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Shalom, Ḥesed, and Tsedaqah as Religious Community Pathways to Human Flourishing: *An Exploration of Old Testament Theological Virtue*

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Abstract: This research explores *shalom*, *ḥesed*, and *tsedaqah* as Old Testament theological virtues that shape the moral and spiritual foundations of human flourishing in religious communities. Through an exegetical-theological reading of Psalm 85, Isaiah 32, and Jeremiah 29, this research argues that the Hebrew Scriptures present flourishing not as individual achievement but as covenantal participation in God's order of love, justice, and peace. *Shalom* represents the holistic goal of restored life; *ḥesed* is the relational virtue of faithful love sustaining solidarity; and *tsedaqah* embodies the structural virtue of justice that orders communal and ecological life. Together, they form an integrated moral ecology—*ḥesed* as the root of divine faithfulness, *tsedaqah* as the trunk of justice, and *shalom* as the fruit of peace. The research concludes that true human flourishing arises not from autonomy or prosperity, but from covenantal relationships grounded in God's steadfast love, social justice, and peace that embraces all creation.

Keywords: Shalom, Hesed, Tsedaqah, Religious Community, Human Flourishing, Old Testament

1. Introduction

In the last decade, studies on human flourishing have grown rapidly across disciplines, from moral philosophy, positive psychology, public health, to

theology. Although originating from Aristotelian *eudaimonia*,[1] modern discussions about flourishing now involve empirical, social, and spiritual dimensions. As a continuation of this development, various studies have attempted to integrate religious, communal, and spiritual aspects into the framework of human flourishing in order to understand how faith and religious practices contribute to holistic human flourishing. VanderWeele, through a multidimensional approach, shows that participation in religious communities has a strong and significant relationship with happiness, mental health, meaning in life, morality, and the quality of social relationships.[2] This shows that the positive effects of human flourishing are much greater when a person is involved in communal religious life (through communal worship or collective rituals) than when they simply maintain a personal religious identity. This view is supported by the longitudinal study by Padilla-Walker et al., which rejects the understanding of flourishing as an accumulation of positive individual behaviors, such as education, service, or personal activism. They emphasize that humans develop through complex social networks, especially during the formation of identity and adult life orientation.[3] Thus, relationality is not merely a complement to flourishing, but rather a key indicator of human success in living a full life. Empirical studies by Melchior et al.,[4] Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton; Santini et al.[5] emphasize the importance of close social relationships for happiness, physical health, and resilience.

In line with this, Russell et al. assert that overall justice, namely comprehensive justice within organizations and social systems, is a prerequisite for human flourishing.[6] This means that humans cannot thrive within an unjust structure. Thomas Pogge extends this thesis to the global scale by asserting that universal human flourishing is impossible as long as the world economic order remains exploitative and discriminatory.[7] Universal moral principles demand global conditions that enable all human beings to develop fully.

Kleinig and Evans place flourishing as the aspirational ideal of human life, which

[1] (Symons and VanderWeele, 14 February 2024, 26).

[2] (VanderWeele 2017).

[3] (Padilla-Walker, Memmott-Elison, and Nelson 2017).

[4] Having strong socialties is also associated with better health and aging, with a large body of literature linking different aspects of social relationships with better mental health. (Melchior et al. 2003).

[5] (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton 2010).

[6] (Cropanzano et al. 2024).

[7] (Pogge 1999).

includes moral, relational, and existential human flourishing. Human dignity is understood as the core of flourishing: humans must be treated as ends, not means.[8] Thus, justice, dignity, and universal rights are prerequisites for achieving a good life. In a similar context, Shabbir et al. warn against reducing flourishing to a mere economic indicator, because relational dimensions, justice, and truth are far more decisive in shaping human flourishing.[9]

However, the contribution of religion to flourishing is not universal in a single form. Wormley et al. emphasize that the role of religion in flourishing varies greatly in non-Western cultural contexts, non-Christian traditions, or indigenous communities.[10] Fatma et al. show that the combination of religious practices, spiritual values, and communal norms is a major force in fostering flourishing, while existing research is still too geographically limited.[11] Therefore, they call for the expansion of flourishing studies into more diverse religious and cultural contexts.

VanderWeele responds to this by proposing a dialogue between universal understandings of flourishing and those that are culturally or religiously specific. Flourishing, he says, is not singular but is influenced by cultural values, religion, and local traditions, making an approach that respects community wisdom imperative.[12] Levin echoes this sentiment, arguing that the Aristotelian roots of flourishing need to be expanded to encompass the diversity of human experience and the broad contextual realities, including religious beliefs and spirituality.[13] In this case, Voorter and van Vliet view human flourishing as a conceptual foundation for bridging individual and collective interests.[14] In other words, flourishing becomes a moral vision for a just, dignified, and sustainable life together.

The various studies above show one common thread: flourishing is a condition that is realized in relationships, relationships with others, with the community, and with the divine. Humans cannot flourish in isolation, because their very existence is co-relational (being-with). Thus, flourishing is not merely individual flourishing, but participation in the moral and spiritual structures that shape communal life. It is this relational dimension that places the community as an ethical and spiritual space where humans experience, nurture, and realize the good life. In this context,

[8] (Kleinig and Evans 2013).
[9] (Shabbir, Hyman, and Kostyk 2022).
[10] (Wormley et al. 2025).
[11] (Fatma, Kumar, and et al. 2022).
[12] (VanderWeele et al. 2023).
[13] (Levin 2020).
[14] (Voorter and van Vliet 2025).

religious communities serve not merely as gatherings of believers but as ecosystems of values that foster love, solidarity, and justice. This view is consistent with the vision of religious communities in the Old Testament tradition, where relationship with God is never separated from social and moral responsibility toward others. In the theological horizon of ancient Israel, faith was always collective and practical, expressed through concrete actions that restored communal life. Therefore, the Old Testament approach to religious community offers a fundamental contribution to the concept of human flourishing, emphasizing that true human flourishing cannot be separated from an ethical life rooted in a covenant with God and relationships with others.

Ancient Israelite theological tradition did not recognize the concept of flourishing in modern terms, but manifested it in three main categories: *shalom* (peace), *ḥesed* (faithfulness), and *tsedaqah* (justice). These three concepts combine moral, social, and spiritual dimensions within a covenantal framework, which affirms that a good life is only possible in right relationship with God, others, and creation. Thus, the Old Testament offers not only religious metaphors for flourishing, but theological virtues that can serve as distinct pathways to a whole and meaningful life in religious community.

These three are not merely ethical terms, but theological structures that describe a good life before God and others, a life full of peace, faithfulness, and justice. In this framework, flourishing is not only human happiness, but a state in which all of creation functions as it should under God's covenant. Thus, the Old Testament community provides a rich conceptual foundation for the search for a theological path to flourishing: not through individual achievement, but through covenantal relationality, living in shalom, ḥesed, and tsedaqah as the path to a whole life.

2. Shalom: A Whole and Balanced Life

The word shalom in the Old Testament is derived from the word *šlm.* This word is widely used in Semitic languages. The lexical meaning of the word shalom is: 1) relating to well-being; 2) health; 3) safety; 4) completeness; 5) wholeness; 6) peace.[15] Thus, the meaning of the word shalom is quite broad, covering many aspects of the life of God's people, especially the community in Israel.

Meanwhile, according to Stendebach, the theological meaning of the word shalom is not “the absence of war,” but rather emphasizes the state of wholeness and harmony that God desires or wills for all of His creation. This is a “gift from

[15] (Stendebach 1998, 245–247).

God," which includes: 1) a right relationship with God; 2) material and social well-being; 3) justice; 4) fertility of the land; 5) security from enemies. So, according to Stendebach, shalom is a condition in which everything runs according to God's order.[16]

The development of the word shalom in the Old Testament includes: 1) It began with personal relationships, namely as a greeting and also for physical flourishing. This is found in Genesis 37:4, where the word shalom cannot be used as a greeting to others because of the severance of brotherly ties. Genesis 43:27–28 states shalom as a common greeting to inquire about health (both physical and mental) and well-being; 2) Shalom is also used in the context of worship in Numbers 6:24–26, namely a blessing by faith in worship; 3) Numbers 25:12 and 26:6, shalom in the context of economic prosperity, one of which is fertile land and the absence of pests or wild animals; 4) Shalom in the national sense, namely politics and the military (national security), is found in Deuteronomy 20:10–11 as an offer of peace in war; 5) Prophecy, one example being Isaiah 9:5, where shalom is God's world order that includes justice, truth, and prosperity. Jeremiah 29:7, shalom as economic flourishing in the community in exile; 6) Ezekiel 34:25; 37:36 declares an ideal peace covenant with God's people, especially Israel, which is a future covenant, that is, eschatological. This is God's hope for His people; 7) The tradition of wisdom, namely shalom in individual life in Psalm 29:11, in which God provides security and power; Psalm 34:15, as a consequence of actions, resulting in success in life; Proverbs 3:2, 17, obtaining shalom as a result of pursuing wisdom and knowledge, the essence of which is the fear of the Lord.[17]

Thus, *shalom* in the Deuteronomic community is an inseparable whole, namely, human flourishing in terms of spirituality and worship, economy, society, national security, and physical and mental health. *Shalom* is not merely a condition of external human flourishing, but a way of life that expresses humanity's connection with God, one another, and creation. This is what makes human flourishing possible. When people live in shalom, they not only experience social prosperity or physical health, but also moral and spiritual harmony that allows all dimensions of life to develop holistically.

Therefore, it can be said that shalom is an expression of human flourishing in religious communities. By living in *shalom*, humans are not only "flourishing" socially and psychologically, but also "restored" in their identity as creatures participating in God's will for the world. This kind of life not only signifies human

[16] (*Ibid.,* 247).

[17] (*Ibid.,* 248).

flourishing in a worldly sense but further reveals the perfection of life rooted in a covenant relationship with God. Thus, *shalom* presents a new paradigm of human flourishing.

Furthermore, shalom leads humans to understand that true human flourishing is participatory and relational. Humans cannot "flourish" alone; they can only experience flourishing in a network of healthy relationships—with God, with others, and with the universe. When one of these relationships is damaged, human flourishing is disrupted. Therefore, shalom cannot be separated from the ethics of responsibility: the responsibility to love, nurture, and reconcile. In this sense, shalom does not merely refer to a static condition of "conflict-free," but to the dynamic process of life continually moving toward deeper harmony. It is a call to "seek peace and pursue it" (Ps. 34:15), an active endeavor that demands justice, faithfulness, and compassion in every aspect of life.

In this vision, *shalom* becomes a formative principle for social and spiritual life. It changes the orientation of human life from self-interest to loving reciprocal relationships. The concept of *shalom* rejects the dichotomy between spirituality and social welfare, between personal salvation and public responsibility. Instead, it affirms that human flourishing always bears fruit in social actions that bring justice and peace. Thus, human flourishing in a theological perspective cannot be separated from moral and communitarian dimensions; a person can only "flourish" when he or she participates in striving for shalom for others.

Furthermore, *shalom* has an eschatological dimension that expands the horizon of human flourishing beyond the limits of history. In the prophecies of the prophets, shalom points to a new reality that God will bring about at the end of time—a renewed world, where "the wolf will dwell with the lamb" (Isa. 11:6) and there will be no more tears or suffering. This shows that true flourishing is never fully achieved in a world that has fallen into sin, but awaits its fulfillment in God's work of salvation. In this perspective, shalom combines the reality of the present (already) and the hope of the future (not yet): humans are called to live in shalom now, while awaiting its fulfillment in the coming kingdom of God.

The rich and comprehensive meaning of shalom does not appear in a vacuum; it is rooted and grows from the testimony of Scripture. Therefore, several texts in the Old Testament need to be examined to see how shalom became a reality that was lived, proclaimed, and promised by God for the welfare of His people.

a. Psalm 85

Psalm 85 is about renewal and peace after God's people have experienced hardship

or suffering.[18] The word *shalom* in Psalm 85 is specifically found in verses 9–11. According to Schmid, the *Sitz im Leben* of Psalm 85 is post-exilic liturgy during the Persian period, in which this text hopes for the restoration of God's relationship after the punishment of exile, social and spiritual welfare, harmony between God, humans, and creation, as well as harmony between love, faithfulness, justice, and peace.[19]

According to Zenger, *shalom* is very important for God's people, who are in exile.[20] *Shalom* here means salvation for His people. This salvation will come when God is present, whose presence is manifested in steadfast love, faithfulness (truth), justice, and peace. According to Zenger, steadfast love and faithfulness are important pillars, which are the first pair, while the second pair is justice and peace. The two pairs must be holistically interrelated with one another and cannot be separated. If the two are separated, there will be an imbalance; for example, love without law, or justice without love, will be one-sided. According to Zenger, when this is present in the lives of God's people, there will be restoration between God and His people, between humans and their neighbors, and with the cosmic creation.[21] Unlike Zenger and Gruber, the starting point is that peace or salvation can occur when there is faithful love, loyalty, and justice.[22] They cannot be separated from one another. This shows the existence of dialectics. Shalom is not merely the absence of war, but the dialectic between faithful love, loyalty, truth, and shalom.

The word שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*), meaning peace or salvation, is: 1) comprehensive and holistic. Everything that God's people need is fulfilled, so that they are satisfied, happy, and whole. This condition is prosperity, flourishing, fulfillment, and complete salvation; 2) relational with God. This is a spiritual condition, in which God's people no longer apostatize and return to Him through repentance; 3) manifested in the meeting of divine values. This is a combination of Ḥesed (steadfast love): God's faithful love, mercy, and covenant faithfulness. ʾEmeth (fidelity/truth): Faithfulness, reliability, truth. *Ṣedeq* (justice): Justice, legal and moral truth. *Shalom* (peace): Holistic peace itself; 4) the dynamics of achieving steadfast love, faithfulness, justice, and peace are in dialectics. Because it is still a process and still a journey.[23]

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[18] (Gertz and Berlejung 2010, 72).
[19] (*Ibid.*, 80).
[20] (Lothar and Hossfeld 2005).
[21] (*Ibid.*, 370).
[22] (ben Isaac and Gruber 2004).
[23] (Hossfeld 2005, 367–370).

b. Isaiah 32

Isaiah 32 describes a king who rules justly in verse 1. The climax of the prophecy in Isaiah 32 is verses 1–18, which relate to righteousness (*tsedeq*) that produces shalom. The *Sitz im Leben* of Isaiah 32 is a time of political turmoil and hope for renewal at the end of the 8th century BC.[24] This text calls for reform and warns against injustice.

The concept of *shalom* in Isaiah 32:17–18 is the result of righteousness (*tsedeq*). *Shalom* is not merely the absence of war, but the establishment of righteousness leads to *shalom* (peace and prosperity). *Shalom* occurs in social communities. This is the hope in Isaiah 32, when there was chaos in the nation of Israel. The context is the renewal of David's kingdom, as well as worship and social justice.[25]

According to Oswalt, truth and justice mean not oppressing the people or the weak.[26] Meanwhile, according to Beuken, shalom is: 1) a condition of complete and secure life. This is the work of God found in verse 18, whose characteristics are a secure dwelling place and trust and tranquility (9–11); 2) the product of God's work, not of man (15a).[27]

The interrelated and inseparable relationship between justice and truth will result in shalom, as Beuken clearly states. This relationship is fundamental and sequential: 1) justice and truth are the foundation, which is the beginning before the formation of shalom (16–17); 2) the cause-and-effect relationship found in verse 17, namely that truth will produce peace or shalom. The sequence is: Spirit of God – Transformation – Justice & Truth – *Shalom*; 3) concepts that complement one another. Justice (*Mishpat*) and Truth (*Tsedaqah*) are like two sides of a coin that complement each other, as well as fertilizer that nourishes shalom.[28]

The aspect of *shalom* in Isaiah 32 clearly states that justice and righteousness must be upheld. The source is God Himself, in whom justice and righteousness are rooted. This is what transforms God's people, bringing about *shalom*. This aspect of *shalom* shows that it is spirituality in which the Spirit of God works, but it is God's law, rooted in the Torah, that is also the basis of social law in the enforcement of justice and truth. This is the vessel of shalom in the lives of God's people. This is the holism of *shalom* that is the basis of human flourishing for mankind.

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[24] (Gertz and Berlejung 2010 , 117).
[25] (*Ibid.,* 320).
[26] (Oswalt 1998, 588).
[27] (Beuken 2000, 233–237).
[28] (*Ibid.,* 240).

c. Jeremiah 29

The word *shalom* appears four times in Jeremiah 29, in verses 7 and 11. The historical context of Jeremiah 29 is the exile in Babylon in 587/586 BC. Verse 7 provides specific instructions on how to live in exile. This text transforms the concept of shalom from well-being in one's own land to well-being in the diaspora, that is, exile in Babylon or elsewhere.[29] This is what defines their identity in the diaspora.

The welfare of the city or shalom for the diaspora city, which is where Israel was exiled, namely, Babylon, according to Thompson, is an overall aspect.[30] The aspect is the prosperity and overall goodness of the city of Babylon. Meanwhile, according to Nicholson, *shalom* in Deuteronomy 29:7, 11 is: 1) *shalom* in the community in verse 7, namely: a practical concept in which *shalom* or the welfare of the city of exile where they are located will directly affect the security and welfare of God's people themselves; the paradox is praying for and fighting for the welfare of their oppressors; a social dimension that is communal and political, which transcends individual peace; 2) *shalom* as a divine plan found in verses 10–14, God's promise which also includes restoration with God and national restoration; 3) the characteristic of shalom in the context of Jeremiah 29 in exile is: facing exile where God is still present there.[31]

Shalom in the Context of Jeremiah 29:7 refers to flourishing within the city. Its aspect is the economic life of God's people in exile or diaspora. The purpose is that they might survive there and not fall into suffering or slavery. This aspect of shalom is crucial for the people of God. Thus, *shalom* encompasses the totality of life.

The theological understanding of *shalom* in the Old Testament community shows that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but a comprehensive vision of restored life within the covenantal relationship between God, humanity, and creation. This is clearly reflected in three key texts—Psalm 85, Isaiah 32, and Jeremiah 29—which together depict the dynamics of *shalom* as a theological, social, and spiritual reality forming the foundation for human flourishing among God's people.

Psalm 85 portrays shalom as the renewal of the relationship between God and His people after a time of suffering and exile. According to Schmid, the *Sitz im Leben* of Psalm 85 is post-exilic liturgy during the Persian period, when the people hoped for the restoration of their relationship with God, social renewal, and cosmic

[29] (Gertz and Berlejung 2010, 339–340).
[30] (Thompson 2022, 79–81).
[31] (Nicholson 1989,62–63).

harmony.[32] Stendebach emphasizes that *shalom* here represents salvation that arrives with the presence of God manifested through steadfast love (*ḥesed*), faithfulness (*ʾemeth*), righteousness (*ṣedeq*), and peace (*shalom*).[33] These four values are inseparable; they form a mutually sustaining dialectic. Love without justice becomes mere sentimentality, whereas justice without love turns into moral violence. True *shalom* emerges in the balance between these—bringing restoration that touches spiritual (repentance and faithfulness to God), social (relationships among people), and cosmic (harmony of creation) dimensions. Thus, Psalm 85 reveals *shalom* as a holistic and relational condition of life, where steadfast love, faithfulness, truth, and justice meet in a divine encounter that nurtures the fullness of human flourishing.

Isaiah 32, on the other hand, expands the meaning of shalom by affirming that justice and righteousness are both the source and the path toward peace. In the context of the political turmoil of the late 8th century BCE, this text calls for social and spiritual reform through just governance.[34] According to Oswalt, justice and righteousness are not limited to legal obedience but also entail moral sensitivity to avoid oppressing the weak. Beuken adds that shalom in Isaiah 32:17–18 is the fruit of God's transformative work through His Spirit, producing a life of safety, tranquility, and trust. The relationship between justice (*mishpat*) and righteousness (*tsedaqah*) is causal and complementary: justice and righteousness are the foundation, while shalom is the outcome. The sequence is clear—God's Spirit works, brings about moral transformation, produces justice and righteousness, and finally brings forth *shalom*. Therefore, *shalom* in Isaiah 32 does not arise from human effort but from God's presence and action restoring the social, legal, and spiritual order of His people. Here, shalom becomes a sign of a life that is just, true, and rooted in God's presence—a form of human flourishing centered on divine order.

Jeremiah 29, however, presents the most contextual and paradoxical dimension of shalom: flourishing in the midst of exile. In verses 7 and 11, the word shalom appears in God's command for the Israelites to pray and work for the flourishing of the city where they were exiled—Babylon. The historical context is 587/586 BCE, when Israel lived in alienation and had lost its national identity. According to Thompson, *shalom* here encompasses prosperity and overall flourishing for the city in which they live, even for their oppressors.[35] Nicholson interprets *shalom* in Jeremiah 29 as having two primary dimensions: first, a socio-communal

[32] (Schmid 2004).
[33] (Stendebach 1998).
[34] (Wegner 2021, 111).
[35] (Thompson 2022, 88–89).

dimension—the flourishing of the city of exile directly influences the flourishing of God's people themselves; and second, a theological dimension—God's plan that includes both the restoration of the divine-human relationship and the national restoration of Israel. Thus, *shalom* in the context of the diaspora is not merely a state of personal peace but a call to participate in God's work for the common flourishing, even amid circumstances that seem contrary to hope. Here, *shalom* is transformative—it transcends geographical, social, and political boundaries, making every space where God's people dwell a site of participation in the divine mission.[36]

From these three primary texts—Psalm 85, Isaiah 32, and Jeremiah 29—it becomes clear that shalom is not merely a state of peace or social stability but a vision of holistic life. Together, they form a conceptual framework that reveals shalom as the foundation for human flourishing.

First, *shalom* in Psalm 85 emphasizes relational restoration as the primary foundation of human flourishing. In the post-exilic context, shalom arises as the fruit of a dynamic encounter between steadfast love (*ḥesed*), faithfulness (*ʾemeth*), righteousness (*ṣedeq*), and peace (*shalom*).[37] These four values are interwoven and inseparable. This signifies comprehensive restoration—spiritual, social, and cosmic—through which human flourishing becomes the experience of holistic life.

Second, shalom in Isaiah 32 represents a form of human flourishing that originates from divine transformation, where society experiences true peace because it is rooted in justice, righteousness, and the faithfulness of God. Flourishing life grows out of morally and spiritually just structures. Hence, it must be pursued intentionally.

Third, *shalom* in Jeremiah 29 reveals its participatory and communal dimension. In the context of exile in Babylon, God commands His people to "seek the flourishing of the city" where they live, even though that city is the land of their enemy.[38] This command is revolutionary: shalom no longer refers solely to the flourishing of God's people in the Promised Land but extends to the flourishing of all, including other nations.

These three portrayals—relational restoration (Psalm 85), moral-social transformation (Isaiah 32), and communal participation (Jeremiah 29)—together form a theological synthesis in which shalom emerges as an integrative vision of holistic life. *Shalom* unites love and truth, justice and faithfulness, spirituality and

[36] (*Ibid.,* 72).
[37] (Tate 1990, 102).
[38] (Neil 1970, 155).

social responsibility. It rejects the dichotomy between spiritual salvation and social flourishing, inviting humanity to live participatively in God's redemptive work in the world. Thus, shalom stands as the theological foundation for human flourishing: life that thrives not because of the absence of suffering or the abundance of material wealth, but because human beings participate in the divine order that manifests justice, love, and wholeness for all creation.

3. Hesed: Faithful Love that Sustains Life

The word *Ḥesed* (חֶסֶד) in the Old Testament is difficult to translate into a single English term. It can mean *mercy* or *grace*, yet such translations only capture a portion of its full meaning. The literal or etymological sense of *ḥesed* is not a legal term, unlike *mišpāṭ*, which is rooted in law or the covenant (*bərît*).[39] Rather, *ḥesed* arises from a social and interpersonal perspective within the community. Thus, its etymological meaning refers to faithful and active goodness expressed in social relationships. It is this quality of *ḥesed*—faithful, relational, and life-giving—that ultimately fosters human flourishing.

The theological meaning of the word *ḥesed* includes: 1) God's active and saving nature. This word is not limited to feelings, but refers to God's powerful actions to keep His promises, care for and save His covenant people; 2) Sovereign and promising faithful love. God's generosity is rooted in His choice and covenant with Israel. God's faithfulness is not based on legal obligation, but on His faithful character; 3) God's goodness (*'emet*), in which ḥesed is eternal, endless, and reliable (Ps. 136); 4) Gracious and merciful. Although the word ḥesed is rooted in the word covenant, it is also used in conjunction with words such as "loving" and "gracious," which emphasize God's mercy and goodness regardless of human merit; 5) The basis of hope. This word is the basis of the hope of God's people when they cry out in distress for God's help and forgiveness for their sins.[40] Thus, the theological meaning of the word ḥesed is God's faithful love, which is not passive but active, sovereign, eternal, and full of mercy, manifested in His acts of salvation and preservation of His covenant people.

The use of the word *ḥesed* (חֶסֶד) in the Old Testament includes: 1) relationships between people. The emphasis is on reciprocal relationships. This can be seen in the relationships between: family and clan, namely husband and wife (Ruth 1:8), parents and children (Gen. 47:29); friendships such as Jonathan and David (1 Sam.

[39] (Sakenfeld 1978, 90–92).
[40] (Zobel 1998, 251–252).

20:8, 14–15); host and guest, such as Lot and the people of Sodom (Gen. 19:19), Rahab and the spies of Israel (Josh. 12:12); ruler and subject, such as David and Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:1, 3, 7). From these examples of ḥesed: saving lives (Rahab), protecting and granting rights (David to Mephibosheth), burying the dead (the men of Jabesh-Gilead to Saul, 2 Sam. 2:5), and keeping promises (Jonathan asked David to show ḥesed to his descendants). This shows that there is mutual, long-term, and reliable hope; 2) Religious usage in which God is the subject. a) God is the ultimate giver of ḥesed, shown to His people: i) to the ancestors: Abraham (24:12, 14), Jacob (Gen. 32:11); ii) to David and his dynasty, namely God's promise to David's descendants based on God's ḥesed (2 Sam. 7:15; 1 Kings 3:6). This is also seen in the phrase *ḥasdê dāwîd* ("faithfulness to David") referring to this eternal promise (Isa. 55:3; 2 Chron. 6:42).; iii) to all of Israel, whose deliverance, restoration, and guidance are based on God's ḥesed (Ex. 15:13; Ps. 106:7, 45; Isa. 54:8, 10); iv) to individual believers, whom God saves, preserves, and forgives individually, rooted in God's ḥesed (Ps. 23:6; 32:10; 51:3; 103:4); b) The nature of God's ḥesed is: i) active and powerful, equated with salvation and justice, as well as redemption (Ps. 98:2–3; 130:7); ii) eternal and faithful (Ps. 136); iii) abundant and comprehensive, filling the earth (Ps. 33:5) and reaching to the heavens (Ps. 36:6; 108:5); c) The relationship between ḥesed and covenant (*bərît*). What is interesting is that ḥesed is God's nature, which is not done because of His obligation based on law or covenant, but rather God's nature that precedes and is the basis of the covenant.[41] Thus, the covenant becomes the framework in which eternal and faithful *ḥesed* is expressed; in addition, God is described as "keeping covenant and steadfast love" (1 Kings 8:23; Deut. 7:9, 12). So, it is God's ḥesed that gives life to the covenant.

Thus, Hesed is not merely an abstract feeling of love, but rather the practice of faithful and responsible love in the context of communal life. Similarly, human flourishing is not merely a state of individual flourishing, but rather a reality of life that develops through a network of meaningful and mutually supportive relationships. In this case, *Hesed* functions as a relational virtue that nurtures human life holistically, in spiritual, social, and moral dimensions. Based on this, several aspects can be identified that show how ḥesed is the foundation for a flourishing life, namely

First, hesed affirms that humans can only "flourish" in the context of relationships marked by loyalty and active love. Such relationships are the spiritual foundation of meaning, hope, and trust—the three main dimensions that, according to VanderWeele, shape human flourishing as a whole. Second, hesed fosters the

[41] (*Ibid.,* 253).

integrity of the religious community.[42] God's active and continuous faithful love leads people to live in solidarity, loyalty, and social responsibility, creating a mutually supportive ecosystem of relationships that becomes a vessel for shared moral and spiritual growth. In this case, ḥesed becomes the glue of the community—a virtue that maintains social sustainability through trustworthiness and commitment. Third, ḥesed provides an ethical paradigm in the context of a world damaged by selfishness and injustice. Here, ḥesed corrects the secular view of human welfare, which is often reduced to individual pleasure or success. Ḥesed affirms that true human flourishing is born of faithfulness in love, even when that love demands sacrifice. Fourth, ḥesed shows that human flourishing is participatory: humans only experience a good life when they participate in God's ḥesed that sustains all creation. Human flourishing in this sense is not merely a result, but a process of becoming. Fifth, ḥesed contains an eschatological power that expands the horizon of human flourishing beyond historical limits. Ḥesed marks God's unwavering faithfulness to His creation, ensuring that life will continue to be renewed even when humans fail in their faithfulness.

Thus, ḥesed is not merely one of God's attributes, but becomes the principle of community that shapes the entire reality of human flourishing. In ḥesed, humans discover that to "flourish" means to "remain faithful"—faithful to God, to one another, and to their moral responsibility toward creation. This is the virtue of loyal love that becomes the soul of a religious community: love that gives life, loyalty that heals, and compassion that upholds life in the midst of a broken world.

4. Tsedaqah: Justice that Gives Life

According to Ringgren and Johnson, the term *truth* originates from the Hebrew root *ṣ-d-q* (צדק). This word carries a dynamic and relational range of meanings—not merely referring to factual or legal correctness, but more profoundly to *a state of right, justice, and legitimacy*, encompassing cosmic, social, legal, and personal dimensions. Lexically, the term *ṣ-d-q* (צדק) means *straight, right, just, or legitimate*. It describes something that conforms to the proper standard or norm.[43] In relational contexts, however, the term refers to acting in accordance with one's role and responsibilities within a relationship—such as in a covenantal relationship with God or with others.

Theologically, Ringgren and Johnson distinguish two primary meanings: 1) Divine righteousness (*ṣedeq*) refers to God's active and saving character—

[42] (VanderWeele 2024, 12).
[43] (Gardner 2015).

particularly His acts of defending, delivering, and justifying His covenant people. God's justice here signifies His powerful intervention to uphold the rights and salvation of the oppressed and those faithful to Him; 2) Human righteousness (*ṣᵊdāqâ*) refers to conduct and behavior aligned with the order of God's covenant—living in faithfulness to God and in harmonious and just relationships with others and with creation. It denotes integrity and sincerity of heart in maintaining one's relationship with God and the community. [44]

The use of the word *Ṣādaq* in the Old Testament, with *qa*l, is "proven true, becoming true." This word is often used in disputes in Mamur 51:6. Meanwhile, Psalm 143:2 states that humans cannot justify themselves before God; with hiphil, namely *hisdiq*, meaning "to declare true, to justify, and to defend."[45] God or a judge is usually the subject. This word is usually used to mean "to save" in Psalm 82:3 or "to justify" in Isaiah 53:11.

As a noun, the word *Ṣedeq* appears 119 times in the Old Testament.[46] Its meaning refers to an orderly and right divine principle. Isaiah 45:8 and Psalm 85:14 depict Ṣedeq dynamically, like rain or light. It is the foundation of God's throne in Psalm 89:15, indicating that His rule is based on justice. In Jeremiah 23:6, the declaration "The Lord our righteousness" (YHWH *ṣidqēnû*) means that the Lord Himself is the salvation and the right of God's people.

Meanwhile, the noun *Ṣᵊdāqâ* appears 157 times in the Old Testament.[47] Its emphasis is on the real and concrete action of righteousness. Isaiah 54:17 refers to God's intervention in salvation, while also emphasizing the righteous acts performed by humans that bring salvation and protection. More unique is Genesis 15:6, which counts Abraham's belief or faith as righteousness. This is characteristic of the Priestly Code, which emphasizes faith. Thus, it is no surprise that Ṣᵊdāqâ is depicted as fertility and life in Isaiah 45:8 and Amos 5:24.

The adjective *Ṣaddîq* in the Old Testament describes a righteous person. It depicts someone whose life is in harmony with the covenantal relationship, both with God and with fellow humans and the rest of creation.[48] This term is often contrasted with the wicked in the Book of Psalms. However, this does not mean a life free from suffering, as it involves a dialectical tension, as experienced by Job, a righteous man who endured suffering.

Thus, the concept of righteousness (*ṣedeq*) is relational and soteriological,

[44] (Ringgren and Johnson 1998, 551–552).
[45] (Wilcock 2001, 48–52).
[46] (Ringgren and Johnson 1998).
[47] (*Ibid.,* 553).
[48] (*Ibid.,* 554).

dynamic and active, centered on covenant and rooted in the divine order. When righteousness is practiced actively and dynamically, according to Isaac and Gruber, it becomes virtue/goodness/charity, leading to social justice. This results in human flourishing across all aspects of human life and the rest of creation. In this sense, justice is not a form of moral restriction, but a dynamic that enables life to become orderly, fruitful, and fair for all. This implies:

First, *tsedeq* affirms that human life can only flourish within a right order. In texts such as Psalm 97:2 and Psalm 89:15, justice and righteousness are referred to as the "foundation of God's throne," signifying that justice is the basis of God's rule over the world. Justice is not an additional attribute of God, but the essence of divine governance that orders all creation to align with His will. Therefore, when justice is established, human life and the rest of creation function according to God's design.

Second, *tsedeq* affirms the relational dimension of justice. *Tsedeq* is a form of responsibility towards relationships: a person is considered righteous when they act with integrity, remain faithful to the covenant, and treat others justly. Consequently, justice is not merely a system, but a character and a virtue that binds the community in mutuality. A community living in *tsedeq* is one where members care for one another, rather than oppressing each other; a community where everyone has the space to grow without harming others.

Third, *tsedeq* has a soteriological function directly related to the restoration of life. In Isaiah 45:8 and Psalm 85:14, *tsedeq* is depicted as rain or light that causes the earth to sprout—metaphors emphasizing the creative and life-giving function of God's justice. Divine justice creates space for life to rise again from ruin, fostering hope for the oppressed and restoring the dignity of the wounded. This affirms that justice is not just a social condition, but a divine action that restores humanity and the world towards flourishing.

Fourth, *tsedeq* functions as a moral principle that directs human behavior toward a right life. *Ṣᵊdāqâ* in the Old Testament never stops at personal moral action, but is always rooted in social action—defending the oppressed, caring for the poor, and restoring broken social relationships. Proverbs 21:3 states that "to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice," meaning that justice is a form of true worship. Here, justice is a form of devotion oriented towards maintaining the common good (communitarian justice), and it becomes the social foundation for human flourishing.

Fifth, *tsedeq* also affirms the cosmic and ecological dimensions of human flourishing. In the Hebrew understanding, justice and righteousness are not only human affairs, but also pertain to the order of creation. Injustice causes cosmic disintegration—the land becomes barren, waters run dry, and the relationship

between humanity and nature is broken.[49] Conversely, established justice restores the fertility and balance of nature, as stated in Isaiah 32:16–17: "Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field." This illustrates that humans flourish when they uphold justice for the earth and the rest of creation.

Sixth, *tsedeq* culminates in an eschatological vision that unites justice with peace. The prophets depict a future where justice will "roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). This imagery shows that justice is a divine current that continually renews the world until its completion. Human flourishing in this horizon is not merely a moral ideal, but a theological promise—that God Himself is at work establishing a justice that restores the world, and humanity is called to participate in that work.

Seventh, *tsedeq* is a transformational virtue that changes individuals and communities. Justice is not only what God does, but also what humans are called to realize in concrete action. In the context of a religious community, *tsedeq* becomes the measure of genuine faith: true faith must produce tangible justice. A just community provides space for every member to flourish according to their divine calling without discrimination or inequality.

Therefore, *tsedeq* affirms that a flourishing life cannot be built upon injustice, inequality, or oppression. True Human Flourishing is a life rooted in truth and justice, for only in a right order can humans experience genuine peace and meaning. *Tsedeq* is not merely an ethical norm, but the path to human flourishing—a life that mirrors God's justice, sustains the life of others, and preserves the harmony of creation.

5. Rooted in Ḥesed, Standing in Tsedaqah, Bearing Shalom: Old Testament Pathways to Human Flourishing

While the Old Testament does not use the term "human flourishing," it expresses its reality through three key concepts: *shalom*, *ḥesed*, and *tsedaqah*. These three become the distinctive expressions of the vision of a good and whole life within the framework of Israel's faith. Thus, although the term human flourishing does not appear explicitly, its substance is embedded in the tradition of the Israelite community. *Shalom* depicts a life of peace and harmony; *ḥesed* affirms the steadfast love that binds relationships; and *tsedaqah* signifies the order of justice that upholds communal life. *Shalom* can be realized because of the presence

[49] (Gardner 2015).

of *ḥesed* and *tsedaqah*—the three are dynamically interconnected and form the moral-spiritual structure of the life of God's people.

The Old Testament paradigm places these three within the horizon of covenant, faith, and hope—three axes that guide humanity toward wholeness of life. First, within the covenant framework, *shalom*, *ḥesed*, and *tsedaqah* arise from the covenantal relationship between God and His people. In the Deuteronomic tradition, the covenant demands moral obedience as a response to God's love; whereas in the Priestly tradition, the covenant emphasizes God's unilateral grace that supports human fragility. These two traditions are not contradictory but complementary—creating a balance between human responsibility and divine mercy as the foundation for human flourishing.

Second, faith functions as the starting point that secures this covenantal relationship. Abraham's faith in Genesis 17 serves as a paradigmatic example: the act of believing and walking with God results in righteousness (*tsedaqah*) and opens the way for *shalom*. This means human flourishing does not begin from human achievement, but from a response of faith to God's restorative love. Third, hope marks the eschatological direction of flourishing. The prophetic tradition shows that hope in divine restoration gives meaning to life both now and in the future. This hope is rooted in covenant and faith, but also transcends them by directing the people toward a final vision of a renewed world.

These three major concepts—*shalom*, *ḥesed*, and *tsedaqah*—do not stand alone; rather, they mutually reinforce each other as the path for a religious community toward human flourishing. Viewed functionally, *shalom* provides the teleological vision (teleological virtue) of the ultimate goal of a whole and peaceful life; *ḥesed* embodies the relational spirit (relational virtue) that maintains faithfulness in love; and *tsedaqah* establishes the moral and social structure (Structural Virtue) that upholds justice in communal life. When these three work in harmony, they form a spiritual and social ecosystem that supports holistic human growth. In a beautiful metaphor, *shalom* can be understood as the fruit, *ḥesed* as the root, and *tsedaqah* as the trunk that supports the entire tree of life. Without any one of them, life becomes lopsided—both morally, spiritually, and socially. As can be seen in Figure 1.

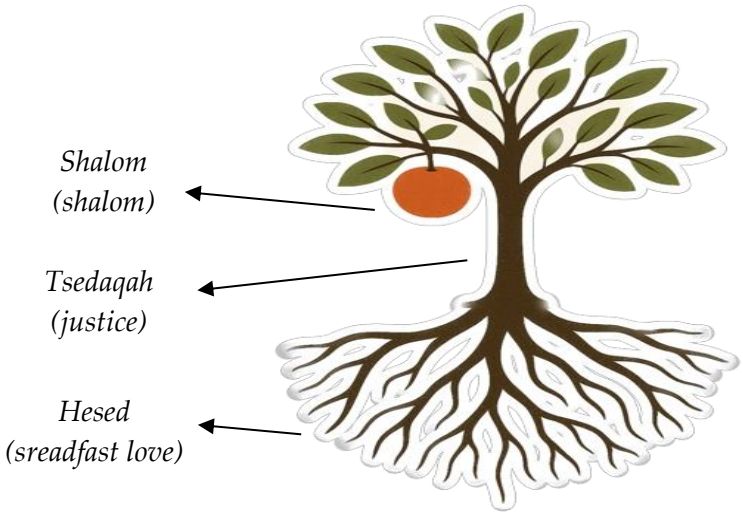


Figure 1. The Tree of Human Flourishing

Therefore, human flourishing in a religious community is not about material prosperity or individual success, but a life rooted in God's steadfast love (*ḥesed*), standing upon His justice (*tsedaqah*), and bearing fruit in a peace (*shalom*) that sustains all of creation. A religious community that embodies these three virtues becomes a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God in the world—a community that lives with faithful love, upholds justice, and brings wholeness to communal life.

However, this vision is not merely ideal or abstract. It finds its most concrete meaning in the historical experience of the people of Israel during the exile. Amid the loss of their national identity and the pressure of foreign imperialism, the people of Israel were called to seek *shalom*—not only for themselves but also for the city to which they were exiled (Jer. 29:7). Thus, human flourishing becomes an act of faith and spiritual resistance in the midst of suffering. *Shalom* in this context transcends the boundaries of happiness or suffering; it signifies *flourishing beyond suffering and happiness*—a human flourishing born from a relationship that remains alive with God, with one another, and with creation, even in a situation of alienation.

Thus, the epistemology of *shalom* in the context of the diaspora reveals the true face of human flourishing: a life that does not depend on external conditions, but on restored relationships and a renewed commitment to God's covenant. It is here that humans experience wholeness of life—relational, spiritual, and ecological—as a tangible manifestation of flourishing rooted in God's own love, justice, and peace.

6. Ethical and practical implications

The question that arises is how these concepts can be realized in pluralistic democracies that lack a shared theological commitment? The concepts of *shalom*, *ḥesed*, and *tsedaqah* were certainly part of ancient Jewish religious life and also part of daily life in the diaspora as a means of survival. A way of life built upon religion that became cultural, social, economic, and political in order to survive in exile or the diaspora. This is also one of the foundations of the New Testament, which is certainly related to Christianity, extending to the present day through its values or kerygma. Contemporary Christianity exists within a plurality or diversity of ideologies, ways of thinking, and cultures, particularly in Indonesia, which adheres to democracy and Pancasila, a philosophy that emphasizes religious, cultural, ethnic, and political pluralism as enshrined in the third principle of Pancasila. Thus, this presents an opportunity to establish an institution that upholds religious values rooted in the ideologies of *shalom*, *ḥesed*, and *tsedaqah*, which are grounded in the biblical principles discussed earlier. The space already exists within the Indonesian context, where this can also synergize with other communities or institutions. The goal is the well-being or shalom for Christians and other communities in a holistic manner.

One organization that has done this is the Jeremiah Group in the United States. Its vision is to promote the well-being of all New Orleans residents, regardless of ethnicity, race, or religion. This vision is rooted in Jeremiah 29:7. The well-being of the city is inseparable from the well-being of its people, so they strive to promote the well-being of the city (Stout 2010, 21). Its mission is to build collective power for accountability (Stout 2010, 4). Its members are quite diverse, including Catholic and Protestant churches in New Orleans, synagogues, labor unions, parent-teacher associations, and other civil society organizations (Stout 2010, 1). They assisted Katrina victims; subsequently, from 2005 to 2007, they aided evacuees from Dallas, Houston, and other cities (Stout 2010, 49), advocated for evacuees' voting rights, championed the rights of detainees, encouraged residents to exercise their voting rights in elections, and fought for the extension of housing assistance for evacuees (Stout 2010, 50–51). The results include many registered and motivated voters, policy changes by the government, public awareness, and collective strength. The Jeremiah Group has improved the well-being of the cities where they operate.

One of the organizations working to promote well-being in Indonesia is Wahana Visi Indonesia ("Wahana Visi Indonesia" 2026). The organization's vision is to be a Christian humanitarian organization that serves and collaborates in empowering the most vulnerable children, families, and communities through community

development, advocacy, and disaster response to bring about sustainable change without discrimination based on religion, race, ethnicity, or gender ("Wahana Visi Indonesia" 2026). The organization strives to improve the well-being of Indonesians by partnering with churches, schools, universities, the government, and other institutions ("Wahana Visi Indonesia" 2026). Its welfare initiatives include health programs, education—providing financial assistance to underprivileged children—child protection, and economic development in 500 villages across Indonesia. The results include 1,200,000 children receiving assistance, 527 integrated programs designed to improve child welfare, family resilience, community empowerment, and system strengthening, as well as 8,000 individual sponsors from Indonesia and 11 other countries contributing to the organization ("Wahana Visi Indonesia" 2026).

These are social movements or organizations rooted in religious values embodied in the concepts of *shalom*, *ḥesed*, and *tsedaqah*. These theological values can be realized in communities built by the church or Christians, particularly in democratic countries such as Indonesia and others, because they prioritize diversity or plurality in a democratic state. Thus, the well-being of the people or citizens is achieved or realized, as part of the identity of God's people.

7. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Old Testament offers a profound theological framework for understanding human flourishing through the interrelated virtues of *shalom*, *ḥesed*, and *tsedaqah*. These three concepts do not merely represent moral ideals but form the spiritual and ethical structure of covenantal life that enables the community to live fully before God. First, *shalom* signifies the ultimate vision of life in harmony—peace that integrates spiritual, social, and ecological well-being. It is not merely the absence of conflict but the fullness of existence that emerges when love and justice meet under God's covenant. Second, *ḥesed* functions as the sustaining power of communal life. As steadfast and loyal love, it shapes relationships through fidelity, mercy, and solidarity. It is through *ḥesed* that communities cultivate trust, belonging, and compassion—conditions essential for human flourishing. Third, *tsedaqah* provides the moral and structural foundation of justice that orders life rightly. It restores broken relationships, protects the weak, and ensures that every person and all creation can thrive in accordance with divine order. Together, these virtues form a theological ecology of life—*ḥesed* as the root of faithful love, *tsedaqah* as the trunk of justice, and *shalom* as the fruit of peace. Human flourishing, therefore, is not defined by individual prosperity or temporal happiness but by participation in God's covenantal order that unites love, justice,

and peace. In this vision, the religious community becomes the living expression of God's Kingdom: a space where steadfast love is practiced, justice is embodied, and peace becomes the fruit of life shared with all creation.

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