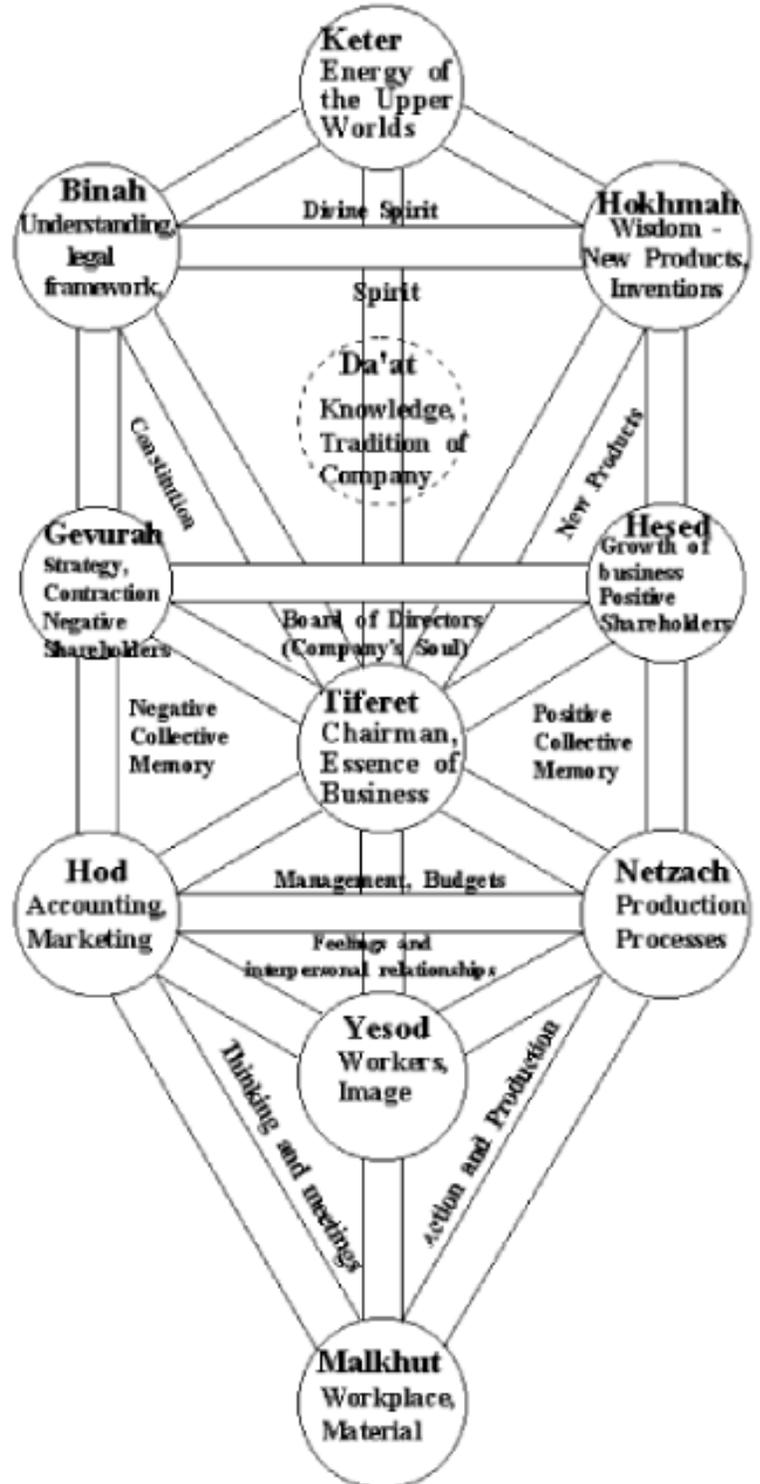


A Kabbalistic View of Business

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Background

A MANUFACTURING COMPANY SET ON THE TREE OF LIFE



In seeking to understand the way a business works we first need to realise that this understanding must come at several different levels.

At the most basic, physical level of a business we need to know about operational details - at what temperature the kiln should be set for firing pottery or how long the clay pots should be left in the kiln once it is ready.

While much of the activity in a business is carried out at this level it eventually becomes apparent that there is more to deal with than just physical facts. At the next, non-physical, level we may include the psychology of the people who work in the business. There have been many models over the years attempting to deal with this aspect; they include McGregor's "Theory X and Theory Y," Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" (1) and behavioural models such as those formulated by Myers-Briggs (2) and Belbin (3).

Helpful as these models have been there still appears to be a dimension missing in understanding the way in which a business exists and that is what might be called the spiritual dimension.

To gain a better comprehension of the overall context in which a business functions and which embraces the spiritual dimension it might be useful to understand something of a tradition of wisdom known as Kabbalah (4).

Principles

Kabbalah, a Hebrew word meaning "to receive," is a body of knowledge which, according to legend, was given to Abraham by Melchizedek, a King and High Priest of Jerusalem. It deals with the fundamental laws of existence and while it may be most commonly associated with the Judaeo-Christian tradition some of its teachings have common ground with the esoteric forms of other religions.

Whilst subscription to a particular religion is certainly not a pre-requisite for understanding Kabbalah it does suppose the acknowledgement of God or a Supreme Being or Guiding Force. The names are rather less important than the acceptance of the principle. Before referring to a business in Kabbalistic terms it is appropriate to set out some of the main points of Kabbalah.

The main tool of Kabbalah is the diagram known as the Tree of Life consisting of ten circles or "Sefirot" (singular "Sefirah") and twenty-two paths. This is one of four trees which interconnect to form a second diagram known as Jacob's Ladder ([Click here for a full view of Jacob's Ladder](#)) and refers to the vision in the dream of Jacob at Bethel of a ladder on which angels could ascend and descend between the highest heaven and the densest parts of the physical world. The four worlds are known in descending order as Azilut (the Divine or world of Emanation), Beriah (Creation), Yezirah (Formation) and Assiyah (Action). The human psyche is described by the world of Yezirah and is the one which may also be used to map the psyche of a business.

The ten Sefirot are the ten different qualities of God and, because God is everywhere and contained in everything, then any worldly situation may be placed upon the Tree of Life as a reflection of the Divine.

This last statement has enormous implications as it means that, whatever situation is under review, referring it to a diagram of the "Tree of Life" may help to resolve problems or deepen one's understanding of the position.

God, according to Kabbalah, created the universe because He wished to behold His own image and, God being perfect, man's role is to beautify the world in order for the image to be perfected.

The soul is believed to live through many physical lifetimes and actions in any one incarnation may reap punishment or reward in the same or future lifetimes. Eventually the soul is re-united with God but this re-union can not be achieved until all past debts - or karma - have been paid.

When we are conscious of how the Tree of Life operates in the context of a business then we are better able to keep the business in balance and to make it beautiful. In doing this we are therefore able to raise the level of the world and polish God's image a little brighter.

The conventional view of a business is that its purpose is to make money but this is only one of its dimensions. Certainly the more financially successful a business the more it can achieve for all connected with it but to see it simply as a money making machine will ensure its premature breakdown. Good sense as much as Kabbalah should tell us this!

By focusing instead on the consciousness of the company and keeping its true purpose in mind - the perfecting of the world - there lie opportunities of great fulfilment for managers, employees, customers and shareholders alike and financial prosperity will also flow as a natural consequence. Prosperity resulting from right action in business will be of a far more lasting and stable nature than the money from actions taken for short term gain. This is not to say there will not necessarily be hard decisions and moments of crisis but by understanding the Tree as a frame of reference for the business there is the greater likelihood that difficulties will be overcome.

Looking at the diagram of the Tree we see that there are three pillars; the right-hand pillar is known as the pillar of action and the left hand pillar is known as the pillar of form; this embodies the concept of active and passive and a balance must be kept between the two. When too much emphasis is placed on one side then the laws of nature will swing the whole model back to balance again.

The central pillar is known as the pillar of consciousness and it is the ascent of this pillar which is our task as human beings either as individuals or as part of a company or business. By ascent of this column, by paying attention to our consciousness the Tree - of the individual or the company - remains in balance without the self correcting mechanism which is bound to occur (sometimes painfully) when too much emphasis is paid to either forceful or passive action.

Intention is everything and is best expressed in the words of the song "It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it."

As we shall see, the triangles connected by the Sefirot are also important in understanding the behaviour of a company or individual.

The traditional names and meanings of the Sefirot are also can now be set out together with the equivalent way in which they might be translated to the setting of a manufacturing company.

Sefirot

Keter: The Crown, contact with the Divine Spirit down through which the energy of the upper worlds flow:

The creative energy which was present in the founder of the company as the idea of its formation occurred and which continues to exist for the possibility of extensions and growth of the business. It is not the invention of a particular product which is embodied by Keter but the energy flowing into an individual which enables wisdom or insight to be received. One has to be in state of grace before such insight can be gained.

Hokhmah: Wisdom, Inspiration or the active intellect.

The inspiration for a new idea or new generic product e.g. the vacuum cleaner or portable telephone. This idea is seen in a flash of clarity which is made possible by the Creative or Divine energy of Keter. This is the 1% of "99% perspiration, 1%

inspiration."

Binah: Understanding or passive intellect.

The flash of inspiration which conceives of the idea of a portable telephone may occur in a moment but it then has to be translated into circuit diagrams and materials so that it is workable and safe. Binah is the "99% perspiration, 1% inspiration."

Da'at: "Knowledge" This is known as a "non-sefirah" or black hole through which access to other worlds may be obtained.

Da'at represents the collective knowledge of the company and in the context of a corporate body it is the point through which access is obtained to other corporate bodies.

This is also the position of the shareholders who have the power to remove the chairman situated at Tiferet (see below). However, they do not partake directly in the running of the company so their position in a space which is not actually a sefirah is appropriate.

Hesed: Loving Kindness or Mercy.

In the company context this means expansion and enthusiasm and is the place where a genuine love for the work and for all associated with it is generated. When the idea of creating love in business started to be discussed openly in the nineteen-eighties (a successor to Drucker's "Human Side of Enterprise) this was the Sefirah which was being developed. McGregor's "Theory Y" is also located here.

Gevurah: Judgement or Discipline.

This is where decisions are made about the direction of the company of a strategic nature although each individual in making decisions within their own sphere of operation will be using their own Gevuric qualities if operating from Tiferet rather than Yesod (see below).

Over reliance on Gevurah produces a harsh kind of environment - the nineteenth century mills were extreme examples and unless Gevurah is consciously tempered with the loving kindness of Hesed then the Universe brings itself back into balance - hence the rise of the Trade Union movement to counteract the employment practices of the nineteenth century which worked too much to the advantage of the employer. This is the place of McGregor's "Theory X."

Tiferet: Beauty or Wisdom - from another name "The Seat of Solomon".

In an organisational diagram of a company this is the place occupied by the chairman who makes the overall decisions necessary to ensure that the company remains balanced between the active and passive pillars and brings through the Divine Spirit into the everyday world of the company described below.

Although Tiferet is embodied by a Chairman the Tiferet of a company is an essence that extends in time beyond individual occupation of that position. The Tiferet of a company is therefore accessible to anyone who aligns themselves with the essential energy of that company. At the individual level each person has the option of operating from the detached state of Tiferet or the ego centred state of Yesod.

Netzach: Meaning "To make Eternal" or to set cycles in motion.

This is the home of the sales and marketing departments who generate interest in the company products and attract

customers. Other activity cycles are also initiated here such as production of goods and accounting.

Hod: Reverberation - the continuation of that which has been set in motion at Netzach. The measurement of cycles.

This is the home of the information systems in a company - everything from time sheets to annual accounts are dealt with here. It is often said that the management of a company in trouble will demand more and more information much to the chagrin of the employees. In terms of the Tree this means a greater concentration on the Sefirah of Hod with sheaves or reports. If a conscious decision is not finally made on the basis of the information received then "paralysis by analysis" occurs (remember this is the passive side of the Tree) and self correction takes over with the relevant manager deciding to "do" something - "anything" - and another cycle is set in motion by swinging back to Netzach.

Where a company is "run by accountants" then there is a great emphasis on Hodian matters with the danger that business opportunities are lost as those in charge are not noted for their spontaneity. At the other end of the scale when a company is "run by salesmen" there is the danger that the company flies by the seat of the pants and every sales opportunity - good or bad - is accepted. Without due attention to good accounting the company tends to swing out of control by, for example, giving away too much discount, and becoming unprofitable.

This is also an unstable situation with too much concentration on Netzach - the "courting" of customers and the instigation of the razzmatazz of too much corporate hospitality. The three pairs of Sefirot on the Tree must always work in harmony with each other for stability to exist.

Yesod: the Foundation. Sometimes known as the reflection (of Tiferet). The repository of moods.

This is the image of the company and is therefore the Sefirah to which most people relate most of the time. Actions are carried out by reference to how the company will be seen or reflected in the eyes of those outside it. However, while the image of the company is important there is no direct connection between Yesod and Gevurah or Yesod and Hesed so that decisions taken at a Yesodic level may often be incorrect.

In terms of Jungian psychology Yesod equates to the ego while Tiferet is the Self. For example, a company may make a donation to a local charity but if this is done solely for the kudos it will bring then the donation does no good for the energy behind the gift is wrong.

The decision about making the gift needs to be taken in the light of which charity is the most appropriate (Gevuric decision making) and where the greatest love (Hesed) can be created by the gift and expressed by those giving it. A gift made from the consciousness of Yesod (ego) is able to access these qualities only remotely.

Yesod is also the place where budgets are set and monitored. They govern the life of the majority of employees who are usually unaware of their broader implications. For the managers who sit on the pillar of consciousness between Yesod and Tiferet there is the danger that they will be driven downwards to Yesod by the demands of the budget even in cases where the longer term good of the company demands a revision of targets which can only be made from the detached position of Tiferet. It is the ego which insists that "it will not give in" when the Self recognises the art of the possible.

Malkhut: The Kingdom

We are describing the psyche of a company - the Yeziratic world - but this is interleaved with the Assiyatic or physical world beneath it. The central point (Tiferet) of the physical world is at the same place on Jacob's Ladder as the Malkhut of the psychological world. As such the Malkhut of a company deals with its physical nature - both the product and the workplace. Bearing in mind that the central pillar of consciousness contains the energy of the company it is clear that beautifying the workplace and the physical product will enable greater energy to flow up the Tree. Similarly, the physical products will carry the energy or consciousness which has come down the Tree in the individual psyches of those people

making the products.

Triangles:

The three triads Yesod/Netzach/Malkhut, Yesod/Hod/Malkhut and Yesod/Hod/Netzach represent the day to day way in which the company acts, thinks and feels respectively. It is essential that these three be kept in balance. The most common danger is to act continuously without taking time for serious thought. However, while this may be true of a private business, the danger in the public sector is the continual round of meetings (thinking) which result in little or now action taking place. Perhaps the most common feature in both these traditional types of environment is the lack of positive feeling which is built up so that employees frequently don't feel very good about their company. In the absence of a conscious decision to generate a positive feeling the business simply sucks up whatever negativity is swimming around.

As a result of this lack of attention to the feeling aspect in companies the "New Age" business has evolved in which much attention is paid to dealing with the relationships between people in a business and the deliberate generation of a positive and loving atmosphere.

Commendable as this is it counts for nothing if too much emphasis is given to this area at the expense of the other triads in the lower face of the Tree in which case the result is often that of an ungrounded, airy-fairy environment - note that the feeling triangle is the only one of the three triads centred on Yesod not in direct contact with Malkhut which represents physical reality.

These triangles in the lower part of the Tree are all areas which are the concern of the day-to-day operations and where the ego and image of the company is to the fore. This is where people argue for "rights and wrongs" collectively or individually and where issues of sunroofs on company cars can assume more importance than the long term viability of the business.

The triad formed by Hod/Netzach/Tiferet is where people launch their careers and is inhabited by those who wish to "get on" rather than be one of the masses. Seen as a pyramid with Tiferet at the peak it aptly represents the decreasing number of people who reach the higher levels of management. More and more as these people climb towards the central part of the Tree they are able to take the longer term and more detached view that embodies the state of Tiferet.

Tiferet represents impartiality and neutrality and is one point of the vital triangle of Tiferet/Hesod/Gevurah. In psychological terms this is the triangle of the soul and for a company it symbolises the Board of Directors of which Tiferet is the Chairman. For the Chairman, the company may be seen as a child and he gives a little guidance here, a little nudge there. Some brightening of the company's image may be called for (a polishing of Yesod) or greater discipline regarding safety standards (more Gevurah); a change in the presentation of accounting information (Hod) or the purchase of a new factory (Malkhut).

Not all chairmen, of course, are able to act this way all of the time - indeed, if they could, they would long ago have ascended to a higher and more saintly world - and the challenge for the chairman is to handle this power responsibly. Where this power is abused and, for example, impossible targets are set for companies or employees are exploited or no regard paid to the environmental consequences of the company's actions then the Chairman is acting out of his own personal Yesod (ego) and mistakenly assumed that the purpose of the business is for it to glorify him personally rather than be a part of the beautification of the Universe and of God's Creation.

Few chairmen, unfortunately, are aware of the true nature of their responsibility and an old Israeli proverb might act as a salutary warning - "If the head stinks then the whole fish is rotten"

Either side of Tiferet are the two triads of Tiferet/Netzach/Hesed and Tiferet/Hod/Gevurah. Placed on Jacob's Ladder these are no longer part of the physical reality of the company but represent the positive and negative emotional experiences of the company throughout its life.

For example, the stories of the wonderful boom market in the nineteen eighties when profits were high and business plentiful will be passed from generation to generation of employees as a positive experience in the collective psyche. Conversely, the stories of the ogre of an office manager who retired in 1955 may still be used as a threat to potential miscreants entering the company by those who remember their own tortured apprenticeship.

The Tiferet of the company is the heart of the company and although it may be personified by a chairman, even chairmen change as companies are bought and sold. However, at the centre of the company is its core and this can be accessed even by those who are normally concerned with only the day to day transactions. When that core is accessed then the person accessing it is in touch not only with the emotional experiences just described but also with the great intellectual concepts of the triad Tiferet/Binah/Gevurah in which are present the history of the company and code of practice.

In legal terms these are wrapped up in the Memorandum and Articles of Association as well as the drawings of the products and ideas noted in the description of Binah. Only at the Tiferet level of consciousness does one have access to the understanding of what is and is not possible in a company in the broader context of the legal and historical framework.

Someone on the shop floor may have an idea for what appears to be a new production process but, perhaps, only by referring to the minutes of a Board meeting held forty years earlier can the Chairman and the Board see exactly why that practice should not be re-introduced - information which is not accessible from someone acting only at the Yesodic level of the company.

On the other side of the Tree is the triangle Tiferet/Hokhmah/Hesed - again only accessible from the neutral position of Tiferet - whence all bright ideas and inspirations flow. In the example just quoted one could say that the Chairman would access the idea of changing casting production by reference to the active side of the Tree while the reasons for not doing so would be obtainable from the passive side of the Tree.

All this knowledge about the company, its practices, history, image, feeling etc. is held in the black hole of Da'at. This is the knowledge or "intellectual property" which is so sought after that the "industry" of industrial espionage has arisen. Above Da'at is Keter and, crossing the abyss from Tiferet, the chairman is able - sometimes - to be given a glance of divine light or divine guidance which will enable him to act for the good of the company and of the Universe.

On occasion this may even involve the transgression of earthly laws for the denser the matter the more laws are necessary but such transgressions are not carried out lightly. Knowing when such exceptional actions should be taken is part of the responsibility of operating at a higher level of consciousness and always there is the duty to ensure that it is not the false voice of temptation which is calling.

For the Board of Directors, symbolised by the triangle Tiferet/Hesed/Gevurah there is constantly the choice of acting according to the active or passive intellectual triads of Tiferet/Hokhmah/Hesed or Tiferet/Gevurah/Binah respectively or surrendering to the great triangle of the Spirit which is represented by Tiferet/Hokhmah/Binah and in the middle of which sits the Abyss of Knowledge which is Da'at. This last triangle also represents the lowest part of the world of Beriah (Creation) and for a Board of Directors and Chairman to surrender their conscious actions to the energy of the higher and unseen worlds from where the Holy Spirit emerges can be a little unnerving to say the least.

The Divine Light is contained in the triangle Keter/Hokhmah/Binah and is well above the physical world amongst the angels and archangels. Hovering above the physical and psychological world is the world of Spirit or Creation (Beriah) and, beyond that, the world of the Divine (Azilut). Such energies have their part to play although only a few may be aware of them.

As has already been stated the individual always has the opportunity to access the upper Sefirot of his own psyche and by doing so it is sometimes possible that the Divine Light in a company is more visible in the eyes of a holy welder than in the Boardroom.

When the energies from those higher worlds can be brought through to benefit our everyday business then we are truly

helping to make our companies "on Earth as it is in Heaven" and God will be closer to beholding the Glory of His own Image.

The diagram of the Tree of Life gives us a framework within which to carry out this task and by understanding that structure we make the task of applying our knowledge that much easier.

The structured approach of the Tree of Life might seem at odds with the organisational trends of recent years in which there has been a move away from hierarchical organisations. There was much talk in the eighties of groups of people which would surface within an organisation, perform a task and then disappear, this in stark contrast to the rigid departmental structures which had typified organisations previously.

Even though the names may have changed and "facilitators" and "team leaders" have replaced "managers" the functions carried out within these "new companies" are still capable of being described with reference to the Tree. People still have the choice of acting from Yesod or Tiferet (ego or self) and attention still has to be paid to marketing and measuring (Netzach and Hod). The form may have changed but the essence is still the same - a fundamental principle of Kabbalah.

Where once, in the Sinai desert, the main activity was the building of the Ark of the Covenant so today the majority of mankind - certainly in the "developed" world - spends much of its time in industry and commerce. Where Kabbalistic principles were certainly applied in the construction of the Ark they have not so far made a major impact in today's business world and yet they perhaps provide the key for which many industrial leaders have been searching.

References:

1. *For a general discussion of the works of Maslow, McGregor and other related works the reader is referred to "Management and Motivation" edited by Victor H. Vroom and Edward L. Deci, published by Penguin as one of their Penguin Modern Management Readings.*
2. *A description of the Myers-Briggs model is to be found in "Gifts Differing" by Isabel Myers, published by Consulting Psychological Press. See also "Please Understand Me" by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, published by Prometheus-Nemesis Book Company.*
3. *Management Teams by R. Meredith Belbin, published by Heinemann.*
4. *For further study of Kabbalah the reader is referred to the works of Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi*

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