

# New Age

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## Doctor Bronner's Magic Soap

In any family business, the second generation faces the challenge of sustaining the vision of the founder. It must be especially hard when the founder is someone as unusual as Emanuel Bronner, who believed that a soap bottle could help save the world. For decades, Dr. Bronner's liquid soap has been popular not only for soap-related reasons (it's good, all natural, and cheap) but also for the voluminous preachings from Dr. Bronner's "All-One-God-Faith" philosophy printed in minuscule type on each label. Bronner died in 1997 at the age of 89. But his son Ralph, now the vice president of the company, has devoted himself to carrying on his father's crusades for both world peace and quality cleansers.

Dr. Bronner was born into the soap-making business in Germany, where his family, then called Heilbronner, had made soap since 1844. At one point, the family owned three soap factories in Europe. Bronner came to the United States in 1929, and when he became a U.S. citizen in 1936, he dropped the prefix "Heil" from his name in protest over its association with Adolph Hitler. Soon after the beginning of World War II, his parents were slaughtered by the Nazis. Reeling from this tragedy, Bronner decided that simply making soap was no longer enough. He needed, he said, to help humankind unite and stop the killing. He began to envision what he calls "one world, one faith . . . all one united."

Bronner's unique label began when he started to collect facts and put them on his soap labels, he said, so people could continue to learn and expand their understanding. He gradually began to incorporate from all the worlds religions and philosophies, with the hope they would unite mankind through a love of God and peace on Spaceship Earth.

(continued on other side)

## • UPDATE OF THE BRONNER FAMILY, 1999 •

*Dr. Bronner, passed away peacefully at 89, Friday, March 7th, 1997 after a 3 year battle with advanced Parkinson's. During this time he was at home, where the business is run, in the loving care of his wife Gladys and wonderful nurses. He worked on the Moral ABC to the last days. For over three years his sons, Jim and Ralph, as well as Jim's wife Trudy had been running the business completely, so there was no break in continuity.*

*Jim Bronner became president, but sad to say, he passed away after an 11 month courageous battle with lung cancer, June 12th 1998. He did have time to train his oldest son David, a Harvard graduate and an incredible caring person. David is now President and doing a wonderful job with supervising the soap production, making us more environmentally aware and working with our wonderful employees and customers.*

*Trudy Bronner is our CEO and directs the daily operation and helps in all areas of running the business. She has been the real backbone of the business for the past five years.*

*Ralph is vice-president and has traveled over 200,000 miles, telling the story, working with the media, attending conventions, working with radio and TV talk shows, answering the many letters and calls about his dad's life, the label, and the Moral ABC and still plays guitar when he has time.*

*David, Trudy and Ralph will continue the quality, integrity and ideals set up by Dr. Bronner. His teachings on the label will not change as they were Dr. Bronner's life's work. We are even doing more with profit sharing and giving back to Spaceship Earth and its' people. We have turned over a 1,000 acre "Rain Forest" near Mt. Palomar in California, worth over one million dollars, to the Boys and Girls Club as well as funding fresh water wells in Ghana, an orphanage in China, a chemistry lab in a Mexican school, college scholarships in foreign affairs, homeless shelters, homes for special children and sending hundreds of cases of soap to good causes all over the world from Green Peace to Outward Bound. Dad would be happy and proud!*



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MAGIC SOAPS**

**. . . . Cleanse the Body & the Spirit.  
"ALL-ONE!"**

*Ralph Bronner*

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# Travel

Sunday, January 10, 1999

DR. BRONNERS  
MAGIC SOAPS



"ALL-ONE!"

There are lathers and, by God, there are lathers.

More than once on the road, I have thought of this small bottle of concentrated peppermint soap as a godsend since it works just as well for bathing as for shaving, washing clothes (or dishes, or vegetables) and even repelling bugs and drying up athlete's foot.

Thanking God, of course, is just what soapmaker Emanuel Bronner would've wanted me to do.

If you doubt this, you haven't seen the labels of every packed-by-hand bottle of Dr. Bronner's Peppermint 18 in 1 Pure-Castile Soap, a staple of the tread lightly on Mother-Earth crowd and a fixture on shelves of travel and health food stores. Each label is itself packed (by Bronner's own hand, from the early '50s until his death at age 89 in 1997) with up to 3,000 printed words. In prose that generally runs on until it reaches an exclamation point or a verse of Bronner's fondest mantra ("We're All-One or None!"), they outline his prescriptions for cleanliness as well as that thing they say is next to cleanliness.

Directions to godliness intermingle with directions for use. Some are easy to distinguish ("Don't Drink Soap! Keep Out of Eye Dilute! Dilute! OK!"), while others begin in the tub and veer sharply Milky Way ward: "Enjoy sink body rub to stimulate body mind-soul-spirit and teach Hillel's Essene Moral ABC uniting all free in the African Shepherd Israel's great All-One-God-Faith!" And some, including these lines just below where it says Dr. Bronner's uses no synthetic oils or detergents, are 100-percent pure Emanuel Bronner, the German immigrant who'd merged his Jewish faith with Christian, Moslem, ancient Greek and other teachings, and merely used soap as a vehicle, his son says, to spread the word across Spaceship Earth: We're all Brothers & Sisters because One, ever-loving, Eternal Father is our only God, & All-One-God-Faith reunites God's legion!

All-One-God-Faith—Bronner's *raison d'être* and until recently the name of his Escondido, Calif., company—was once a thorn in the sides of sons Ralph and James Bronner, who spent their early years estranged from their eccentric father (who learned soapmaking from his family but whose doctorate was self-awarded). James Bronner's son and widow, Trudy, now run the company, and Ralph, a retired English teacher who long ago settled in Wisconsin, is its public voice. The family-owned, profit sharing company now sells about 2 million bottles a year.

"And that's with no catalogue, no salesmen, no brochure, no advertising, ever," says Ralph Bronner. "He was one of the last of the eccentric businessmen in America, and I was the cocky son out of college who told him to change the name to Mint Glow, and that no one was going to buy his soap or his philosophy. But he was right, I was wrong; the soap had to be good to do what it's done . . ."

Ralph Bronner loves to recite customers' letters. They range from the guy who says he was saved from suicide when he read the label, to one who wrote to say that after I shower and get dressed, "it feels like someone put a York Peppermint Patty in my underwear."

The soap is made the way soap's been made for millenniums. The peppermint comes from, you know, real plants. Likewise the eucalyptus, lavender and almond soaps (listed roughly in order of underwear-tingling qualities). Park rangers and wilderness guides tend to recommend them, thus furthering a word-of-mouth campaign started by California hippies in the '60s. A four-ounce, travel-size bottle is about \$2. Ralph Bronner says the family will not sell out to a big conglomerate, or change the labels except to conform to FDA requirements.

I'd heard that you could brush your teeth with it. If true God-realization is indeed painful, I'm on the right path. Blecchh.

—Roger Piantadosi

New Age continued . . .

Ralph Bronner got involved in the business in 1958 in response to his father's plea for help with his bills. When he arrived in Escondido, California, he "was greeted by the smell of poverty, huge barrels of smelly mineral salts, and Dad in his leopard bathing suit," he recalls. "That was his favorite piece of clothing." Men would drive up in Cadillacs and would be dressed to the nines, and Dad would do his business in his leopard-skin bathing suit. Going through his father's cigar box of invoices and receipts, he then discovered that his father had neglected to collect about \$18,000 that people were trying to pay him.

The company is only slightly less eccentric today. It's still located in Escondido, and it still uses no advertising or sales people, relying instead on word-of-mouth and the efforts of Ralph Bronner, who drives around the country dropping in at stores and giving away free samples. A staff of about twenty people makes and packs 2 million bottles a year by hand.

Dr. Bronner's is a \$4 million company, but to Ralph Bronner, the company's success is secondary to its spiritual goals. He tries to make the company a model of what his father called "constructive capitalism," with profit sharing and bonuses for every employee and a wide range of good works. The company recently donated \$1.4 million worth of land to the Boys and Girls Club in San Diego to create Rainforest Ranch, a camp for children from across the country. It has also financed the digging of wells in Ghana and aided an orphanage in China. And of course there's the continuing effort to unite "God's Spaceship Earth" by printing Dr. Bronner's "Moral ABC" on each label. As Ralph Bronner recalls, "Dad always said, 'The soap? That's not important. To teach - that's important.'"

KIAH BOSY AND DAVID LEDEBOER