



pz's perspective

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

by: Pz
photo by: Solus Creations

By now you've seen it. There's Madonna and Guy, Demi and Ashton, David and Victoria, Lindsay, Britney, even Paris sporting their latest fashion accessory. It's not a \$2m Harry Winston diamond ring, a \$2,000 Philip Stein TESLAS watch or a \$250 pair of Chanel shades. No, it's a \$26 red string bracelet. What is being described as "the new hip thing" in attire, this red wool string is the most visible symbol associated with the spiritual movement Kabbalah, sweeping up celebrities and their fans alike.

Seems when the 'Material girl' starts something the whole world picks up on it. This lapsed-Catholic Diva has immersed her entire self— mind, body and deep pockets—in the pursuit of the teachings of Kabbalah because she says, "it helps reveal the value of your worth." She drinks specially blessed water charged with positive energy, burns special candles, and uses her Hebrew name 'Esther' among her closest friends.

Ten years ago it was Scientology that caught Hollywood's attention and attracted celebrities, converts and controversy. With the star of War of the Worlds Tom Cruise currently waging his own personal 'just say no' battle to psychiatry and drugs; Scientology is back in the forefront and in the headlines. In that corner joining Tom

you have John and Kelly, Priscilla and Lisa Marie, Kirsty, Leah and Anne. While they don't do such red thread, they are becoming more and more vocal, singing the praises of their church's convictions.

As different as Kabbalah and Scientology appear—and believe me, that is an understatement—there are some surprising similarities and reasons for attracting their followers worth exploring. For those of you who are not entirely clear—no pun intended—about the origin and philosophy of either of these beliefs you might be interested in what I'll present as a basic, brief 101.

Kabbalah is Hebrew for "that which is received." Kabbalah is the name for the entire movement or philosophy of Jewish mysticism. It is a system of thought which was originally included in Jewish theosophy, philosophy, science, magic and mysticism. It consists of a large body of speculation on the nature of divinity, the creation, the origin and fate of the soul, and the role of human beings. Also, it comprises meditative, devotional, mystical and magical practices which were taught only to a select few and not normally revealed to the general population. For this reason Kabbalah is regarded as an esoteric offshoot of Judaism. Some



aspects of Kabbalah have been studied and used by non-Jews for several hundred years. The Kabbalah is founded on the Torah, the Jewish scriptures and other sacred writings, it is no intellectual discipline, and the mystic is not to practice it in solitude, but is to employ it to enlighten humanity. In short,

Kabbalah is to Torah what philosophy is to science. Like science, the Torah gives us the facts that are fully perceived sensually and rationally quantifiable. Like philosophy, Kabbalah gives us the grander abstract picture that the facts present. There were many modifications and interpretations of Kabbalah throughout the centuries. The Zohar is the major book of the Kabbalah. Zohar means "radiance or splendor." It's two things at once — it's a mystical

IN A STRAND OF RED STRING

commentary on the Bible, on the Five Books of Moses, and it's also a kind of mystical novel, following rabbis who are wandering through the hills of Galilee, sharing secrets of teaching and running into various colorful characters on the road. Kabbalah is a kind of spirituality that does not reject the physical world. Kabbalah, unlike Zen or Hare Krishna, doesn't say give away everything you have and go off to the mountain and meditate for 10 years. Kabbalah really challenges one to find God in the world, and that aspect has some appeal to people who have made it successfully and aren't so willing to give up everything they have achieved.

Scientology is supposed to be a science, a religion and a church. The word Scientology comes from the Latin word *scio*, meaning "know" and the Greek word *logos*, meaning "the word or outward form by which the inward thought is expressed and made known." Thus, Scientology means knowing about knowing. It was founded by Lafayette Ronald Hubbard a famous author primarily of science-fiction. In 1938, he theorized that "life is composed of two things: the material universe and x-factor . . . that can evidently organize and mobilize the material universe." This fundamental concept was the basis for his book "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health" in 1950. In 1951, Hubbard formed the religious philosophy of Scientology based on his discovery that man is most fundamentally a spiritual being—the x-factor. The Founding Church of Scientology was opened in Washington D.C. in 1955. Scientology is an applied religious philosophy that contains tools and methodologies intended to improve life and achieve spiritual freedom for oneself and society. L. Ron Hubbard died in 1986 and unlike many emerging religions the movement survived the transition to new leadership. Scientologists follow Hubbard's belief that a person is neither mind, nor body, but a spiritual being—an immortal soul. The soul travels from body to body and life to life. The word 'soul' is an ambiguous term which has been given meaning by many religions. To avoid confusion, Hubbard selected the word "thetan" from the Greek letter "theta" which traditionally meant "thought" or "life." A Thetan is the essence of a person. One does not have a thetan, one IS a Thetan. The brain, and the rest of the body, is looked upon as a mechanism, a communication center for the Thetan. The mind is perceived as a

collection of pictures. Scientology recognizes "Eight Dynamics." A "dynamic" is an urge, drive or impulse. Understanding these dynamics help a person gain insight and harmonize all their life activities. Scientology is not a dogmatic religion in which one is asked to believe anything on faith. An individual discovers for himself that Scientology works by applying its principles and observing or experiencing the results.

And with anything as potentially controversial as Kabbalah and Scientology, so, too, come the naysayers.

With the addition of high profile stars like Madonna to the ranks of the alternative-faith phenomenon there is no shortage of criticism and scrutiny from within traditional corridors. Many feel the participation of these well-known celebrities have popularized a new pop-psychology distortion of Kabbalah. It is being divisively referred to "crap-balah" and seen as having less to do with any authentic Jewish source and more in common with the writings of Deepak Chopra. They ask are we really to believe that this new batch of famous converts ward off people's envy not by living modestly, but by driving their overly expensive cars while wearing a red string? Denounced by Israeli rabbis and scholars alike they say, "The Kabbalah Center in L.A. has nothing to do with ancient Jewish study. It is not only a cult, but a dangerous cult, distorting the teachings of their sacred books and reducing it to mumbo-jumbo and all kinds of hocus-pocus." Professor of Jewish theory, Arthur Green, sees the fad among celebrities as "nonsense, a rip-off and the most trivial level of Kabbalah." Rabbi David Wolpe of L.A.'s Conservative Sinai Temple went even further in his condemnation to call it "spiritual snake oil." He states, "Simple answers don't grow souls. Red threads and magic bottles of water don't change the world and don't change people. Celebrities are swept up in this latest spiritual craze. Deep spiritual truths are put in a blender and served up as superficial pabulum—it's a disservice to a great tradition."

Scientology, no stranger to negative critiques, has its own share of cynics and skeptics. Having a longer history of celebrity involvement the spotlight has been beaming down on this tax-exempt religion for some period. The heat has again been raised a few degrees with all the attention Cruise has brought to it and to himself. Some critics cite the problems have more to do with the Church of Scientology organization itself rather than the doctrine or

teachings of the group. Follower Anne Archer claims, "Scientology makes people free, sane and able." But others have hurled serious attacks regarding the techniques applied through 'Dianetic therapy' bringing into question just how much free will is actually relinquished in the process.

One thing is for sure. Life IS one big mysterious search and rescue. Our mission in the search is to discover or better yet uncover as many answers as possible to the questions of who we are, why we are here, where did we come from and what we are to achieve during our stay and, in doing so, rescue our true selves in the process. That is the real undertaking. We are out there looking, hoping, and



supposing we can un-turn every stone and the mystery will be right there underneath revealed to us in all its majesty, truth and wonder.

Everyone's search will take them down their own path. They will look in places that they feel contain the answers they seek. Madonna has found Kabbalah, Tom has embraced Scientology. Apparently the principles, tenants, teachings and techniques of these religious philosophies speak to them and work for them. Neither is right, neither is wrong. It is what it is for their lives. They are equally entitled to follow wherever their destiny takes them. It is not for us to judge. What is worth considering, though, is whether their actions affect the rest of us. We, as a group, have a tendency to adopt a group-think mentality. We can be easily swayed or persuaded, especially by famous people we admire or respect if only from afar. Like sheep, we can quickly be steered in any direction by a hurricane-like influence called Madonna or inadvertently maneuvered by a super-nova force named Tom. They are hugely successful and look as if they have rich, full, and flourishing lives. They are doing something right. We want what they have. If we think jumping on their bandwagon might, in some positive way, rub off on our lives, we want in on that action. Still, it is important to remember, while these folks are celebrities, and we may hold them in high esteem, they are, first and foremost,

human beings. They are looking and searching for their own set of life answers just like the rest of us.

PZ'S POINTERS TO SEARCHING FOR LIFE ANSWERS

Don't get blindly caught up in the flock—Just because you see someone you admire practice a dogma or system of belief doesn't necessarily mean it's for you to blindly follow their lead. Exploration is exciting. Curiosity is a good thing. It is through exploration and curiosity we learn and take on new knowledge that has application and meaning for our lives. If you are going to put on a crucifix, know why you are wearing it. If you are going to show off a Patron Saint medallion, know why you

are wearing it. If you are going to display a Star of David, know why you are wearing it. If you are going to wear a Red String, know why you are wearing it. Know the story, the history and the purpose behind the symbol. Don't be a monkey-see monkey-do follower. Don't join the flock of sheep because you feel lost and it's the trendy way to be found. If you decide to be a joiner, do so for the right reasons and on your terms. Don't give up a bunch of money. Don't be pressured into buying tools and tapes and charms and trinkets you don't want. Don't be shamed into going against your inner voice. Be more discerning. Be a leader and decision maker in your own life.

Put judgment aside—How quick we are to judge. We judge everything and everyone on so many levels. Anything outside the realm of our version of what is right and wrong or good and evil we dismiss or criticize. We find fault with family, friends, strangers, groups, races, and entire countries. We exhaust energies to divide and clash rather than focus on unite and harmonize. We get locked into some small-minded view that doesn't allow room for other ideas or opinions. We are definite and convinced that our way is the best, right, sure, correct and only way. Anything that doesn't jive with that thinking just isn't so. When we live in judgment we limit ourselves to the