

Blessed

*The Kabbalah of Alignment
and Abundance*



Rabbi David Aaron

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OF
ALIGNMENT
AND
ABUNDANCE

Maggid Books

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The Kabbalah of Alignment and Abundance

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whose generosity made this project possible.*

May the study of this book bring great merit to his parents

Morris and Rose Caskey

of blessed memory.



*Dedicated by
the Mayberg Foundation*

to Rabbi Aaron

for opening profound and relatable pathways to God.

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MAYBERG :::: FOUNDATION

Dedicated to all who suffered from October 7th



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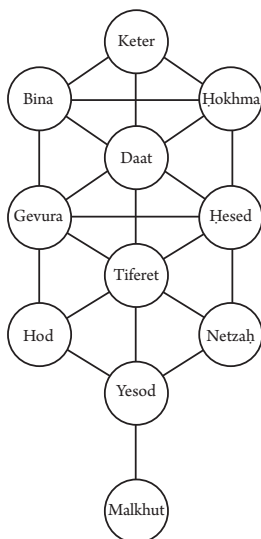
Introduction

B*lessed* shares the Torah's secret wisdom on how to find fulfillment and channel divine abundance into your life, the lives of others, and the world.

The secret/inner dimension of the Torah¹ – better known as Kabbalah – teaches that there are ten channels of divine powers called *sefirot* through which God's presence is made manifest in the world. When you tune in to these powers, you download enormous blessings into your life and the lives of those around you.

Kabbalah typically depicts the *sefirot* arranged on a “Tree of Life,” which looks like this:

-
1. The dimensions of the Torah are often explained using the acronym PaRDeS (literally, “orchard”), with “p” standing for *peshat*, meaning a simple/obvious level of understanding; “r” standing for *remez*, meaning a hinted/deeper level of understanding; “d” standing for *derash*, meaning a homiletic/allegorical level of understanding; and “s” standing for *sod*, meaning a secret/mystical level of understanding – in other words, the kabbalistic interpretation.



The tenth *sefira*, located at the bottom of the tree, is called *malkhut*. It is the power of receptivity. Metaphorically speaking, the nine powers above it are like music and *malkhut* is like the radio which is necessary in order to tune in and hear the music.

The first *sefira*, located at the top of the tree, is called *keter*. It is the power of self-awareness and good will. When you are tuned in to *keter*, you experience your individual self as a part of the Universal Self, shared by all. And you are filled with willpower and freedom. The motto of *keter* is: “I want, therefore I am, but I don’t know what I want. I just know that I want.”

Next down are *hokhma* and *bina*. *Hokhma* is the power of visionary thinking and goal-mindedness. It’s the ability to dream and clarify what you want. *Bina* is the power of strategic thinking and practicality. It’s the ability to plan and clarify how you will accomplish what you want.

Below them, positioned in the center, is *daat*, the power of decisiveness, determination, and conviction. It’s the ability to take your dreams and plans to heart. *Daat* takes the intellectual energies of *hokhma* and *bina*, and converts them into the emotional energies of passion and caution of the next two *sefirot*, *hesed* and *gevura*.

Hesed is the power of loving kindness and passion. *Gevura* is the power of fear, self-restraint, reticence, caution, and courage.

Centered below them is *tiferet*, the power of truth and compassion. It's the ability to be true to yourself, to unconditionally love yourself and thereby balance your emotions. *Tiferet* blends and balances the flow of your passions and cautions so that in your excited pursuit of your dreams and amid fears of failure, you don't lose yourself but stay true to who you are.

The next three powers, *netzah*, *hod*, and *yesod*, are instinctual. They help you cope with the challenges that originate with the recipients of your giving or from the conditions of the environment in which you seek to realize your vision. They put your dreams and plans into action.

Netzah is persistence, perseverance, endurance, and victory. It's the ability to relentlessly push forward and conquer. *Hod* is acceptance, surrender, and gratitude. It's the ability to humbly accept the challenges in your life, be grateful for how far you've come, and let go and let God.

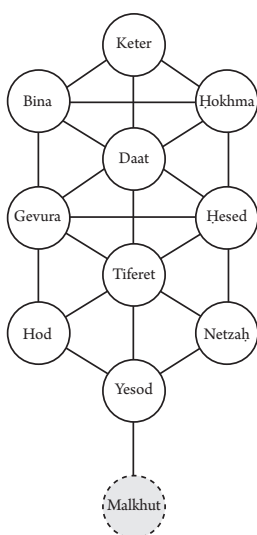
Yesod is the power of responsibility, adaptability, and peace. It's the ability to responsively balance and blend the flow of *netzah* and *hod*. It navigates the dynamics of give-and-take, so that what you have to give fits the capacity of others to take. Whereas *tiferet* ensures that in your giving you're being true to yourself, *yesod* ensures that in your giving you're at peace with others.

When you successfully tune in to these powers, you feel fulfilled and abundantly blessed. And so do all the others around you.

Let us now begin to see how you can best do that.

Chapter 1

Malkhut: Receptivity



Malkhut literally means “kingdom,” and a kingdom is a place where a king dwells. *Malkhut* is the power to build ourselves and the world into a kingdom – a dwelling place that accommodates and welcomes the presence of God. What does it mean that God dwells within us and the world? It means that the attributes of God fill us and that they guide us and the world.

It is important to clarify what we mean when we refer to God’s attributes. These attributes are not just characteristics that God has. Indeed, Judaism teaches that God does not *have* attributes – God *is* His attributes. God *is* wisdom, God *is* love, God *is* justice, God *is* truth, God *is* peace, God *is* life, and infinitely more.

Humans have attributes, traits, talents, etc. For example, you may be wise, but you are not wisdom, while God *is* wisdom. Imagine that several people are sitting in a room having an intelligent conversation, sharing their wisdom; in that room God is present inasmuch as God is wisdom. And if you believe in wisdom, then you believe in what Kabbalah would describe as one of the manifestations, or one of the “faces” of God.

Similarly, you might be a loving person, but you are not love itself. But God *is* love itself. It’s not that He has the attribute of love – rather, God is love.

This is an essential point to grasp because it goes to the very definition of God as One. Indeed, it ranks among the primary principles of the Torah – the belief that God is absolutely One and not plural in any way (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:4). If we were to say that God has attributes, we would be implying that there is God and then added to Him – from outside of Him – are His attributes. If this were true, then God would not be One in the sense of an absolute Oneness. But that’s not what the Torah teaches.

Another point needs to be crystal clear: Although we just said that God is His attributes, we are not saying that His attributes are Him. That would be a totally different idea and completely wrong. God is wisdom, love, truth, peace, life, etc. But wisdom, love, truth, peace, and life are not God because that would be limiting God and God is limitless and infinitely greater than that.

To illustrate: David Aaron is a rabbi, but he is also a husband and a father and a son. So we can understand that David Aaron can be all that, but all that is not who he is. He is much more than all that. In other words, David Aaron is a rabbi, husband, father, and son, but a rabbi, husband, father, and son do not limit who David Aaron really is. They are only facets of David Aaron. David Aaron is all of those things, but still much more.

According to Kabbalah, when we talk about bringing the presence of God and channeling the *Shekhina*, the Indwelling Divine Presence, into the world, we are speaking about behaving in a loving way, in an honest way, in a just way, in a peaceful way, so that we bring God as love, as truth, as justice, as peace into the world. In this way, God is present

within us and among us. This is what establishing God's kingdom on earth – *malkhut* – is all about. It means building this world into a royal kingdom for the King; it means bringing the King into the kingdom.

How do we do that?

The world becomes a holy royal kingdom when we think, speak, act, and treat each other like loving loyal subjects of the King, unified in our service of accomplishing His goals and values. When we do that, we become receivers of God's presence and transmitters of divine wisdom, love, truth, peace, kindness, etc. Because God – the King – is all that, but of course He is infinitely more. In other words, the King comes to live in this world if it is, in fact, His kingdom. But if we act as if we live not in a holy kingdom but in a jungle, in a dog-eat-dog world which is nothing more than a rat race, then we act and treat each other like animals, and we live in a world that is devoid of God's presence. Basically, we have thrown the King out of His kingdom. Kabbalah calls this the exile of the *Shekhina*.

Many religions aim to get close to God in the *next* world, in the afterlife, but that's not the goal of a life lived according to the precepts of the Torah. The Torah and its commandments aim to bring God into *this* world – into our lives, into the here and now. And that's because God desires to be in this world.

For example, God, as love, doesn't want to remain theoretical, abstract, and ethereal. Love wants to be actualized and made present in this world through a smile, a kind word, a hug. Similarly, kindness doesn't want to remain theoretical, abstract, and ethereal. Kindness wants to be actualized and made present in this world through kind acts such as giving charity, extending hospitality, and visiting the sick.

Most people think living according to such precepts – which are embedded in the Torah – is about spiritualizing the physical, but in truth, it's the opposite. The Torah teaches us how to take divine values and ideals, and put them into action in this world. The Torah is not fixated on teaching us how to have a great afterlife. Rather, it wants us to fix this broken world so that we can all have a great life living here and now in the presence of God in His kingdom.

If you'd say, "I believe in love, but I don't believe in God," you'd be stating the impossible. According to Judaism, you are actually a believer

in God, because God is love. So as long as you believe in love and you work to bring more loving thoughts, words, and actions into the world, then you are, in fact, serving God. It doesn't matter that you don't use the word "God." As long as you make love your ruler, as long as you let love guide your life, and as long as you live in the service of bringing love into the world in a concrete way, then you are living a godly life even if you don't call it that.

If you'd say, "I believe in truth, but I don't believe in God," then you'd be stating the impossible. According to Judaism, you are actually a believer in God, because God is truth. And therefore, if you make truth the guiding force in your life and you are honest and truthful and live with integrity, then you are, in fact, serving God. It's just a different way of saying it, and what most matters is not how you say it but how you live it. Deeds matter more than words.

Our goal is not to believe in God but to live in a godly way by channeling divine ideals and values. This is how we bring God down to earth, so to speak. In other words, our goal is to live lives that manifest the divine attributes in the world, which the kabbalists describe as manifesting the *sefirot* in the world.

This applies to all the *sefirot*. Our goal is to accommodate God's presence in the world by becoming living conduits for channeling the divine goodness of the *sefirot* into the world.

Judaism calls that becoming a "chariot for God."

The Jewish patriarchs and matriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, were all chariots for God, because they were living vehicles or conduits for the presence of God in this world. For instance, how did Abraham channel God into the world? Through acts of kindness. Abraham embodied kindness – indeed, he was the epitome of kindness. Generosity was his *modus operandi*. And therefore, Abraham brought God, as kindness, into the world.

But remember, kindness isn't God. Because God is more than kindness; He is also justice. So when you bring justice to the world, you've just brought God into the world. But justice isn't God because God is also peace. So when you bring peace into the world, then you're bringing God into the world. It's all about bringing goodness into the world because God is the personification of all goodness. The word

“God” is obviously associated with the word “good.” God is “Good Almighty” – God engenders every facet of absolute good.

According to Judaism, God is not a being who happens to be good. Rather, good is what we call God. And we believe that good is conscious, that good communicates to us and guides us.

If you say, “I believe in good, I serve good, good is the ruling power of my life, all I want to do is bring good to the world,” that’s synonymous with believing in God, serving God, and building this world into a kingdom – *malkhut* – for the Indwelling Divine Presence, the *Shekhina*.

TURNING ON, TUNING IN

Malkhut is the power to receive and transmit the Indwelling Divine Presence of Good Almighty into our lives and into the world. Like a radio that receives and transmits sound waves, *malkhut* is the power to receive and transmit abundant divine goodness.

Now, a code word for *malkhut* is *Knesset Yisrael* (“the assembly of Israel”). And that’s because the first thing you need to do to build *malkhut* – that is, to become a receiver and transmitter like a radio – is to know that you can’t do it by yourself. You have to be part of an assembly, a collective, a community.

I like to illustrate how this works with a drawing entitled “Eight Heads” by the famous artist M.C. Escher.¹ He was quite an extraordinary artist whose drawings were intended to convey and communicate very deep ideas, especially about how people and objects interact with and complement each other. This particular drawing really demonstrates the meaning of community.

If we were to remove any single person in the picture, everybody connected to him or her also disappears. This is because everybody is part of everybody. Her nose and her neck are the outline for his beard and his hat. Through his art, Escher was telling us that we are all linked.

I can’t be me without you. And you can’t be you without me. My ego is trying to convince me that I’m self-contained, self-sufficient, and independent. But if I buy into that, then I become totally deluded,

1. “Eight Heads” by M.C. Escher can be viewed on the website of the National Gallery of Art at www.nga.gov.

because there is no such thing in this universe – in this universe, everyone and everything is completely intertwined, interfaced, interdependent. And I can't be me if you're not you. We are both an individual expression of community. Neither one of us is separate and independent of everyone else. Every single human being is actually an individual expression of the global community. In order for you to be truly you, what must you be? Consciously part of the community, part of humanity, part of the global whole, for we are all connected whether we consciously acknowledge it or not.

It's like the so-called "butterfly effect"² that suggests that a small act (such as a butterfly flapping its wings) in one part of the world can have a profound effect (such as a tornado) in another part of the world as a result of a number of chain reactions. This goes to prove that no event is ever isolated.

In fact, no one and nothing is isolated or independent. But if that is true, what makes you an individual?

You are a unique individual expression of the whole universe at this place, at this time. You were created in the image of God, who is the whole, but not the whole that is a sum of its parts. God is greater than the sum of His parts. In fact, God is the whole *before* any parts.

But every part is an individual, partial expression of the whole. That's why the Torah does not permit Jews to count each other. What's wrong with counting? The answer is that nobody can be number one. We need everyone in the room to exist. We don't count each other because counting implies that we are somehow separate and existing independently – I'm one, you're two. But that's not true. How can I be me without you being you? Indeed, how can I be anything without him being him and her being her, and them being them and us being us? Although we are not the same, within every one of us is every one of us. We exist in a holographic universe. Within every detail, the whole is reflected and expressed.

2. A concept of chaos theory posited in 1972 by mathematician and meteorologist Edward Norton Lorenz.

LIVING A BLESSED LIFE

The first thing you need to know – in order to tune in to *malkhut*, receive divine abundance in your life, and transmit it to others – is who you are. That is, you need to know that you are part of a community. This is the first step to a blessed life. You can find yourself only outside of yourself, as part of a community.

That this is true has been demonstrated by many studies examining health, happiness, and longevity. Who are the healthiest, happiest, and longest-living people in the world? People who have healthy relationships, and not just intimate relationships in terms of marriage and family, but relationships within their community.

So you must ask yourself: What am I doing in my own life to create a context in which I identify myself as part of a community? Of course, you already are part of a community, but are you aware of that truth? Are you thinking, acting, and speaking in ways that reflect that truth?

Years ago, I met a famous actress who was Jewish. She told me that every day, she meditated on the face of Buddha but always in her meditation, she got to the point where she would start to cry for no apparent reason. She said, “I meditate on the face of Buddha because there is something very calming about his face, but I always end up upset.”

I said to her, “Maybe you end up crying because you’re Jewish.”

And she looked at me and said, “I think you’re right.”

Judaism is not simply a religion or spiritual path. It starts with peoplehood. The Jews did not receive the Torah when they were just a family; they had to first become a people – the nation of Israel. So, to this day, in order to receive blessing in your life, to tune in to God, you have to become aware of who you really are and live accordingly. And who are you? You are a part of a community.

As a teenager, I was always looking for community although I didn’t know that at the time. I would go to rock concerts in order to experience that moment when thousands of people in the arena held up a lit match in a show of unity. Today, people hold up their cellphones, but in my day, we held up a lit match, and when we did that, something very powerful happened. This ritual awakened within us a feeling that we were one.

The problem was that we were not a community – we were an audience at a rock concert. And even though we experienced a momentary sense of oneness, there was nothing afterward. We returned to our solitary lives; we had not built a community of any kind.

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, realized that people were craving connection and community. So he created what is known today as social media, which is a substitute for community, but it's not community. I know somebody who posted on his Facebook page every day; he had thousands of Facebook friends. Then one day he died and there were no more posts. His wife reported that nobody wrote in to ask, "Hey, how come you're not posting anymore?" Nobody really cared that much. That's not what community is about.

As mentioned, there has been considerable research conducted on the transformational power – the blessing and the joy – that living as part of a community gives its members. What does it really take to build and be part of such a community?

THE POWER OF VISION, VALUES, RULES, AND RITUALS

The first thing that creates community is shared vision and values. This is what the book of Proverbs teaches: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (29:18). Community is not a group that gets together in a bar, like in the TV sitcom *Cheers* ("where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came"), nor a loose group of neighbors like in *Friends* (who promise "I'll be there for you"). That's not a community. These folks don't necessarily have shared vision and values nor shared noble ideals that they are serving to actualize together.

What truly creates, sustains, and unites community? The same thing that unites soldiers in the army – rules and rituals.

When I was in the Israeli army, I didn't want to be in a religious unit, because I wanted to meet all kinds of people who were not necessarily religious. The first day after I was drafted, all the new recruits were standing in line when the sergeant called out, "Whoever is religious, step forward!" I didn't step forward because I knew what was about to happen – they were going to put all the religious guys together and separate us from the non-religious guys. That was exactly what I didn't want. So I made sure that I ended up in a unit that was not religious.

Once my unit assembled, the sergeant began to tell us all the rules of the army, some of which seemed totally irrational. For example, soldiers were not allowed to wear a ring and women soldiers had to wear their hair in a ponytail or bun. Naturally, everybody wanted to know why. He explained, “All these rules are what turns us into an army – the very fact that we are all committed to these details is what makes us a unit. The details themselves are irrelevant. What matters is that they turn us into one organism. We become like one hand.”

Hearing this, I thought, “This is the best explanation I’ve ever heard of Jewish law.” The difference is that the details of Jewish law are extremely relevant, although we might not realize it. All the details are rooted in and further the vision and the values of our people.

It’s commonly believed that Jewish law is about connecting us to God. Of course it is, but it does so by first connecting us to our peoplehood. It says: This is how our people celebrate our holidays. This is how our people eat. This is how we dress. This is what makes us distinct and connects us to each other.

Yes, we have rituals. Yes, we have uniforms. Just like in the army. Israeli soldiers wear olive green, and when we see them, we know exactly who we are looking at. The uniforms send a powerful message. There is also something very powerful about the hasidic uniform – fur hats, long black coats, and white shirts – or about the Modern Orthodox uniform typically featuring distinctive knitted yarmulkes.

Uniforms convey a certain message. If you would go into a hospital to see your neurologist and find him wearing ripped jeans and a cartoonish t-shirt, you might not even believe that he is a doctor. “Who are you?” you might ask. “I’m your neurologist – I’ll be the one operating on your brain.” What would you say? “Oh no, you won’t!”

I like uniforms. I like wearing a team shirt and hat. The tzitzit, the four-cornered garment with the ritual fringes, is my team shirt. And my yarmulke is my team hat.

Once, a friend and I organized a very large Jewish outreach retreat in the Catskills Mountains of New York. We finished the retreat late and it took even more time to pack up. By the time we were driving back to the city, it was two in the morning and we pulled into a rest stop. We were really hungry and we expected to be able to buy some

kind of kosher snack, but there was nothing kosher at that rest stop, not even a chocolate bar.

I was so hungry, and I looked longingly at the McDonald's, which was offering a ninety-nine-cent burger with a free Ronald McDonald mug. But I asked myself, "Why am I not going to eat this food?" The answer: "Because I'm part of the Jewish people. I am connected to my people and our history, so I won't. It's not our team's food plan." And at that moment, I felt more satiated by not eating than I would have been by eating, because I felt plugged in to Jewish peoplehood.

Some Jews think that Jewish law is about satisfying God and making Him happy, or worse still, about placating Him, or avoiding punishment, or earning some kind of reward in heaven. But this is not true. Jewish law is all about building community and aligning your will with God's as a member of that community – *Knesset Yisrael*, "the assembly of Israel."

If you are a religious Jew living alone on some mountain, you could be eating glatt kosher, praying all day long, keeping every stringency of Jewish law, and still be a complete failure. In fact, our Sages say that one who removes himself from the community is actually evil.

Why such a harsh condemnation? Because the very root of evil is defining yourself as self-contained and independent. So much of Jewish life is about being interdependent, being part of the community. Keeping Jewish law together keeps us together. You might not understand the reason behind all the details, but you live according to them because this is what we have always done as a community.

THE ROLE OF PRAYER

What else creates community?

Prayer.

People who pray together stay together. It's true – prayer is a powerful thing. And it's interesting to note that in Hebrew, a synagogue is not called a *beit tefilla* ("house of prayer"), but a *beit kneset* ("house of assembly"). In other words, it's a community center. We come together to pray, but the power of our prayers is rooted in our coming together to dream together.

The leader of the prayer service is called a *hazan*, a word that comes from the Hebrew word *hazon*, meaning "vision." And that's

because Jewish prayer is an exercise in visionary thinking. Some people think that prayer is about us telling God what we need in an attempt to try to change His mind, but Jewish prayer is about hearing ourselves tell God what we need in order to change – not His mind but our minds. Communal prayer is about dreaming and envisioning together the shared ideals we stand for, live, and want to actualize. We ask God to help us fulfill our dreams for a better world filled with His Indwelling Divine Presence and blessings.

In this, Judaism differs from many other religions.

Once a fellow applied to participate in my summer seminar. He was coming back from the Far East, where he had meditated, naked, on top of a mountain for six months. So I asked him, “Why were you doing that? What did you think about all that time?” He answered, “I practiced thinking about nothing. I was trying to attain enlightenment.” So I asked him what he expected to learn in my summer session, and he answered, “I want to know what Judaism has to offer me.”

I said, “In the Jewish tradition, the holy person does not sit on top of a mountain and meditate all by himself. He helps build community in the service of bringing greater good to the world. Now, sometimes, you may need to retreat from ordinary life, but if you do, it is so that you can return to better build the community, which is essential to successfully tuning in to abundance, receiving it, and transmitting it to others. Being Jewish is all about being part of a people with shared vision and values, and living in service of the greater good for the betterment of the world.”

THE ROLE OF SHARED LANGUAGE AND COMMON HISTORY

What else creates community?

A shared language. A common history.

We Jews are part of a story that began with our patriarchs and matriarchs, and proceeded through our ancestors. Why is it so important to be a part of this story?

Imagine that you are a word. Where would you prefer not to be? Probably the most meaningless place for you would be the dictionary. You definitely don’t want to be in a dictionary. Let’s say you are the word “ball.” Who is in front of you? “Bald,” a guy without hair. He just