

They say they're going to help me but what exactly are they?

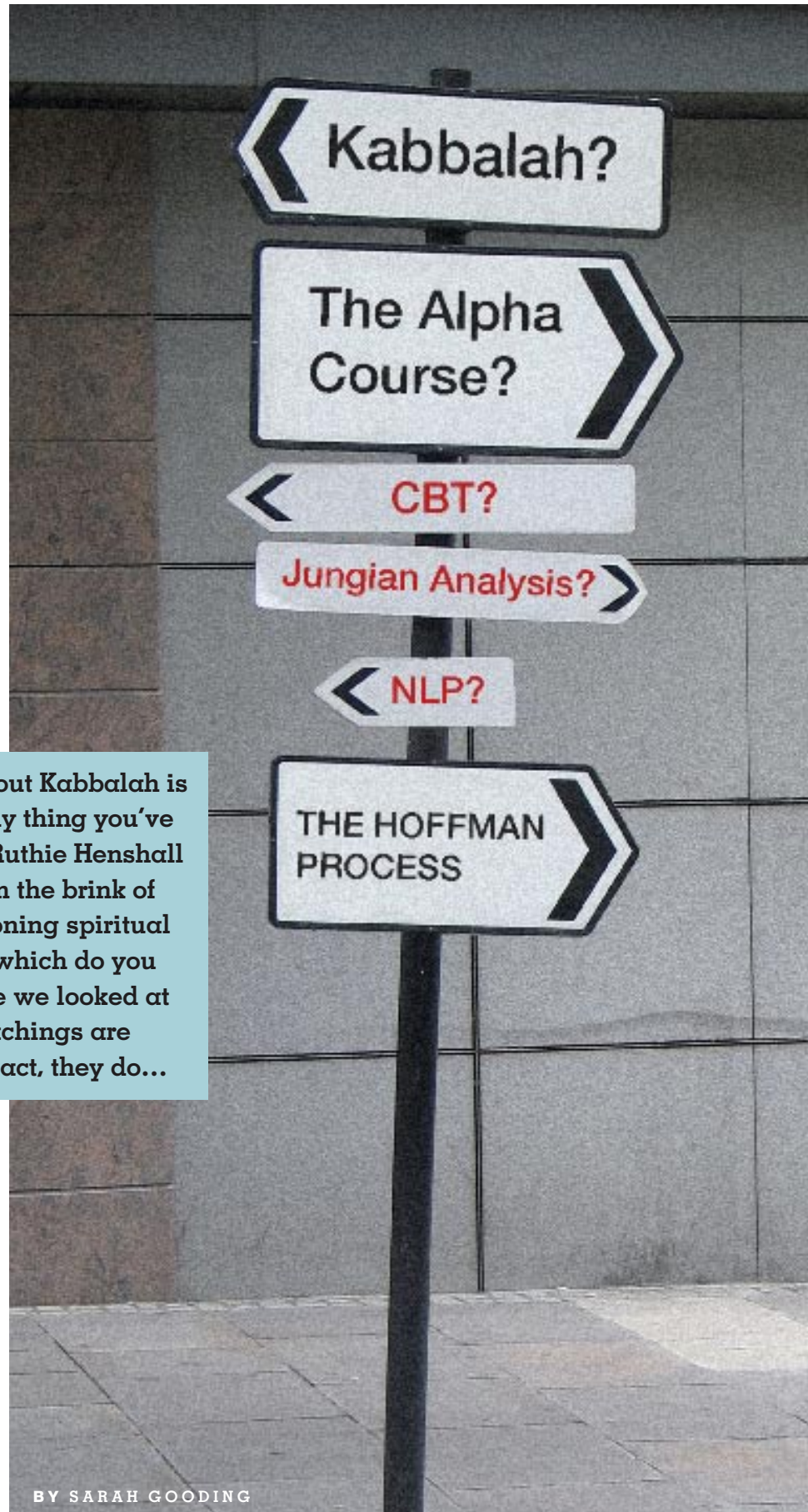
Perhaps the only thing you know about Kabbalah is that Madonna does it; maybe the only thing you've read of the Hoffman Process is that Ruthie Henshall credits it with bringing her back from the brink of self-destruction. But if you're questioning spiritual or personal issues in your own life, which do you turn to? We decided it was high time we looked at exactly how these therapies and teachings are supposed to help – and whether, in fact, they do...

← Kabbalah

What is it?

Kabbalah is not a religion, as you might think, but rather a practical application that can be embraced by anyone, of any religion, and is intended to help you live your life to the full.

In Kabbalah, everything starts with you; central to its wisdom is the belief that everyone is granted the power to transform their life, be it in love, happiness, health or work. Above all, Kabbalah is a practical as well as spiritual process to be applied to everyday life. It →



BY SARAH GOODING

teaches you to be proactive rather than reactive while promoting sharing, tolerance and personal responsibility. Kabbalah focuses on 'giving', the idea being that the more you give, the more you receive. And we're not talking money here – despite what you may have read, Kabbalah is not for the super-rich and you are not obliged to make donations.

What's actually involved?

It's a very individual study – you incorporate as many of its principles or beliefs into your life as you like according to what you feel is relevant. As with many things, though, it's generally held that the more you put in, the more you'll get out. Meditation is key, as it's believed that through it you'll feel calmer and better able to deal with negative situations. A visit to the Kabbalah Centre in London, where you can speak to a teacher one-on-one, is a good place to start, or you can attend one of the many courses offered. Alternatively, you can study at home. A ten-lesson course called

The Power Of Kabbalah includes lessons on meditation and stress management.

Would it work for me?

Given that its basic principles focus on being a better person, Kabbalah seems suited to most. Study is intended to give you practical tools to make life easier and calmer – who wouldn't want that? It's probably not about to tell you anything new, instead it reinforces common sense with an emotional support so you can live your life your way.

How was it for you?

Jo, 42, researcher "I was a real sceptic. I'd heard the word 'Kabbalah' bandied about, but had no idea what it was. A friend who'd visited the Centre raved about it, but I didn't take her seriously until almost overnight she transformed into a happier, more contented person. After my husband died, I'd started to live through my children and knew it wasn't healthy – I felt I needed balance and structure

in my life. Over the last two years I've totally redressed my priorities and simplified my life with a move to France. Above all, Kabbalah has taught me contentment."

Mary, 31, company director "I'm a naturally spiritual person so Kabbalah was something I wanted to investigate. I went to an open day at the Centre, found it fascinating and signed up to an introductory ten-week course. Most people on it were between 20 and 40 and a lot like me. I loved that it wasn't exclusive and relished the individual study. And yet, for all my interest, I didn't complete the course. It became clear that in order to get the most out of Kabbalah, you really need to commit to devoting time to your studies and I don't have the self-discipline or the time to invest in it properly right now."

The study of Kabbalah is free, although you'll need to pay for text books and so on. To find out more, call 020 7499 4974 or visit kabbalah.com

The Alpha Course



What is it?

The Alpha Course was started in the late 1970s as a means for 'new' Christians to

have questions they might have about their faith answered. In 1990, a curate noticed many of the people attending the course weren't Christians at all, but were there out of curiosity. Some became Christians, some didn't, but the Alpha Course was then tailored to appeal to non-Christians and packaged as an opportunity to investigate all things relating to the Church. The slant is very much "Come here to ask questions", not "Come here to be converted".

What's actually involved?

A ten-week course (usually one evening a week, but including one weekend). Each meeting starts with supper and a speaker before turning into a forum for debate. "The intention is very much that it should be a cosy, unthreatening environment where all sorts of 'big' questions can be discussed, from 'How can God possibly exist when there is such suffering in the world?' to 'Why did my father die when I was five?'," says spokesperson Mark Elsdon-Dew. The group is not necessarily led by a clergyman – it could be someone who's simply a member of a congregation.

Would it work for me?

You won't necessarily get answers, but you will have the opportunity to pose questions. It could be for you if, as a non-Christian, you find you're curious and/or eager either to find out more or have a really good debate about the possibility/impossibility of God and Christianity.

Turn up as and when you feel like it, the course is intended for anyone from sceptics to those with specific questions, as well as people who

have no knowledge of Christianity at all. The majority of people who try Alpha attend on a friend's recommendation.

How was it for you?

Sophy, 30, teacher "I was brought up without religion at home, but my mum became religious shortly after she became terminally ill, and that made me curious. After she died, I wanted to find out more so joined an Alpha Course. Most people had similar questions, there was a lot of, 'If God exists, why does he sanction terrorism?' There was also an amazing variety of people on the course, from ex-heroin addicts to dentists. It's not so much Bible studies as looking at the

relevance of Christianity in the 21st century. I've always found religion faintly embarrassing, but even though I didn't 'sign up', the course made me realise Christians aren't all sandal-wearing Bible-bashers."

Victoria, 38, librarian "Like many people, I sort of believed in something but I had no idea what and after a glass of wine too many with a Christian friend, I agreed to do the Alpha Course. I thought my friend's faith sweet but naïve and relished the chance to have a good theological argument, confident I'd come out thinking, 'Told you it was a load of rubbish.' At first I was unsettled by how friendly everyone was, it

seemed a bit cultish, but I was just as surprised by how normal people were. Religion is deeply uncool, but there's no other place in society for real theological discussion so I loved that aspect. I thought I'd be sold Christianity, but I wasn't. I was inspired by the discussions, and was genuinely surprised when I suddenly 'got it' and became a Christian." →

It's free to join an Alpha Course. To find out more, call 0845 644 7544 or visit uk.alpha.org

"The Alpha Course is very much about 'come here to ask questions', not 'come here to be converted'"

Jungian Analysis

What is it?

A therapeutic approach to the treatment of many psychological problems, including depression and anxiety, based on the work of psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Many of us presume that as we get older we'll achieve an understanding of who and what we are. "But that doesn't always happen, and that's when we need help," explains Liza Glenn, associate member of the Society Of Analytical Psychology. "The focus is on understanding symptoms, rather than just treating them. Analysis is about building a relationship between therapist and client so they can identify behaviours and, when it seems those are holding them back, start making changes."

What's actually involved?

Analysis can run anywhere from 18 months to three years. Most people have sessions once a week,

"Jungian analysis may be useful to those who feel life is threatening to overwhelm them"

those who are acutely distressed go two or three times. Analysts are trained to listen, understand, and read between the lines to see what someone is not saying.

Would it work for me?

It might if you're unhappy and lacking fulfilment. Jungian analysis may be useful to those who feel that life is threatening to overwhelm them. This feeling could be triggered by anything from a bereavement to a series of failed relationships or problems arising from childhood.

How was it for you?

Belle, 41, mature student "My father died when I was five, and we then went to live with my grandparents. When I was 11, my grandfather died too. It was only after my son was born and I became depressed that my GP referred me to a counsellor who recommended Jungian analysis. At that point the alternative was antidepressants, which I didn't want. I hadn't even considered the impact of my childhood on my adult life, but my analyst helped me to see that the loss of my father and grandfather at a young age, coupled with my mother's depression at her losses, may have contributed to the fact that I underachieved at school and dropped out of university. I saw my analyst twice a week for over two years and I'm feeling far more positive about the future."

Louise, 44, housewife "When my kids were babies I managed fine, but when they hit pre-school age I felt like my life was over. I had no time for myself, I couldn't even think of returning to work and felt entirely unable to cope. I started seeing an analyst on a friend's suggestion and soon I was coping better with the kids, seeing my friends occasionally and looking for part-time work. But my relationship with my husband was getting worse – it felt like the more I saw my analyst the more intense the rows were at home. Therapy had given me back my independence and confidence, but that made him feel that I didn't need him any more – I realised we needed marriage counselling. Jungian analysis helped me, but in a roundabout way it also exposed the weaknesses in my marriage."

Jungian analysis costs up to £100 per session. For more information call the Group-Analytic Practice on 020 7935 3103 or visit gapractice.org.uk

CBT

What is it?

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is based on the idea that how we think, how we feel and how we act are all interwoven.

Thoughts influence behaviour, so negative feelings impact our moods, leaving us depressed. That leads to emotional withdrawal, which causes physical withdrawal. CBT is essentially about cause and effect, and the idea that if you can stop negative thought patterns, you will feel less depressed/panicked/anxious.

What's actually involved?

A therapist works with the client to address the way they think. "Sixteen sessions is the classic model for CBT," says analyst Liza Glenn. "It's short-term therapy." Sessions are very specific, with the therapist working to identify in minute detail the exact thought processes that make a client feel panicky or depressed. The therapist then tries to teach the client it's possible to change that behaviour. CBT is about taking responsibility – once you've taken control, you become less helpless and more able to cope.

Would it work for me?

CBT is useful for those whose problems are not long-standing nor too entrenched – it's no good if they originate in childhood or if your issues involve the way you interact with others. "If you have a specific problem, CBT can be very useful," says Liza, "but if your anxieties are more general or widespread, you may need the greater commitment and depth of more formal analysis."

"CBT is useful for people whose problems are not too long-standing or well-entrenched"

How was it for you?

Anne, 36, designer "I went back to university after my children started school and was preparing for exams. I'd never known stress like it; I couldn't sleep and was overwhelmed by feelings of failure. The more I worried, the less I slept, which made me even more anxious. I couldn't stop negative thoughts forming and couldn't concentrate on anything else. My GP suggested I try CBT and learning which triggers sent me into a state of panic meant I could stop the anxiety taking hold."

Jessica, 40, PR "I married at 25, was divorced before 30 and left to bring up two children single-handedly. My confidence was at an all-time low and I didn't believe I'd meet anybody else. Then I met David and believed I could be happy, but shortly after we began living together he was diagnosed with cancer and died 18 months later. My grief was all-absorbing, I couldn't control my anger and was given antidepressants, but they didn't help. My GP referred me to a therapist, but CBT wasn't enough – it didn't even scratch the surface. I started analysis twice a week instead and it's still taken two years to really get back on my feet." →

CBT costs around £40-£60 per session. For more information call the British Association For Behavioural And Cognitive Psychotherapies on 01254 875277 or visit babcp.org.uk

NLP

What is it?

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) focuses on what makes us tick, how we communicate and interact. “The basic premise of NLP is that through awareness of the way we operate in given situations, we’re given the opportunity to behave differently,” says hypnotherapist Brid Hendron, who specialises in NLP.

What’s actually involved?

“NLP is specifically designed to provide a rapid change or shift – the average number of sessions is just four,” reveals Hendron. “Therapists use a variety of techniques to change the way the brain thinks about things, with the idea that if you can’t change a situation, why not change the way you view it?” At its most basic, therapists use NLP to show you how to shift your perspective. Some therapies teach you how to move away from things that are difficult, but NLP is more about accepting things as they are while learning to view them differently.

Would it work for me?

NLP isn’t just useful if there’s something wrong, it’s more an ‘even if you’re already great, why not be better?’ mentality. But the speedy process means it’s not so suitable for people with acute depression or a very troubled past. “Lots of people choose to do NLP if they’re having problems with confidence, relationship issues or wish to change particular habits or behaviours that they’ve adopted – it’s making changes for the future rather than dwelling on the past,” says Hendron.

How was it for you?

Lucy, 49, office manager “I was referred to a therapist after a medical review at work identified me as suffering from stress. I was sent on a group NLP course that was spread across three weekends. It was nothing like I’d imagined, it didn’t feel like therapy at all. I found it so useful. I’ve always been scared of confrontation in the workplace and had never admitted how much that stressed me before. But now NLP has taught me a little perspective, I cope with my anxieties very differently. It’s a really practical application, one I imagine would be useful to almost

everyone. You don’t have to feel that there’s something wrong to learn NLP techniques, it’s not that kind of therapy.”

Katie, 30, estate agent “My friend Victoria has always been quite negative, but when I saw her recently she was like a different person, bright and positive. She told me it was down to NLP. I’d ended a serious relationship four months earlier and was suffering from a real loss of confidence so, despite my cynicism, I thought, ‘Why not?’ I arranged six sessions over eight weeks. Mostly my therapist and I just seemed to chat – about

my childhood, friendships, work, parents, everything – and I couldn’t understand how this could possibly be helping. Yet, after three weeks, I was feeling better. I had faith in my therapist based on the fact she’d trained in NLP for seven years, but most of the time I couldn’t actually work out where the chat stopped and the therapy started. I’ve no idea how it worked – but I don’t really care. I feel better and that’s all I ever wanted.”

Expect to pay around £75-£100 per NLP session. For more information call 0800 952 0545 or visit hypnotherapists.org.uk

THE HOFFMAN PROCESS

What is it?

An intensive course where you look at and assess repetitive behaviour patterns you’ve detected in your life, in relationships, work or more general issues such as self-esteem or anxiety. It’s a practical guide to finding out who you are and what motivates you, starting with reflections from childhood and running right up to the present day. “It’s a one-off process,” says Tim Laurence, founder of the Hoffman Institute in the UK, “ideal for someone who might go to their doctor and say, ‘I don’t know why, but I’m feeling really depressed.’”

What’s actually involved?

On an eight-day residential course you’re led through a series of structured exercises to identify negative behaviours before learning ways of acquiring new ones. It’s not about apportioning blame, but rather aims to give people the chance to get over whatever hang-ups they’ve accumulated and start forgiving themselves and people around them, before promoting self-responsibility.

Would it work for me?

Most people are between 30 and 50 and questioning the direction of their lives. Described as a ‘psychological detox for the soul’, it’s not for the faint-hearted – a

recent participant was overheard saying, “I feel like I’ve been through a boil wash then a spin dryer.” You will be assessed for suitability before you can even sign up.

How was it for you?

Louise, 52, sales manager “I wanted to reappraise issues I’d looked at but never really addressed, exploring the obstacles that were stopping me living my life fully. The course exceeded my expectations. I now feel more forgiving and compassionate toward other people and my husband and teenage children have reacted positively, saying I’m much calmer in the way I react to things. You have to commit to it to get the most out of it; if you aren’t open to change it could be quite challenging.”

“I wanted to understand myself better, understand why I felt like such a bystander to my life”

Rachel, 43, social worker “From 17 I’ve had an on-off eating disorder. I’ve tried courses before but always felt they didn’t quite dig deep enough. I wanted to

understand myself better, to understand why I felt like such a bystander to my life. The course is structured so you feel very safe – which I needed as I often felt vulnerable and spent a lot of time in tears. But suddenly all the things I felt were unachievable are within my reach. It’s possible that, at 43, I might finally be maturing naturally, but I think the course was the catalyst for that.” ■

The Hoffman Process costs £2,050 (eight days residential, all inclusive). For more information call 0800 068 7114 or visit hoffmaninstitute.co.uk