

THE MASTER PHOTOGRAPHER

That Zalman was a Master Photographer there was no doubt; he had produced, with a keen eye, a good sense of composition, and endless patience in the darkroom, some of the finest photographs in the world. Of flowers, his shots were the most pleasant; of landscapes, his were the most breathtaking; of sporting events, his were the most dramatic; of wars, his were the most horrible; of women, his were the most beautiful; of everything that he aimed his camera at, his shots were the best.

Zalman's shots were in only the most exclusive galleries and in the parlors of the richest people. At auctions, his work caused a sensation; prices for his work broke all the records; his portfolio was a sound investment. Without a doubt, Zalman was the the most successful photographer in the world, and most critics agreed that his work was technically and aesthetically the very best.

Zalman was at the peak of his career when he traveled to Jerusalem to photograph the Holy Places. He took with him his favorite cameras and set out, from his hotel, at different times of day ("in order to note the various qualities of natural light on the subject," he said) to the places that he had been commissioned to photograph.

He photographed the Church of The Holy Sepulchre at twilight ("during the interval of light after the sun has fallen below the horizon but before the sky is completely dark for the night," - his definition) and El-Aksa Mosque and the Dome of The Rock at dawn ("during the interval of light between the darkness of night and when the sun first rises above the horizon for the day," - again, his definition),

but, after repeated visits, he could not find a time, satisfying to him, to photograph the Western (Wailing) Wall of the Jews.

One afternoon, after weeks of unsuccessful attempts to photograph the Wall, Zalman was aiming his camera at passers-by when a sheepish looking man dressed in a black coat and a fur cap approached him.

"What are you doing?" asked the man in the black coat.

Zalman lowered his camera. He did ^{not} like people to interfere with his work, but because he was frustratedly waiting for a better quality of light, he did not mind spending a minute chatting with a stranger. "I am trying to take a picture of the Wall," he answered.

"Why?" asked the stranger.

"Don't you know who I am?" asked Zalman.

"I am the Rabbi of the Wall," the stranger said as if nothing could be more important than that.

"I am Zalman, the Master Photographer," retorted Zalman. "I have been commissioned to photograph the Wall. I have come here at every hour of the day and night and under diverse weather conditions during the past few weeks, but I have not yet found the appropriate light in which to take my pictures."

"Master Photographer," repeated the Rabbi of the Wall. "What does that mean?"

Zalman smiled. "I am the most famous in the world. I am sure that you have seen my work at some time."

"I don't believe that I have," said the Rabbi. "But if you are truly a Master Photographer, then I will make with you a deal. I have been a photographer at the Wall for more years than you have been on this earth, and I, more than anyone else, am familiar with the light at the Wall. If you can prove to me that you are truly the Master Photographer that you say you are, then I will tell you about the time when the light at the Wall is like no other light that you

have ever seen, when it is surely the most beautiful in the world."

Zalman laughed. "If you want to see my photographs, you can go to almost any bookstore and purchase a book about my work; that is proof enough."

"No," said the Rabbi. "You must prove to me that you are a Master Photographer by taking for me a picture of the Image of G-d."

Zalman looked up at the sky. "I don't need your help," he said. "Go away and let me do my work!"

"Very well," said the Rabbi. "But you will most likely miss the special time I know of and will be standing here for years waiting for the appropriate light in which to photograph the Wall." The Rabbi turned away from Zalman and went to pray at the Wall.

After a few more days of unproductive waiting for the appropriate light, Zalman, even more frustrated and desperate than before, approached the Rabbi and said, "O.K. It's a deal. I'll bring you a photograph of the Image of God tomorrow."

The next day, Zalman returned to the Wall bringing to the Rabbi a beautiful photograph of a flower. "Here is a photograph of the Image of God," said Zalman.

The Rabbi examined the picture of the flower and said, "It is true that G-d is apparent in all of His creations, but I can not accept this as a photograph of the Image of G-d. You'll have to do better."

A few hours later, Zalman returned with a photograph of himself which he showed to the Rabbi. Thinking himself smart he said, "God created man in His image. Here is a photograph of the Image of God."

"Very dangerous," said the Rabbi. "It is true that G-d created man in His image but in His spiritual image, not a physical image. This photograph is no good."

The next day, Zalman returned to the Rabbi with his entire

portfolio. He showed the Rabbi pictures of the sky, the sea, the stars, landscapes, famous personalities, wars and other historic events, but the Rabbi was not impressed and sent Zalman away.

The next day, Zalman brought the Rabbi a photograph of pure light. The Rabbi thought for a few minutes and shook his head. Zalman showed the Rabbi a photograph that was pitch black. The Rabbi said, "And G-d divided the light from the darkness." He also rejected that photograph.

Zalman was at a loss as for what to do. He had wasted a month trying to take a picture of the Wall. He became angry at the Rabbi. "Tell me when this beautiful light you know of falls on the Wall! It is impossible for me to take a photograph of the Image of G-d."

Hearing those words, the Rabbi smiled. "It is impossible to take a photograph of the Image of G-d with that ridiculous camera that you carry around. My camera is much more sensitive to the Light of G-d; with it, you can take His photograph." He took Zalman by the elbow and led him to a table in front of the Wall on which lay an open Torah scroll. "This is my camera. Its film is sensitive to the Light of G-d. When you read it, you are photographing the Image of G-d. The special time that I promised to tell you about, when the light is different from any that you have ever seen, and more beautiful, is on Yom Kippur when, brighter than usual, G-d's Shechinah descends upon the Wall to reveal His Glory."

Zalman was amazed. He listened to the Rabbi read a few lines from the Torah, and just as he was about to vent his anger at the strange man in black who had tricked him, he noticed that the Wall was in a perfectly beautiful light, a light different from any that he had ever seen before. He quickly lifted his camera and took a series of pictures, which, when developed, proved to be the most beautiful that Zalman had ever taken. His photographs of the Holy Places became an instant

success, and Zalman was once again confirmed as the Master Photograprer by all who knew his work.

But years later, when I was writing his biography, Zalman related to me this very incident and admitted that he could never forget the Rabbi of the Wall who had mocked him. "That Rabbi," Zalman told me confidentially, "is the real Master Photographer. My photographs are simple and plain when compared to his. It took me some time to fully appreciate his peculiar lesson, but now it is quite clear. My photographs are praised for being the best in the world, yet they are merely of G-d's creation. The Rabbi took photographs of G-d Himself, and that is something I have yet to accomplish. But sometime, I have promised myself, I will return to Jerusalem to spend Yom Kippur at the Wall, and then I will truely be able to accept the title of Master Photographer."

Zalman did return to Jerusalem and did spend Yom Kippur at the Wall with the Rabbi, and, as it turns out, is still in Jerusalem taking pictures of Holy Places and passers-by with his favorite cameras -- except on The Sabbath when he takes up a camera of a different sort and photographs the Image of G-d.

Joshua Soman, Persky
Jerusalem
October, 1983

A Theory For Our Times

Almost everyone has a theory about the coming of the Messiah. Here, in Jerusalem, the Jews, Christians, and Muslims are all anxiously awaiting the terrific and terrible Day of Judgement, The End of Days, the beginning of the Messianic Era. It seems that each person concerned has his own theory about when this fantastic occurrence will take place. Some people think that a six thousand year cycle must be fulfilled. Some believe that when all of Israel observes the Sabbath, the Messiah will come. Some believe that only after the world is cleansed by disaster, will the Messianic Era be ushered in. Others believe that the Messiah will come just when the Messiah is no longer needed. Others believe that the Messiah will come at the Messiah's appointed time, whenever that may be. Some look for signs in the stars or clouds. Some try to find the answer by interpreting special passages in a Holy text. Some people admit that they do not understand or do not believe in such a notion.

I do believe and will explain, according to my theory, exactly when the Messiah will come. It is really a simple theory, most sensible, and I truly do not understand why it has not been proposed before. Even if it is wrong (we will see when we get there), it deserves some thought and attention; it is an elegant theory, reflecting the strong influence of mathematics on my thought, stemming from my education at one of the world's most advanced technological institutes: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The theory is as follows: The Messiah (or Messianic Era, Day of Judgement, Day to End All Days, Day of All Souls) will come when

the population of the earth at any one moment is equal to the sum total population of human beings that have existed since the beginning of time.

I will explain in more detail.

No one will disagree with the notion that all souls will be present at the Day of Judgement. So, as I see it, in order for all souls to be present, all of the souls that have filled all of the bodies for all history must be present. For this judgement to take place fairly, we must all be alive or all be dead (only after that day will we know that it does not make much of a difference). My reasoning, which agrees with most others' on this specific point, proposes that we will all be alive; otherwise, what is the use of Creation and of Life (granted by G-d) in the first place?

But how will all souls be present in living bodies? In order for this notion to make sense, I will borrow, with a twist, from another theory, plainly, The Reincarnation of the Soul.

I believe that every body has a soul. I also believe that this soul comes from (at conception) and returns to (at death of the body) ~~to~~ a soul-pool. The soul-pool is merely the storehouse of all souls, not as individual souls, but as an aggregate of all soul essence.

A metaphor will explain.

If we look at the body as a vessel (a cup) and at the soul as the water which fills it, then the soul-pool is where the water is scooped up from at birth (when the vessel is formed and filled) and where it drains back to at death (when the vessel breaks, releasing the water). Even though each individual vessel, during its lifetime, has an individual collection of water, before and after, all unused waters are mixed together and become interdispersed (so that no two scoops are ever the same).

Now for the mathematical part of my theory.

In the beginning there was only one human soul in use (Adam's

for example) and then there were two (Adam's and Eve's) and then there were three (Adam's, Eve's, and Cain's) and then four (Adam's, Eve's, Cain's and Abel's) and so on....

Before long, there were many souls (drawn from the soul-pool) in use on earth. But as new souls were gathered (children were born), old souls were returned (people died) so that the total number of souls actually drawn from the pool at any one time was never really that great; it exactly equalled the population of the earth.

But the population did increase steadily (barring disasters such as the Great Flood, famines, plagues, and wars which set the numbers back for a while) and recently has begun to expand at an ever increasing rate (geometrically) so that one day the total number of people (or souls) present may equal the total number of people (souls) that existed in all previous times.

I will expound simply and clearly.

If the population of the earth increased by just one person every day, then, after the third day, the population on any day would never be equal to or greater than the sum of the population on all previous days. If X is the population on a certain day, and the population increases by one person per day, then (after the first three days) X is always less than $(X-1)+(X-2)+(X-3)$or literally: the population on any day is less than the sum of the population of the day before plus the population of two days before plus the population of three days before and so on. The Messiah would never come.

If the population of the world increased according to the famous Fibonacci Series (0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13.... - each subsequent element is the sum of the two previous elements) then, ^{again,} according to my theory, the Messiah would never come because the population at any one time period is only equal to the sum of the population of the previous two time periods and not to the sum of all previous time periods as

far back as the beginning.

If the population always increased by its square (X^2) then my theory would also fail because we would always have more people than previously existed (1,2,4,16,256....for example, sixteen is greater than four plus two plus one).

Looking at actual historic population charts (which I will leave to your own research if you want to persue the issue further), we see that the population growth of the earth has followed a pattern of increasing slowly and steadily for many centuries and then, more recently, has exploded so that fairly soon it is possible that the instantaneous population of the world will equal the sum total of all previous lives up to that instant - and at that instant - how can I best express it? And why do I believe it so?

When all souls are present, we will all know it.

All indicators point to my theory. All intuition tells me that it is correct. The numbers work. It came to me in a dream. So, little more to be said.

I hope that I have satisfactorily presented my theory, and that you have been able, without much taxation on your part, to understand it.

Just one afterthought: Now that we know when the Messiah is coming, well, why not hasten the event by fulfilling the first and greatest commandment - Be fruitful and multiply!

May the Messiah come quickly!

Joshua Soman Persky
Jerusalem
November, 1983

THE BOY WHO SAW ANGELS

Chazah, at the age of three, was already seeing angels. While the other children were playing with building blocks and dolls, Chazah sat quietly on the side staring into space.

This was no problem until Chazah entered the classroom. All of the other students watched and obeyed their teachers, but Chazah only paid attention to the angels. When his teachers asked him a question, his usual response was, "What?" But after the question was repeated, Chazah would always say the correct answer. Many teachers simply thought that he had a hearing problem.

Chazah first attributed what was going on in the world around him to angels when he was six years old. One afternoon, his mother asked him what he was doing so quietly in his room. He responded, "I am seeing the angels."

Doctors often agree that it is healthy for a young child to have an active imagination, but when Chazah was brought to the local doctor by his father, a different opinion was given. After a number of long sessions with the patient, the doctor, with the same humorless tone that he used to tell people that their loved one has passed away, told Chazah's parents that the child was mentally ill. "He sees angels and there is nothing that we can do. It is most likely a deficiency of the brain since birth."

Chazah's parents were heartbroken. They tried as best they could to carry on as if nothing was wrong with their child, but late at night they held each other and wept. Secretly, though, they each thought that the deficiency stemmed from the other side of the family.

"Wasn't his Uncle Temunah a bit retarded?" thought Chazah's mother. "Wasn't her Aunt Veyira in the hospital for most of her life?" thought Chazah's father.

But Chazah himself was quite content. He was never as bored with the angels as the people around him were with everything else. The angels filled his days with wonderment and his nights with dreams more vivid than life itself. Whenever anyone asked Chazah what he was doing as he sat or stared out into space, he responded, "I am seeing the angels." The questioner usually turned and walked away.

Because of his peculiar nature, Chazah had a great deal of trouble making friends. A few children mocked him but most just never paid him any attention. They were all convinced that he was mentally ill.

But there was another student in Chazah's class who had trouble making friends, and his name was Mark.

Mark, without a doubt, was regarded as the most intelligent student in the school. All the teachers and students knew of his superior qualities and expected great things of him. They often conjectured as to whether he would become a famous lawyer and politician, an eminent doctor and scientist, or a writer of profound works. Mark spent most of his time in the school library to which, as a special honor, he had been given the key. But because he spent so much time in the library, he became an outcast from the centrally active group of students. He, like Chazah, was alone during most of the day.

One evening, after coming from the library, Mark noticed Chazah sitting in front of the school with his eyes closed. "Are you asleep?" he asked.

"No," said Chazah. "I am seeing the angels."

"What do you mean you are seeing the angels? Your eyes are closed," said Mark.

"It does not matter," said Chazah. "I see the angels with my

eyes open or closed."

"I suppose that when one sees angels, it does not matter whether one's eyes are open or closed," said Mark.

Chazah knew that he was talking to a classmate who was different from the others who were ignorant, and, as he was tired of being alone all the time, he said to Mark, "If you will be my friend, I will tell you all about the angels so that you can see them too."

Mark dearly wanted to have a friend, and even though he thought Chazah a bit strange, he was curious enough to shake hands on the deal. "I will be your friend forever if you can explain to me how it is that you see angels."

Chazah stood up and looked all around, signalling to Mark to do the same. Mark looked all around.

"What do you see?" asked Chazah.

"I see the schoolhouse, the play area, the trees, and the road leading into town," said Mark.

"Now, close your eyes!" said Chazah.

Mark closed his eyes.

"What do you see?" asked Chazah.

"I don't see anything," said Mark.

"But you know that there is still something there," said Chazah.

"Yes."

"How do you know?" asked Chazah.

"I just know," answered Mark.

"You are thinking with your intellect," said Chazah.

"Yes," said Mark.

"Well, think about the wonderful design in the world, how everything is related to everything else; how water flows, evaporates, and falls as rain to flow again; how plants grow, are eaten by animals who are eaten by other animals, who decay into soil which provides

food for plants; how the planets rotate in their course and the stars in theirs; how fire burns and transforms all that it touches; how the rainbow appears; how the moon effects the tides; how we see, hear, smell, taste, and feel at all; think of it all guided by the Laws of Nature which are the laws of gathering and dispersion, growth and decay, conservation and transformation; think of these comprehensive laws that order the physical universe as being ruled by higher principles, the Principles of the Laws of Nature, such as the Laws of Justice and Perfection; think of these principles guided by even higher principles and so on until you reach G-d Himself who created all."

Mark opened his eyes and looked around again.

Chazah continued: "The Laws of Nature that control the corporeal world are, themselves, incorporeal. The Principles of the Laws of Nature are also incorporeal; I perceive them all as angels. When I say that I am seeing the angels, I merely mean that I am contemplating and perceiving, as best that I can, the higher aspects of existence, the Laws of Nature and the Principles of the Laws of Nature, all the incorporeal laws that order the corporeal world around me."

"Yes," said Mark. "I understand. I have had these thoughts myself, but I did not know how to express them; and all this time I thought that you were crazy, but now I see that you are even cleverer than our teachers. We will be best friends and I will try to teach all of the other students what you have taught me. This is wonderful; I am seeing angels." Mark closed his eyes. "Yes, I am still seeing angels." Mark opened his eyes and looked all around. "I am seeing angels!" he yelled. He gave Chazah a slap on the back.

Chazah was as happy as could be for finally making a friend. The world is beautiful, he thought. And one by one, with a prayer, he thanked all the angels and the One Most High.

Joshua Soman Persky
Jerusalem
November, 1983

A LOG ON THE FIRE

We sit around the campfire singing songs in Hebrew and in English; looming above us in the darkness is Masada; in front of us, the Dead Sea. The air is still. Sparks from the fire ascend to merge with the stars but burn themselves out just above our heads. The guitar is hardly heard beneath our voices which try to fill every crack in the desert.

The fire is burning low, but from where are we to gather wood? We send out scouts who return with twigs, bushes that were already burnt by the Negev sun; they will only prolong the delicate state of affairs; we must add substance: a branch, at least; a log, at best.

"Come one, come all!" we sing. "Tomorrow wake in Israel."

Sarah's fine voice peaks above the rest. She has come from South Africa. Her lungs are strong from singing on the beaches of Capetown. She sings even as she walks, searching for wood. She adds her twig to the fire.

Alberto brings his deep voice into play. He has sung in the high mountains of South America. Born in Buenos Aires, he lived as an Argentine for twenty-two years before settling in Arad. He envies the guitarist whose fingers dance lightly; when he plays, he often snaps a string. If my night vision were better, he tells himself, I would find more than a twig to add to the fire.

Amnon plays the guitar softly but sings without restraint. He is happy to be holding a guitar, tonight, as opposed to a rifle. He watches the flames, like life, like Israel,

flicker before his eyes. The circle of Jews from around the world gives him more than comfort; it gives him strength. These are my brothers come home, he thinks even as he sings and plays and watches the dying flames; let us sing together forever; for this we were born. He would throw the guitar into the fire to keep it burning. Maybe, he prays, a miracle will occur.

"By the shores of the Jordan," we sing. "And by the shores of the Dead Sea."

Ester puts a handful of twigs on the fire. She sits with her husband Avraham. Her voice is calm and soothes the group. Avraham is silent; he does not yet know that his wife is pregnant. He thinks about Canada, about summers in Montreal.

Susana watches the sparks fly. This is the most beautiful moment in my life, she tells herself, but what am I doing here? Her hands caress the parched ground upon which she sits. She misses her family in Paris; yet she sings as loud as the rest.

"Come to the desert my brother; come to Jerusalem!
Come to the orchard my sister; come to Jerusalem!"

She adds her brush to the fire.

From where shall salvation come? From where is God's hand directed?

The car pulls off the highway but the headlights remain on. "What is going on here?" asks the young man laden with booze and cigarettes; his pocket is full of cash. "I saw the fire and thought that I would stop for a while; I'm

on my way to Eilat by the Red Sea. It's so dark out here.
Have I much further to go?"

"Come join us," says Yoseph from Morocco.

"Welcome to the party," says David from the Soviet Union.

The American joins the circle and soon he is singing:

"We have come from yesterday, for today and for tomorrow.
We have come to the Sea of Galilee."

He sees the fire burning low. His voice is timid.
Should I bring it over? he ponders. He is thinking of the
log in the trunk of his car; it belonged to his uncle who
had wanted to throw it away. He listens to the voices and
is moved by their beauty; but the flame is getting low.
What this fire needs is a log, he tells himself. He rises
and returns with the log.

America! thinks each member of the circle. America
has brought the log and has rekindled the fire. Oh, bring
us a million souls, America!

Joshua Soman Persky
Jerusalem
December, 1983