

KABBALAH TODAY



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KABBALAH ICONS

Ashlag's commentary on *The Book of Zohar* and his commentary on the Holy Ari's *The Tree of Life* made him the foremost Kabbalist of the 20th century



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THE OMNIPOTENT MAGICIAN WHO COULD NOT BE ALONE

A tale for grownups

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SKETCHES IN WORDS

Reality is made of Lights and the vessels that receive them. Kabbalah sketches explain how it happens.

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ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Kabbalists reached the top of the spiritual ladder, and declared that there isn't, never was, and never will be any "bad" in reality.

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A GLIMPSE OF RADIANCE

The Book of Zohar is the most mysterious and profound book, describing how one can affect one's fate and that of humanity

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IN 1969, THE BEATLES DECLARED THAT ALL WE NEED IS LOVE, AND THEY WERE RIGHT... KABBALAH SAYS THAT THE ONLY FORCE AND THE ONLY LAW THAT EXISTS IN REALITY IS THE FORCE (OR LAW) OF LOVE.

Photograph by Joe Bennet

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CAMP MOUNT SINAI

"...they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount"

(Exodus 19:2)

RASHI—the great 11th century commentator—explains, *"As one man in one heart."*

by Oren Levi

According to the wisdom of Kabbalah, love is the force that sustains and provides for the whole of creation, keeps its pieces in harmony, and provide life for the bodies and the souls. This is why Kabbalists call this force, "the Creator."

When Kabbalists speak about Mt. Sinai, they are talking about the means to achieve the Creator, the quality of love. In a letter to a student, Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam) explains that according to the Talmud (Shabbat, p. 89a), the word Sinai means *Sina'a* (hatred). To achieve the force of love (the Creator) one must transcend one's natural hatred toward others and become detached from the ego.

The Torah (Pentateuch) tells us that Moses climbed above

the Mount (his ego) and discovered the Creator. Subsequently, he came down and told the children of Israel about his revelation. He said that if all of them

it was at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

In his article, "The Arvut" (The Bond), Baal HaSulam describes the practical side of this mutual love. The article is dedicated not so much to Moses, but to what the people had to do to be worthy of receiving the Torah (law) from Moses. He explains that the love and bonding that the people of Israel created—for which they received the Torah—had a very practical side: they became respon-

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If all of them united as one man in one heart, with a common wish to be in a state of mutual love for one another, they would also unite with the Creator



united as one man in one heart, with a common wish to be in a state of mutual love for one another, they would also unite with the Creator. Once they had done so, the Creator would be within them, revealed, and they would be awarded eternal and complete life, in unity with the Creator.

*As Above,
So Below*

"For I, the Lord, do not change"

(Malachi 3:6)

Nature's spiritual law does not change, just as nature's physical laws do not change. Bonding with mutual love is still a prerequisite to revealing the Creator, as

Editor's Note

Let's Talk about Love

The feature article of this issue, "Love, Love, Love," explains that the Creator is a force of love. It is this force that creates and sustains all life. Once we acquire the ability to truly love, we will find the key to a hidden door—the door to His universe.

"Love is a many-splendor thing," sang The Four Aces back in 1955. Indeed, a person who obtains the quality of love, who loves unreservedly is handsomely rewarded. Such a person bonds with the force that begets all creations, perceives the events and situations in our world at their deepest root, and lives in agreement with the Creator and His creations.

Kabbalah explains that there are two ways to achieve the Creator: a path of pain and a path of Light. Righteous people such as Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, author of *The Book of Zohar*, and Baal HaSulam, author of the most comprehensive commentary on *The Zohar*, explain that by loving others, one can march on the path of Light and experience eternity and bliss while still in this world.

These Kabbalists reveal through books what we would otherwise reveal through our own efforts and pain. By doing so, they introduce us to a path of progress through enlightenment, the path of Light.

In this issue we will try to focus on both the importance of love as a means to achieving eternal life and harmony, and the ways by which we can develop it. There are as many ways to experience love as there are people; but the message of Kabbalah is very clear: if you acquire the quality of love, you have become as eternal and whole as the Creator. ■

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DIRECTLY TO THE CREATOR

In his *Commentary on the Writings*, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (The Ramchal) writes that the name *Ysrael* (Israel) derives from the words *Yashar El* (directly to the Creator). He explains that those who are Israel—who want to reach the Creator—pave the way for all the nations of the world “to enter under the wings of divinity,” that the nations are dependent upon Israel’s implementation of their role.

LOVE, LOVE, LOVE

by Chaim Ratz

In the 1960s, love was the name of the game. Woodstock, Hair, and “make love, not war” sentiments were the models by which we lived. But if even *the law of reality* agrees that love is the name of the game, why didn’t the ideals that attracted us to Woodstock last? Where is the love we were promised?

Love Is Life

Before we find where love went, we need to understand why Kabbalah states that in the whole of reality, there is nothing but love. Just imagine a woman holding her newborn baby in her arms. She gazes down at it, smiles, feeds it when the baby is hungry, and wraps it in blankets to keep it warm. Beneath all her actions is only one energizing force: her love for her baby. This is the law of love.

This seemingly obvious example demonstrates why love is the only force that can create life. What other force could guarantee that parents would care for their offspring, thus securing the continuation of their species? What other force would make certain that existing species have the means to persist and thrive? Evidently, without love, there is no life. This is why Kabbalah says that *Creator, nature, and love* are synonymous.

There is yet another statement that Kabbalists make, derived from the statement that the Creator is love: Because He is good, He created creations

that want to receive His benefits.

According to *The Book of Zohar*, the seminal book of Kabbalah, reality originates from the Creator’s thought to do good, to benefit. *The Zohar* explains that the Creator’s nature is good; hence, so is His will, and hence, so are His thoughts.

And because He wants to do good, He created a world that runs on a desire to receive the benefits He wishes to give. This is why the law, and the force by which the whole of reality operates, is the Creator’s love.

A Mother’s Love

This brings us back to our question: Where is the love we were promised? Where are His benefits? Since the Creator formed our reality, *we are the creations that wish to receive the benefits He wishes to give.*

The mother-and-child example shows us that the love doesn’t exist in the baby (creation), but in the mother (the Creator). She is really the one who is enjoying her love for the baby, and the baby simply exists to enjoy *her* love for it.

And as cute as babies are, being a baby isn’t life’s purpose. Babies don’t remain babies, but grow up, become adults, and develop their own abilities to love. Thus, they become like their creators.

Likewise, the Creator’s purpose in creating us is

for us to become like Him. The Kabbalistic term for being like the Creator is *Dvekut* (adhesion). *Dvekut* doesn’t mean that two things are “glued” to one another, but that they are at the same time identical, yet separate beings.

Therefore, to enjoy the love that exists in our Creator, we need to “grow up” and become “spiritual adults,” like Him.

Many Pieces, One Soul

In the whole of reality, as we’ve described above, there is only the Creator’s love. This love created us, the intended recipients of that love. The name Kabbalists gave this creation is “the soul of *Adam ha Rishon* (The First Man).” For short, we call it “Adam.”

Adam is not many souls (creations) put together; Adam is one collective soul, divided into billions of pieces. Just as our bodies are made of trillions of cells, all functioning as one unit, Adam’s soul is made of billions of pieces, all functioning as one spiritual entity.

If the cells in our body work harmoniously, we are healthy; if they work against one another, we become ill. Similarly, when our souls, the pieces of Adam’s soul, work together, our souls—the whole of humanity—are spiritually healthy.

Adam’s division into so many souls was no coincidence, but a predetermined act by the Creator.

The division is imperative for our success in becoming like Him. Just as children need other children around them to develop

social skills and grow up, our souls need other souls in order to develop into being like the Creator.

These souls are not really separated from ours; they are different parts of the same soul (body). But our *perception* of these souls as distinct and separate allows us to relate to them as separate, and thus create a “society of souls,” just like our human society. And just as children play and thus learn how to become grownups, we learn how to communicate with “other” souls, and work harmoniously with all of Adam’s parts. This is how our souls mature.

Straight to God

Yet, there is a fundamental difference between the way our souls develop, and the way we develop our social skills. Children have visible grownup role models to emulate and learn from. But our “spiritual parent” is hidden. We cannot emulate Him because we cannot see or hear Him.

To become spiritual adults, we need to employ a slightly different method than our regular school classes, where everyone learns together. Just as each

cell in our bodies has a different function, each piece of Adam’s soul represents a slightly different facet of the collective desire to re-

ceive pleasure. Some pieces are created to want to be wealthy, some want to be powerful, some want to be knowledgeable, and some want to be Creators, or at least like Him.

The first person who wanted to become like the Creator was Abraham. He discovered that being like Him meant having His nature—that of giving. When Abraham became like the Creator, he started to spread the knowledge of the Creator wherever he could. In fact, we call him “the Patriarch” because of his affinity with our spiritual Father, and his desire to bring all of us to Him.

In Kabbalah, souls that want to be like the Creator are called *Ysrael* (Israel). *Ysrael* is a combination of two words: *Yashar* (straight) and *El* (God). Therefore, Israel are those whose desire is to go straight to the Creator, to achieve His nature.

Abraham’s Legacy

The early patriarchs taught whomever they could, since they knew from their own experience that this was the best thing they could give their fellow people. This was also their spiritual legacy. In his book, *The Mighty*

Hand, The Rambam (Maimonides), the great 12th century Kabbalist, beautifully describes how Abraham roamed from city to city and from country to country, spreading wisdom and knowledge to anyone who’d listen. This is how he created the first group of Kabbalists.

Abraham’s group grew into a nation, named after its desire—Israel. This nation’s role in the world has not changed since it first appeared as a group of Kabbalists. The spiritual legacy to spread the method of achieving the Creator remains the same. The Holy Ari, the great sixteenth-century Kabbalist, puts it beautifully in his book, *Shaar HaPsukim* (*Gate to the Verses*), Parashat Shemot: “*Adam ha Rishon* contained all the souls and contained all the worlds. When he sinned, all the souls ... divided into seventy nations. And Israel should be in exile in each and every nation, to gather the roses of the sacred souls that were scattered among those thorns.”

Longing for Love

They say that money makes the world go around. Curiously, the Hebrew word for money is *Kesef*, which stems from the word *Kisufim* (longing). The great 20th century Kabbalist, Baal HaSulam, addresses this similarity and explains that money is indeed longing, but the longing isn’t for the money itself. Beneath the desire is really a longing for the Creator’s love. Then, Baal HaSulam continues to explain that we can only attain the Creator’s love when we are “in *Dvekut*” with Him, when we are like Him.

All we need to perceive His love for us is the right method. Then, the love that He feels for us will be felt within us, toward each other, and back toward the Creator. The Rav Kook (the first Chief Rabbi of Israel) eloquently expressed this love in a talk with the author, AZAR (1911): “I wish the whole of humanity could be placed into a single body, so I could embrace them all.”

www.kabtoday.com/links/3/love

■ Sneak-a-Peek @ the book *Wondrous Wisdom*

Desire—the Fuel that Drives Us

Do we eat because we are hungry or because we want *not* to be hungry? Do we scratch our noses because they itch, or because we want them to stop itching? When we were teenagers, did we clean our rooms instead of doing something fun because we wanted to clean our rooms, or because we wanted not to have a parent who was mad at us? I could go on and on with these rhetorical questions, but I think most readers will see where this is heading.

Every single act we perform in life is born out of a desire. From the smallest, most insignificant, conscious act, to acts that require a vast amount of energy, they are all performed for one single reason: a desire entered us and affected us enough for us to take an action to fulfill it. Kabbalah calls the force that propels us to fulfill these desires “the will to receive.”

We are completely controlled by desire; without

one, we remain perfectly still, not moving as much as an inch. But what is the goal? What are we trying to achieve by consciously and subconsciously following our desires? The answer is pleasure. We pursue them in order to receive pleasure in one form or another.

Sometimes that pleasure may be the feeling of doing something because we believe it is the right thing to do. Other times it may be at the expense of another’s happiness. But no matter what the desire, it is the same will to receive that is the underlying force, literally leading us around by the nose to act in a manner that fulfills the desire.

This will to receive is so complex and cunning that at best we barely even notice we are slaves to it. Of course, nobody in their right mind wishes to ad-

mit they are a slave to anything or anybody. But if a person takes time to seriously reflect why he or she performs any given action, even actions of the highest morality, there is only one conclusion that explains all acts. We act only in order to receive pleasure for ourselves... period.

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"Our whole work is to discover love within us, each and every day."

--Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag

Pri Hacham (A Sage's Fruit), Letters.



Kabbalah Icons

BAAL HASULAM

RABBI YEHUDA LEIB HALEVI ASHLAG (1884-1954)

by Eli Vinokur

Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag is better known as Baal HaSulam (Owner of the Ladder) for his Sulam (Ladder) commentary on The Book of Zohar. This work, and his commentary on the Holy Ari's The Tree of Life, have made him the foremost Kabbalist of the 20th century, as well as one of the greatest Kabbalists of all time.

Rabbi Ashlag spent his entire life interpreting and spreading the wisdom of Kabbalah. His innovative commentaries introduced a unique method for teaching Kabbalah, which enables every person to study the reality we live in, its roots, and its ultimate purpose.

Baal HaSulam was born in Poland. At age 19 he was ordained as a rabbi by the principal rabbis of Warsaw, and for 16 years taught, as well as served as a judge on religious issues. His Kabbalah teacher was Rabbi Yehusha of Porsov.

In 1921, he immigrated with his family to Israel (then called Palestine) and settled in the old city of Jerusalem. The word of his arrival quickly spread among Polish Jews, and he soon became known as erudite and proficient in Kabbalah.

Gradually, a group of students formed around him. They would come to his house in the wee hours of the morning to study Kabbalah. After some time, Baal HaSulam moved from the old city of Jerusalem to another Jerusalem neighborhood, Givat Shaul, where he served as the neighborhood rabbi for several years.

His Major Works

His two principal works, the fruit of long years of labor, are *The Study of the Ten Sefirot*, based on the writings of the Ari, and *The Sulam (Ladder) Commentary on The Book of Zohar*. The publication of the 16 parts of *The Study of the Ten Sefirot* began in 1937. In 1940, his book *Beit Shaar HaKavanot (The Gatehouse of Intentions)* came out, containing commentaries on selected writings of the Ari. *The Sulam Commentary on The Book of Zohar* was published in 18 volumes between 1945-1953. Subsequently, Baal HaSulam wrote three additional volumes in which he interpreted *The New Zohar*. The publication of the latter



interpretation was completed in 1955, after his demise.

In his "Introduction to The Book of Zohar" he explained why he called his commentary

by a ladder to climb it, and all the abundance of the world is in your hands."

Baal HaSulam composed a series of introductions to prepare students for the proper study of Kabbalah and to explain the study method. Those writings include "The Preface to The Book of Zohar," "Introduction to The Book of Zohar," "Preface to the Wisdom of Kabbalah," "Preface to The Sulam Commentary," "A General Preface to The Tree of Life," and "Introduction to the Study of the Ten Sefirot." These introductions cover everything students need to know to maximize their studies and accelerate their progress toward spirituality.

In 1940, Baal HaSulam published a paper he called *The Nation*. In his last years, he wrote "The Writings of the Last Generation," in which he analyzed different doctrines of government and outlined a detailed plan to build a wholesome society.

Promoting His Ideas

Baal HaSulam did not settle for putting his ideas to paper. Instead, he worked arduously to promote them. As part of his efforts, he met with prominent figures in Israel such as David Ben Gurion, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Zalman Shazar, and many others.

David Ben Gurion wrote in his diaries that he met with Baal HaSulam several times, and that these meetings surprised him because "I wanted to talk to him about Kabbalah, and he, about socialism."

About the Man

Baal HaSulam was a fascinating and complex individual: broad-minded, well-educated, and deeply involved in world events in general, and in Israel, in particular. His views were, and still are, considered revolutionary and far-reaching in their boldness.

An excerpt from the newspaper *Haaretz*, published December 16, 2004: "One day in Jeru-

salem of the early 1950s, Shlomo Shoham, later an Israel prize-winning author and criminologist, set out to look for Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag. ...Ashlag at that time was trying to print *Hasulam* (literally, *The Ladder*), his Hebrew translation and commentary on *The Book of Zohar*... Whenever he would raise a little money, from small donations, he would print parts of his *Hasulam*. 'I found him standing in a dilapidated building, almost a shack, which housed an old printing press. He couldn't afford to pay a typesetter and was doing the typesetting himself, letter by letter, standing over the printing press for hours at a time, despite the fact that he was in his late sixties. Ashlag was clearly a *Tzadik* (righteous man)—a humble man, with a radiant face. But he was an absolutely marginal figure and terribly impoverished. I later heard that he spent so many hours setting type that the lead used in the printing process damaged his health."

It took over half a century for his greatness to be recognized, but today his achievements are well known. In recent years, his teaching has attracted a great deal of attention, and hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world study his works, which have been translated into many different languages. Now, anyone who truly wishes to climb to the spiritual world can easily do so.

Baal HaSulam passed away in 1954, but his way has been continued by his successor, his first-born son, Rabbi Baruch Shalom Ashlag.

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Baal HaSulam's Manuscript
Courtesy of Bnei Baruch Archives

The Ladder: "I have called my interpretation *The Sulam*, to show that the purpose of my commentary is as the purpose of any ladder. If you have an attic filled with abundance, you need on-

land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (8:11-12).

We are in the midst of those days, and the words of the Lord are the love that already exists in the whole of nature, in the Creator. But it has yet to live among us. If we bond with love, we will feel this love and reveal the Creator. Like Him, our lives will be perfect and eternal. This is the state to which He wants to bring His creatures, the purpose for which He has created us. ■

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CAMP MOUNT SINAI

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sible for one another.

They were not able to secure each other's physical well being because at the time, the people of Israel were slaves on the run, with no certainty of a future. But the one thing they could promise each other was their love, and that was enough for them to receive the Torah and discover the Creator.

Today, too, love is the call of the hour. While there is enough food to provide for the whole planet, people are still starving. And where there is no physical shortage, the most rapidly spreading illness is depression. Our time is the time Prophet Amos predicted:

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the

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Rav Michael Laitman, PhD

The Omnipotent Magician

Do you know why only old folk tell stories and legends? Because legends are the cleverest thing in the world! Everything in the world changes, and only real legends remain. Legends are stories about wisdom. To properly tell them, one must have great knowledge and see things others do not.

For that, one needs to have lived a lot. That is why old people are often good legend-tellers. It is written in the greatest, most ancient magical book, *The Book of Zohar*, "an old person is one who has acquired wisdom."

Children love to hear legends because they have the imagination to envision everything, not just what others see. If a child grows up and still sees what others do not, he can eventually "acquire wisdom."

Because children are often able to see what others do not, they know that imagination is real. When they grow, they remain as "wise children."

There once was a great magician, noble and goodhearted, but he had no one to receive his affection, to play with, to spend time with, or to think about. The magician also needed to feel wanted, for it is very sad to be alone.

"What should I do?" he thought to himself. "Perhaps I will make a stone, a tiny, beautiful stone, and perhaps this stone will be the answer to my loneliness. Once I've created the stone, I will stroke it and feel there is always something by my side."

Both I and the stone will feel good, because neither of us would want to be alone." He waved his wand and in an instant there was a stone, just as he wanted.



The magician stroked the stone, hugged and softly spoke to it. **But the stone did not respond.** It remained cold and did not return the magician's affection. Whatever he did to the stone, it remained the same unfeeling object.

This saddened the magician. Why did the stone not respond?

He created more stones, then rocks, hills, mountains, planets, galaxies, and finally a whole universe. **But they were all the same** —cold, unresponsive objects.

He was still sad and still alone. In his sadness, he thought that instead of stones, he would make a plant, a beautifully blooming flower.

He would water it, give it fresh air and plenty of sunshine, play it some music, and make the plant happy. Then they would both be pleased, because they would not be alone.

He waved his wand and in an instant there was a flower, just as he had wanted.

The magician was so delighted he began to dance around it. But the flower did not move. It did not dance with the magician or follow his movements. It barely responded to what the magician did to make it happy.

If he watered it, the plant grew; if he did not, it died.



This was not enough for such a good-hearted magician who wanted to give with all his heart.

He needed something more, so he would not be sad and all alone. He created many kinds of plants in all kinds of shapes and sizes: fields, forests, prairies, orchards, plantations, and groves. But none of them was more responsive than the first plant. Again, the great magician felt sad and alone.

The magician thought and thought. **What should he do?** "I know," he said to himself,



"I will create an animal! What sort of animal? A dog, a cute little dog that would always be with me.

I would take it for walks and the dog would jump and trot and run around."

When the magician would come home at night, the dog would be so pleased to see him and would run to greet him. They would both be happy and they would no longer be sad and alone.

The magician waved his wand and a cute little puppy immediately appeared, just as he wanted. He cared for the puppy, fed it, gave it water, and stroked it.



He even ran with it and washed it and took it for walks.

But a dog's love depends on being with its owner. The magician was sad to see that a dog could not reciprocate the way he wished, even if it played nicely and followed him everywhere.

A dog could not be the true friend that he wanted.

It could not appreciate what the magician was doing for it, and could not comprehend the magician's thoughts and desires, and how much effort he was making for it.

That was what the magician really wanted.

So the magician made other creatures: fish, fowl, mammals, all to no avail. **None of them understood him.** Once again, he was very sad to be so alone.

And once again, the magician sat and thought. He realized that a true friend must be someone who would look for the magician, who would want very much to be with him.

The magician also realized a friend of his would have to be similar to him, able to love like him, understand him, and generally resemble him and be his partner.

Partner? True friend?

The creature would have to be close to him, understand what he gave it, and be able to reciprocate by giving him everything in return.

Magicians also want to love and be loved. And the magician knew that if he had such a friend, they would both be happy, because it is very sad to be alone.

The magician then thought about creating a man. **"A man could be a true friend!"** he thought.

He could be like the magician. **He would merely need a little help to become like his creator.**

Then the two of them would be happy because they would not be alone, and it is very sad to be alone.

A TALE FOR GROWNUPS

Who Could Not Be Alone

But for them to feel good, the man must first feel alone and sad without the magician.

The magician waved his wand again and made a man in the distance.

The man was not aware that there was a magician who had made all the stones, plants, hills, fields and moon, rain, winds, etc.

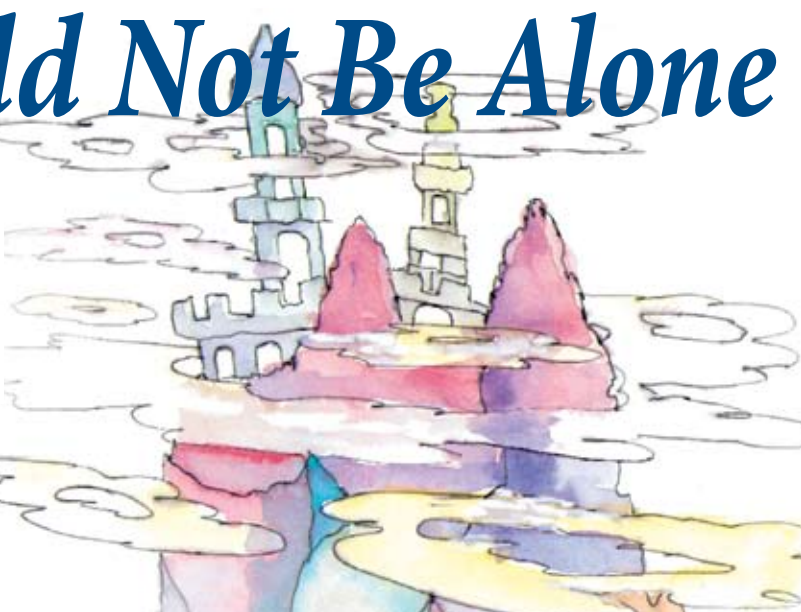


He did not know that he had made an entire world filled with beautiful things, such as computers and football, which made him feel good and satisfied.

The magician, on the other hand, continued to feel sad that he was alone because the man was unaware of his existence. He did not know there was a magician who had made him, loved him, was waiting for him, and thought that together they would feel good and would not be sad and alone.



Yet how would one who is content and has everything, even a computer and football, want to find someone he does not know. How would he want to get acquainted with the magician, become close to him, love him, and be his friend?



Can someone so unaware say, "Come, we will both feel good, because it is very sad to be alone, without you"?

One knows only one's surroundings, does what everyone else nearby does, speaks as they speak, and wants what everyone else wants. One tries not to offend others and asks them nicely for presents such as a computers or a football. How can one possibly know there is a magician who is sad to be alone?

But the magician is good-hearted and constantly looks out for man, his creation. And when the time is ripe, he waves his wand and very softly calls to one's heart. Then, one begins to search for something but does not realize it is the magician calling, saying, "Come, we will both feel good, because it is very sad to be alone without you."



Then, the magician waves his wand once more, and the person feels the magician's presence. That person begins to think of the magician, that it will be so nice together, because it is very sad to be alone and without the magician.

Another wave of the wand and the person feels there is a magic tower filled with treasures and glory. It is here that the magician waits for him, and only there will they feel good.

"But where is this tower? How can I reach it? Where is the path to it?" the person asks himself, puzzled and confused.

"How can I meet the magician?" He keeps feeling the wave of the wand in his heart and cannot rest. He constantly sees magicians and mighty towers and cannot even eat.

That is what happens when a person wants something very much and cannot find it. Indeed, it is very sad to be alone. But to be like the magician — wise, mighty, noble, good-hearted, loving, and a friend — a wave of the wand is not enough. **One must learn to make wonders oneself.**

So the magician secretly and gently leads the man to the greatest, oldest magical book, *The Book of Zohar*, and shows him the way to the glorious tower. The man rushes to meet the magician, his friend, and tell him, "Come, we will feel good together, because it is very sad to be alone."

But alas, a high wall surrounds the tower, and many guards repel the man, not letting him and the magician be together and feel good. The guards are vigilant, and the man despairs. The magician is hidden deep within the tower, behind heavy locked gates, and the wall is high; nothing can pass through.

What will happen next? Can they be together and feel happy?

Every time the man weakens and despairs, he suddenly feels a wave of the wand and he rushes to the walls again to try to outwit the guards.

He wants to break into the gates, reach the tower, climb the rungs of the ladder, and meet the magician.

And every time he charges forward and approaches the tower, the guards become more vigilant, arduously and mercilessly fending him off. But with each attempt the man grows braver, stronger and wiser.

He learns all sorts of tricks himself and invents things only a magician can.

And every time he is pushed away, his craving for the magician grows. He feels his love for the magician stronger than ever, and wants more than anything else in the world to be with the magician and to see his face. Oh, it will be so good to be together. Now, even if he is given everything in the world, without the magician, he will feel alone.



Then, when he can no longer bear to be without him, the tower gates open, and the magician, his magician, rushes towards him and says, "Come, we will be happy together, we no longer have to be sad and all alone."

And ever since that day, they are best friends, faithful and true, and there is no finer pleasure than their togetherness, always and forever.

And they feel so good together that they never remember, not even briefly, that it was very sad to be alone.

The End

www.kabtoday.com/links/3/magician



"I wish the whole of humanity could be placed into a single body, so I could embrace them all."

--The Rav Kook

Mike's Place

The Continuing Adventures of Desire (and how Desire became little Desiree)

by Michael R. Kellogg

When we left off in the last issue, our friend Desire had discovered that it was made of a desire to receive pleasure, and that the Creator was a desire to give pleasure. Desire had also discovered that to be like the Creator, it had to receive not because this was what it wanted, but because receiving pleased the Creator. This turned Desire from a receiver to a giver, just like the Creator, because it received in order to give, and not for its own pleasure.

One day, Desire met a Kabbalist, who explained that the desire to receive within us is called "a feminine desire," and the desire to give within us is called "a masculine desire." Desire listened carefully to the Kabbalist, and then said: "Since I'm a desire to receive, I must be a girl. In that case, from now on my name will not be Desire, but Desiree."

But that's not the end of our story, far from it. You see, something very special happened when Desiree gave pleasure to the Creator by receiving from Him. When she received this pleasure, she realized what it was like to do what the Creator does—to give. In other words, Desiree learned what it felt like to be The Creator.

Now this may seem like the perfect situation: Desiree knew what she was like—a receiver—and now she learned what the Creator was like—a giver. But there is a fly in the ointment here: before all this receiving in order to give to the Creator stuff took place, Desiree had no idea what her own nature was. Everything was kind of on automatic pilot—she just received.

But now, things were very different. Now that Desiree experienced two different desires, she

could compare them. In other words, before she discovered the Creator, Desiree felt only herself. But now she felt herself as well as the Creator. It was

Before she discovered the Creator, Desiree felt only herself. But now she felt herself as well as the Creator

as if she had two kinds of desire within her: her original pleasure from receiving, and the pleasure from being like the Creator.

Her own nature—receiving because it felt good—was totally opposite from the Creator's nature of bestowal. And this oppositeness made her feel just awful. Why? Because she wanted to be like the Creator, and now she realized that she was the exact opposite of Him.

Kabbalists call what Desiree felt "The bread of shame," which is essentially the sensation of being totally opposite from the Creator.

When Desiree felt that bread of shame, she said to herself: "How in the world can I work this out? I know what I am like, and I know what He is like. I

want to be like Him, and not like me, but not only did I love the pleasure I received from Him, I loved doing what He does—giving—even more. What a pleasure that was, being like the Creator! But now I want to be like the Creator just so I can feel good. Oh boy, what a mess!!!"

Indeed, this is quite a pickle that Desiree finds herself in. Now she not only wants pleasure from receiving, as before, but she wants pleasure from giving, too! You see, when Desiree gave back to the Creator, she had discovered that giving pleasure is millions of times more fun

than just receiving it.

But by enjoying the giving, Desiree realized she was actually still receiving. Giving, she found out, meant thinking of His pleasure, not her own. So Desiree sets her sights on accomplishing one goal: to be able to receive in order to bestow for the right reason—because that is what the Giver wants her to do, without any thought of Her own pleasure.

Once again, Desiree begins to contemplate: "Now let's see, I want to give, but I want it because it feels so good be like the Creator does. Heyyyy, what if I had no idea that I would get pleasure from bestowing? What if I had no idea that the Creator is the giver, or even that He exists? EUREKA!!! What I need is a total mind-melt, erase the awareness and sensation of the Creator from my mind. Then, if I choose to give, simply because giving is a

good thing to do, and not because I knew it would be pleasurable, well that would be true, honest giving.

Yes folks, Desiree had another Eureka moment. And the first thing Desiree did, was to stop receiving altogether, because when receiving pleasure, she knew, she wouldn't be aware that there was a giver.

Of course, she did remember that the Creator exists, but she didn't feel His existence at the moment. "Now," she said to herself, "If I receive, it'll be only because I think giving is the right thing to do, and not because I think I'll get some pleasure out of it."

"Very well," thought Desiree, "except, if I can't feel Him, how will I receive from Him, or give to Him?"

To be continued...

www.kabtoday.com/links/3/mike

Kabbalah Sources

Redemption depends primarily on the study of Kabbalah.

The Vilna Gaon, *Even Shlema* 11,13

The attainment begins from the hidden Torah, and only afterwards does one attain the remaining portions of the Torah, and only in the end does one attain the revealed Torah.

The Vilna Gaon, *The Siddur*

The Torah was given to learn and to teach so that all will know the Lord, from least to greatest. We also find many books of Kabbalists alerting of the importance of the study of the wisdom that everyone must learn.

Rabbi Yitzhak Ben Tzvi Ashkenazi, *The Purity of Sanctity*

Quotes of Great Kabbalists

May it be that the holy flock would begin their study of the holy *Book of Zohar* when they are still small, nine and ten years old ... and redemption would certainly come without any Messiah labor-pains.

Rabbi Shabtai Ben Yaakov Yitzhak Lifshitz, *Segulat Israel (The Remedy of Israel)*, system 7, item 5

All of man's engagements are guided by a single, intrinsic premise, and the internality dresses within all people. It is what they referred to as "Nature," whose numeric count is the same as "Elokim" (God). And this is the

truth that the Creator concealed from the philosophers.

Ramchal, *The Book of the Wars of Moses*, "Rule 15"

As one cannot sustain one's body without some knowledge of the corporeal arrangements of nature... one's soul has no viability in the next world, except by acquiring some knowledge of the arrangements of the nature of the systems of the spiritual worlds. ...One reincarnates until one is granted the attainment of the wisdom of truth through and through.

Baal HaSulam, "From My Flesh shall I See God"

When all the people in the world unanimously agree to annul and eradicate the desire to receive for themselves within them, and will have no other desire but to bestow upon their friends, all worries and harmful ones will be banished from the earth, and each will be secured a complete and healthy life. In the end, each of us will have a whole world to care for our needs.

Baal HaSulam, "Introduction to the Study of the Book of Zohar"

If my generation had listened to my voice, they would have start-

ed to study *The Book of Zohar* at the age of nine.

Rabbi Isaac from Komarna, *Notzer Hessed*

On the learning of *The Zohar* there are no restrictions...

The Hafetz Chaim

One who feels within, after several attempts, that one's soul within is in peace only when engaging in the secrets of Torah, one should know for certain that this is what one has been made for. Let no preventions—corporeal or spiritual—stop one from running to the source of one's life and true wholeness.

Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, *Orot Kodesh* 1

Let not the neuter say, "For I am a dry tree, and who am I to approach inside the holy into the books of Kabbalah?" The righteous have already agreed that this is the inclination's counsel and a lie today. Even when not understanding everything, the words of the Holy Zohar are still able for the soul and good for every soul of Israel; small and great are there, each according to the root of his soul.

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Ben Yaakov Horovitz, *Hanhagot Yesharot (Upright Guidance)*, item 5

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"Since people did not possess the right key to the secret, the thirst for knowledge here eventually led to vanities and superstition of all kinds, from which ultimately developed a kind of Vulgar Cabbala that lies far away from the true one."

--Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716), a German philosopher, mathematician, and Imperial Court Councilor to the Habsburgs



Sketches in Words

Lights and Vessels

by Avi Ventura
drawings by Gia Basilaia

In the previous issue of Kabbalah Today, we said that a bowl represents the desire to receive pleasure and we called it a Kli (vessel). We also said that the Light, which fills the Kli, is drawn as a downwardly arrow. There is also an upwardly arrow, which represents the Kli's desire to give pleasure to the Creator.

1. The whole of reality consists of five stages. In the first stage, known as "The Root Stage" or "Stage Zero," the Creator thinks, "I want to express the love that I feel, so I will create something that will receive My love."

2. In Stage One, His thought creates Creation, which is made of a desire to receive the love that the Creator wants to give.

3. In Stage Two, When Creation receives love, she (Creation) discovers its source—the Creator—and wants to be like Him. In the same way, as children grow, they don't want to receive from their parents, but to be like them.

4. Therefore, in Stage Three, Creation receives His love not because it is

In the first stage, known as "The Root Stage," the Creator thinks, "I want to express the love that I feel, so I will create something that will receive My love."

pleasant, but because the Creator wants to give it. When Creation thinks of the Creator's desire instead of her own, it is as if she were giving love, just as she was receiving it.

5. Then, in Stage Four, Creation asks, "Where did He get this idea in the first place?" She wants to know His thoughts, not just give Him love the way He gives it to her.

Drawing 1 represents the Creator's thought of expressing His love by creating Creation, the Root Stage. The downward arrow indicates that a higher degree is creating a lower one. In Kabbalah, every degree that creates another degree is considered higher than the degree it has created.

Drawing 2 presents the entrance of Love (which Kabbalah usually refers to as Light) into the Kli—Creation—as it happens in Stage One.

Drawing 3 presents Stage Two, when the Kli (Creation, us) discovers its source, and wants to be like Him, to give love. The upward arrow represents the Kli's desire to please the degree that created it, the Creator. Note that an arrow that stems from the Kli toward its Creator doesn't mean that it is actually giving anything to the Creator, only that it wants to give.

Drawing 4 represents Stage Three and combines drawings 2 and 3. The downward arrow indicates that the Kli is receiving Light, as we explained in drawing 2, and the upward arrow means that the Kli is doing it not because it is pleased to receive the Light, but because it pleases the Creator that the Kli is receiving. Again, the upward arrow shows the Kli's desire to please the Creator.

Because here the Kli is receiving Light not because it is pleasant, but because it wants to please the Creator, we say that the upward arrow shows the Kli's intention to give. By receiving Light, its intent is actually to give pleasure to the Creator.

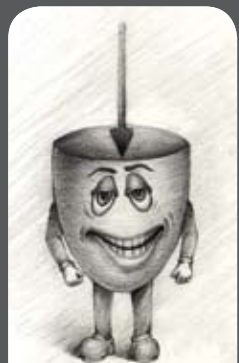
Drawing 5 is similar to drawing 2. However, in this case, the Kli doesn't want to receive the Creator's love, but the Creator's thought, to know why He created Creation to begin with. If the Kli obtained that knowledge, it would become like the Creator in every aspect, from thoughts to actions.

Unlike Stage One, the downward arrow in this case doesn't indicate that the Kli is receiving, but that it wants to understand His thought.

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Drawing 1 - The Root Stage, the Thought of Creation



Drawing 2 - Stage One, the Kli is receiving love (Light)



Drawing 3 - Stage Two, the Kli wants to be like the Creator by giving love



Drawing 4 - Stage Three, the Kli is receiving Light, but with the intention to please its Creator



Drawing 5 - Stage Four, the Kli wants to receive Light, which in this case means knowledge of the Creator's thought, not just the pleasure of His love

Kabbalah Sources - Clear and Simple

All's Well that Ends Well

by Gilad Shadmon

Optimism, according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, is "a tendency to expect the best possible outcome or dwell on the most hopeful aspects of a situation." By this definition, Kabbalists aren't optimists; they don't have to

incide with reality, they wrote books that explained the process of creation and the thought behind it. In the essay, "The Essence of Religion and Its Purpose," Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag wrote that to perceive reality correctly, we need not examine it with our present perspective, but first achieve the purpose of re-

Thus, it is evident that His Guidance over the reality He has created is in the form of purposeful Guidance, regardless of the order of the phases of development, for they deceive us and prevent us from understanding their purpose, being always in an opposite position to their final shape.



be. They know it will all end well. In fact, they say that it will end in the best possible way. By it, they are referring to the whole of creation, at all its levels, spiritual and corporeal, and at all times, since creation was first conceived and to all eternity.

If you read genuine Kabbalistic texts attentively, you will discover that according to Kabbalah, there isn't any "bad" in creation whatsoever, and there never has been. The greatest Kabbalists, such as Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, the Holy Ari, and Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), are individuals who reached the top of the spiritual ladder, perceived the very thought that started creation, and from that apex declared that there isn't, never was, and never will be any "bad" in reality.

To help us understand why they made such statements, which, judging by today's world, do not co-

ality. With this knowledge, he claimed, we will observe our world with new eyes.

Below is a direct translation of Baal HaSulam's thought provoking words:

"By observing nature's systems, we understand that any being ... is placed under particular guidance. This is a slow and gradual growth by way of cause and effect, like a fruit on the tree is guided with favorable guidance to finally become a sweet and fine-looking fruit.

Go and ask a botanist, 'How many phases the fruit undergoes from the time it becomes visible until it is completely ripe?' Not only do its preceding phases show no evidence of its sweet and fine-looking end, but as if to vex, they show the opposite of the final outcome. The sweeter the fruit is at its end, the more bitter it is in the earlier phases of its development.

It is about such matters that we say, 'None are as wise as the experienced.' This is because only one who is experienced has the opportunity to examine creation in all its evolutionary phases, all the way through completion. He can soothe matters and not fear those faulty images that creation undergoes in ... its development, and have faith in its worthy and handsome ripening.

Thus, we have thoroughly shown the conduct of His Providence in our world, which is a purely purposeful care. The attribute of goodness is not apparent before the arrival of the creation to completeness, to its final ripeness. On the contrary, it rather always takes a corrupt form in the eyes of the beholders. Hence, you see that God bestows only goodness upon His creatures, but that this goodness comes by way of purposeful care." ■

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A GLIMPSE OF RADIANCE

by Lior Gur

Since the dawn of humanity, unique individuals climbed the spiritual ladder and achieved the highest level of bonding with the Upper Force, the Creator. We call those people "Kabbalists."

Through this bonding, they came to understand that the whole of reality, from the highest spiritual worlds down to our world, is founded on love and bestowal. They realized that there is nothing in the world except for this force, and that everything that happens in reality was made only to bring humanity to permanent existence with this sensation.

Kabbalists have searched and found the answers to every question they asked—the purpose of our lives, the structure of the world, and how we can determine our destiny. They wrote about what they discovered in books such as *Raziel Hamalaach (The Angel Raziel)*, *Sefer Yetzira (The Book of Creation)*, *Etz Chaim (The Tree of Life)*, and others.

Of all the books, the most seminal, mysterious, and profound is *The Book of Zohar (The Book of Radiance)*. Its author is the great Kabbalist Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai (Rashbi). *The Book of Zohar* describes the hidden system of the Upper Guidance. It depicts the worlds, the great powers that govern them, and how one who chooses to study Kabbalah affects his or her own fate and that of humanity.

The Book of Zohar is the most mysterious, and at the same time most significant book of Kabbalah. In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that *The Book of Zohar*, written 18 centuries ago, was made for our time. Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam) opened it to us and rekindled what has long been forgotten from our hearts.

The Zohar also explains how every event cascades from the Upper World to ours, and the dressings it acquires here. But what makes *The Zohar* unique is the fact that it was not written for its contemporaries; it was rather intended for a generation that would live two millennia later—our generation.

Removing the Covers

Our generation stands at the very threshold of redemption, if we only know how to spread the wisdom of the hidden in the masses.

—Baal HaSulam
"Messiah's Horn"

The 20th century has brought unprecedented changes. These opened the door to a whole new phase, which the greatest Kabbalists have been describing for centuries in their writings. The greatest change of all is that in this century, Kabbalists state that studying Kabbalah is not only permitted, it is a must!

It is written in *The Book of Zohar* itself that the wisdom of Kabbalah would begin its spreading from the year 1840. The great 18th century Kabbalist, The Vilna Gaon (GRA), wrote in his book *Kol HaTor (Voice of the Turtledove)* that the process of the revelation of the Kabbalah would begin in 1990. In his book, *Even Shlomo (Solomon's Rock)*, Chapter 11, he

The depth of the wisdom in The Book of Zohar is locked behind a thousand doors.
Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (Baal HaSulam)
"Preface to the Book of Zohar"

even stated that redemption depends primarily on the study of Kabbalah.

The great Kabbalist, the Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi in the land of Israel (then called Palestine), explained that "the great spiritual questions that were once resolved only for the great and the excellent, must now be resolved to various degrees within the entire nation" (*Eder HaYaker ve Ikvey HaTzon*).

But it was Baal HaSulam who turned the words of the Kabbalists from a vision to a tangible reality. He clearly saw that the time had come to allow everyone to study *The Book of Zohar*. He claimed that by studying *The Zohar*, the whole of humanity would rise and attain the spiritual world.

With this vision in mind, Baal HaSulam devoted himself to composing a comprehensive, accurate, and systematic interpretation of *The Book of Zohar*. His goal was to unveil the book to the public and make it suitable for the souls of our generation.

In the introduction to his commentary on *The Zohar*, he explained why he wrote it: "I have named the commentary *HaSulam* (the ladder) to indicate that the function of my commentary is

as the function of any ladder. If you have an attic filled with abundance, you need only a ladder to climb it, and all the bounty in the world will be in your hands."

Accelerating the Spread of the Wisdom

All the Kabbalists dreamed of our generation, when all of humanity could discover the wondrous things they already had. They prayed that through reading the authentic sources they had left for us, we, too, would achieve bonding with the Upper Force, as did they. In his commentary on *The Book of Zohar*, Baal HaSulam threw us a rope, "a life buoy." In doing so, he paved our way to a future of abundance and prosperity.

Baal HaSulam called upon us to give greater weight to engagement in the wisdom of Kabbalah, and accelerate the spreading of the wisdom. He knew that only the wisdom of Kabbalah could elevate the world to the spiritual realm and into the eternity that Kabbalists had been experiencing throughout the generations.

Webster's Dictionary defines a generation as "a group of indi-

viduals born and living contemporaneously (at the same time)." In Kabbalah, however, a generation is a *spiritual* phase. According to great Kabbalists such as the Holy Ari, our generation—our spiritual phase—began in the 16th century.

The longer we wait with the spiritual ascension our generation is meant to achieve, the greater will be our discomfort. The spiritual realm, which determines what happens in our world, will increase its pressure on us until we decide to achieve this realm for ourselves.

In the words of the great Kabbalist Rabbi Avraham Azulai (in his introduction to the book, *Ohr ha Chama (Light of the Sun)*), "I have found it written that the above decree to not openly engage in the wisdom of truth was only for a time—until the end of 1490. From then on ... the sentence has been lifted, and permission was given to engage in *The Book of Zohar*. And from the year 1540 it has become praiseworthy to engage in great numbers since it is by virtue of this the Messiah King will come, and not by another virtue. It is inappropriate to be negligent."

www.kabtoday.com/links/3/zohar

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 learning 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.

Readers are welcome to read the paper in any order they choose, from back to back, a single article that suits them, or simply contemplating one of the questions and answers interspersed throughout the paper. No prior knowledge is required to benefit from the texts.

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 english@kabbalah.info.

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