

# Basic Concepts in Kabbalah

Expanding Your Inner Vision



LAITMAN  
KABBALAH PUBLISHERS

Rav Michael Laitman, PhD

# BASIC CONCEPTS IN KABBALAH

## Expanding Your Inner Vision

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Published by Laitman Kabbalah Publishers

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1057 Steeles Avenue West, Suite 532, Toronto, ON, M2R 3X1, Canada

194 Quentin Rd, 2nd floor, Brooklyn, New York, 11223, USA

Printed in Canada

Second printing, 2006

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Laitman, Michael.

Basic Concepts in Kabbalah: expanding your inner vision /

Michael Laitman

p. cm.

ISBN 0-9738268-8-6

1. Cabala—History. 2. Spiritual life—Judaism.

3. Meditation—Judaism. 4. Contemplation. I. Title.

BM526.L35 2006

296.1'6—dc22

2006027101

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Translation: David Brushin

Proofreading: Josia Nakash, David Robbins,

Susan Morales Kosinec, Rob Taylor, Robert Jochelson

Editors: Claire Gerus, Michael R. Kellogg

Layout and Drawings: Baruch Khovov

Cover Design: Richard Aquan

Printing and Post Production: Uri Laitman

Project Coordinator: Leah Goldberg

Executive Editor: Chaim Ratz

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FIRST EDITION: JULY 2006

## The Tree of Life

Behold that before the emanations were emanated and the creatures were created,  
The upper simple light had filled the whole existence.  
And there was no vacancy, such as an empty atmosphere, a hollow, or a pit,  
But all was filled with simple, boundless light.  
And there was no such part as head, or tail,  
But everything was simple, smooth light, balanced evenly and equally,  
And it was called the Endless Light.

And when upon His simple will, came the desire to create the world  
and emanate the emanations,  
To bring to light the perfection of His deeds, His names, His appellations,  
Which was the cause of the creation of the worlds,  
He then restricted Himself, in the middle,  
Precisely in the center,  
He restricted the light.  
And the light drew far off to the sides around that middle point.  
And there remained an empty space, a vacuum  
Circling the middle point.  
And the restriction had been uniform  
Around the empty point,  
So that the space  
Was evenly circled around it.

There, after the restriction,  
Having formed a vacuum and a space  
Precisely in the middle of the endless light,  
A place was formed,  
Where the emanated and the created might reside.  
Then from the Endless Light a single line hung down,  
Lowered down into that space.  
And through that line, He emanated, created, formed, and  
Made all the worlds.  
Before these four worlds came to be  
There was one infinite, one name, in wondrous, hidden unity,  
And even in the angles closest to Him  
There is no force and no attainment in The Endless,  
As there is no mind that can perceive Him,  
For He has no place, no boundary, no name.

The Ari,  
a great 16<sup>th</sup> century Kabbalist

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Even though this book may seem very basic, it is not intended to be a book that conveys basic knowledge of Kabbalah. Rather, it is a book to help readers cultivate an *approach to the concepts* of Kabbalah, to spiritual objects, and to spiritual terms.

By reading and re-reading in this book, one develops internal observations, senses, and approaches that did not previously exist within. These newly acquired observations are like sensors that “feel” the space around us that is hidden from our ordinary senses.

Hence, this book is intended to foster the contemplation of spiritual terms. To the extent that we are integrated with these terms, we can begin to see with our inner vision the unveiling of the spiritual structure that surrounds us, almost as if a mist had been lifted.

This book is not aimed at the study of facts. It is a book for beginners who wish to awaken the deepest and subtlest sensations they can possess.

Michael Laitman

## INTRODUCTION

*Open slightly your heart to me,  
and I will reveal the world to you.  
-The Book of Zohar*

- Who am I?
- Why do I exist?
- Where did we come from? Where are we going? And what is our purpose here?
- Have we been in this world before?
- Why is there suffering in this world and can we avoid it?
- How can we attain peace, fulfillment, and happiness?

From generation to generation, people try to find answers to these painfully insistent questions. The fact that they continue from generation to generation indicates that we still have not received satisfactory answers to them.

While studying nature and the universe, we discover that all that surrounds us exists and functions according to precise and purposeful laws. Yet, when we examine ourselves, the zenith of Creation, we find that humanity seemingly exists outside of this system of rational laws.

For example, when we observe how wisely nature created our bodies and how precisely and purposefully every cell in our bodies functions, we are unable to answer the question: “Why does the entire organism exist?”

All that surrounds us is permeated with cause-and-effect connections. Nothing is created without a purpose; the physical world is governed by precise laws of motion, transformation, and circulation. However, the main question—“Why does it all exist (not only us, but

the entire universe)?”—remains unanswered. Is there anyone in this world who has not been touched by this question at least once?

The existing scientific theories assert that the world is governed by invariable physical laws that we are unable to influence. Our only task is to live well by using them wisely and to prepare the ground for the future generations. But good living does not resolve the question concerning why these future generations will, or should, exist.

The question of humanity’s origins—whether from a primitive species through evolution, or through extraterrestrial visitations and settlement—does not change the essential questions. There are two primary dates in every person’s life: birth and death. What happens between them can be unique and therefore priceless. It can also be meaningless if at the end of it is darkness and chasm.

Where is our wise, omniscient, coherent nature that does nothing without purpose? Every atom, every cell in the human organism has its cause and purpose; yet, what is the purpose of the entire organism? Perhaps there exist some laws and goals that we have not yet discovered.

We can research something at a lower evolutionary level than our own. We perceive and comprehend the meaning of inanimate, vegetative, and animate existence. But we cannot comprehend the meaning of human existence. Evidently, this understanding can be attained only from a higher existential level.

Our research of the world boils down to the study of how it reacts to our influence on it. We can only research at our own level and not above it. Even when we research at our own level, we study it by applying some impact on the world and measuring the reaction to the impact. We perceive our influence on the world with our five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Otherwise, we may use instruments that expand the range of our limited senses.

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Unfortunately, we cannot recognize anything beyond what our senses can perceive and research. It is as though nothing exists but what we perceive. Whatever does seem to exist, lives only in what we sense, and a creature with different senses would experience the same things in a totally different way.

At the same time, we do not feel a lack of sensory organs, such as a sixth finger on our hands. Just as it is impossible to explain the meaning of eyesight to one blind from birth, so, too, will we fail to discover the concealed forms of nature with the research methods we are applying today.

According to Kabbalah, there exists a spiritual world that is imperceptible to our sense organs. At its center is one tiny part—our universe and our planet—the heart of this universe. This sphere of information, thoughts, and emotions affects us through the laws of the material nature and its incidents. It also places us under certain conditions upon which we must act.

We do not choose where, when, with whom, and with what traits and inclinations we will be born. We do not choose whom to meet and in what environment to grow. These things determine all of our actions and reactions, as well as all of their consequences. So where is our freedom of will?

According to Kabbalah, there are four mandatory kinds of knowledge to attain:

**Creation:** The study of Creation and the evolution of the worlds, namely:

- The way the Creator created the worlds with the creatures that populate them through consecutive restrictions;
- The interaction laws between the spiritual and material worlds, and their consequences;



- The goal of man's creation is to form a system with an illusion of the existence of free will by combining the soul with the body, and by controlling them through nature and the apparent factor of chance with the help of two mutually balanced systems of light and dark forces.

**Functioning:** The study of the human essence—its interconnection and interaction with the spiritual world. Functioning deals with one's arrival to—and departure from—this world. It also includes the Upper Worlds' reactions to our world and toward other human beings, caused by man's actions. It researches everyone's individual path, from the creation of worlds to the attainment of the ultimate goal.

**Incarnations of the Soul:** The study of every soul's essence and its incarnations, as well as our actions in this life and their consequences for subsequent lives. The research of incarnations examines how and why a soul descends to a body, and what determines the acceptance of a certain soul within a certain body.

Incarnations of the Soul also deals with the mystery of chance, and researches human history as a result of a certain order and cycles of souls. It also follows this path over 6,000 years and studies the connection of the soul with the general governance of the system of worlds and its cycles of life and death. Lastly, it states upon what factors our path in this world depends.

**Governance:** The study of our world: inanimate, vegetative, and animate levels of nature, their essence, role, and how they are governed by the spiritual world. It studies the Upper Governance and our perception of nature, time, and space. It researches the Upper Forces that move material bodies, and the way one's inner force pushes all things, animate and inanimate, to the preordained goal.

Can one solve this fundamental puzzle of human life without touching upon the question of its source? Every human being encounters this question. The search for the goal and the meaning

## INTRODUCTION

of existence is the key question around humankind's spiritual life. Hence, starting with the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we are observing a revival of mankind's spiritual aspirations.

The technical progress and global catastrophes that gave rise to a variety of philosophies have not brought spiritual fulfillment to humanity. As Kabbalah explains, out of all existing pleasures, our world received only a tiny spark—its presence in corporeal objects is what provides all our worldly pleasures.

In other words, all our pleasant sensations, from whatever source, are caused only by the presence of this spark within them. Throughout our lives, we are placed in a forced quest of new objects of delight, hoping to receive greater and greater pleasures; we do not suspect that they might not be anything but shells.

To receive absolute fulfillment, we must acknowledge the need for spiritual elevation above matter. There are two paths in our world to reach that goal: the path of the spiritual ascent (Kabbalah), and the path of suffering.

The path of Kabbalah is a path of independent and voluntary realization of the need to gradually terminate egoism, when the Upper Light is used to perceive egoism as evil.

Sometimes people come to this realization quite unexpectedly. A secular, well-established, calm person suddenly begins to feel acute discontent; any spark of excitement, joy, taste for living, and pleasure disappears from that person's everyday life.

This is the state of our generation, where material abundance gives rise to a sensation of spiritual hunger. We start searching for other sources of fulfillment, often choosing a long and prickly path. Freedom of will exists between the paths of spiritual ascent and the path of suffering. One can only wish that people will "choose life" instead of embarking on the path of suffering, the same path upon which we so often treaded in the past.

## CHAPTER 1 THE METHOD OF PERCEPTION IN KABBALAH

Kabbalah teaches about the cause-and-effect connection between spiritual sources that unite according to absolute laws into one exalted goal: the attainment of the Creator by the created beings.

According to Kabbalah, all of humanity and every individual must reach this ultimate point to fully attain the goal and program of Creation. Throughout the generations, individuals have attained a certain spiritual level through individual work. These people, called “Kabbalists,” climbed to the top of the spiritual ladder.

Every material object and its action, from the smallest to the greatest, is operated by spiritual forces that fill our entire universe. It is as if our universe were resting on a net of forces.

Take, for example, the tiniest living organism whose role is merely to reproduce and sustain its species. Think about how many forces and complex systems function within it, and how many of them remain undetected by the human eye. If we multiply them by the number of organisms living today, and by those that once lived in our universe and in the spiritual worlds, we will then have a vague idea of the vast number of forces and connections that control them.

One can depict the spiritual forces as two interconnected and equal systems. The difference between them is that one comes from the Creator and develops from up downward through all the worlds to our world. The other begins in our world and rises according to the laws that were developed in the first system and now function in the second.

Kabbalah defines the first system as “The order of creation of worlds and *Sefirot*,” and the second as “The attainments or levels of prophecy and spirit.” The second system teaches that people who wish to attain the ultimate degree should follow the laws of the first

system, which are the laws studied in Kabbalah. When one ascends in these degrees, the second factor is born within. This is spirituality.

The corporeal world is full of forces and phenomena that we do not feel directly, such as electricity and magnetism, but even small children are familiar with their names and the results of their actions. For example, although our knowledge of electricity is limited, we have learned to utilize this phenomenon for our purposes and define it as naturally as we give names to such things as bread and sugar.

Similarly, it is as if all names in Kabbalah give us a real and objective idea about a spiritual object. On second thought, just as we have no idea about spiritual objects or even the Creator Himself, so are we equally ignorant of any objects, even those we can grip with our hands. This is because we perceive not the object itself, but our reaction to its impact on our senses.

These reactions give us the semblance of knowledge, though the essence of the object itself remains totally concealed from us. Moreover, we are utterly unable to understand even ourselves. All that we know about ourselves is limited to our actions and reactions.

As an instrument of the world's research, science divides into two parts: the study of the properties of matter and the study of its form. In other words, there is nothing in the universe that does not consist of matter and form. For example, a table is a combination of matter and form, where matter, such as wood, is the basis that carries the form—that of a table. Or take the word, “liar,” where matter (one's body) is a carrier of the form, falsehood.

A science that studies materials is based on tests—experiments that lead to scientific conclusions. However, a science that studies forms irrespective of matter, and separates them abstractly, cannot be based on an experiment. This is even truer with forms that were never connected to matter, because a form without matter does not exist in our world.

A form can be separated from matter only in one's imagination. Therefore, all conclusions in such cases will be based purely on theoretical assumptions. All of philosophy refers to this kind of science, and humanity has often suffered from the unsubstantiated conclusions of philosophers. Most modern scientists have rejected this kind of research because its conclusions are completely unreliable.

While researching the spiritual worlds, we discover that our perceptions are merely a will from Above that wants us to feel as if we are a separately existing entity, and not a part of the Creator. The entire surrounding world is actually the result of the influence of spiritual forces on us. This is why the surrounding world is considered a world of illusions.

Let me explain what I mean with an allegory:

“Once upon a time there lived a coachman. He had a pair of horses, a house, and a family. Suddenly, he had a wave of bad luck: his horses died and so did his wife and children, and his house collapsed. Soon enough the coachman died of grief. At the celestial court, it was discussed what could be given to such a tormented soul. Finally, it was decided to let him *feel* as if he were alive, with his family in his house, as if he had good horses, and was happy with his work and life.”

These sensations are sometimes perceived in the same way that a dream seems real. Indeed, only our sensations create our pictures of the surrounding world. So how can we tell illusion from reality?

As with all sciences, Kabbalah, too, is divided into the study of matter and the study of form. Nevertheless, it has a remarkable feature and an edge over other sciences: Even the part of it that studies form abstracted from matter is based entirely on experimental control; that is, it is subject to empirical testing!

When a Kabbalist has risen to the spiritual level of the studied object, he or she acquires its qualities and thereby has full insight.

This person can practically operate various forms of matter, even before they manifest in matter, as if observing our illusions from aside!

Just as with any other teaching, Kabbalah uses certain terminology and symbols to describe objects and actions: a spiritual force, a world, or a *Sefira* is called by the name of the worldly object it controls.

Since every material object or force corresponds to the spiritual object or force that controls it, an utterly precise conformity is created between the name taken from the corporeal world and its spiritual root, its source.

Therefore, only a Kabbalist, who clearly knows the correspondence between spiritual forces and material objects, can assign names to spiritual objects. Only one who has attained the spiritual level of an object can see the consequence of its influence in our world.

Kabbalists write books and pass their knowledge to others using the “language of the branches.” This language is exceptionally accurate because it is based on the connection between the spiritual root and the corporeal branch. It cannot be altered due to the invariable connection between an object and its spiritual root. At the same time, our earthly language is gradually losing its accuracy because it is connected only to the branch and not to the root.

However, mere nominal knowledge of the language is insufficient because simply knowing the name of a material object provides no understanding of its spiritual form. Only the knowledge of the spiritual form enables one to see its material result, its branch.

We can thus conclude that one should first attain the spiritual root, its nature and properties. Only then can one pass the name on to its branch in this world and study the interconnection between the spiritual root and the material branch. Only then can one understand the “language of the branches,” thus facilitating a precise exchange of spiritual information.

## BASIC CONCEPTS IN KABBALAH

We may ask, “If one should attain the spiritual root first, how can a beginner master this science without correct understanding of the teacher?” The answer is that through the great desire for spirituality, the student finds the right way and acquires the sensation of the Upper World. This is done by studying authentic sources only, as well as by detaching from any material rituals.

## FURTHER READING

***Kabbalah, Science and the Meaning of Life:*** Science explains life's mechanisms; Kabbalah explains life's purpose. In *Kabbalah, Science and the Meaning of Life*, Rav Michael Laitman, PhD, eloquently introduces earthshaking concepts so that even readers unfamiliar with Kabbalah or science can easily understand.

Kabbalah explains that we are all one soul, materialized in many bodies. Similarly, modern science states that at the most fundamental level, we are all literally one. Science proves that reality is affected by its observer. Kabbalah states that reality, and even the Creator exist only within the observer. If you're just a little curious about reality and life's meaning, this is your book.

***Attaining the Worlds Beyond:*** is a first step toward discovering the ultimate fulfillment of spiritual ascent in our lifetime. This book reaches out to all those who are searching for answers, who are seeking a logical and reliable way to understand the world's phenomena. This magnificent introduction to the wisdom of Kabbalah provides a new kind of awareness that enlightens the mind, invigorates the heart, and moves the reader to the depths of their soul.

***Awakening to Kabbalah:*** a distinctive, personal, and awe-filled introduction to an ancient wisdom tradition. Rav Laitman—a disciple of the great Kabbalist Rabbi Baruch Ashlag (son of Yehuda Ashlag)—provides you with a deeper understanding of the fundamental teachings of Kabbalah, and how you can use this wisdom to clarify your relationship with others and the world around you.

Using language both scientific and poetic, he probes the most profound questions of spirituality and existence. This provocative, unique guide will inspire and invigorate you to see beyond the world as it is and the limitations of your everyday life, become closer to the Creator, and reach new depths of the soul.



***The Kabbalah Experience:*** Never has the language of Kabbalah been as clear and accessible as it is here, in this compelling, informative collection. The depth of wisdom revealed in the questions and answers of this book will inspire reflection and contemplation. Readers will also begin to experience a growing sense of enlightenment while simply absorbing the words on every page.

*The Kabbalah Experience* is a guide from the past to the future, revealing situations that all students of Kabbalah will experience at some point on their journeys. For those who cherish every moment in life, the author offers unparalleled insights into the timeless wisdom of Kabbalah.

***The Path of Kabbalah:*** “Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness” (Exodus 20:3). This prohibition from the Bible is also the basis of the Wisdom of Kabbalah. Kabbalists state that there is no reality at all, but something called His Essence, the Upper Force.

As uncanny as it sounds, this notion hides in its wings the very prospect of freedom, for every person, for every nation, and for the entire world. The structure and the perception of reality are the surface of this book.

But the story of humanity, or more accurately, of the human soul, is the undercurrent that drives the reader forward in this book. It is about you; about me; about all of us. This book is about the way we were, the way we are, the way we will be, and most importantly, it is about the best way to get there.

***The Science of Kabbalah:*** is the first in a series of texts that Rav Michael Laitman, Kabbalist and scientist, designed to introduce readers to the special language and terminology of the Kabbalah. Here, Rav Laitman reveals authentic Kabbalah in a manner that is both rational and mature. Readers are gradually led to an understanding of the logical design of the Universe and the life whose home it is.

*The Science of Kabbalah*, a revolutionary work that is unmatched in its clarity, depth, and appeal to the intellect, will enable readers to approach the more technical works of Baal HaSulam (Rav Yehuda Ashlag), such as *Talmud Eser Sefirot* and *Zohar*. Although scientists and philosophers will delight in its illumination, laymen will also enjoy the satisfying answers to the riddles of life that only authentic Kabbalah provides. Now, travel through the pages and prepare for an astonishing journey into the Upper Worlds.

**Introduction to the Book of Zohar:** is the second in a series written by Kabbalist and scientist Rav Michael Laitman, which will prepare readers to understand the hidden message of “*The Zohar*”. Among the many helpful topics dealt with in this companion text to *The Science of Kabbalah*, readers are introduced to the “language of roots and branches,” without which the stories in *The Zohar* are mere fable and legend. *Introduction to The Book of Zohar* will certainly furnish readers with the necessary tools to understand authentic Kabbalah as it was originally meant to be, as a means to attain the Upper Worlds.

**Wondrous Wisdom:** This book presents the first steps, an initial course on Kabbalah, based solely on authentic teachings passed down from Kabbalist teacher to student over thousands of years. Offered within is a sequence of lessons revealing the nature of the wisdom and explaining the method of attaining it. For every person questioning “Who am I really?” and “Why am I on this planet?” this book is an absolute must.

**Kabbalah for Beginners:** By reading this book you will be able to take your first step in understanding the roots of human behaviour and the laws of nature. The contents present the essential principals of the Kabbalistic approach and describe the wisdom of Kabbalah and the way it works. *Kabbalah for Beginners* is intended for those searching for a sensible and reliable method of studying the phenomena of this world for those seeking to understand the reason for suffering and pleasure, for those seeking answers to the major questions in life.

## ABOUT BNEI BARUCH

**B**nei Baruch is a non-profit organization that is spreading the wisdom of Kabbalah to accelerate the spirituality of humankind. Kabbalist Rav Michael Laitman, PhD, who was the disciple and personal assistant to Rabbi Baruch Ashlag, the son of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (author of *The Sulam* commentary on *The Zohar*), follows in the footsteps of his mentor in leading the group toward its mission.

Laitman's scientific method provides individuals of all faiths, religions, and cultures with the precise tools necessary for embarking on a captivating path of self-discovery and spiritual ascent. With the focus being primarily on inner processes that individuals undergo at their own pace, Bnei Baruch welcomes people of all ages and lifestyles to engage in this rewarding process.

In recent years, a massive worldwide search for the answers to life's questions has been underway. Society has lost its ability to see reality for what 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 standard, people who are seeking to understand our true purpose for being here.

Bnei Baruch offers practical guidance and a reliable method for understanding the world's phenomena. The authentic teaching method, devised by Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, not only helps overcome the trials and tribulations of everyday life, but initiates a process in which individuals extend themselves beyond their present boundaries and limitations.

Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag left a study method for this generation, which essentially “trains” individuals to behave as if they have already achieved the perfection of the Upper Worlds while still here in our world. In the words of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, “This method is a practical way to attain the Upper World, the source of our existence, while still living in this world.”

A Kabbalist is a researcher who studies his or her own nature using this proven, time-tested and accurate method. Through this method, one attains perfection and control over one's life, and realizes life's true goal. Just as a person cannot function properly in this world without having knowledge of it, the soul cannot function properly in the Upper World without knowledge of it. The wisdom of Kabbalah provides this knowledge.

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