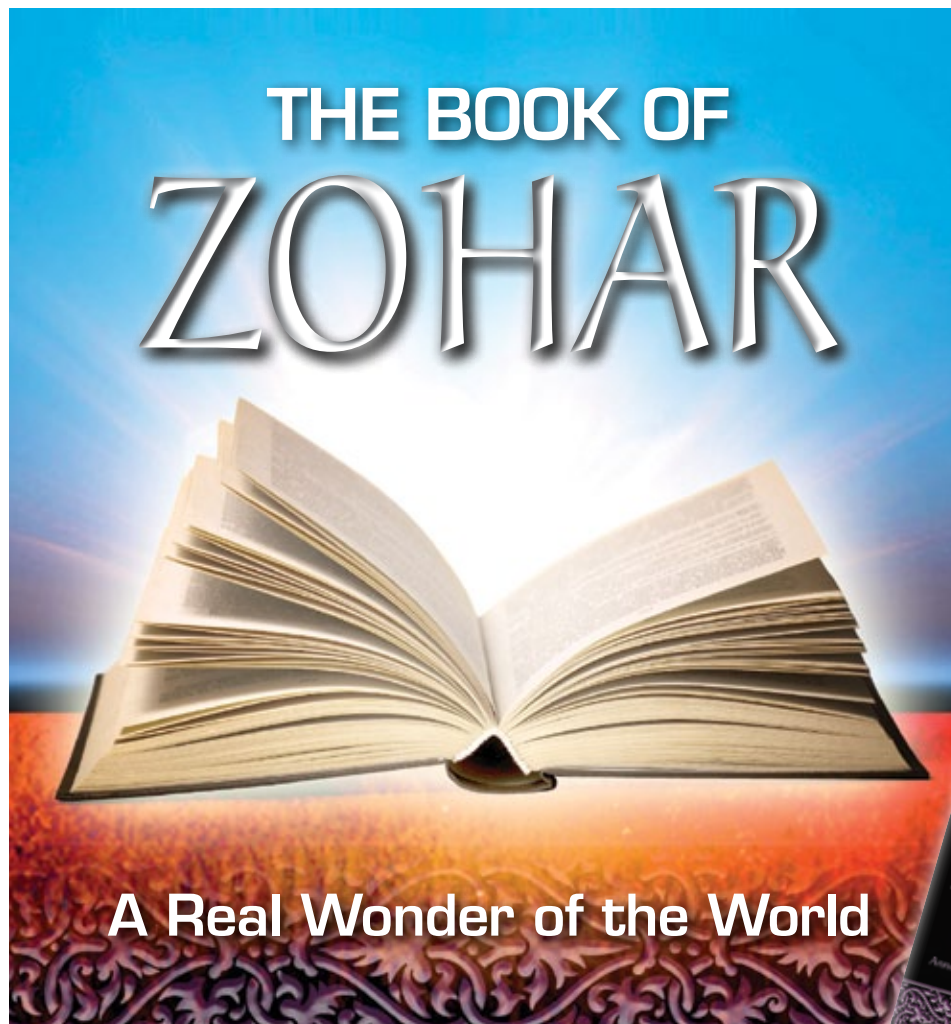
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by Dr. Gene Shklover and Al Shpaner

The seven wonders of the ancient world, the medieval world, and the modern world... the lists keep piling up. People have always been fascinated by manmade structures that please their eyes, give them some enigmatic flavor and make them proud of belonging to the human race.

If someone told you that there is one wonder that everyone had overlooked and it is a book, incredulously you would say, "C'mon, a book? It can't be a wonder of the world."

The Book of Zohar—for millennia this book has mesmerized the minds of old and young, religious and atheists, philosophers and academics, and interest in it just keeps growing. In fact, the keyword "Zohar" is one of the most popular searches on the Internet. So, what is inside this book? What is so special about these ancient Aramaic and Hebrew texts that makes people hold their breath and then say, "Wow!"?

A RIVER OF LIGHT

"Zohar" in Hebrew means Splendor, Radiance, or Light. For the poet in us, the text of *The Book of Zohar* can be likened to a river flowing out of the Garden of Eden and through a person's heart. Anyone who opens his heart will be washed by its waters, will be cleansed and will begin to see.

We often hear that Kabbalah is *The Zohar*. Why? The matter is that this book was written in a very special style, which places us into a multi-dimensional space and walks us through it. While it tells us fables and stories on the outside, at the same time it gradually immerses us in a hidden reality, called the Upper World. It attracts us with its intricate, unusual tales and draws us inside. As we become inspired by it, we gradually enter the Upper World.

Certainly, to grasp the spirit of this book that was written two thousand years ago, we have to aspire and be intrigued. We have to develop a certain sensitivity and comprehension to be able to tune into the people who wrote *The Zohar*.

The men who wrote *The Zohar* were a group of ten great Kabbalists led by the famous Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (RASHBI). These ten men who gathered in a special place, in a special time, represented through their inner, spiritual qualities the "ten *Sefirot*"—the ten founding blocks of creation. They were able to come down from the enormous height of their spiritual attainment to our simple human level in order to explain such concepts that theoretically we are unable to grasp. They lure us with their fables, and like kids who mature from listening to tales, so do we develop from reading this text. With time, we gradually begin feeling the Upper World because a wondrous quality called "the Upper Light" shines upon us as we read.

This wonderful quality of the Light is simply miraculous. People who begin reading this book immediately feel its magnetic radiance, which draws them back to it time and time again. They can read and re-read it multiple

times throughout their entire lives. It always renews their impressions and never becomes boring. *The Zohar* becomes like a breath of air, which they just need to get. They continuously yearn for those inner changes which they experience while engaged in reading *The Zohar*.

PARALLEL WORLDS

The uniqueness of *The Zohar* is that it creates for us a projection of the Upper World to our world. It was written in two spoken languages of Ancient Babylon: Hebrew and Aramaic. These two languages represent two levels of perception. One language narrates stories in images of our familiar world, while the other takes us into the spiritual dimension, revealing to us two worlds one parallel to the other. It tells us stories about this world and in parallel it tells us about its source in the Upper World, thus drawing an image of one world overlaying the other.

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“Light gives of itself freely, filling all available space. It does not seek anything in return; it asks not whether you are friend or foe. It gives of itself and is not thereby diminished.”

Michael Strassfeld

▶ continued from page 1

We then find ourselves between two worlds—the one we are very familiar with and another one that we cannot perceive, but somehow feel that it’s there. However, this image of two worlds exists only in our imagination. In actuality, it is one complete picture, which we still perceive as two.

In our world, images are visual and we see, feel, and understand them. But images in the Upper World reflect attributes like qualities, forces, desires and intentions. To start experiencing them together we need to imagine ourselves on that spiritual level, place ourselves there, and live through the state where we exist simultaneously in these two dimensions.

To experience this fascinating spiritual journey we need to imagine that *The Zohar* is telling us about ourselves and the spiritual states we are going through. We have to be so “thirsty” for this experience that we feel like an empty well. Then, by simply following the text, letting the text flow through us, and trying to feel the picture that *The Zohar* is drawing for us, we will begin touching and feeling the Upper World, thus getting closer to our birth in the Spiritual World.

Now, isn’t that a real wonder of the world?



by Jon Currie

Lights. Lights. Lights. It seems that this time of year there are lights everywhere. And it is no coincidence that virtually every society and every religion has some form of light festival going on right about now. There is Christmas for most of the Western world. There is Chanukah for Israel and Jews everywhere. There is Diwali for Hindus, Chaharshanbe Suri in Iran, and countless more religious and secular festivals of light everywhere.

Twinkling lights adorn trees both indoors and out, and buildings everywhere are spotted with clear and colored lights during the

holiday season. There are lights decorating Christmas trees, candle lights of the Menorah lighting up house windows for Chanukah, Diwali lamps glowing and fireworks erupting in the streets, bonfires of Chaharshanbe Suri blazing, and many more.

The typical wisdom behind this is either a) a coincidence or b) because the nights get longer and darker and the ancients wanted to bring back the sun. But if we look a bit deeper, we will find that the need for lights and light is actually rooted into the psyche and DNA of mankind. Kabbalah explains that we love having lights all around us

because we long for the Light—a metaphor for a sensation of Nature’s benevolence. For us, the experience of Nature on its highest level can only be described as spiritual Light. And the holiday season brings out the need in all of us to feel closer to that Light.

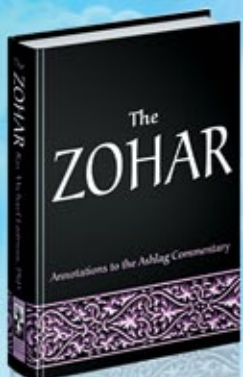
In the end, it doesn’t matter if you light a Menorah, put up a tree, or have a bonfire. At the heart of the matter is the fact that deep inside, you are celebrating the goodness of Nature and your inner yearning to bring that extra bit of Light and happiness into this world. And that is a very good thing indeed.

‘Tis the Season to be jolly by the light of the Yule log, or as we spin our dreidel, or light the fireworks of Diwali, or as we eat sweets for our Iranian New Year. It’s one world we live in after all, and a very small one at that. We all have different holidays and traditions, but to Nature, we are all the same, like one small family.

So look up at the Northern Lights or the lights on Broadway and give a good cheer to your fellow men and women, starting this holiday season and ending never. If we only stop to feel Nature’s kind attitude toward all of us, we will notice how it is urging us to treat each other with the same good spirit of kindness, consideration, and Love.

The text of The ZOHAR is a journey deep into the soul ...

When we delve into this book time after time, trying to unite, the book reveals itself to us and illuminates us with its Light.



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“Good actions give strength to ourselves and inspire good actions in others.”

Plato

by Annabelle Fogerty-Scahill

The smell of pine and cinnamon and the taste of peppermint evoke memories of waiting anxiously for Santa Claus. Those warm memories of childhood linger into adulthood, but the holiday season is no longer just a time of giving and getting presents, eating delicious meals, and enjoying pleasant sights and smells.

HOLIDAY STRESS

The American Psychological Association found in a 2006 survey that nearly half of all American women experience heightened stress during the holiday season. From November to January, the already overburdened modern women strive to uphold the holiday traditions by buying presents, sending cards, and cooking miraculous holiday meals, all while holding a job, taking care of a family, and maintaining a home.

Men share in the anxiety at least as much, since they are often put into the hot seat to finance the added expenses of the holiday season and to deal with the resulting debt come January. The heightened pressure brings out our worst habits as we try to cope with the stress by overeating, drinking alcohol, and other unhealthy behaviors which could have long term effects on our mental and physical health.

OVERSIZED EXPECTATIONS

Experts agree that the undeniable cause of holiday stress is the oversized expectations and disproportioned focus on material consumption. According to



Beth Willinger, research professor at Newcomb College Center for Research on Women at Tulane University, “We have become much more complex and complicated as a society, and expectations have increased. Our expectations as a country have also raised our expectations for overabundance and conspicuous consumption.” It is our expectations that fuel a rash of overspending, debt, and more stress.

So why do we continue in this cycle? According to Kabbalah—a science that studies our innermost motivations, our expectations have gone out of control

because our desires have increased. But when a desire increases, so does the emptiness that is felt when the desire is not fulfilled. And everyone knows that a feeling of emptiness is intolerable.

Adding to our stress level is the fact that the desire for overabundance has not lessened even with the current economic climate, yet our ability to fulfill that desire has. Unemployment has reached its highest level in 15 years, holiday bonuses are down two-thirds, and even those of us lucky to keep our jobs are often working longer hours and are usually making less money. We

just can’t afford to fulfill our oversized desires and expectations.

WHAT DO WE REALLY WANT?

Clearly, something has to change. When people’s expectations and desires can no longer be fulfilled, it’s a sure indication that people must reach for a new kind of fulfillment. After all, what do we *really* want for the holidays? Our holiday traditions come from our human need for connection; what we really want during this special season is to feel high-spirited, festive, joyful, and connected to those around us. So it’s logical that money and the material things it can buy should not be the centerpiece of the celebration, as much as we might have lost sight of that fact.

THE REAL GIFT

The real gift of the holiday season lies in our interpersonal connections. But more than that, these relationships can actually help us overcome our emotional and financial crises in the longer term.

No one can lift themselves out of emptiness, stress, and bankruptcy alone; we can only lift each other. This holiday season, instead of giving ourselves more anxiety and debt, we can give each other the camaraderie and consideration that we all really need. We can raise each other’s spirits and give each other good impressions that will last much longer than a fruitcake or a Big Lot’s gift card. And it is a gift that only gets better with re-gifting.

“There is a wonderful, invaluable remedy to those who engage in the wisdom of Kabbalah ... They awaken upon themselves the Lights that surround their souls ... The illumination received time after time during the engagement draws upon one grace from above, imparting abundance of sanctity and purity, which bring one much closer to perfection.”

—From the “Introduction to The Study of the Ten Sefirot”
by Yehuda Ashlag, Baal HaSulam

“Singing is the song, the call of the soul, that contains the entire Upper Light. The song to which the Upper and the lower ones in all the worlds awaken.”

Baal HaSulam

by **Riggan Shilstone**

Much like a music teacher opens the world of music, the study of Kabbalah opens a new world—the infinite spiritual world

In recent years, millions of people have become interested in Kabbalah. I began my journey almost four years ago after being inspired by Kabbalistic music. This medium of expression has played an important role in my life since childhood, and unexpectedly, it now helped me understand this wisdom known as “Kabbalah.”

Music has been called the “international language,” but is it really that simple? I was a child of the 60’s, comfortable with the simple melodies and harmonies of the Beatles, Gordon Lightfoot, and Peter, Paul and Mary. I had no interest in any other genre, and dreaded the annual school field trip to the symphony hall. But as an adult, I decided to study classical music, found a piano teacher, and spent hours every day practicing.

Today, it’s hard for me to believe that there was a time when I did not love Bach or appreciate the dissonance of Stravinsky or that I existed 40 years without feeling an urge for opera. Even later, I found I could listen to and enjoy the rap music my son brought home! So what was it that changed?

EVERYTHING IS IN THE EAR OF THE BEHOLDER

Tracing back the steps, my course must have been determined when I began studying piano. My teacher’s unabashed excitement and love for classical music simply rubbed off on me. Soon enough, under her tutelage I began to hear patterns and forms that were the very foundations of music. What was hidden before gradually became clear to me, as if materializing out of a fog.

How did she coax my initial interest in music into a passion equal to hers? She started me with Mozart and Beethoven—music whose tunes and harmonies could be appreciated on the surface, even by my uneducated ear. Working from there, she led me deeper and showed me the subtleties that I missed, opening my ears and mind to new possibilities in the music.



We played music, broke it apart and analyzed it, and I listened to her exquisite explanations with awe. As I became more sensitive to the subtleties, we began to go further afield—entering into the world of fugues, atonal harmonies, and strange intervals.

OPENING A NEW WORLD

Years later, when I first heard the music of Kabbalah, my experienced ear immediately sensed that it had come across something entirely new and different—again! I couldn’t quite put my finger on it, but I somehow sensed that there was an infinite depth of meaning and emotion to be revealed if only I would explore this music more deeply. And it was only later, after I did delve into it, that I realized that there was even more: Kabbalah is a methodology of opening us to a totally new world that we do not sense today, just as my piano teacher opened a new world of music for me.

The difference is that when learning about classical music for the first time, I already possessed the sensory apparatus (ears) I needed for studying music. In Kabbalah, however, we not only need to develop an appreciation of the forms and objects of what is termed the “spiritual world,” we must also develop a new “sense” to be able to perceive them.

The path of Kabbalah begins with a new desire. Usually, it is expressed through questions such as, “What is the meaning of life?” and “Why am I here?” Once this desire awakens, we have the motivation to do something about it—to find something to fulfill this desire. That is how we find our way to the books of Kabbalah—an extensive library of materials left to us by Kabbalists throughout the centuries, explaining the spiritual worlds.

These great men have gone before us and entered the spiritual worlds. Their writings tell us exactly how they got there and what they found in this new state. The books form a bridge for us to do the same.

If you try to read Kabbalistic texts such as *The Zohar*, however, you will discover a world of strangeness and mystery. The gulf between our world today and the world that the Kabbalists are telling us about is too vast for us to navigate without assistance.

Just as my piano teacher led me through the maze of music appreciation, a teacher of authentic Kabbalah can show us how to interpret these texts. By starting with concepts we can relate to in some small manner, we can gradually build an awareness and appreciation of the spiritual concepts. In so doing, we actually develop a new sense that will eventually be capable of perceiving this new world.

EXPERIENTIAL STUDY

Just as in music, we must eventually dive into this new world ourselves. I could have been satisfied with becoming an expert in music theory, but I wanted to feel the music, not just understand it. The same is true with Kabbalah.

There are many “experts” who can tell you the structure of the spiritual world in infinite detail, but that is not what Kabbalah is about. Even more than music, it is an experiential study.

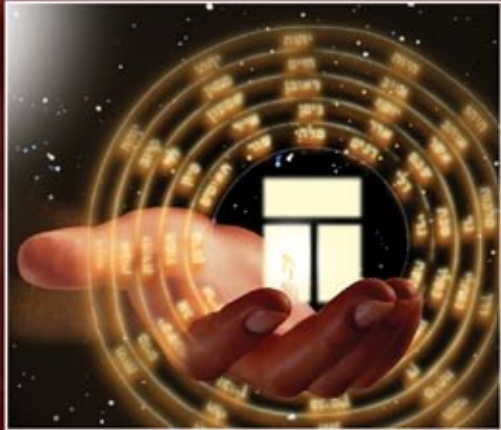
As we read text or listen to the beautiful music of Kabbalah, what we are really studying is ourselves and our inner world. Unless we feel these concepts within, we have accomplished nothing. The Kabbalists left us the map and instructions, but it is up to us to make the journey.





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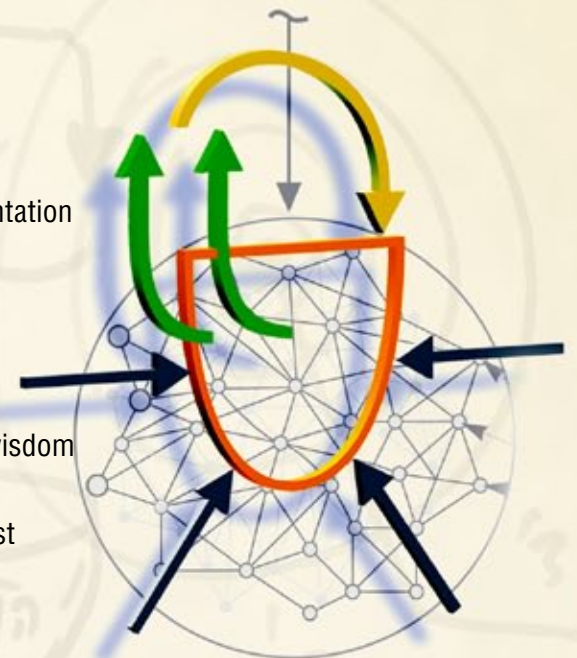
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ABOUT THE BNEI BARUCH LEARNING CENTER

In 1991, Dr. Michael Laitman, established Bnei Baruch for studying, teaching, and disseminating authentic Kabbalah. Bnei Baruch (Sons of Baruch) is named in memory of his mentor, Kabbalist Baruch Ashlag, son and successor of Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag, Baal HaSulam, (Owner of the Ladder) author of *The Sulam Commentary on the Book of Zohar*.



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“Great hearts steadily send forth the secret forces that incessantly draw great events.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson



WOMEN, IF YOU ONLY KNEW ...

by **Dr. Gene Shklover**

The power of women's desire can fuel the change needed to bring the entire world to perfection, joy, and peace

The more humanity develops, the more complicated and unpredictable our lives become. And as usual, the most difficult part falls on the shoulders of the most beautiful part of humanity.

According to the World Health Organization, about twice as many women (20-26%) as men (8-12%) are affected by a depressive disorder each year. Despite the fact that women have achieved freedom, high social status, and equality, they, in growing numbers, still feel psychologically empty and insecure in life.

At the same time, women comprise the greater and, arguably, stronger part of humanity. In fact, they are the driving force that inspires and pushes men to commit heroic and noble deeds. It's no wonder that there is a saying, "God wants whatever woman wants."

So, what happened to that beautiful inspirer about whom numerous poems and songs were written, and who was a devotee of incredible victories and conquests? What happened to that tender, warm, and reliable keeper of the "family hearth"?

However, it isn't just women who have changed. "Men are not the same as they once were," say women, mothers, and wives. In fact, the whole world is not the same. In the modern reality, women have to worry about taking care of things they never had to before: how to earn income together with bringing up children, how to avoid wars and economic troubles, and so on. Struggling to find a balance between all these social and personal challenges while not sensing a strong, supportive man's shoulder, women are becoming more independent and adopting more roles traditionally ascribed to men. Sometimes they even forget that they are women...

WOMAN, THE INVISIBLE DRIVING FORCE

Yet, the entire world is and has always been driven by women's desires, because women are destined by nature to inspire and to bring meaning into the lives of their special ones. They set goals, they define directions, they direct all thoughts, and by doing this, they draw our common future. Yet, they have somehow lost awareness of their role and destiny and try to do everything themselves.

However, our world is governed by the laws of nature as always, and if we observe closely, we see that on all levels

of existence, no living species can exist, live, or survive by itself. Existence is only possible by complementing the "other half." In other words, each element in nature is always a complementary part to its opposite, and only together can they be complete and perfect. Even on the vegetative level, the division into male and female parts is clearly evident. This "specialization" is enrooted into all things by nature, and it dictates that equilibrium can be reached only if both parts, male and female, correctly interact with each other.

This primal law has been operating in all of reality from the beginning of time, building our world in a strictly defined order, ensuring that the "female" part of reality defines the direction of where everything is going. The same applies in our lives; although in recent times, it seems male and female duties and roles have been mixed up. Yet, by virtue of the very foundation of their female nature, women (unknowingly) are still steering the world through their desires.

Intuition and instincts worked fairly well until the 20th century. But as humanity reached the peak of its egoistic development, instincts were subdued by the ego and started working against us. In the 21st century, our collective ego has culminated to a

height of individualism and separatism. The collective positive connection, now lost, in former eras sustained families, villages, states, and nations. Now, we see the very nucleus of human existence, the family, in disarray, as evidenced by the high incidence of divorce, drug use, and depression, all of which exacerbate women's feelings of emptiness.

This heightened and growing emptiness, we are also finding, can no longer be fulfilled by the regular material "stuff" we used to buy or do. Humanity is beginning to realize that the only thing that will fill the emptiness is eternal spiritual fulfillment. Women's emptiness is also the tool we can use to emerge from this current empty state. Women with their desires inherently guiding the world are the critical invisible driving force to steer us all to attaining complete and perfect spiritual fulfillment. Women's desire for spiritual fulfillment will fuel the desperately needed changes for men to naturally enact their part to bring our troubled world to the correct form.

Then our "female" and "male" parts, together in perfect complement, will work in one complete unity that will transcend all of us to the new beautiful reality! ■

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“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

William Butler Yeats

BABY EINSTEIN, IT'S TIME FOR AN EDUCATION UPGRADE!



by **Crystle Medansky**

Today, being a baby Einstein is no longer knowing how to use a TV remote control, but knowing how to push the buttons controlling all of reality...

Threatened with a class action law suit for deceptive practices in claiming that their videos are educational and beneficial for early childhood development, *Disney Company* is offering refunds to millions of parents who purchased *Baby Einstein* videos, or alternatively, they are offering “satisfaction upgrades” to a book or music CD. The offer currently only covers households in the U.S., but British campaigners are pushing for refunds in the UK reporting that they, too, have

collectively purchased millions of Baby Einstein products.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under two. Yet, the electronic media market for babies and toddlers is booming, making screen time more prevalent than ever. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation study found that 68% of children under two years watch screen media on any given day—that is nearly seven in ten children! How did we get here?

LIKE PARENTS, LIKE CHILDREN

It isn't difficult to notice that starting from earliest childhood, every child

naturally strives to imitate his or her parents. Children closely observe their parents' actions and demeanor, and then strive to use this knowledge to achieve their own goals. Through interaction with our children, we help them acquire new capabilities and data, as well as techniques for coping with the world around them.

Survey results confirm that the examples set by adults are the main source of early education. Out of the 68% of children under two years old that watched screen media, only 27% imitated some type of behavior from TV. But 38% can turn on the TV by themselves, and 40% can change channels with the remote. So, our children are not imitating the screen media; they are imitating us!

But that's not all; there is another steady, natural trend that has existed between parents and children for generations. Every new generation is more evolved than the previous. Children always have greater desires, higher aspirations, and bigger dreams than their parents. And so, isn't it our duty and responsibility to provide them with the knowledge and practical tools for realizing their dreams and desires?

In our day and age, when concepts like distance and time have become virtual, this means nothing less than teaching them the rules that govern all of reality, as well as the ultimate purpose for which we were created.

EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

While our children easily manipulate electronic gadgets that didn't exist a few decades ago during our childhoods, and while we mull over the cons and pros of showing them the hottest new “educational video” on the kids' market, we can be certain that there is one wisdom that is sure to guarantee their best future, right at the beginning of their lives.

This wisdom, called Kabbalah, will teach them (and us) about the fundamental laws of all reality, the relationships that are required in today's age, the nature of their desires, and most importantly, the formula for lasting fulfillment. These concepts and principles can be learned through games, music, books, and interactive group activities which are fun and entertaining.

And of course, the best way to teach your child all of these principles is to learn and implement them yourself. It will then come easily and naturally to your children. Let your little ones begin their exploration of the world by setting positive examples and upgrading their education to one befitting of our day and age. What could be better than to show our children right at the beginning of their lives how to guarantee their best future?



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CLASSICAL SCIENCE WILL NEVER DISCOVER THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

A question I received: Physics says the same thing as Kabbalah: that we perceive only a small portion of everything that exists in the physical universe. How are the parts of the physical reality that we don't perceive different from the spiritual world, which we also don't perceive?

My Answer: Scientists are able to create instruments to recognize what we don't perceive with our bodily senses. These instruments enable us to expand our senses, although all the data that we discover using these tools still has to go through our senses and be transformed into a form that we can perceive.

Currently we perceive everything inside the desire to receive, in an egoistic manner, because we are egoists within. Therefore, no matter how many new phenomena we reveal in nature, we will not reveal the spiritual realm because it is based on an altruistic nature. Without changing our egoistic nature, we can only reveal more of our material world.

The spiritual world can only be revealed by changing the method of

how we perceive our surroundings. We have to change our perception from reception to bestowal; then our perception will become altruistic. However, in order to develop this kind of perception, we need a new method of relating to the world.

This is why a completely new science about the world—Kabbalah—is emerging to replace the sciences that examine nature through our egoism. Classical science is now in crisis because it cannot give us anything qualitatively new. People feel oversaturated by the material things because these things no longer fulfill them. That is why people are starting to ask the question: Where do we go from here? The only answer is to shift to a different way of using our desire.

THE BOOK OF ZOHAR IS A TICKET TO THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

A question I received: Why is *The Book of Zohar* so famous?

My Answer: It is common knowledge that *The Book of Zohar* is unique; it is the only book with the power to bring human beings into the spiritual world. This unparalleled mission is what brought this book to

fame and has made humankind have a special relationship to it.

The discovery of the spiritual world using *The Book of Zohar* begins by opening ourselves to the text so it can flow through us easily, completely unobstructed. We can then begin to feel new, spiritual sensations.

As we are reading or listening to this book, we have to expect to feel a new realm that is made up of feelings, but without any fantasies or visual images. We should try to feel the words of this book immediately and directly, as when reading something that is close to us, something we understand and experience as we are immersed in reading the text.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE

A question I received: Why is Kabbalah important?

My Answer: Out of all the things filling up our lives, some are more important and others are less. Every

moment, we change our opinion of what is more important; sometimes we value sleep, other times play or food, and so on. But how do we find the most important thing in life?

It has to be unconditional, infinite, and higher than anything. It has to transcend the boundaries between life and death and fulfill all of our desires, even those we don't even know we have yet. It has to be the highest, most exalted thing in the world, the very peak toward which all things lead.

So how do we find this thing and attain it? How do we reach absolute joy and success here and now?

We can do it through a method called "the wisdom of Kabbalah." That is why this wisdom is so important. We value anything according to how much it benefits us, and if Kabbalah can help us attain everything, this makes it more important than anything else.

Ask the Kabbalist

Ask Your Questions and Find Your Answers at Laitman.com



About Bnei Baruch

Bnei Baruch is a not-for-profit, international organization dedicated to sharing the wisdom of Kabbalah in order to raise humanity's level of spirituality. Bnei Baruch provides individuals of all faiths, religions, and cultures with the precise tools needed to embark on a fascinating journey of self-discovery of the real purpose of life and its attainment.

Bnei Baruch's (Sons of Baruch) founder and president, Kabbalist Dr. Michael Laitman, was the disciple and personal assistant of Kabbalist Baruch Ashlag, son and successor of Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag, Baal HaSulam, author of *The Sulam Commentary on The Book of Zohar*.

Bnei Baruch shares a vast amount of authentic Kabbalah materials (text, video and audio) and study programs, all free of charge.

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