

MARCUS WESTON:

Marcus Weston is the Senior teacher and Trustee at London's Kabbalah Centre. A thought-provoking speaker and advisor to business leaders, diplomats, politicians, celebrities and royalty around the world, Marcus began his career in international finance. Known for his straight-talking ways, he has been invited as the guest-speaker at various international peace meetings and business conferences. In 2008, he was asked to speak at the United Nations, where he secured the Centre's NGO consultative status and has since spearheaded many socially impacting community projects.

See www.kabbalahcentre.co.uk for more information.



THE INTRIGUING INTERVIEW WITH... MARCUS WESTON

What are some of the founding principles of Kabbalah?

Kabbalah is rooted in the belief that there is a Universal system of cause and effect, and that nothing is by coincidence. There is a method in the madness and there really is a purpose to all things.

It's a practical system of ideas and insights designed to help individuals gain more from life, teaching student to harness their full potential, feel more in control, realise the best version of themselves, and reach a broader understanding of how life, business and relationships work.

It is about being a co-creator in Life. Often we talk about a higher power but not in terms of 'God', a man sitting on a cloud, but as energy, which is present in all spiritual moments, such as taking in the view from even a mountain, or a painting. It's not about God and praying to someone to forgive us, it's about the existence of this universal energy and how much we awaken to that energy and tap into our potential.

Kabbalah is regarded as ancient wisdom, but it is very interested in modern life. How can spirituality be integrated into day-to-day living?

The real definition of spirituality is not what you learn in the classroom, but how you put it into practice in the outside world. How can we treat each other with a greater sense of dignity? Ego represents the very attitude, behaviour and belief systems that have the potential to get us into trouble.

The more seeds we plant - rage, envy, doubt, etc. - the more they grow and uproot us.

Kabbalah is very interested in our interactions and work lives, as most people spend the majority of their time at work, so how you treat the person sitting next to you in the office is extremely important.

We also talk about soul mate relationships - where what most people seem to have are body mate relationships. When a relationship holds, we are left wondering whether the couple are just 'staying together,' rather than 'being together'. To achieve this soul mate relationship isn't easy, especially if you don't know your own soul first. To make a spiritual relationship work, it's about giving when you feel you

don't have anything left to give and loving when you feel you can't love. You have to get over yourself, out of your past and into the present. And that takes work.

Another question is, "What is the root of your healing?" Why might your higher consciousness have helped to create this experience for you? What is it trying to show you? In our Western society, we are very good at treating symptoms, but are not so good at addressing their underlying causes. Many healers will ask, "What did you do to make yourself ill? What happened in your life?" This questioning is the opposite of apportioning blame. The essence of compassion is to recognise that your life is worth investigation and truly investing in.

What does practising Kabbalah involve?

The Centre is like a university with thousands of people coming and going to classes on anything from relationships to reincarnation. Typically in those classes they will spend one hour per week studying an ancient Kabbalistic teaching, and for the rest of the week they are asked to test out that lesson. We try to teach as many different aspects as possible, so that people can find a revelation in their own way - some people hate meditation, but prefer to study - everyone is encouraged to find whatever works for them. Fundamentally, the practice is based on studying a profound wisdom. When you focus on this, as strange as it may sound, you find that you start making better decisions in everyday life. Through becoming more closely connected to the good and bad things that happen to you, a certain internal strength is fostered.

The Kabbalah has come into public consciousness through its celebrity following. What would you say to those who view it as an elitist organisation?

The Kabbalah was interestingly founded 4,000 years ago with a celebrity status through Abraham, who was quite the celebrity, but I guess the market place wasn't so obvious then.

Some think that the celebrity thing is great because of the marketing, but I'm not so convinced.

It can distort the wisdom to something superficial and it's not. It's ancient and revered. It's a very inclusive practice - all the courses and lessons are either free or fairly inexpensive, and are continuing to come down in price - we want to enable anyone who is interested in studying to be able to do so. There is a great community here, you will meet people from every nation, belief system, skin colour, background - and, unusually, everyone gets on famously.

Spirituality is a very personal matter, does it get diluted through belonging to an organisation?

When it comes to our classes, we offer a deep range of topics that speak to the individual. The word "spirituality" still has some funny connotations in the English language and a lot of people think it's something for weak-minded people; that if you can't handle life, you seek out something spiritual.

We like to open those doors and inspire people to think outside this box.

The Centre is a registered Charity and has 3 essential parts: the courses and menu of classes on offer; the community volunteering and our work to facilitate the material needs that many Londoners have; and then traditional side, which is the meditation and prayer.

You went from investment banking to becoming a Kabbalah teacher, what inspired this change?

I was very fortunate to be working in investment banking and was loving life in London, making money, but then this rut kicked in. Same old day after day. Something started creeping into my system, and I thought, "This can't be what life is about." I couldn't understand why this particular path wasn't fulfilling. One night I was sitting in a bar with a friend and we jokingly agreed to quit our jobs. Unexpectedly, he went through with it and so I had to, too, because I had verbally committed. I went off to see the world and it opened my eyes to a myriad of things. When I came back to London someone told me about Kabbalah, and eventually I took a course. It was mind-blowing. All the pieces fell into place. The wisdom, the journey, the connection, the unity of global connection

and the personal responsibility - it ticked every box and I knew this was it for me.

What does the red string symbolise?

It represents a connection to Rachel the Matriarch. There is a tomb in Bethlehem, where every year on the 11th of Scorpio, it is believed that the soul comes back to the body. Traditionally, we wrap around 60 miles of string around the tomb on that day and there's a particular meditation to capture her energy. You are supposed to wear the red string on the left side of your body because that's the receiving side (the right signifies sharing).

It's a symbol of protection against negative energy and what's known as evil eye. Plus it's a reminder to stop giving out negative energy, too.

Finally, tell us about the expansion of the Centre?

It's been dubbed 'The Arc', but that's not its official name. The Centre has an incredible base of over 1,000 students who participate in different projects on a weekly basis currently within four London boroughs supporting youth unemployment and the physical needs of the public - we simply needed more space. Fortunately, we managed to acquire the car park behind the building, which we are planning to turn into a big conference space.

The idea is for it to become a centrepiece for London's spiritual thinking with thought leaders, teachers and experts talking about subjects ranging from female leadership, to peace initiatives, to how to overcome life's challenges.

We want to create a forum where anyone can come and learn about social issues and spiritual solutions through building on the concept that everyone collectively contributes to the economy, crime rates, political agenda and what we read in the newspapers.

If there was a tipping point in consciousness, which highlighted how responsible we could be, that could change the world. And give London a catapult of energy.