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A story of Night Blooming Cereus Flower: An exploration from *Aleph Tav* Christology towards shalom society and flourishing spirituality

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini merupakan lanjutan dari artikel kami sebelumnya tentang *Koinomics*, yang pertama kali dipresentasikan dalam seminar sehari yang diselenggarakan oleh OCRPL (Oktober 2020), kemudian di salah satu buku terbaru kami dengan judul yang sama, *Koinomics* (Christianto, 2022) dan buku lain yang membahas Ekonomi Kerakyatan (Christianto, Marpaung, Sembiring, 2023). Namun, sebelum kita membahas bagaimana kita dapat mewujudkan masyarakat shalom di masa depan, yang dapat dianggap sebagai cara lain untuk menafsirkan impian Indonesia tentang "*masyarakat adil dan makmur, gemah ripah loh jinawi*" yang selaras dengan hukum Tuhan, sebagaimana telah kita bahas sebelumnya bersama Taurat sebagai hukum Tuhan sejak Perjanjian Lama; pertama-tama kita akan membahas sesuatu yang sekilas tampak tidak berhubungan, yaitu dari eksplorasi Kristologi *Aleph Tav* hingga kemampuan unik ala John Kay. Kisah itu juga menandai mekarnya Bunga Wijaya Kusuma.

ABSTRACT

The present article is a follow up to our previous article on *Koinomics*, first presented in a one-day seminar held by OCRPL (Oct. 2020), and then in our recent book with the same title, *Koinomics* (Christianto, 2022) and another book discussing Ekonomi Kerakyatan (Christianto, Marpaung, Sembiring, 2023). But before we discuss how we can implement a *shalom society* in the future which can be considered as another way to interpret

Kata kunci:
Genesis 1, Aleph Tav,
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society, Harapan Eskatologis

the Indonesian dream of “*masyarakat adil dan makmur, gemah ripah loh jinawi*” in a way that is in tune with God’s laws, as we explored before along with the Torah as God’s law since the Old Testament; first of all we shall discuss something which at first glance quite unrelated, that is from exploration of *Aleph Tav* Christology to John Kay’s distinctive capabilities. That is also a story which was marked by blooming of Night Blooming Cereus Flower.

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and I will sup with him, and he with Me.” - Revelations 3.20¹

Keywords:
Genesis 1, Aleph Tav,
Christology, Shalom society,
Koinomics, Eschatological
Hope,

Introduction

The world holds its breath for certain miracles, but few are as ephemeral, as intensely concentrated in their beauty, as the blossoming of the Night Blooming Cereus flower. In our home country, Indonesia, it is known by a far more evocative name: **Bunga Wijaya Kusuma**.² In the cool darkness, when the rest of the garden is asleep, this flower unfurls a perfect, milky-white star—a magnificent chalice of scent and light— and supposedly, only to wilt and retreat before the dawn.

This story is about our exploration — a flash of inspiration that connected quite various diverse themes, such as the ancient Hebrew alphabet, the gentle customs of India, and the startling, perfect timing of a flower’s bloom in our home’s quiet yard. And in latter sections, we also will discuss, among other things, an exploration

¹ A quote from Joel S. Goldsmith’s article, “The mystical I.” ()

² **Note:** "Bunga wijaya kusuma" in Indonesia is the same flower as the night-blooming cereus. Its latin name is [*Epiphyllum oxypetalum*](#). It is known for its white, fragrant flowers that bloom only at night and wilt before dawn. Sometimes it is also called: “*Epiphyllum Pumilum*.”

from a conference on philosophy to John Kay's distinctive capabilities and towards shalom society.

The present article can be considered a follow up to our previous article on *Koinomics*, first presented in a one-day seminar held by OCRPL (Oct. 2020), and then in our recent book with the same title, *Koinomics* (Christianto, 2022) and another book discussing Ekonomi Kerakyatan that we wrote with a specialist on *cooperative economics* (Christianto, Marpaung, Sembiring, 2023). But before we discuss how we can implement a *shalom society* in the future which can be considered as another way to interpret the Indonesian dream of "*masyarakat adil dan makmur, gemah ripah loh jinawi*" in a way that is in tune with God's laws, as we explored before along with the Torah as God's laws since the Old Testament (Walton, 2023; Wills, 2007); first of all we shall discuss something which at first glance quite unrelated, that is from exploration of *Aleph Tav* Christology to John Kay's distinctive capabilities framework.

Background story: An invitation to present in a conference of philosophy

The invitation arrived unexpectedly, framed by the formal invitation of an academic institution: the call for papers for the "*First Conference on Philosophy Research*" to be held in Hyderabad. That was around a few years ago (2023).

This writer's immediate response, was that he is not, by formal study a philosopher. His background was more in theology and a bit onto cosmology, yet distinct, areas of thought. Yet, the esteemed professor who extended the invitation insisted. He believed my perspective, coming from a unique confluence of spiritual and historical inquiry, was precisely what the nascent conference needed.

The professor who invited him came with reply was warm, insistent, and utterly compelling.

Humbled, this writer accepted to present something, then he wrote back that if accepted he would present something of a philosophy right from the Biblical narrative. A task then became: what kind of Biblical a grounded, idea could he present to an audience of seasoned thinkers? For several coming weeks before the day of the *conference of Philosophy research*, the weight of the presentation settled upon me. This writer thought that he needed a starting point that was universal, yet overlooked; a commonly misunderstood theological principle, yet also deeply philosophical; and utterly to be resonant with the pressing situation, that is our human condition nowadays.³

³ See also footnote #15, cf. V. Christianto, "Meet the Hidden Jesus within you in Javanese spirituality and Namaste greeting," *NPTRS*, vol. 3 no. 2 (2022).

It is this writer's hope, that what we discuss in this article may shed a few lights to several problems that we commonly found in realizing, especially the *fifth point* of Pancasila, or the Five Principles, in this country.⁴

Methodology

The methodology used in this exploration is qualitative study, especially with respect to literature survey of relevant sources, but not only that, this writer also did Biblical/textual analysis along with certain philosophical exploration; for introduction literatures see for instance (De Marco, *Sweeter than Honey*, 2011; Walton, 2023). And in the latter sections, this writer also did a comparison between John Kay's distinctive capabilities framework and *shalom society* as depicted in the Old Testament.

⁴ **Note:** Pancasila or “the Five Principles” is the national philosophy of Indonesia; see for instance an interpretation in a preceding article, Christianto, Robby I. Chandra, F. Smarandache. “A re-introduction of Pancasila from Neutrosophic Logic perspective: In search of the root cause of deep problems of modern societies,” *NPTRS* Vol. 2, No. 2 (2021). url: [A re-introduction of Pancasila from Neutrosophic Logic perspective: In search of the root cause of deep problems of modern societies | The New Perspective in Theology and Religious Studies](#)

Results

Genesis 1:1 and the Divine Pre-Existence

This writer found an anchor, starting by the very first verse of the Bible, **Genesis 1:1**—*Bereshit Bara Elohim Et HaShamayim Ve'Et Ha'Aretz* ("In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth").⁵

For decades, scholars have focused on the grammar, the singularity of 'Elohim' (plural in form, singular in action), and the idea of creation *ex nihilo*. But his focus zeroed in on two seemingly insignificant Hebrew letters nestled deep within the text: **Aleph** (א) and **Tav** (ת). See for instance, Achenbach (2012); De Marco (2011), Walton (2023), Wills (2007).

These two letters, the first and the last of the Hebrew alphabet, form the untranslated word '**Et**' (תא). The 'Et' marker is an untranslatable direct object signifier. It is usually ignored in translation because it has no semantic value in modern speech. However, in Genesis 1:1, the text reads: "In the beginning, God created [**Aleph Tav**] the heavens and [**Vav Aleph Tav**] the earth."⁶

Why is this important? -- If language is the container of the Divine thought, then the very first creative act was bookended by the first and last letters of the

⁵ Which later on, this verse can also be connected to the book of Revelation.

⁶ **Note:** according to several sources, the Hebrew meaning of "Aleph Tav" word in Genesis 1:1 is "*God who make covenant with humans,*" and that points exactly to Jesus Christ, especially in His redemptive act in Golgota, around 2000 years ago. At this point, we can say that the Genesis 1:1, at the very beginning of the Holy Bible, already declared a *proto-euangelion* (proto-Gospel). And there are sources that say the actual wording that Jesus used in the book of Revelation when He said: "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," were actually spoken in Hebrew language, as follows: "*I am the Aleph and the Tav, the first and the last* (from the Hebrew alphabet)."

alphabet—a symbol of the *totality* of God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Long before the term **Logos** was used by Greek philosophers, or the concept of the pre-existent Christ was fully articulated in the Gospel of John,⁷ here, in the very bedrock of scripture, stood the silent, divine signifier: the **Aleph Tav**.

It speaks to a Divine Pre-Existence—a Christic essence, a mediating force, a primal Word that was not just *with* God, but *was* God, and was inherently involved in the very structure of the cosmos *before* time began. It suggests that the Creative Act was saturated with this Divine Presence; see Treat (2024); Walton (2023), Wills (2007).

Namaste as a common greeting: The Divinity Bowing to the Divinity

The philosophical power of this insight, the idea that the **Aleph Tav** was present *in* the creation, rather than just *outside* of it, provided the necessary bridge to the concept that I would present at the Hyderabad conference.

This led me to the customary Indian greeting, a phrase of profound reverence:

Namaste.

Traditionally, *Namaste* is understood as a respectful salutation, meaning "I bow to you." More spiritually, it is often interpreted as: "The Divine light in me bows to the

⁷ It is known that the Logos term used in Gospel of John may not correspond neatly with the term used for instance by Philo, but may originate from Jewish thought, more known as Memra, see for example an article by a Jewish scholar: D. Boyarin, "*Gospel of Memra*." (2001).

Divine light in you." It is an acknowledgment of shared sacred ground among those involved in the dialogue (cf. reminding us to M. Buber's philosophy).

But for the conference, I wanted to propose an interpretation deepened by the Aleph Tav concept. It wasn't just a recognition of shared divinity, but a profound, active acknowledgment of the Pan-Christic presence.

My proposed (alternative) reading of *Namaste* became: **"The Divinity within me—that is, the indwelling Aleph Tav, the Jeshuaic essence—bows down to the Divine essence, the Aleph Tav, already resident within you."** (cf. Walton, 2012; De Marco 2011; Wills, 2007).

This interpretation reframes the greeting from a passive acknowledgement to an active, humble submission—the recognition that the same creative *Word*, the same pre-existent essence, indwells every human being.⁸ This is the seed of light, the divine DNA, that makes us fundamentally more than biological accidents.

Navigating the Critics

Nonetheless, it is possible that such an interpretation, blending a deep dive into Hebrew etymology with a traditional Hindu/Indian custom, could easily be

⁸ **Note:** Whenever we begin to realize the significance of such a *Divine essence* whom indwell inside of us (especially for those believers in Lord Jesus Christ, the Ultimate Word of Father in Heaven), then we come to be a spiritual being, no matter what. And that would remind us to Christian spirituality writers, for instance Joel S. Goldsmith (2012, etc.) who emphasized the "*in-dwelling of Christ in each of us*," and also cf. Simone Weil (1947, 1952).

dismissed as syncretism⁹ — the haphazard mixing of disparate religious beliefs—or reductive dynamism, the belief that divinity is merely an impersonal force or power scattered throughout the world.

While this proposition can be deemed still debatable (because Hebrew language can be argued from several views) this is not about fusion or reduction; it is about *recognition*. If the Aleph Tav is the Logos, and the Logos is the creative Person behind the creation of the Cosmos, then its presence is necessarily universal.¹⁰ It is not limited by geography, culture, or historical revelation; it is the fundamental structure of being.

The presence is not merely a force *in* the world (Dynamism), but the very *ground* of the world (a step beyond Panentheism, but more onto Cosmic Christology, just as we read in Letter to Colossians, see chapter 1). It is the personal, yet ubiquitous, creative *Word* that gives being to all things. (Situmorang, 2022, Walton, 2012; Wills, 2007).

Pan-Christic Biogenesis: The secret behind Human Design. I needed a term to encapsulate this specific proposition—a concept that spoke to the universality of

⁹ Especially by several pedantic readers, this exploration of diverse themes may be dismissed as just a syncretistic effort, or using known parlance: “progressive theology,” while actually it is not.

¹⁰ **Note:** That is in quite accordance with the verses that St. Paul wrote in his Letter to Colossians chapter 1, which according to scholars those verses were originating from an ancient hymn of the Earliest Christianity, dedicated to the Jesus Christ the Lord (see also, for instance, L. Hurtado’s book).

the Logos (Christic), its presence in all of existence (*pan-*), and its role as the fundamental architect of life itself (*biogenesis*).

I settled on a new term: **Pan-Christic Biogenesis**.

It is a theory of origin that posits the Divine Logos (**Christ**) as the immanent, life-giving structure of all created things (*pan-biogenesis*). It says that the creative energy of the Aleph Tav is literally the template upon which all biological life is structured and given its unique, irreplaceable value.

This concept served as a direct and necessary counterpoint to the prevailing modern, materialist narratives of humanity. We are, far too often, reduced by philosophical and scientific models—by the popular understanding of what Descartes proposed, or by what modern medicine sometimes implies. We are treated as little more than complex biochemistry machines—manipulable, controllable, and devoid of inherent sanctity outside of our physical processes.

Pan-Christic Biogenesis argues the opposite: the human being is not merely a machine that produces consciousness; it is a Divinity inside each one of us built upon a Christic blueprint. Our essence is not merely the sum of our chemical parts; it is the unique and unrepeatable reflection of the Aleph Tav itself. We are designed to interpret the presence of the Divine because we are fundamentally composed of that same Presence (cf. Letter to Colossians chapter 1:15-20).

The bloom of a flower

The day when I was due to present the file, and yet strangely lightened by the stance that I would give to the audiences, I stepped out onto the yard, stretching my shoulders against the late-day sun.

And then I saw it. In the corner of our garden, the impossible had occurred.

The Bunga Wijaya Kusuma, the Night Blooming Cereus, was in full, glorious bloom.

It was an extraordinary anomaly. This flower, which reserves its spectacular display for the cover of deepest darkness—a few precious hours, often around midnight, once a year—had decided to open its heart at the moment (even I was not sure if it was blooming since the night before or just in the morning). Its enormous, trumpet-like petals were milky white, catching the amber afternoon sun, radiating a scent that was at once intoxicatingly sweet and utterly pure.

A Warm Hallelujah

To witness the Bunga Wijaya Kusuma bloom is a blessing. While for many people, it may be just a coincidence, to me it affirmed that philosophy is not just an exercise of the mind, but a journey of the soul. The universe, in its quiet, botanical way, had

validated the concept of **Pan-Christic Biogenesis**. It seemed to say: *Yes. The Word is everywhere. The blueprint is perfect.*

Thanks be to God for such an inspiration. It is this writer's hope that this sharing—of an ancient Hebrew mystery, an Indian greeting, and the perfect bloom of a single, majestic flower—will likewise warm our heart with the realization that the Divine essence is not far off, but deeply, profoundly, and beautifully within the very fibre of our being.

In the next sections, this writer will discuss a little bit more on how there is deep connection between *Aleph Tav* Christology with the sought-after shalom society hidden in the Old Testament's laws of God. The pursuit of a just and peaceful world—a Shalom Society—is a timeless aspiration woven into the fabric of human history. Yet, achieving this ideal often seems elusive. We seek complex blueprints for societal restructuring, overlooking a profound truth: the foundation for true peace and dignity can be found not in external laws alone, but in the recognition of the Divine essence within every human soul. This truth is illuminated through an ancient lens: the Aleph-Tav Christology, a theological mystery that acts as the ethical wellspring for the Old Testament's vision of Shalom (cf. De Marco 2011; Walton, 2012; Wills, 2007).

This proposition beautifully connects an ancient Hebrew mystery, an Indian greeting (likely *Namaste*, recognizing the Divine in the other), and the perfection of a flower to the central

realization: the **Divine essence is not far off, but deeply, profoundly, and beautifully within the very fiber of your being.**

The Hebrew mystery at its core is the Aleph-Tav concept. *Aleph* is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; *Tav* is the last. Together, they signify wholeness, totality, and the Alpha and Omega (a concept later adopted in Greek). In Jewish tradition, the Aleph-Tav symbol, often appearing untranslated alongside the Name of God in the Old Testament, points to God's all-encompassing presence—the beginning and the end of all creation.

Aleph-Tav Christology proposes that Jesus Christ embodies this Aleph-Tav sign. He is understood as the eternal Word (Logos) through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17). The Divine spark, the organizing principle of the universe, is personalized in the Christ.¹¹

The crucial ethical leap here is this: If Christ is the Aleph-Tav—the **Divine wholeness**—and we are created *in the image* of God (Genesis 1:26), then every single human being carries a reflection of this Aleph-Tav deep inside. This is the source of Divine dignity. It means:

- Intrinsic Worth: A person's value isn't based on their societal status, accomplishments, race, or wealth. It is intrinsic and non-negotiable, stemming from the Divine spark within.

¹¹ Just as Jesus once remarked: “*I and the Father are One.*” (Gospel of John).

- Universal Connection: Because the same Divine essence resides in all, every relationship becomes sacred. To dishonour another is to dishonour the Aleph-Tav present in them.

This understanding shifts the focus from external compliance to internal reverence (cf. De Marco 2011; Walton, 2012; Wills, 2007).

The Ethics of Shalom: External Law, Internal Dignity

The Shalom Society is the Old Testament's highest ideal, a concept far richer than merely the absence of war. Shalom means **wholeness, completeness, prosperity, well-being, harmony, and peace**. It describes a state of creation where everything is in its proper, thriving, and just relationship with God, humanity, and the environment.

According to the Holy Bible, the word "shalom" can be read for instance in Psalm 122:7, as follows:

"May there be peace within your walls. May there be safety in your great buildings." – Psalm 122:7 (Holy Bible, Easy to read version).

"Kiranya damai sejahtera ada di lingkungan tembokmu, dan kesentosaan di dalam puri-purimu!" – TB2 LAI 2024.

"Kiranya shalom ada di dalam tembok-tembokmu, sentosa ada di dalam benteng-bentengmu!" – TB ILT3

"May shalom be within your ramparts, prosperity in your palaces." – Complete Jewish Bible (D. Stern, ed., p. 921).¹²

After reading and comparing the above verse of Psalm 122:7 from different translations of the Holy Bible, we can comprehend that the blessing for shalom is likely to be originated from a blessing / prayer intended for Jerusalem, perhaps because they represent the descendants of Abraham. But there is certain hint from the Holy Spirit, that the "shalom society" can also be expected to be a blessing for any country / nation who seek to fulfil God's law, or to enable the Kingdom of God to flourish (cf. Keener, 2024).

Then, we can also ask: how does the Aleph-Tav Christology connect to the **laws of God** (Torah) that seek to build this Shalom Society?¹³

¹² While we provide here an example from Psalm 122, with translation example shown by D. Stern, Complete Jewish Bible, actually there is specific *The Messianic Aleph Tav כף Scriptures*, second edition, which can be found at url: [The-Messianic-Aleph-Tav-Scriptures-INTRODUCTION-2nd-Edition-MODERN-Hebrew.pdf](#)

¹³ Several readers may, understandably, write back that there is not yet known the so-called Aleph-tav Christology per se, but what this writer write here is just a reinterpretation of Colossians 1:15-20 especially if we re-read again the Hebrew Bible; see for instance, (a) Predrag Petrović, "The Christological Aspects of Hebrew Ideograms," *Bogoslovni vestnik/Theological Quarterly* 79 (2019) 4, 1027—1038, DOI: DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2019/04/Petrovic> (b) [The-Messianic-Aleph-Tav-Scriptures-INTRODUCTION-2nd-Edition-MODERN-Hebrew.pdf](#)

The connection is this: The laws are a practical, external framework designed to protect and express the *internal* Divine dignity (cf. De Marco 2011; Walton, 2012; Wills, 2007).

If every person has Aleph-Tav dignity, then society's structures must reflect this. The laws of the Torah—covering everything from ritual purity to civil justice—are the scaffolding for a Shalom world. Consider a few examples of how Torah laws mandate actions that honour the *Aleph-Tav* in others:

- Laws of Justice and Fairness: The law demands impartial justice for the poor and the rich (Leviticus 19:15). Why? Because a poor person's Aleph-Tav dignity is equal to a any other person's dignity in higher strata of the society. To pervert justice is to deny the Divine imprint in the marginalized.
- Laws of Social Welfare: The commands regarding the **Sabbath year** and the **Jubilee** (Leviticus 25) dictate the periodic release of debts and the return of land. These radical economic laws ensure that no person or family is permanently crushed by debt or poverty. They act as a safeguard against a system that would strip a human being of their inherent dignity and reduce them to a perpetual servant.
- Laws of Compassion: The requirement to leave the corners of the field unharvested for the poor and the stranger (Leviticus 19:9-10) is not mere charity; it is a command to embed the respect for human dignity into the very economic act of harvesting. It provides a means for the less fortunate

to maintain their dignity by gathering for themselves, rather than merely begging. The command to **love your neighbour as yourself** (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22) is the ethical summation of the entire framework, only possible when one first recognizes the shared Divine essence (Aleph-Tav) in both oneself and the neighbour.

The laws of the Old Testament are, therefore, not harsh, arbitrary rules but prescriptions for preserving the Shalom that naturally arises when the Divine worth of every Aleph-Tav soul is honoured.

Implications

A. An Extended exploration to E.F. Schumacher, from the Old Testament's view of Social Justice towards creating Shalom Society in this Modern Days

Modern economics—driven by rapid technological advancement and an obsession with Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—often neglects its impact on the environment, the human scale, and spiritual ethics. To this end, two frameworks separated by millennia and different cultural backgrounds offer sharp critiques and alternative solutions: E.F. Schumacher's human-scale economics, and the Old Testament's divinely ordained social law (see also E.F. Schumacher, 2008).

E.F. Schumacher, in his landmark 1973 work, *Economics as if People Mattered*, challenged the paradigm of unlimited material growth, advocating for Intermediate

Technology and a human-centred economy. Meanwhile, the Old Testament presents a theological blueprint for Tzedek (righteousness) and Mishpat (justice)—socioeconomic principles designed to prevent structural poverty, balance property, and ensure the dignity of every individual in the theocratic society of ancient Israel.

This article aims to analyse and compare these two frameworks. We will explore how Schumacher's insights, derived from 20th-century ecological and philosophical critique, find surprising resonance with the revealed socio-economic mandates of antiquity, particularly in their emphasis on limits, appropriate scale, and the priority of the human over the material.

E.F. Schumacher, a statistician and economist who worked for the British Coal Board, argued that economics had gone astray because it ignored three fundamental aspects: people, nature, and spiritual values. At the heart of his thinking was a rejection of the worship of "giants" in all their forms—mass production, big cities, and large bureaucracies. (see also E.F. Schumacher, 2008).

A. Critique of "Big Economy"

Schumacher severely criticized what he called "Metaphysical Economics," in which the value of everything is measured by price and growth is considered the ultimate goal. He argued that this model was flawed because it considered natural resources—especially fossil fuels—to be income, when in fact they are capital.

Draining this capital was not only ecologically unsustainable but also intergenerationally immoral.

B. The Concept of Intermediate Technology

Schumacher's primary solution was Intermediate Technology or Appropriate Technology. This is not the most primitive technology, nor the most sophisticated, but it is technology that is:

1. Affordable for the poor to use.
2. Simple to understand and maintain.
3. Gently impacts the environment.
4. Job-oriented, not capital-oriented.

The goal of Intermediate Technology is to shift production from capital-intensive metropolitan centres to rural areas, providing dignity to work, and empowering local communities. Human scale is key: a tool or organization must be understandable and controllable by humans, not the other way around (see also E.F. Schumacher, 2008).

This is an ethical framework that contrasts with the materialistic nature of Western economics. In this view, the purpose of work is not simply to produce goods, but to impart dignity and shape human character.

"To obtain the maximum amount of goods with the minimum consumption of resources (natural and human) is the goal of Western economics...."

Schumacher places humans and their souls at the centre; goods are merely tools. He advocates a lifestyle of simplicity and nonviolence toward humans and nature. The principle of sufficiency replaces the principle of greed as the driving force of economics (see also Schumacher, 2008).

A few Lessons from OT

Principles of Social Justice and Righteousness in the Old Testament

The socio-economic order in the Old Testament, particularly as established in the Torah, was not simply a set of ritual rules, but rather the constitution for a nation destined to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). These principles were rooted in the just and righteous character of God.

A. Central Concepts: *Tzedek* and *Mishpat*

Justice in the Old Testament is not understood solely as retributive justice (delivering just punishment) but as distributive and relational justice.

1. *Tzedek* (Righteousness): Refers to a state or relationship that is right. In a social context, *tzedek* is about living a righteous life and maintaining a right social order—ensuring everyone receives their due share.

2. *Mishpat* (Justice): More specifically, mishpat is the concrete act of upholding tzedek, especially for the vulnerable—widows, orphans, and foreigners. Upholding justice is an act that corrects social imbalances.

B. Anti-Poverty and Anti-Accumulation Mechanisms

The Torah has a structured economic mechanism designed to prevent the permanent concentration of wealth and ensure that everyone has access to the means of production, namely land (Walton, 2023)

1. The Law of the Sabbath and the Sabbatical Year

Every seventh day, work ceased to honor creation and to give rest to slaves, foreigners, and livestock. Every seventh year, the land was to be left fallow, and debts were to be forgiven (Deuteronomy 15:1-2). This was a fundamental recognition that human property rights are temporary and that nature also needs rest.

2. The Jubilee Year

The culmination of the social laws, occurring every fifty years (after seven Sabbatical cycles), the Jubilee Year was a complete socio-economic revolution:

- Land was to be returned to the families of its original owners.
- Hebrew slaves were to be freed.

This law ensured that the poverty and bankruptcy of one generation would not become a curse for the next. The principle behind it is theological: "The land is mine, and you are both aliens and permanent residents to me" (Leviticus 25:23). Absolute ownership belongs only to God, making humans merely stewards.

3. Prohibition of Usury and the Obligation of Almsgiving

Lending to poor Israelites was to be interest-free (usury) (Exodus 22:25). Loans were not transactions to profit from the misery of others, but rather acts of social assistance. Furthermore, the law of gleaning, which required field owners to leave their harvests on the sidelines for the poor, guaranteed their right to earn a dignified living (Leviticus 19:9-10).

Points of Intersection and Comparison: Humanity, Scale, and Limits

Although Schumacher wrote in the context of the 20th-century industrial crisis and the Old Testament addressed ancient agrarian societies, their essential socio-economic ethics show remarkable convergence (see also Schumacher, 2008).

A. Prioritizing Humanity Over Efficiency

Both Schumacher and the Old Testament system reject the idea that financial efficiency or capital accumulation should be the primary standard of success.

- E.F. Schumacher: The economy should serve people (providing decent work, character, and a decent environment), not the other way around. High GDP is worthless if people are degraded.
- Old Testament: The Sabbath and Jubilee laws deliberately reduced production efficiency and forced material sacrifices (not planting for a year, cancelling debts) for the sake of human dignity (rest) and relational justice (second chances). People and right relationships are more valuable than maximum yields.

B. The Concept of Limits and Sustainability

Both views are based on the principle of limits, a concept foreign to modern growth economics.

- Schumacher: Material constraints (natural resources are capital) and scale constraints (organizations that are too large become inhumane and unmanageable). He explicitly advocates ecological sustainability (see also E.F. Schumacher, 2008).
- Old Testament: Theological and temporal constraints. The land belongs to God and must therefore be treated with respect. The Sabbath and Jubilee are God-imposed limits on property rights and resource use, effectively enforcing social and ecological sustainability in the ancient context.

Schumacher's insights in his seminal work "Economics as if people-mattered" and *Intermediate Technologies* strongly reflect the need for localization and

decentralization. This aligns with the way Old Testament law was applied and can be further developed into "**development as if people-mattered.**"

For example, the Law of Jubilees ensured that land and capital (in the form of land) remained in the hands of family communities, preventing mass migration and the concentration of wealth in a single urban centre or dynasty. This law effectively supported small-scale economies and stable, locally established communities—a prerequisite for a deeply rooted society, precisely the kind Schumacher envisioned to overcome the dehumanization of industrial society.

Table 1. Comparative aspects of Schumacher’s economics and OT laws

Comparative aspects	E.F. Schumacher’s economics	Social Justice values in OT
Highest values	Human beings, nature, characters	Human dignity, Tzedek & Mishpat (Divine Justice preservation)
Main criticism	Giantism, deification of GDP (PDB), destructive technologies.	Endless accumulation of rich to be owned permanently, in oppose to Jubilee year, exploitation of the poor/vulnerable people
Collective mechanism	Intermediate technology, Scale of humans, simple life style	Jubilee Year each 49 years (to be implemented in each 50 th year), Sabattical year, <i>riba</i> system is forbidden, Gleaning law.
Concept of limitation	Ecological limits (Natural resources as capital).	Theological limits (<i>Lands are owned by God</i>).
End goal	Maximal welfare with minimal human efforts	Preservation of God’s orders in a right way (Tzedek) and freedom preservation (Mishpat).

Contemporary Critique and Relevance

A. *Implementation Challenges*

While these principles sound ideal, they both face challenges in reality.

1. Schumacher: The criticism levelled at him is that Intermediate Technology cannot always compete with the efficiency of the global economy, and that the Small Is Beautiful movement is vulnerable to co-optation and marginalization by larger corporate and political powers.

2. Old Testament: The Jubilee Order proved extremely difficult to implement, even for the ancient Israelites. The rabbis struggled for centuries to implement the Sabbath and Jubilee Laws, demonstrating that human nature tends to resist restrictions on wealth accumulation.

B. *Spiritual and Ethical Legacy*

The primary relevance of these two frameworks for the contemporary world can be found in reaffirming the role of ethics and spirituality in economics.

Amidst the climate crisis, global wealth inequality, and workplace alienation, both Schumacher and the ancient scriptures remind us:

- Economics is a branch of ethics, not the other way around. An economic system based solely on materialism will fail to meet the deepest human needs.

- Sustainability is a matter of justice. Treating nature with respect (Schumacher) and recognizing God as Owner of the Land (Old Testament) lead to practices that ensure resources are available for future generations—an intergenerational Tzedek issue.

The notions of an "*Economy That Makes People Matter*" and a "*Just Society According to God*" are fundamentally a call to return to common sense rooted in the limitations of nature and human values. Both demand that we prioritize quality of life, justice, and right relationships over quantity of goods, unlimited accumulation, and the destructive pace of growth.

Discussion

The direction of E.F. Schumacher's Ethical commitment – welfare economics or Christian shalom?

E.F. Schumacher, through his visionary work "*Economics as if People Mattered*," launched a fundamental critique of the post-World War II industrial economic paradigm. His primary criticism lay not only in market failures, but also in the philosophy behind "Big Economy," which ignored ecological limits, glorified unlimited growth, and led to the dehumanization of labour.

Analysing Schumacher's framework—centred on Intermediate Technology, small-scale economics, and new environmental-friendly ethics—raises questions about his ideological position: Was he a centre-left economist advocating the redistribution

of wealth, or an ethical visionary seeking a far more radical spiritual and social transformation?

This review article argues that Schumacher's thought has a deeper ethical and structural convergence with the ideal of Shalom, in the sense of the Kingdom of Heaven realized through the teachings of Jesus Christ, than with the macroeconomic and centralistic solutions of modern socialist welfare economics.

Dissecting the First Pole: Socialist Welfare Economics

Welfare economics, particularly its centre-left counterpart, operates within the same "Big Economy" paradigm as the capitalism Schumacher critiqued, albeit with different goals.

A. Superficial Similarities

While there are seemingly clear moral overlaps:

1. Anti-Poverty: Both views aim to reduce poverty and ensure a dignified life for all.
2. Market Correction: Both views recognize that free markets, if left unchecked, will produce extreme injustice and inequality.

B. Fundamental Divergence: Scale and Growth

However, fundamental differences emerge on the issue of scale and dependence on growth:

1. Welfare Economics: This school accepts and, fundamentally, relies on large-scale industrial systems and capital-intensive technologies. The welfare state is funded through progressive taxation and redistribution mechanisms that are only possible if the economic base—namely, GDP growth and mass production—remains high. Its solutions are extrinsic (regulated by the state and large bureaucracies) and macroeconomic.

2. Schumacher: He rejects the foundations of this system—namely, "giantism" and the dogma of growth. He argues that the problem is not how to distribute the output of giant factories, but why they need to be giant in the first place. He advocates decentralization, job-oriented Intermediate Technology, and locally managed systems. Schumacher's solutions are intrinsic (through appropriate technology and scale) and microeconomic (community).

Therefore, while Schumacher agrees with socialists in opposing capitalist injustice, he disagrees with the methodology and scale adopted by welfare economics. He rejected the giant tools (large bureaucracies, large industries) used by the centre-left, just as he rejected the materialistic goals of the right (see also E.F. Schumacher, 2008).

Philosophical Affinity with Shalom and the Kingdom of Heaven

The concept of **Shalom** (in Hebrew meaning : “peace, wholeness, well-being, and total harmony”) in the sense of the Kingdom of Heaven embodied by Jesus, provides a framework much more in line with Schumacher's vision. Shalom refers not only to personal peace but also to relational restoration—peace between humans and God, with each other, and with creation.

A. Overcoming Materialism (Critique of Mammon, cf. Matthew 6)

Schumacher, through his Economics principles and critique of consumerism, emphasized that the purpose of life is not to accumulate things but to develop character and awareness.

- Teachings of Christ: Jesus radically rejected the worship of Mammon (possessions) and called for a simple life focused on eternal values (Luke 16:13). He taught: "*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*" (cf. Matthew 6:33).
- Schumacher's Convergence: Schumacher reversed the order of priorities in modern economics—from having to being. This is the core of the Kingdom of Heaven ethic, which places inner (spiritual) wholeness and right (ethical) relationships above material wealth.

B. Justice (Tzedek and Mishpat) and Human Dignity

The Old Testament—as mentioned in the previous article—emphasizes Tzedek (relational righteousness) and Mishpat (just action for the vulnerable). Christ's teachings deepen this mandate through the commandment of love.

- **The Dignity of Work:** Schumacher focused on meaningful work and argued that technology should be designed to serve and empower people (eliminating dehumanization). This aligns with the emphasis on the dignity of each individual, which is the ethical foundation of the Kingdom of Heaven (see also E.F. Schumacher, 2008).

- **Priority of the Little People:** The principle of "economics as if people mattered" and Intermediate Technology inherently favour local communities and the common people. This directly reflects Christ's mission of favouring the marginalized (widows, orphans, the poor)—a concrete manifestation of Mishpat.

C. Ecological Integrity (Shalom with Creation)

The most powerful aspect of this convergence is the view of Nature.

- **Shalom and Creation:** Shalom encompasses harmony with nature. The Kingdom of Heaven is not only about human souls, but also about the redemption of all creation (Romans 8:19-22).

- Schumacher: His primary criticism is that modern economics treats nature as unlimited "revenue," when in fact it is "capital." His view of ecology and limits is a bold call for stewardship that is at the heart of a Christian ethic of creation.

Introducing the Shalom-Driven Capabilities: Extending Kay's Distinctive Capabilities Framework for Sustainable Value Creation

It is known that John Kay's *Distinctive Capabilities Framework* (Kay, 1995) offers a profound and nuanced understanding of corporate success, shifting the focus from the static possession of strategic assets (Resource-based approach) to the dynamic cultivation of enduring **relational contracts** (Relationship-based approach). Kay identified three essential capabilities—**Architecture, Reputation, and Innovation**—as the non-replicable sources of superior performance and sustainable competitive advantage. These capabilities encapsulate "what makes our organization so special," rooted in the continuity and stability of relationships with customers, suppliers, shareholders, and employees. The present article proposes the Shalom-Driven Distinctive Capabilities Framework (SD2CF), an extension of John Kay's relational model of competitive advantage. Building on Kay's core pillars of Architecture, Reputation, and Innovation, the SD2CF introduces a fourth, non-replicable capability: Social and Environmental Responsibility (SER), rooted in the Hebrew concept of *Shalom* (wholeness, well-being, and restorative justice). This extension provides a values-based alternative to common ESG terminology, reframing

corporate success as an act of gratitude and reciprocity toward the community and environment. The article operationalizes this four-part framework into a measurable system by leveraging the Objectives and Key Results (OKR) methodology, creating the Distinctive Capabilities Maturity Model (DCMM). Finally, we establish a direct link between the DCMM's Key Results and the metrics of the Risk Maturity Index (RMI) (Antonucci, 2016), offering a comprehensive roadmap for organizations to embed *Shalom*-driven distinctive excellence into strategic execution and risk governance.

The Imperative of Measurable, relational depth

John Kay's Distinctive Capabilities Framework offers a profound and nuanced understanding of corporate success, shifting the focus from the static possession of strategic assets (Resource-based approach) to the dynamic cultivation of enduring relational contracts (Relationship-based approach). Kay identified three essential capabilities—**Architecture, Reputation, and Innovation**—as the non-replicable sources of excellence performance and sustainable competitive advantage. These capabilities encapsulate "*what makes our organization so special*," rooted in the continuity and stability of relationships with customers, suppliers, shareholders, and employees.

While conceptually powerful, Kay's framework, in its original form, often lacks the operational precision required for modern execution [1]. Theory of planning

demands not only *what* to focus on but *how* to measure progress and *when* to adjust course. The abstract nature of "Architecture" or "Reputation" can leave managers without clear metrics, making it challenging to link strategic investments directly to capability development [2][3].

This section addresses this gap through a three-fold extension:

1. Conceptual Expansion: Introducing Social and Environmental Responsibility (SER) as the fourth distinctive capability, informed by the holistic integrity of *Shalom*.
2. Operational Translation: Applying John Doerr's OKR methodology to translate all four capabilities into a structured, quantifiable system: the Distinctive Capabilities Maturity Model (DCMM).
3. Risk Integration: Aligning the DCMM's Key Results with the dimensions of the Risk Maturity Index (RMI) to integrate capability development seamlessly into risk governance.

The Foundational Framework: Kay's Distinctive Capabilities

Before operationalizing the framework, it is essential to re-examine Kay's three capabilities through the lens of measurement potential.

A. Architecture (Relational Structure)

Architecture refers to the intricate structure of internal and external relational contracts. It embodies the tacit organizational knowledge, shared routines, and the ease of information exchange that allows for flexible, collaborative responses to change. Distinctive Architecture is a collective interest sustained by mutual commitment and trust, generating value through superior coordination.

The Measurement Challenge: Architecture is largely intangible. Measuring it requires quantifying the health and efficiency of relationships and knowledge flows, rather than simply counting assets.

B. Reputation (Information Signal)

Reputation serves as a powerful signal of quality and intent to customers, especially when information asymmetry makes informed decisions difficult. Built over time through consistent experience, quality signals (price, promotion), and word-of-mouth, a strong reputation reduces transaction costs and builds a sequence of trust-based relationships.

The Measurement Challenge: Reputation is often measured reactively (e.g., via brand surveys). Operationalizing it requires metrics that track the *antecedents* and *consistency* of the reputation signal itself.

C. Innovation (Sustainable Uniqueness)

Innovation is an undeniable source of distinctiveness. However, Kay noted that successful innovation is often neither sustainable nor easily appropriable, as it

quickly attracts imitation. Transforming an innovation into a lasting competitive advantage requires a range of supporting strategies that protect and leverage the initial breakthrough.

The Measurement Challenge: Simply counting patents or new product launches is insufficient. The key is measuring the **appropriability**—the ability of the firm to capture the value of its innovation—and its contribution to long-term revenue streams.

The Extension: Social and Environmental Responsibility as Shalom

The central theoretical contribution of this article is the introduction of the fourth capability: **Social and Environmental Responsibility (SER)**, viewed through the lens of the Hebrew word *Shalom*, cf [8][9].

A. Conceptualizing SER through Shalom

While the common term ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) focuses largely on *risk* and *compliance*, *Shalom* offers a perspective of relational wholeness and active well-being [8][9].

Shalom is not merely the absence of conflict (a low level of compliance) but the active, reciprocal pursuit of comprehensive well-being and restorative justice for all stakeholders. This elevates SER from a defensive compliance cost to a proactive, non-replicable source of competitive advantage.

A *Shalom*-driven SER commitment means:

- Deep Stakeholder Contracts: Extending the relational contract (Kay's Architecture) to the broader community and environment.
- Authentic Signal: Building a Reputation (Kay's second pillar) based on genuine, verified societal contribution, not just greenwashing.
- Sustainable Innovation: Directing Innovation (Kay's third pillar) toward solutions that restore ecological and social balance (e.g., circular economy products).

A firm that pursues *Shalom* builds a bond of authentic trust with its market, which competitors cannot imitate. This is the **Shalom Advantage**.

B. Measurement Challenge for SER (Shalom)

The measurement of SER must transcend input metrics to systemic impact metrics—quantifying the firm's contribution to actual well-being and restoration. The inclusion of SER (Shalom) as an essential capability moves the firm beyond simply mitigating known risks (a *Defined* RMI level) to proactively creating systemic resilience (an *Optimized* RMI level). A firm pursuing *Shalom* manages latent risks—such as climate change liabilities, resource scarcity, and social inequality—that traditional risk models often struggle to quantify [6][7]. The pursuit of wholeness

and restorative justice ensures the firm's long-term license to operate, making it the ultimate form of risk diversification.

Towards Operationalizing Distinctiveness: The DCMM and John Doerr OKR

The leap from conceptual capability to measurable action is best facilitated by the OKR methodology. John Doerr's principle, "Measure What Matters," advocates for setting an ambitious Objective (what is to be achieved) and coupling it with a set of measurable Key Results (KRs) (how we know we achieved it). The Distinctive Capabilities Maturity Model (DCMM) utilizes John Doerr's Objectives and Key Results (OKR) methodology to operationalize the four capabilities.

Table 2. Operationalizing John Kay's distinctive capabilities

Strategic Objective (O)	Strategic Intent	Illustrative Key Results (KRs) (Measurable Goals)
O1: Architecture	Achieve internal and external relational health for superior coordination.	KR 1.1: Increase cross-functional project efficiency (time-to-market) by 20%. KR 1.2: Reduce critical staff turnover in high-trust, collaborative roles to < 5%.
O2: Reputation	Establish the firm as the most trusted signal of quality and intent in the industry.	KR 2.1: Achieve a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +65 among key customer segments. KR 2.2: Reduce customer-facing service failure rates by 15% for 3 consecutive quarters.

O3: Innovation	Capture maximum value from proprietary breakthroughs for sustainable advantage.	KR 3.1: Increase the percentage of total revenue derived from products/services patented/protected in the last three years to 40%. KR 3.2: Reduce time from idea incubation to revenue-generating launch by 30%.
O4: SER (Shalom)	Become a net-positive contributor to community and environmental well-being.	KR 4.1 (Social Shalom): Achieve 100% traceability of Tier-1 supply chain for living wage compliance. KR 4.2 (Environmental Shalom): Achieve 1:1.2 water usage restoration in key high-stress regions (water positive).

This application of OKR transforms abstract capabilities into **actionable mandates**.

The DCMM's maturity is defined by the consistent achievement of increasingly ambitious KRs across all four pillars.

The Heart of the Debate: Inner Transformation vs. External Structures

The key difference between the two poles can be found in the location of transformation.

The Welfare Economy seeks transformation through external structures: laws, taxes, government programs, and the vast state bureaucracy. Change occurs from the top down. The Shalom vision seeks bottom-up transformation, starting with the inner/spiritual—repentance from greed, love, and the formation of a just community.

Schumacher, with his rejection of "giantism" and his call for simplicity, effectively chose the second path. Intermediate Technology is not simply a policy; it is an expression of ethical values about how society should live and work. Schumacher's vision of decentralization, local responsibility, and a focus on the character of workers closely resembles a model that could be used to realize Shalom on a community scale (see also E.F. Schumacher, 2008).

While E.F. Schumacher can be seen as a pragmatic ally of socialists in their resistance to the injustices of capitalism, his framework is fundamentally incompatible with welfare economics' reliance on unlimited growth and large-scale development.

Instead, Schumacher's deep emphasis on appropriate scale, ecological limits, the dignity of work, and the subordination of the material to the ethical puts him on the same path as Shalom's vision. Shalom's vision of the Kingdom of Heaven is one of total wholeness—ecological, social, and spiritual—that can only be achieved through a radical rejection of Mammon and the building of communities rooted in love, justice, and simplicity (see also E.F. Schumacher, 2008).

In this regard, Schumacher provides an economic blueprint (Intermediate Technology) for a community that has the potential to *become a thorough manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, where technology serves humanity and humanity lives in harmony with nature*. He can be considered as an economic prophet calling for a structural conversion that begins with the ethical conversion of each individual.

Concluding remark

This writer begins the present article with a little exploration on the Aleph-Tav interpretation of Genesis 1:1 which he presented in a conference of Philosophy-Research held in Hyderabad, around few years ago. Then this writer also explores a bit on E.F. Schumacher's philosophy economics based on his seminal work. E.F. Schumacher and the Old Testament, though separated by historical context, stand as two pillars calling for an economy rooted in wisdom.

Schumacher offers both a philosophical critique and practical 20th-century solutions (Intermediate Technology, Human Scale) to address the dehumanization of industry. The Old Testament, through the Laws of Jubilee, Sabbath, and Mishpat, provides an ancient and timeless theological mandate to address structural injustice and prevent wealth from destroying society.

Essentially, both teach the same lesson: the true measure of an economic system is not how rich it makes the rich, but how well it serves the poorest and how respectfully it treats creation. In both the "*Economy that Makes People Matter*" and "*Justice According to Divine Order*," human beings are ends, not means.

And then we can start to discuss how it is possible to discuss implementing shalom society in God's way as we can read in The Old Testament, and one way that we can implement that, in our opinion and based on experience, is we can extend a bit John Kay's distinctive capabilities framework, that is to introduce shalom as a new distinctive capability element.

John Kay's Distinctive Capabilities Framework is arguably one of the most insightful theories on the source of enduring corporate success. By moving the discussion from strategic assets to strategic relationships, it highlights the non-replicable complexity of human and organizational interactions.

The Shalom-Driven Distinctive Capabilities Framework (SD2CF)—Architecture, Reputation, Innovation, and Social/Environmental Responsibility—provides a vital and necessary evolution of Kay's influential model. It reframes competitive advantage not as dominance, but as **relational excellence and reciprocity**.

By leveraging John Doerr's OKR methodology, the framework transforms the abstract concept of *Shalom* and the existing capabilities into the measurable rigor of the Distinctive Capabilities Maturity Model (DCMM). Furthermore, by aligning the DCMM's Key Results, we provide a unified roadmap for management, capability development, and risk governance. In the complex, interdependent economy of the 21-st century, true distinctiveness is found not just in operational excellence, but in the active, measurable pursuit of **Shalom** for all people in a country.

Last but not least, allow me to conclude this spiritual exploration with a quote from Joel S. Goldsmith:

"NO TRUTH IS TRUTH EXCEPT THE TRUTH THAT REVEALS ITSELF IN YOU"¹⁴

¹⁴ J.S. Goldsmith, "1955 Kailua Study Group, Tape 14," September 1, 2012.

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¹⁵ **Note:** several ideas that this writer presented at the cited conference, have been discussed in an article, V. Christianto, "Meet the Hidden Jesus within you in Javanese spirituality and Namaste greeting," *NPTRS*, vol. 3 no. 2 (2022). url: [Meet the Hidden Jesus within you in Javanese spirituality and Namaste greeting | The New Perspective in Theology and Religious Studies](#)

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