

Awakening
to
Kabbalah

Other Books by Rav Michael Laitman, PhD,
Published by Laitman Kabbalah Publishers

Attaining the Worlds Beyond

A Guide to the Hidden Wisdom of Kabbalah

The Science of Kabbalah

The Kabbalah Experience

Awakening to *Kabbalah*

The Guiding Light of
Spiritual Fulfillment

Rav Michael Laitman, PhD

For People of All Faiths, All Backgrounds

JEWISH LIGHTS Publishing

Woodstock, Vermont

*Awakening to Kabbalah:
The Guiding Light of Spiritual Fulfillment*

2006 First Printing
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Laitman, Michael.

Awakening to Kabbalah : the guiding light of spiritual fulfillment /
Michael Laitman.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-58023-264-7

1. Cabala. 2. Mysticism—Judaism. 3. Spiritual life—Judaism. I. Title.

BM525.L247 2005

296.1'6—dc22

2005026131

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Jacket design: Tim Holtz

Jacket art: S-113 “Kabbalah,” 1976 original serigraph by Shraga Weil.

Published by the Safrai Fine Art Gallery, Jerusalem, Israel. Copyright
Safrai Gallery.

Manufactured in the United States of America

Published by Jewish Lights Publishing

A Division of LongHill Partners, Inc.

Sunset Farm Offices, Route 4, P.O. Box 237

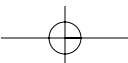
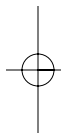
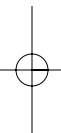
Woodstock, VT 05091

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PREFACE

Out of all known creatures, the human being is the most complete. Yet it is the human who asks the eternal question, repeated in every generation: “What is the purpose of creation?”

Scientists have been trying to find the reason for our existence for centuries, and yet they have failed to find the answer. The question grows more and more acute with each passing generation, because the pains of the world only increase in time, and the struggle for survival continues. Hence, it is quite possible that the answer is not within our reach, and science simply cannot provide it.

But the question is not just “Why do things exist?” but also “What am I living for?” The evolutionary processes of nature and living organisms astonish us with their inconceivable contradictions. For example, young animals mature in a matter of weeks or months, while humans need many years to grow. Only at the end of the process do you see that humans are the masters of creation; however, during the transitional phases, humans are much weaker than any other animal. If we did not

know the final outcome, we would reach the opposite conclusion—that it is the young animal who will become the master of creation and the human who will lead a bitter life and die. It follows that we understand neither the meaning of our existence, nor the reason behind the evolutionary process.

We perceive the world through our five senses. What we perceive by sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch then unite to form our image of the world around us. Therefore, if we had other senses we would feel the world differently. It is common knowledge that dogs “see” the world through their sense of smell, and to the bees the world appears to be divided into billions of cells.

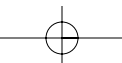
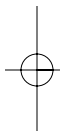
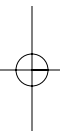
If we can perceive only a small portion of all that exists around us, and in a very limited range, is it then possible to *feel* everything around us? Can it be that this is where the secret to the purpose of our existence lies? If this is so, then we need another sense, a sixth sense, to discover what we cannot feel with the other five senses. How can we acquire that sense? Why are we not given that sense at birth?

There is a simple answer to these questions. It is up to us to develop this sixth sense. Because humans are very different in their development from all other creatures, they acquire or develop everything with a human, moral effort. And once we have acquired this additional sense, we differentiate ourselves from the beast once and for all. Out of all living creatures, we humans are the only ones with the ability to discover in ourselves that hidden sense and develop it.

Humankind evolves gradually, from generation to generation. We evolve technologically, scientifically, culturally, but not ethically. At a certain point in their evolution, people must feel an inner need for spiritual development, a need to discover that extra, hidden sense, or else they will not endure. Kabbalah is the method for the discovery of that sense.

The evolution of humanity is like the evolution of the individual: It evolves through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. During this process, it uses every means at its disposal. Then, when we discover that extra sense within, we begin to feel a wider world around, to see the meaning of life, the reason for suffering, and the purpose of existence. Those feelings enable us to control the world, to uproot the source of pain and head toward the goal of discovering the meaning of life.

The purpose of this book is to help those of you who are interested in spirituality. Many sources, and most notably the Zohar, have pointed to our moment in history as the age of Kabbalah. Our souls have evolved over many centuries, through many difficult periods in history, and we now possess the spiritual readiness and desire to go beyond our limited physical existence and rise above this transitory world. The large-scale movements and popularization of Kabbalah through workshops and meditation retreats are merely small signs that our time has come. We are now able to start developing the sixth sense, and by so doing, we will change ourselves and, by extension, the world around us for the better.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many, many people contributed to the making of this book. They have given their precious time and outstanding abilities; I am in debt to all.

My first thanks are to Marc Daniels and his wife, Adrienne E. Hacker Daniels, PhD, whose initial initiative and zeal are the very reasons you are reading these lines.

I would like to thank Benzion Giertz for the original compilation and supervision of the Hebrew version. I would also like to thank Chaim Ratz for his sensitive and intelligent translation.

I would like to thank the entire Jewish Lights Publishing staff, but the hard work and dedication of some is worth special notice: Alys R. Yablon, Jewish Lights Publishing Jerusalem-based editor, for her sensitive and thoughtful editorial assistance without which this book would not have been so accessible to the reader; Emily Wichland, vice president and managing editor of Jewish Lights, who was so helpful in managing the development of the book from its conception to its

final word; and Lauren Seidman, project editor, who carefully brought the draft into its completed form.

Last but by no means least, I would like to express my deepest and most sincere gratitude to Stuart M. Matlins, founder and publisher of Jewish Lights, whose wise assistance and personal care were crucial to the successful completion of this book. I have already published over thirty books, in many countries and with many publishers, but it was especially pleasurable for me to work hand in hand with this master of making books. His advice and counseling I will always treasure.

INTRODUCTION

Every authentic Kabbalah book contains terms that depict suffering, such as beating, affliction, and torment. As in the Bible, Kabbalah uses these terms to refer to any state of being that is less than ideal. The Creator's purpose in creation is to do good to His creations. Thus, if a desire to take pleasure in something is not realized immediately, it is defined as suffering. It is written in the Gomorrah that if you put your hand in your pocket expecting to pull out three coins and find that there are only two, you are already suffering.

The wisdom of Kabbalah speaks of receiving eternal, unlimited pleasure in every desire that surfaces or that will surface in every person. It speaks of a life where happiness is acquired effortlessly. Nature (which is *Elohim*—God—in Gematria) urges us to obtain that perfect state. Therefore, every state that is *less* than that is considered suffering.

Kabbalists, who receive unending pleasure and feel their existence as eternal, beyond life and death, where there is only gain and no loss, measure all situations compared to their own

state of being. They say all of us *must* reach that state sooner or later. In order to accelerate our development to the ultimate good, they often describe our state as incidental, temporal life, infested with torment (such as injustice, hunger, poverty, greed, jealousy, and selfishness). Because we are used to our present condition, we do not feel our lives as they depict them. We do not see any other way to exist, and see that everyone is struggling for survival. For that reason it is hard for us to understand the statements of Kabbalists and evaluate our lives through their eyes.

Nevertheless, it would be unwise to discard their depictions offhand, because at the end of the day, their intention is to impel us toward the best state of existence possible. In many ways, they are like parents motivating their children to reach the best, most pleasurable state. Their books are recommendations, tips that help us all correct and direct our hearts, and consequently our lives, toward success, tranquility, peace, and above all—happiness.

KABBALISTS ABOUT THE WISDOM OF KABBALAH

WHO SHOULD STUDY KABBALAH?

On the learning of the Zohar there are no restrictions.

—The Hafetz Chaim (1843–1933)

If my generation had listened to my voice, they would have started to study the book of Zohar at the age of nine.

—Rabbi Isaac from Kamarna, *Notzer Chesed* (1806–1874)

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, 88–89 (1865–1935)

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, 147 (d. 1807)

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 Shem Tov had already written in The Book of Faith that Judea and Israel will be salvaged for ever only through the wisdom of Kabbalah, because this is the only Godly wisdom given to the sages of Israel from days and years of old and through it the glory of God and His Holy Torah shall be revealed.

—Rabbi Shabtai Ben Yaakov Yitzhak Lifshitz, *Segulat Israel*
(*The Remedy of Israel*), system 7, item 5 (1845–1910)

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 Yeshtarot*
(*Upright Guidance*), item 5 (d. 1873)

My brother, being troubled with business, either in wealth or (God forbid) in great poverty, does not rid you (God forbid) of engaging in this wisdom, for whatever are you living for, and why had all this been revealed to us? Why had the Creator

revealed in our generation what He did not reveal except in the generation of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochay and his friends, the study of the wisdom of the Ari? You are not rid of the internality of the Torah, for without it man is like a hay-eating beast, as it is written in the Tikkunim of the verse “All flesh is grass.”

—Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Eichenstein of Ziditchov,
Keep from Evil, 29 (1763–1831)

Indeed, if we set our hearts to answer but one very famous question, I am certain that all these questions and doubts will vanish from the horizon, and you will look unto their place to find them gone. This indignant question is a question that the whole world asks, namely, “What is the meaning of my life?” In other words, these numbered years of our life that cost us so heavily and the numerous pains and torments that we suffer for them, to complete them to the fullest, who is it that enjoys them? Even more precisely, to whom do I give delight?

It is indeed true that historians have grown weary contemplating it and particularly in our generation. No one even wishes to consider it. Yet the question stands as bitterly and as vehemently as ever. Sometimes it meets us uninvitingly, pecks at our mind and humiliates us to the ground before we find the famous ploy to flow mindlessly in the currents of life as yesterday.

—Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (Baal HaSulam),
Introduction to the Study of the Ten Sefirot, item 2 (1884–1954)

WHY DISSEMINATE THE WISDOM?

Do have strength my soul-mate to shine the light of the wisdom of the hidden in the world. The time has come now for every one to know that the salvation of Israel and the entire world depends but on the appearance of the wisdom of the

hidden light of the Torah in a clear tone. And the hidden will also raise the revealed to its feet.

—Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, *Igrot 2* (1865–1935)

I have seen it written that the prohibition from above to refrain from open study in the wisdom of truth, was only for a limited period, until the end of 1490, but from then on the prohibition has been lifted and permission was granted to study The Zohar. Since 1540 it has been a great Mitzvah (very good deed) for the masses to study in public, old and young ... and that is because the Messiah will come because of that and not because of any other reason. Therefore, we must not be negligent.

—Rabbi Chaim David Yosef Azulai (The Chidah),
Introduction to Ohr HaChama, 81 (1724–1806)

Redemption depends primarily on the study of the Kabbalah.

—The Vilna Gaon, *Even Shlema* 11,13 (1720–1797)

Only through the expansion of the wisdom of Kabbalah in the masses will we obtain complete redemption.... Both the individual and the nation will not complete the aim for which they were created, except by attaining the inner part of the Torah and its secrets.... Hence, it is the great expansion of the wisdom within the nation that we need first, to merit receiving the benefit from our Messiah. Consequently, the expansion of the wisdom and the coming of our Messiah are interdependent. Therefore, we must establish seminaries and compose books, to hasten the circulation of the wisdom throughout the nation.

—Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (Baal HaSulam),
Introduction to the Tree of Life, item 5 (1884–1954)

When enlightenment diminishes from the Children of Israel in the course of the exile, and the Godly precedence vanishes and

forgotten from them, many will fall in the pits of corporeality... This will be because the secrets of the Torah will vanish from them. Not many will be wise and know the secret, only one in a city, and many will swim in the ditch of error.

—Rabbi Moshe Kordoviro (The Ramak), *Know Thou the God of Thy Father*, 139–40 (1522–1570)

And will know the secrets of the Torah and the taste of the Mitzvot ... because the soul is strengthened by them and is isolated with its Maker... And besides the good that is hidden in the next world for the delving and learning in it, in this world too they taste the taste of the next world. By the virtue of the delving, the Messiah will come, for then the earth shall be full of knowledge, and this will be the reason to hasten His coming.

—Rabbi Isaiah Ben Abraham HaLevi Horowitz (The Holy Shlah), *First Article*, 30 (1565–1630)

I have news about the city of Prague ... and how Judaism is declining there day-by-day.... Indeed, it is that previously the revealed Torah was sufficient; but now in the days of the Messiah, there must be the teaching of the hidden too.... Before, the evil inclination was not as strong, and the revealed Torah was sufficient as a cure for it. But now, before the redemption, the evil inclination is increasing, and we must be strengthened with the hidden too.

—Rabbi Simha Bonim of Pshisha, *The Torah of Joy*, 57 (1767–1827)

We must know it, for we are commanded to it: “Know this day, and lay it to thy heart, that the Lord, He is God.” Thus, we are committed to know and not only to believe, but rather with matters that reason with the heart.

—Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutzato (The Ramchal), *The Book of the War of Moses*, Rules, 349 (1707–1746)

THE BENEFITS

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* (1720–1797)

This revelation will not be, but through the study of the Torah. But the redemption depends primarily on the study of the Kabbalah.

—The Vilna Gaon (1720–1797)

In the future, only with the help of the book of Zohar will the children of Israel go out from the exile.

—Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochay, *Parashat Nasoh*, Book of Zohar
(c. 2nd Century CE)

While the orthodoxy continues to insist solely on Gomorrhah and Mishnah, rejecting the Agada, the Kabbalah and the research ... it impoverishes itself, and all the means that it applies to defend itself, without adopting the real potion of life, i.e. the internal light of the Torah, will not help. It will be filled with anger ... for the obvious and tangible that is apparent in Torah and Mitzvot alone, can never, under any circumstances bring one to one's goal, in any generation, and all the more so in ours. It is possible only alongside the expansion of the many spiritual roots.

—Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook,
Igrot 2 (1865–1935)

Upon studying this composition, one awakens the power of the souls and those righteous people, along with the force of Moses ... for when they practice it, they renew the renewed Light that was renewed upon writing this composition, and

divinity shines and illuminates from that Light as it did when it was innovated, and all who study it, reawaken the benefit and that former Light that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochay and his associates had uncovered upon making the composition.

—Rabbi Moshe Kordoviro (Ramak), *Ohr Yakar*,
gate 1, item 5 (1522–1570)

The Study of the book of Zohar is preferable and above all other studies.

—Rabbi Chaim David Yosef Azulai (The Chidah) (1724–1806)

Woe unto them who make the spirit of Messiah vanish from the world, so as never to return, make the Torah dry, without the moistness of mind and knowledge, for they confine themselves to the practical part of the Torah, and do not wish to try to understand the wisdom of the Kabbalah, to know and educate themselves in the secrets and the reason behind the Torah and the Mitzvot (commandments). Alas, they cause by their deeds the poverty, the ruin and the robbery, the looting, the killings and destruction in the world.

—Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 30

The study of the corrections of The Holy Zohar ... purifies the body and the soul, and has the virtue of bringing redemption soon in our days.

—Matte Efraim

Even when one does not have the vessels, when one engages in this wisdom, mentioning the names of the Lights and the vessels related to one's soul, they immediately shine upon us to a certain measure. However, they shine for him without clothing the interior of his soul for lack of the able vessels to receive them. Despite that, the illumination one receives time after time during the engagement draws upon one grace from above,

imparting one with abundance of sanctity and purity, which bring one much closer to reaching perfection.

—Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (Baal HaSulam), *Introduction to the Study of the Ten Sefirot*, item 155 (1884–1954)

When one as much as reads the words ... what is it like? It is like a sick person who drinks a therapeutic potion that helps although one is not proficient in the wisdom of medicine.

—Rabbi Moshe Zechuta (Remez), part 3, 2 (1625–1698)

All the great Kabbalists cry out unanimously, that as long as they remove the secrets from the Torah and do not practice its secrets, they destroy the world.

—Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, *Igrot* 2 (1865–1935)

ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

The revival of the nation is the foundation for the construction of the great repentance—the repentance of Israel and the repentance of the world, which will follow.

—*Whisper to Me the Secret of God, from the Sayings of Rav Kook*

Israel—a nation that complete universalism is rooted deep within its soul.

—*Whisper to Me the Secret of God, from the Sayings of Rav Kook*

But if, ... one of Israel degrades the virtue of the internality of the Torah and its secrets, ... as though it were, God forbid, redundant, by that one causes degradation and decline of the internality of the world, which are the Children of Israel, and

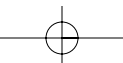
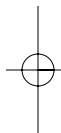
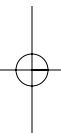
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*intensifies the domination of the externality of the world—
meaning the Nations of the World—over them. They will
humiliate and disgrace the Children of Israel, and regard
Israel as superfluous, as though the world has no need for
them, God forbid.*

—Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (Baal HaSulam),
Introduction to the Book of Zohar, item 69 (1884–1954)

*Rabbi Elazar Bar Abina says, “No calamity comes to the
world, but for Israel.”*

—*Talmud Bavli*, Masechet Yevamot, 63





1

GREAT KABBALISTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Because of our ability to absorb various pictures and impressions of the world around us, we can describe what we feel in this lifetime and create books from our experiences. But Kabbalah books describe what a person who experiences both the physical world and the upper, spiritual world at the same time feels, something that others do not perceive.

Such is the uniqueness of the books of Kabbalah. They describe things an ordinary person cannot feel, though they are attainable. A Kabbalist is not just a person who feels the upper world, but someone who can describe emotions in a clear language so that anyone can understand them. Thus, by studying these books, we will be able to nurture the missing senses inside us, the ones with which we will be able to feel the upper world to the point where we can see our past and future lives. After all, “there is no time in spirituality.” Through Kabbalah, we can all attain the sensation of the eternal upper world and live willingly in both worlds at once.

There is a special force in books of Kabbalah: any person who studies them under the right guidance can attain the spiritual degree of the author. That is why it is crucial that we know which books to study. There are many books of Kabbalah, written in various styles and forms and written by Kabbalists at various degrees of attainment. We now know which of the books are the ones that help us enter the spiritual world and which of them direct us like a guidebook intended for a person lost in a foreign country.

There are several ways to describe the spiritual worlds. The spiritual world and our own world are parallel. Everything in the spiritual world comes down to ours. All the events originate in the upper world. They descend from it to ours and clothe the suitable objects of this world very accurately.

Nevertheless, we should refrain from thinking that there is spirituality within our material world. Spirituality stands as an abstract force behind this world's objects and manages the entire process unfolding in this world. This stems from the verse in the Torah, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness," being a prohibition to see anything that has to do with godliness and spirituality in corporeal things.

There is not an object, phenomenon, or force in this world that is not a consequence of the upper world. Therefore, Kabbalists use words taken from our world to describe spiritual objects, for they are the roots of all our world.

An ordinary person, as yet without a spiritual screen, relates to books of Kabbalah as if they were fairy tale stories of things that happen in our world. But Kabbalists will not be confused by the words, for they know precisely from which branch they stem and which consequence in our world correlates to the root in the spiritual world.

That is how the Torah was written. The books of the prophets, however, were written in a different language, the language of legends, whereas the Talmud describes the laws of

the spiritual world as acts, laws, and commandments that exist in our world. Thus, even behind the words of the Talmud we should see the objects and actions of the upper world.

In the following sections, we will outline the major books of Kabbalah from the beginning of time until today, and their authors, the great Kabbalists throughout history.

ADAM, THE FIRST MAN

The history of Kabbalah corresponds to the history of humankind. It begins at the same time Adam appeared on earth, who (as tradition has it) was the first man. With Adam begins the spiritual evolution of humankind. Adam was the recipient of the first Kabbalah book: *The Angel Raziel (Hamalaach Raziel)*.

A person who lives in this world feels the nature of the world within him or her, as well as the nature of the world around. People who feel both worlds simultaneously are called Kabbalists. The first man sensed those two worlds and described them in his book. That book is now available to us, containing interesting drawings with explanations and diagrams that the first man wrote by himself.

When one opens the book, it is evident that the author is not an uncivilized, uneducated mammoth hunter. He was a Kabbalist of a very high degree. He discovered the fundamental secrets of creation. He studied the upper world, the world where our souls roam before we are born and descend to this world and where they return after our physical death.

The first man, who was also the first soul that came down to our world, tells us about the evolution and descent of the rest of the souls. He does not tell us about the bodies that would be born in our world, but about those souls that come out of his own, the souls of his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He tells us about the entire humanity that would stem

from him, what will happen to it, and when it will rise once more to the root from which it came.

He tells us how these souls will regroup into one soul, a soul that exists on a much higher level than our own, of which we are but fragments. That is what he tells us in *The Angel Raziel*. The word *raziel* comes from the Hebrew word *raz*—the angel of secrets who reveals the secrets of creation.

ABRAHAM THE PATRIARCH

The primary book that came into our possession after the book of the first man was the book of Abraham the Patriarch, *The Book of Creation (Sefer Yetzira)*. It is a special book and a difficult one to understand, because it is very synoptic, containing only several dozen pages. We've known about its existence for thousands of years, but it is impossible to study Kabbalah with it because Abraham did not mean to introduce a study book for those in our world and explain how to develop the sensation of the upper spiritual world. His purpose was not to teach the attainment of the upper world, but only to mark out a few principal laws that he discovered about that world.

However, Abraham the Patriarch described the various interconnections between our world and the spiritual world and demonstrated how the spiritual world operates, where the spiritual forces come from, and how they clothe the bodies of this world. The book explains how each body receives a special force from above, which determines what will happen to it in our world and what will finally become of it—that is, what humanity will attain under the influence of the upper forces.

The Book of Creation was written in a different way than *The Angel Raziel*. It is comprised of chapters (called *mishmiot*), and its language is better organized. Abraham writes about the structure of the spiritual world, about the ten *sefirot* (properties of the spiritual reality), *partzufim* (spiritual objects, or systems),

and management systems, how the upper force (the light) descends, how it is balanced and collected, and how the collective soul is divided into individual souls that descend in a certain order. He writes about relationships between the bodies in this world, under the influence of the souls that clothed them. Although the book is interesting, it is very far removed from today's souls and can only serve as a learning aid because of its great power.

The property that characterizes Abraham is called *hesed* (benevolence). Abraham was known for his hospitality. His book gives humanity his power of *hesed*, which allowed the following generation to develop and aspire toward spiritual attainment. But the generation that followed Abraham demanded a new revelation, which resulted in the emergence of new Kabbalists.

MOSES, THE TORAH, AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE BRANCHES

The next significant composition, after *The Book of Creation* and *The Angel Raziel*, is the book of Zohar, but between Abraham the Patriarch and the Zohar there were many great Kabbalists, the greatest of whom was Moses.

Moses was known for being different than other Kabbalists in that alongside the revelation that he obtained, he was ordered to make it known to the whole of humankind. That did not happen with previous Kabbalists. Since then, all Kabbalists form study groups.

Moses had seventy disciples, and Yehoshua Ben Nun (Joshua, the son of Nun) was the one who ultimately inherited both his wisdom and leadership. Moses did more than research the upper world. He dealt with the practical realization of his spiritual attainment in our world, such as the exodus from Egypt. With the wisdom he acquired and the upper forces he

received from above, he was able to bring the people of Israel out of exile.

Moses's task was to deliver the people of Israel out of Egypt and write a book with which any man could "conquer" the upper world and leave Egypt in the spirit—stop worshipping idols, objects, the sun, and other false gods. He wanted to enable people to obtain entry into the spiritual land of Israel, called the world of *Atzilut*—a world of eternity and wholeness. It is a situation that one attains inwardly, beyond the boundaries of time and space.

The method Moses introduced in his book is called Torah, from the word *ohr* (light). It contains instructions on how to use the light to enter the spiritual world, how to live for an eternal goal instead of the transient life we live in this world. With this book, a person can uncover the entire picture of creation, though he or she may experience just a tiny fraction of it. He or she can calculate correctly and attain the desired outcome, build his or her life toward the final goal, the one Moses wanted to attain. That is what a person who studies the method that Moses developed gradually achieves.

Moses's method, resulting from the Torah, allows anyone living on earth to attain his spiritual level, meaning that he or she can exit this world with his or her feelings and enter the upper world, the entire creation. The Hebrew root of the name Moses is the word *moshe*, which means pulling out of this world. The Torah is a historic tale about the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. But in fact, it depicts an exit from a state of corporeal lowness called Egypt to a higher state called "The Land of Israel."

Moses used the language of the branches. He used names of objects, feelings, and actions of our world, but intended to point to objects in the spiritual world: supreme powers, secret forces, exits and entries of power, and information and effects,

including harmful ones. All of these themes are portrayed as a historic tale about human development. In fact, the Torah describes a certain era in human development, but it actually refers to spiritual roots.

If we do not interpret the Torah solely as a historical document, we are then able to perceive spiritual forces that come from the upper world to ours. Instead of flesh and blood figures, such as Moses and Pharaoh, or animals and nations, we will see spiritual forces. If we remove the outer shell from the Torah, we will see an entirely different picture, detached from this world. Then, gradually, we will come into contact with these forces and use them for spiritual elevation.

With the help of his seventy disciples, Moses composed a guide to spiritual ascent. He made several copies of it and taught it in groups that together became known as the “people of Israel.” Thus, the people of Israel originated from a group of Kabbalists, the disciples of Moses, and belonging to that nation is determined by a striving for spirituality. Hence, anyone from the nations of the world who feels a desire for spirituality can become a Jew.

The Jews are that group of people who adopted the concept of monotheism in the time of Abraham. After Abraham’s death, a group of people who believed in a single force of leadership, a force one could turn to, was established. The successors of Abraham, who called themselves Jews, were unique in that they wanted unity with the Creator, *dvekut* (adhesion) with Him. They were also called Hebrews from the Hebrew word *ivri*, meaning one who crossed over from this world to the spiritual.

In the book of Torah, Moses developed a science for attaining contact with the upper world. But for most people, it is difficult, if not impossible, to see anything deeper than family sagas and history. We will not even be able to feel what is concealed in it, as Kabbalists tell us.

USING THE ZOHAR TO READ THE TORAH

People search for all kinds of codes in the Torah and find all the possible interconnections among its parts. Indeed, the parts of the Torah are interconnected in an infinite number of ways—the number of the letters, the words, the verses, and the phrases have been calculated. Recently, a fantastic work of calculation analyzed the inner structure of the letters and parts of letters. But those calculations give us nothing. They don't teach us what stands behind each symbol or dot, or the shape of the letters and their combinations.

The Torah was first written as a single word with no spaces. Only later was that single word divided into individual words and the words into letters, and those letters were further broken down to their parts. In the end, these parts become a point and a line that extends from it. A black point on a white background symbolizes the source of the light: the light emanates from the single point. If the light descends from the upper force, from the Creator to the creature, it is a vertical line; if the force is ascribed to the entire creation, it is a horizontal line.

This is all the information that we get from the Creator. All the possible combinations between dots and lines depend on those two signs sent to us from the Creator:

- The vertical line—a personal sign sent to humankind by the Creator
- The horizontal line—a general sign sent to humankind by the Creator
- All the situations in between

All the signs combined created the code for the relationship between God and humankind, and at any moment things

can appear different because at any moment the soul is in a different state.

A person who looks at the letters of the Torah, provided he or she has learned to read it correctly, can see his or her own past, present, and future through the combinations of dots and lines. But to see these things, one needs a key. With it, one can read the Torah like a tour guide to the spiritual world as opposed to simply a historic episode. This key is found in the Zohar, which interprets the Pentateuch and explains exactly what Moses meant by writing the Torah.

When we study the five books of the Pentateuch through the eyes of the Zohar, we see something entirely other than our world; we see the upper world, the spiritual leadership of our world, and the entire creation. That is why Kabbalists read those two books together.

Before printing the book of Zohar, Moses's students and followers wrote, over several hundred years, basic interpretations of incidents in the Torah so that we could better understand what Moses had written. The first interpretation of the Torah is the Mishnah, from the word *sheni, shanah* (something that repeats itself). The Mishnah portrays all the spiritual laws as laws of this world. It explains what one must and must not do. We know these explanations as Mitzvot (commandments, precepts) of "do" (positive precepts) or Mitzvot of "do not do" (negative precepts).

Only Kabbalah can explain these actions. It explains that the most important thing is not the worldly act, but the aim in the spiritual world. What a person does with his or her internal intentions matters. That is precisely what the sages and the disciples of Moses tell us about.

The Talmud was the next generation, whose sages explained the right way to keep the Mitzvot in each and every situation. But they also understood that it was not about the

mechanical observation of Mitzvot in our world, but rather that through these Mitzvot, in their correct spiritual context, we may study the nature of our world and the upper world in the best way for us.

Though the Mishnah and the Talmud explain each spiritual law in detail, they are written in everyday language. Hence, if you do not have the code for the book of Zohar, you only see the Mishnah and the Talmud as recommendations for the right way to lead a religious, orthodox way of life.

All great Kabbalists, meaning all those sages of the Mishnah (the *Tanna'im*) and the Talmud (the *Amora'im*), explained in their texts the system of creation and how we can best use its laws. They explained the reason why these forces come down to us and how we can use them to get a positive response and ultimately become vital and active parts of creation.

When these forces come to us from above and we react to them correctly, our responses climb up again and bring down to our world good results for everyone. This is the task of Kabbalah, also called the wisdom of Kabbalah. The word *Kabbalah* comes from the word *lekabel* (to receive), meaning to learn how to receive the abundance that comes to us from the upper forces correctly.

A person who begins to study Kabbalah can clearly see that the reason for all the pains and catastrophes we experience both on the personal and global level is that we do not correctly interpret what happens around us. Because of our benighted behavior and incorrect reaction, our situation and the consequences that return to us increasingly worsen.

Kabbalah is the most practical science. It provides humanity the key to the leadership of the world. But for us to lead it, we must first study it. For that we need to know the general structure of the universe and its system of management, so that we may know how to take an active part in it.

RABBI SHIMON BAR-YOCHAI
(SECOND CENTURY CE)

Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai (Rashbi) was the author of the book of Zohar, which was written in the second century CE. It is the most important work of Kabbalah and considered to be its primary and most fundamental textbook. Rashbi lived between the Talmudic period and that of the Zohar and is regarded as a great researcher of both human nature and the upper world. He is also among the most important sages of the Talmud (his name is mentioned there some four thousand times). He was proficient in the languages of both the Talmud and Kabbalah, and he used both of them to describe the upper system of management, how the events of the present and the future are made to happen there—all the innovations and transformations—and how they come down from there to our world and manifest themselves in the clothing of this world.

The Zohar explains which actions influence the rest of the world from here below. Rashbi was the first Kabbalist to describe the reactions that we get from above for our thoughts. He described how they operate in the upper world and thus affect the unfolding of future events that are to descend to us. The Zohar is crucial to us because it encircles all the possible circumstances throughout human history.

Before Rashbi began to write the Zohar, he established around him a group of disciples, where the soul of each disciple corresponded to a certain spiritual degree in the upper world. There were nine students, and he was the tenth. Together they formed one collective soul, corresponding to the complete structure in the spiritual world called the *Eser* (ten) *Sefirot*.

Thus, although Rashbi is the author of the book, each and every one of the students represents one of the attributes of the spiritual world he describes. He built a sort of prism, through

which the simple upper light descends to our world and divides into ten parts, which are then divided into ten inner *Sefirot*. Their story is in fact a description of how those ten spiritual properties or forces come upon our world and lead it and how each person can use these forces for his or her own benefit and for others.

Rashbi said he could not have written the book by himself. He was supposed to write the book for the last generations and, in the meantime, conceal it so that it would only be revealed in the sixteenth century. To write this book in such a way that the intermediary generations would pass it by, he used his disciple Rabbi Abba. Rabbi Abba began writing the book while hearing and studying it from his teacher, but he wrote it in such a way that those who read it perceive only the outermost layer of the book.

The more people work on themselves, the further they refine themselves and rise spiritually. As they rise, they become better qualified to delve into the depth of the Zohar and actually feel what is written in it. They receive spiritual forces and become increasingly able to take an active part in the overall evolution.

Rabbi Abba did not write the Zohar in Hebrew, as Abraham and Moses wrote their books. Instead, he wrote it in Aramaic, which was a language used in Mesopotamia (today's Iraq). The book also contains words in Greek and Latin that were prevalent at the time. However, that does not diminish the value of the book in any way. In writing this way, the author wanted to hide the book's inner meaning, wrapping it in an unappealing package.

To write the Zohar, Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai hid in a cave in the northern part of Israel (the Idra Raba) with his son Rabbi Eleazar. They sat in a cave for thirteen years, eating—as the Midrash has it—carobs and drinking water from a nearby spring. Their clothes were torn, so to stay covered, they buried themselves in sand. During the day, while buried, they studied and examined everything, and later wrote what they learned in the book of Zohar.

When the thirteen years had passed, Rabbi Shimon left the cave with his son and gathered ten disciples around him. He raised them spiritually, each according to his individual soul, thus building a collective spiritual vessel in which they felt the structure of the upper world, the highest root of our existence.

When the book was finally written, Rabbi Shimon passed away and was buried in Miron, not far from where the book was written. His son is buried next to him, and his other disciples are also buried nearby.

The Zohar was concealed while Rabbi Shimon was still alive, right after the writing was completed. Humanity as a whole, and especially the Jewish people, were not at the spiritual degree that would have allowed them to use the book for a spiritual purpose and for the good of all humankind.

The Torah also speaks only of spiritual worlds, but it has spread so well throughout the world precisely because it was written so that everyone can understand it at his or her corporeal level and adhere to what it says. Moses referred to spiritual laws, but he did it so that those who adhered to those laws would direct the entire illumination of the universe on him- or herself in the best possible way. Because of the coded and “simple” way the Torah was written (“simple” because when we read it, we *think* that it is simple and clear), the Torah didn’t have to be concealed like the Zohar, and could remain out in the open and not handed over secretly from one Kabbalist to another.

Rabbi Shimon ordered the Zohar buried in his lifetime. In fact, he both wrote it and concealed it. Today, many parts of the Zohar are still missing. Five or six hundred years later, the book was found by chance: a Kabbalist asked one of his students to get some food from the market. The student returned with food wrapped in paper. The Kabbalist was astonished to see that the wrapping was an ancient manuscript.

The Kabbalist began to study it and saw that it led to the secrets of creation. He immediately sent his students back to the market. They burrowed in every pile of trash and gathered all the pages they could find, eventually ending up with more than 2,700 pieces of paper. An Arab merchant, who had come to Israel after a camel ride in the area of the rivers of Euphrates and Tigris, had found these pieces of paper along the way and thought to use them as wrappings for his spices. Thus the pages of the ancient book of Zohar were put together again.

The Kabbalist Moshe De Leon was the first to publish the Zohar in thirteenth-century Spain. It contained not only commentaries on the Torah, but commentaries on other books as well, such as the books of the prophets and Kabbalistic explanations to the Mishnah and the Talmud. Therefore, what we now refer to as the Zohar is only a part of the original book. It is not a large book today, containing approximately three hundred pages of text, and is about twenty times smaller than the original size, meaning that a huge amount of information is still missing. However, this is not so great a loss, because new Kabbalists have come along and told us about everything that happens in the two worlds and how the upper world affects our own, building today and tomorrow. Except for the interpretation of Moses's five books of the Pentateuch, almost nothing else remained. However, even in its present form, it remains a key by which we can open the gates to the spiritual world.

After Rabbi Moshe De Leon, the Zohar was concealed again for hundreds of years, until the late Middle Ages, the time of the Holy Ari.

THE ARI (1534–1572)

In each generation, the same souls that existed in previous generations reappear. They are clothed in new bodies, evolve, and

become more sensitive and receptive to sublime and complex spiritual knowledge. Thus, people who lived thousands of years ago had the same souls as our own but are more developed today, bringing technological and spiritual progress to our world.

Any progress in humankind is the result of souls rising to a higher degree, after having gained experience in previous lives. Each soul that comes to our world begins its life with the experiences it has accumulated in the previous life. Hence, the soul goes through a process of accumulating knowledge, spiritual attainments, and worldly sensations, leaving it with memories we call *reshimot* (reminiscence).

Of all the souls that have come down to our world from previous generations, only a few have wished to evolve into the spiritual realms. However, in our time, many have done so. We are much more advanced than our ancestors. It is easier for us to absorb new information and live it, because we are born prepared to absorb this information. Hence, each new piece of data is completely natural for us.

Kabbalah books tend to be revealed and concealed intermittently. They can be hidden for several generations, reappear, and then be lost again. It happens this way so that humanity can go through certain “corrections” (*tikkunim*). Generally speaking, these books exist throughout the history of humankind to correct humanity and assure its development. All these books will be known to everyone in the future. The Zohar and the books of the prophets state that in our final days, all humanity will use these books as manuals for attaining the upper worlds, and people will have happy, eternal, and complete lives.

Souls of great Kabbalists go through special cycles. They do not appear in our world in every generation but, like the books, only in special ones. The soul of the first man incarnated later on in Abraham the Patriarch, Moses, Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, the Holy Ari, and, in our days, Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag.

Such a soul comes only during special times, when it is meant to influence and correct the entire human race.

In the sixteenth century, the time of the Middle Ages and barbarism, a child was born in Jerusalem. Later in his life he received the name the Holy Ari. He absorbed the entire Kabbalistic knowledge since the first man and processed it and phrased it in such a way that all the generations following him could receive their spiritual nourishment from his books.

The Ari later moved to Egypt. His father passed away while the Ari was young, and he went to live with his uncle. At thirty-five he came to Tzfat, an ancient city in Israel that at the time of the Ari was home to many Kabbalists.

The Ari taught in a school he had arranged for his disciples for eighteen months and then died at age thirty-six. His first disciple was Chaim Vital, who was twenty-eight at the time. Chaim Vital wrote down everything he'd heard during those eighteen months, and what he wrote comprised the twenty volumes we know as the writings of the Ari. When the Ari passed away, he left his work to Chaim Vital and no one else. Chaim Vital was the only one permitted to practice Kabbalah after the demise of the Ari and publish the writings of his teacher.

What distinguishes the Ari is not only that his soul was an incarnation of the souls of giant Kabbalists, but also that it was born precisely at the time when the general level of souls in the world demanded spiritual evolution. The first phase of the evolution of the souls ended with the Ari—a phase of unconscious evolution, the Middle Ages, a time of barbarism and savagery.

The appearance of the Ari brought with it a new era of human development. Souls that awaken a desire for spirituality and knowledge of the upper world began to descend and clothe themselves in the bodies of our world. This caused the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance. It was a time of evolution, leading to the industrial revolution.

The Ari was given permission from above to renew the system that existed back in the days of the first man and change it from a system for unique, individual souls to one that is suitable for the masses—a large number of souls who evolved previously in this world and were now ready for spiritual ascent.

The Ari received the book of Zohar in the sixteenth century. He taught his students all the Kabbalistic sources that preceded him. Later on, these sources were published in one book, called *The Tree of Life (Etz Hayim)*. It is a textbook that teaches about the way to the spiritual world, explaining how we can rise and attain perfection and eternity.

The Ari wrote some twenty other books in addition to *The Tree of Life*. They are very difficult to understand, but today they form the basis for the entire method of Kabbalah. In those books, the Ari describes the laws of creation as a clear scientific system, in a way that could be used in textbooks for study. The primary part of the Ari's books is divided into eight parts called "Eight Gates." Each gate describes a certain topic in Kabbalah in a clear, scientific manner. He explains the laws of the upper world, how humans influence these laws, and the reincarnations.

All the books of the Ari were written in a new and completely different approach, suitable for the souls beginning the correction of the world. Many Kabbalists all over the world relied on his work, especially in Eastern Europe, Ukraine, White Russia, and Poland. Many were drawn to Kabbalah, and a mass movement called Hasidism was established on the basis of it. The Hasidim are people who are drawn to connect with the upper spiritual world. They see that there is a sublime goal to their worldly lives.

Studying the books of the Ari raises us beyond the level of our world. The Ari stated that anyone who felt a desire for the spiritual world could study his books. Before the Ari, the

special soul of a Kabbalist would descend as if by grace from above, and the right book for that generation would appear. But since the time of the Ari, anyone with any kind of desire for spirituality can study Kabbalah, and by learning from his books, one can enter the upper world. We have already stated that in every generation the same souls return, clothed in new bodies and retaining their previous experiences. Therefore, each generation is wiser than the last and aspires for something higher.

During the time of the Ari, the general evolution of the souls was such that souls desired spiritual elevation and were not satisfied with a mere ordinary life on the level of this world. That desire was the beginning of the Renaissance and the industrial revolution. In spirituality, this process is expressed by the desire to discover the origin of life, to search for the answer to the question: "What is the meaning of my life?" From the time of the Ari onward, that question began to ripen in the souls that descended. It made people search for the origin of life. This search takes us to the study of the upper world from which we come, though we cannot actually feel and understand it. The Ari took the wisdom of Kabbalah and created an entirely new system, suited for souls that want to rise by themselves.

Before the Ari, two types of souls came to this world: one, the beastly kind, was concerned only with procreation and preservation of the species, while the other, the Kabbalistic souls, were independently occupied with studying the spiritual world. Since the time of the Ari, the souls that descend to our world can no longer settle for the beastly sustenance of this world. They have evolved to such a degree that a great many of them want to rise to the spiritual world.

Today, souls are acquiring desires for independent spiritual ascent, and they need a method to help them come to the spir-

itual world. The Ari was the first to establish such a method and thus is considered the most important Kabbalist. The Ari writes that since the establishment of his method, any person wishing to study Kabbalah can do so, regardless of his age, sex, or nationality.

After the Ari, many people began to open up to Kabbalah. Hundreds of souls began to rise independently and break through to the spiritual world. The last phase of human development begins with the Ari. Starting in the sixteenth century, souls embarked on a new spiritual birth, attaining complete entrance to the spiritual world while still clothed in their corporeal bodies. This prosperous time continued until approximately the 1920s. Without the method of the Ari, the spiritual world would have been inaccessible to such a large number of souls. The prosperity was especially noticeable in Eastern Europe, where many Kabbalists emerged, establishing many movements in Judaism.

At the time of his early death, some of the Ari's texts were buried with him, some were hidden in a box by his relatives, and Chaim Vital himself began to work on others. Gradually, the books were written and printed. Shmuel Vital, Chaim Vital's son, carried on the work of his father, and his son, Chaim Vital's grandson, continued after him, publishing the books of the Ari. The Ari's grave was opened some three generations after his demise and the rest of his scriptures were dug out. They were composed into the Eight Gates, the primary texts of the Ari.

Thus we see that even the followers of the Ari were not in possession of all his compositions. Even Chaim Vital did not have sufficient knowledge to compose a comprehensive and concise method, suitable for every soul that descends to this world, despite the tremendous efforts he made to preserve those texts for us.

**RABBI YEHUDA ASHLAG, BAAL HASULAM
(1884–1954)**

In the end, neither the Zohar nor the writings of the Ari were intended for a systematic study of the Kabbalah. Although the Kabbalah is indeed a science, before the twentieth century there never was a true textbook. It is only in our days that a comprehensive and concise method suitable for all souls of this world was established. To fill in the gaps, Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, the great Kabbalist who was born in Warsaw in 1884 and lived in Jerusalem from 1922 until his death in 1954, wrote a commentary on the Zohar and the texts of the Ari. Rabbi Ashlag, called Baal HaSulam (Master of the Ladder), evolved while writing the commentaries and published his principal work, *The Study of the Ten Sefirot (Talmud Eser Sefirot)*, considered the predominant Kabbalah study book of our time.

This textbook consists of six volumes, containing more than two thousand pages. It includes everything that Kabbalists have written since the dawn of time: the writings of the first man, Abraham the Patriarch, Moses, Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, and the Holy Ari. This book displays Kabbalah in a concise manner, fit for study. Thus, we have with us today everything needed to learn how creation was made, how it comes down to us, and how we can influence it from below, all the way to the highest world, to have the future we'd like to have.

Today the Zohar is incomprehensible without the Sulam commentary. Yet, the method of Baal HaSulam is often misunderstood. To those who have not achieved spiritual fulfillment, the book may be perceived as dry, schematic, and unemotional. It can read like an instruction manual rather than something that moves our heart. But this perception stems from a lack of understanding.

Studying Kabbalah means attaining what the books speak of, not just knowing what is written in the books. Unlike any other science, with Kabbalah you become the subject of the

research as you study, so the things about which you read happen inside of you rather than on the page.

Some say that all we must do is read, which then triggers something in the world above, which we do not understand. But this contradicts the desired outcome of the study, the purpose of the study, and what we should be doing. One should rise to the spiritual world while living in this world, in this corporeal life. That, in fact, is the purpose of the system of Kabbalah, and it can only be achieved through the right study, with the real books, written by Rashbi (Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai), the Ari, and Baal HaSulam.

When we learn from *The Study of the Ten Sefirot* under the right conditions and with the proper guidance, the upper world opens. There is a special approach to the material in the book and a special key that explains how to read the text, to make it open correctly. When a person studies like that, he or she begins to feel the universe, to see and feel in every sense what exists beyond the range of that sense, because his or her senses are corporeal and limited and can perceive nothing beyond their scope.

Baal HaSulam writes in the introduction to the *Study of the Ten Sefirot* that anyone can attain the highest point of spiritual evolution in our world, anyone can attain equivalence of form with the upper force—the Creator. We can attain the highest spiritual state while living in this world, because the body no longer stands as a barrier between the upper world and the soul. It doesn't matter if the soul is clothed in a body or not, because we can freely move from world to world and exist in all the worlds simultaneously in a state of eternity and perfection. Then, we become timeless, motionless, and spaceless.

Baal HaSulam writes that using his method makes all these phases attainable and that his method is suitable for everyone without exception. Besides the *Study of the Ten Sefirot*, Rabbi Ashlag also wrote a commentary on the Zohar and on the writings of the Ari. Baal HaSulam writes that he is a reincarnation

of a soul that starts with the first man, continues through Abraham the Patriarch, Moses, Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai, the Ari, and finally him. Because of that, he could take the compositions of these Kabbalists and process and present them to us in a way that suits our generation.

Although Baal HaSulam lived in our generation, much the same thing happened to his writings as happened to the Zohar and the writings of the Ari: some of his writings were concealed and are only now being published. I myself have many manuscripts of Baal HaSulam in my possession that my students and I are preparing for publication. These manuscripts are a spiritual inheritance I received from my rabbi, Baruch Ashlag, the son of Baal HaSulam.

RABBI BARUCH ASHLAG, RABASH
(1907–1991)

Baruch Ashlag represents the next phase in the evolution of Kabbalah after his father. The eldest son of Yehuda Ashlag, Baruch Ashlag was born in Poland in 1907 and came with his father to Israel at age fifteen. He always worked simple jobs: he was a construction worker, a road builder, a shoemaker, and a clerk. Never ashamed to do any work, he knew that jobs are necessary to survive in this world and nothing more. He was offered quite a few high offices, but never accepted any of them.

Although he was very knowledgeable in Torah and Talmud, Baruch Ashlag never served as a community rabbi. Instead, he spent his entire life following in the footsteps of his father and advancing in the study of Kabbalah. When his father passed away, Baruch Ashlag inherited his disciples and continued his work. He published the Zohar with his father's commentaries, as well as several other books.

I myself came to him in 1979, having already been in search of a teacher for four years. I was studying by myself and

with all kinds of “Kabbalists.” I went a long way knowing I needed to study Kabbalah, but not knowing who could teach me. From the first lesson with Rabbi Ashlag, I knew he was the right instructor for me. I remained with him for twelve years, until his death. When he died, I was there at his bedside.

Rabbi Baruch Ashlag wrote five books of articles, called *Shlavey Hasulam* (The Rungs of the Ladder), in which he successfully expressed all the inner states of a person who is on the way toward attaining the upper world. He studied all the possible phases, every step and movement that a person makes on the way, and explained how to reach the spiritual world and how to feel and live in it.

He constructed a system by which the individual could attain the upper world, something that previous Kabbalists did not do. This unique aspect of his articles is especially significant for those who want to attain the spiritual world. Without those articles, it is impossible to even imagine getting beyond our physical reality.

He also left us a manuscript of sermons he had heard from his father, which he called *Shamati* (I heard). Using these articles, we can define the characteristics of our own spiritual state and learn how to continue the spiritual ascent in that specific situation. The book is the basis for all the phases in the spiritual worlds and their many combinations, which affect the soul of one who aspires to attain them.

The works of Rabbi Baruch Ashlag are essential to us and to anyone who wishes to be open to the spiritual world. After the death of Rabbi Ashlag, a group was established, called Bnei Baruch (The Sons of Baruch). Together, we continue to study in the way he paved.

