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How to Really Make America Great Again: Lessons about Selflessness from the Book of Ruth

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ABSTRACT

America is in crisis and appears to have lost its moral compass, and citizens have lost confidence in its major institutions and power sources. This paper examines the Book of Ruth and shows that there are many powerful lessons for our society contained in it. One key lesson is the importance of selfless, altruistic kindness, especially on the part of leaders. It also has a powerful message about xenophobia. Other lessons that can be derived from this story are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Book of Ruth, leadership, xenophobia, corporate philanthropy, care ethics, and conscious capitalism.

INTRODUCTION

America is in crisis and the people have little confidence in important institutions such as Congress, big business, and the news media (Gallup, 2017; the first draft of this paper was written in 2016 when confidence was at an all-time low. In 2017, confidence rebounded from 2016 levels but remains at historically-low levels. People have a reason to be upset. The Social Progress Index (SPI) uses 53 different economic indicators that include education, human rights, corruption, life expectancy at 60, nutrition, safety, etc. SPI measures the true well-being of people living in 133 different countries and is a much better measure of how well a country is doing than per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It was created so that it would be easy to determine whether or not a country was providing for its people's basic needs as well as see whether opportunity is provided for citizens of a country to achieve their full potential. The United States ranks 19th on social progress, just barely ahead of Slovenia and is similar to countries such as Russia and Saudi Arabia that "significantly underperform on social progress relative to their wealth" (Green, 2016).

Poor people and even some middle-class people feel socially and politically excluded since affluent individuals and the corporate entities have access to the people in power by providing them with the needed funds to run for office (Bartels, 2008).

According to the Economic Intelligence Unit, the United States is no longer a full democracy and is now a flawed democracy (Haynie, 2017). Gilens & Page (2014) examined more than 1,800 U.S. policies from 1981 to 2002 and assert that the United States political system does not serve the interest of the majority of Americans. Rather, it serves the needs of special interests such as corporations; the country resembles an oligarchy more than a democracy. Legislation is much more likely to follow the preference of the wealthy elite at the 90th percentile of income than the majority of people at the 50th percentile. Apparently, special interest groups are

gradually transforming the United States into an oligarchy that is concerned only about the needs of the wealthy.

President after president has lied to the American people. According to Lewis (2014: xiii), the war in Iraq came about because of 935 lies made by President George W. Bush and top officials of his administration regarding the Iraqi threat. The war in Vietnam which cost more than 58,000 American lives resulted from fabrications made by President Johnson (Lewis, 2014: 8-12). President Obama told untruths about the Affordable Care Act when he repeatedly assured Americans that "If you like your health plan, you can keep it" (Lewis, 2014: xviii). It appears that we are living in the "post-truth" and "alternative facts" age.

Corporate fraud is a serious problem. In the United States, a single type of corporate fraud involving corporate securities has been estimated to net its perpetrators \$380 billion annually (Tillman & Pontell, 2016). Tillman & Pontell feel that corporations are not afraid of committing fraud for the following reason:

Theories of deterrence are based on a simple idea: that criminals, either individuals or corporations, behave rationally, weighing their actions against possible gains and consequences. To stop crime, we need to tip that calculation in society's favor. Phil Angelides, the former chairman of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, which examined the causes of the 2008 financial collapse, said the relatively small fines paid by corporations are "akin to someone who robs a 7-Eleven, takes \$1,000 and being able to settle for \$25 and no admission of wrongdoing." He added, "Will they do it again? Absolutely, because it pays." (Tillman & Pontell, 2016).

Extreme contempt and hatred for the poor and long-term unemployed in the United States is becoming a serious problem (Lubrano, 2013). Susan Fiske, Professor at Princeton, studies the attitudes of Americans to the poor; Fiske claims that "Americans react to the poor with disgust." According to Fiske, "We're losing part of our humanity" by dehumanizing the impoverished and "These were the seeds to the Holocaust: That some lives matter more than others" (Lubrano, 2013). Unfortunately, the catchphrase of "Make America great again" appears to have been distorted by some to "Make America hate again" and "Make America white again."

The United States is among the countries with the highest level of inequality. CEOs have incomes that are approximately 295 times greater than that of the typical employee; median incomes are lower today than they were 25 years ago; about 25% of children under the age of 5 live in poverty (Stiglitz, 2014). Lafer (2017) highlights the fact that "For the corporate lobbies, growing inequality poses a central political challenge: how to advance policies that are bound to exacerbate inequality, while avoiding a populist backlash."

Stiglitz (2014) provides the answer to the question as to why income inequality is so out of control in the United States:

The American political system is overrun by money. Economic inequality translates into political inequality, and political inequality yields increasing economic inequality. In fact, as he recognizes, Mr. Piketty's argument rests on the ability of wealth-holders to keep their after-tax rate of return

high relative to economic growth. How do they do this? By designing the rules of the game to ensure this outcome; that is, through politics.

So corporate welfare increases as we curtail welfare for the poor. Congress maintains subsidies for rich farmers as we cut back on nutritional support for the needy. Drug companies have been given hundreds of billions of dollars as we limit Medicaid benefits. The banks that brought on the global financial crisis got billions while a pittance went to the homeowners and victims of the same banks' predatory lending practices (Stiglitz, 2014).

The real battle is between two kinds of capitalism: rapacious, predatory capitalism vs. conscious capitalism (Friedman, Friedman & Edris, 2017). Both views have their roots in the work of Adam Smith. Believers in the former type of capitalism feel that government regulation is a problem and hurts growth. CEOs that follow this kind of capitalism are more concerned with profit than people or society. They would probably agree with Milton Friedman that:

There is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use it resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud (Friedman, 1970).

Back in 2005, based on trend tracking data, Aburdene (2005) felt that the country was at the “dawn of conscious capitalism.” The Conscious Capitalism organization is a network of corporate leaders committed to the idea that capitalism has to be moral if it is to work properly; it cannot just be about helping the wealthy. A key principle is believing that free enterprise capitalism is noble when it “lifts people out of poverty and creates prosperity.”

The credo of conscious capitalists is at their website where the “Four Principles of Conscious Capitalism” are discussed (Conscious Capitalism, 2016):

We believe that business is good because it creates value, it is ethical because it is based on voluntary exchange, it is noble because it can elevate our existence and it is heroic because it lifts people out of poverty and creates prosperity. Free enterprise capitalism is the most powerful system for social cooperation and human progress ever conceived. It is one of the most compelling ideas we humans have ever had. But we can aspire to even more (Conscious Capitalism, 2016).

This battle between the two kinds of capitalism is even affecting higher education.

For the corporate elite, the institution of mass higher education has become an expensive and unnecessary luxury. To the extent that university graduates are needed to staff corporations, this is more easily accomplished by targeting funding to specific programs. Not only are the liberal arts themselves superfluous, but the very idea of liberal education — universities as a place outside the competitive pressures of the rat race, where students and faculty are protected by standards of academic freedom — has become a hindrance rather than a help.

The corporate vision of 21st-century higher education is simply professional job training. This not only reduces the number of disciplines deemed deserving of funding, but also fundamentally alters the meaning of education. Career training is not about broad-mindedness, critical thinking, self-discovery, or personal expression; it is about conveying facts and competencies. These do not require academic freedom, hence tenure comes to seem like nothing but an undeserved perk. This is the logic that led Governor Walker of Wisconsin to propose stripping out of the University of Wisconsin mission statement the notion that "the University exists to provide public service and improve the human condition" and that "the search for truth" is fundamental to the university's purpose (Lafer, 2017).

Interestingly, most Americans want their country to be one with less inequality of wealth and income distribution. In fact, there is little difference between Democrats and Republicans when it comes to beliefs regarding ideal wealth distribution: 32% of wealth for the richest quintile (top 20%) and 11% for the poorest (Ariely, 2012). Unfortunately, we are nowhere near this distribution of wealth. Income inequality is not something to be ignored: A significant number of economists believe that it weakens the economy and hurts economic growth (Stiglitz, 2012). In addition, staggering income inequality damages the faith of citizens in a democratic government. We need a leader that can make people understand that everyone wins if we all work together to help everyone prosper, not just the top 1%.

Three of the wealthiest Americans – Sheldon G. Adelson, Warren E. Buffett, and Bill Gates – with very different political views were dismayed by the unresponsiveness of Congress to passing an immigration bill. They were concerned about the "lack of humanity" and the indifference to passing legislation that would advance America's self-interest. In their words:

The current stalemate – in which greater pride is attached to thwarting the opposition than to advancing the nation's interests – is depressing to most Americans and virtually all of its business managers. The impasse certainly depresses the three of us (Adelson, Buffett, and Gates, 2014).

Extreme devotion to a political party (i.e., "partyism") has become a serious problem in the United States and may be worse than racial biases. In 1960, approximately 5% of Democrats and Republicans said they would be "displeased" if a child married someone from another political party. By 2010, that ratio shot up to 49% of Republicans and 33% of Democrats (Brooks, 2014).

This paper will examine the Book of Ruth and demonstrate that many of its ideas are as relevant today as three millennia ago.

BOOK OF RUTH

The Book of Ruth, only one of two books named after women (Esther is the other one), is part of the Hebrew Bible, the Hagiographa or *Kethubim* (Writings) and describes events that occurred approximately 3,000 years ago in the time when Judges ruled in ancient Israel. Ruth the Moabite (from the ancient nation of Moab) was the ancestress of King David so the story probably takes place about 80 to 100 years before the birth of David (Slotki, 1952). There is, however, a great deal of controversy among scholars as to exactly when the author wrote the

book. There is also disagreement as to the authorship of the Book of Ruth. The Talmud (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Bathra 14b) believes that the author was the prophet Samuel. The Book of Ruth has many valuable lessons for people living today; indeed, its message resonates. Appendix A provides a brief summary of the Book of Ruth from Birnbaum & Friedman (2012).

LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH

The story of Ruth is very simple but has several interesting lessons. As we shall see, it is not apparent how this tiny scroll made it into the canon. We draw six major lessons that are applicable to a major country in crisis, as the U.S. finds itself today (please see table 1).

Table 1. Lessons from Ruth about Leadership Qualities that can “Make America Great Again”

Lesson	Example in the Book of Ruth	Relevance for Business
(1) Kindness and compassion	Ruth shows kindness to her mother-in-law Naomi by staying with her	Compassion, altruism and selflessness lead to innovativeness among followers (Friedman, Fischer & Schochet 2017)
(2) Love of the stranger	Boaz welcomes Ruth the Moabite	Diversity increases innovativeness (Friedman, Friedman & Leverton, 2016).
(3) Showing Compassion for One’s Country and Community	Elimelech punished for leaving his homeland during a famine when he could have helped	Ethical implications of aggressive tax policies (Fischer & Kraten 2017)
(4) Caring for One’s Employees	Boaz greets and works alongside his workers	See (1) above
(5) Philanthropy	Boaz follows tradition and allows the poor to gather his gleanings	Paying a fair share of taxes is the ultimate philanthropy (Fischer & Friedman 2017)
(6) Women as decision makers	Naomi and Ruth rectify their late husbands' mistakes	Groups that contain women members are more socially cohesive (Thompson 2015)

Lesson One: Importance of Kindness and Compassion Especially for Leaders

The Talmudic sages stated that the Book of Ruth was written in order to teach humankind the importance of *gemilut chasadim*, acts of loving-kindness. (Midrash *Ruth Rabbah* 2:15).

Rabbi Ze'era said: The scroll of Ruth tells us nothing of the laws of cleanliness or uncleanness, of what is prohibited or what is permitted. Why then was it written? To teach you how great is the reward of those who do deeds of kindness (Midrash Ruth Rabbah 2:14; translation by Bialik & Ravnitzky, 1992)

The message of the Book of Ruth is that kindness is repaid with kindness. Ruth shows kindness to her mother-in-law Naomi by staying with her and is in turn shown kindness by Boaz who marries her. God shows kindness to both Boaz and Ruth and they have a son, Obed, who is the grandfather of King David. Hendel (2008) identifies five different types of kindness shown in the Book of Ruth.

To call the Book of Ruth a love story is inaccurate. Nowhere is the word love mentioned when relating the story of Boaz and Ruth. Boaz married Ruth as a *go'el* (guardian/redeemer). He referred to Ruth as "my daughter," not exactly a term of love (Ruth 2:8, 3:10; 3:11). Ruth referred to herself as "your maid-servant" and "handmaid" (Ruth 2:13, 3:9). Ruth was looking for a protector and someone who would perpetuate the name of Machlon, her deceased husband. It should also be noted that Ruth was a childless widow, definitely not a youngster. The Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 4:4) believes that she was 40-years old when the story occurred. Ruth is never described as being beautiful, but as a "virtuous woman" (Ruth 3:11). Ruth was surprised by the kindness shown to her because she was a foreigner.

Boaz is willing to be a *go'el* but indicates to Ruth that there is a relative who comes first. *Ploni Almoni* (which literally means "unnamed, anonymous one" or "unnamed widower", i.e., someone who was intentionally not named by the text) was also a potential *go'el*, and was a closer relative to Elimelech's family than Boaz, but indicated that he was willing to redeem the field but not willing to marry Ruth. Clearly, Boaz was not in love with Ruth and recognized the marriage as a family responsibility to provide a redeemer/guardian.

Ziegler (2017a) provides the following reason that the name of this relative was not mentioned in the text.

There may also be a specific reason for this *go'el* to lose his name. This *go'el* did not merely evade a responsibility; he refused to do an act whose very objective is "to uphold the name of the dead person upon his inheritance" (Ruth 4:5, 10). It is an apt punishment, measure for measure (*midda ke-negged mida*), to delete the name of the one who refused to establish the name of his deceased relative. Likewise, a man who refuses to perform the mitzva of *yibbum* (which is similarly designed to uphold the name of the deceased brother) is given a new, shameful name. The name that he is henceforth called in Israel is "the house of the one who removes his shoe," alluding to the ceremony which accompanies the refusal of the brother to marry his sister-in-law. Thus, the *go'el*, the man who had the opportunity and the responsibility to restore the name of his deceased relative, loses his name in this narrative, as a fitting consequence for his refusal to fulfill this duty (Ziegler, 2017a).

Abraham Ibn Ezra, medieval commentator, proves that Boaz was a very old man when the story takes place (see commentary on Ruth 4:17). There are only 366 years between the time the Israelites entered the Promised Land and the birth of David. During these 366 years, we have six generations: Nachshon ben Amminadab, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David.

Ibn Ezra concludes that Boaz had to be in his 80s when he married Ruth. He did not marry Ruth because of his great passion for her; he married her because he wanted to help her.

Ziegler (2015: 16-26) addresses the question of why the Book of Ruth was written. She makes the point that the idea of performing acts of *chesed* (deeds of loving kindness) is an important theme in the Torah. Abraham, for example, is defined by *chesed*. She concludes that what is unique about the *chesed* in the Book of Ruth is that it is selfless, altruistic kindness. Both Boaz and Ruth, progenitors of King David and the Davidic dynasty, exemplify this trait. The entire book demonstrates all the sacrifices made by Ruth for Naomi. One of the most eloquent passages in Scripture expressing love between two people is in the following passage where Ruth makes it clear that she will not leave Naomi, her dejected and destitute mother-in-law:

Do not entreat me to leave you, or to turn back from following you; For wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people, and your God is my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. The Lord may do so to me, and more also, if anything but death separates you from me (Ruth 1:16-17).

Naomi warns Ruth that if she joins her and goes to Israel, she will remain a widow. Naomi believes that Ruth has nothing but poverty and misery to look forward to if she remains with her. At the end of the book, after Ruth gives birth to Obed, she gives the child to Naomi to raise. Clearly, this was also an act of great kindness. People must have been quite awe-struck because they stated: “a son was born to Naomi.” (Ruth 4:17).

This is a message for all leaders: self-nullifying, altruistic kindness may not be demanded of ordinary people but is “an absolute necessity for our leaders” (Ziegler, 2015: 25). It is too easy for leaders to become corrupt and obsessed with fame, fortune, and power; the antidote is to be totally unselfish and altruistic.

Lesson Two: Loving the Stranger

Xenophobia is quite natural to most people. What is especially unique about the Bible is how important it considered the precept of not oppressing the stranger. The injunction not to oppress the stranger becomes an important law in the Torah and is mentioned no less than 36 times (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 59b). There is even a special Golden Rule for the stranger (Leviticus 19:34):

When a stranger dwells among you in your land, you are not to maltreat him. The stranger who dwells with you shall be like a native among you; you shall love him like yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 19: 33-34).

The Bible dictates the love of God (Deuteronomy 6: 5), but not nearly as many times as it dictates concern for the stranger.

The Moabites were disliked by the ancient Israelites because of what their ancestors had done to in the days of Moses. The Israelites, about to enter the Promised Land, were in the town of Shittim (a town in Moab opposite Jericho). The Moabites and Midianites had their women seduce the Israelite men and entice them to worship foreign deities (Numbers 25: 1-9). This resulted in a divine plague that killed 24,000 Israelites. Moabite men were not permitted to

“enter the congregation of God,” i.e., marry Jewish women because of their evil character (Deuteronomy 23: 4-5). Even worse, the Bible describes the incestuous origins of the people of Moab (in Hebrew, *me-ab* means from a father). Lot’s daughters slept with him after the destruction of their town of Sodom; both became pregnant. One daughter called her son Moab (Genesis 19:37) hinting at her son’s origins. One can imagine that the Moabites were a reviled and despised people because of their origins. Despite all this, Boaz understanding the plight of the stranger took pity on her and married her. The reward for showing concern for the Moabite woman was that the Davidic line was established through this union.

Several hundred years later, Ruth the Moabite immigrated to the land of Israel as a penniless, childless widow. She was the quintessential “stranger” who needed protection and she also sought a spouse who would perpetuate the name of her deceased husband.

Boaz welcomed Ruth and says the following:

And Boaz replied and he said to her, “It has surely been told to me all that you have done with your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birthplace and went to a nation that you did not know yesterday or the day before. May God repay you your deeds and may your reward be complete from the Lord, the God of Israel, under Whose wings you have come to seek refuge” (Ruth 2:11-12).

Ziegler (2017b) makes the point that Boaz was stating this publicly and making it clear to everyone, as well as his overseers, that Ruth was a righteous woman and should be treated with respect. She proves this from the following.

This may be seen by the manner in which Boaz’s statement is introduced by two separate verbs, “*va-ya’an*” and “*va-yomei*” (“he answered” and “he said”). This combination seems to have the force of an official pronouncement, rather than a private communication. Moreover, the doubled use of the word “*nagad*” which opens Boaz’s speech (“*huggeid huggad li*,” “it has surely been told to me”) indicates that Ruth’s extraordinary actions are known to all (Ziegler, 2015: 221-222).

Ziegler (2017b) also points out that:

The cadence of Boaz’s speech is also extraordinary, as every few words end with the second person suffix –*eikh*, creating a sing-song quality:

huggeid huggad li kol asher asit et chamoteikh
acharei mot isheikh
va-ta’azvi avikh ve-immeikh
ve-eretzmoladeteikh...

yeshalem Hashem po’aleikh
u-tehi maskurteikh
sheleima mei-im Hashem....

Boaz's rhythmic speech is designed to impress itself upon the listeners' memory and be repeated to one another. This should affect the people of Bethlehem's willingness to accept Ruth into their midst (Ziegler, 2015: 223).

Boaz, who was a prominent leader -- he was a descendant of Nachshon ben Amminadab, leader of the tribe of Judah when the Israelites left Egypt for the Promised Land with Moses (Number 1:7) -- does more than publicly endorse Ruth. He agrees to marry Ruth after she makes the request and this union lays the seed of the Davidic dynasty. This is an interesting union. Boaz, at the top of the economic and political ladder, marries someone all the way at the bottom. His empathy with the plight of the Moabite stranger, his pity for a woman who was totally bereft in a land not her own, was rewarded by his becoming the progenitor of everlasting royalty.

CEOs must follow the example of Boaz and encourage diversity in the workplace. The downtrodden of society should be trained and hired. This includes women, minorities, the disabled, and even those with Down's syndrome. Firms that have employed autistic individuals and those with Down's syndrome have found that these employees are hardworking, dedicated, and loyal employees (Friedman, Lopez-Pumarejo, and Friedman, 2006). CEOs are not expected to marry the unfortunates of society, but they should at the very least understand the importance of caring for them and doing everything possible to help them.

Chua (2007) examined several of history's hyperpowers such as the Achaemenid Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Tang Dynasty, the Mongol Empire, the Spanish, Dutch, and the British Empires to see what made them so great. She found that these societies were, at least for their times, quite tolerant and pluralistic. This enabled them to tap into the creative abilities and talents of various groups that were excluded in other countries.

A country that wants to become great should show kindness to strangers and not be xenophobic. Immigrants tend to be extremely entrepreneurial and own 18% of the small businesses in the United States (Fiscal Policy Institute 2012). They also applied for more than 75% of patents at the leading universities in the United States (Martin, 2012). Most of these patents were in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) areas that help create jobs and stimulate economic growth (Martin, 2012). According to Schramm (2011):

Kauffman [Foundation] research shows that immigrants are disproportionately likely to start a business—indeed, roughly 25 percent of successful high-tech startups over the last decade were founded or co-founded by immigrants. Highly educated immigrants want to come to the United States because ours is a nation in which science can flourish and ingenuity can be rewarded.

Not only are immigrants not a burden but they are crucial to innovation and entrepreneurship. The way a country thrives is by encourage capable immigrants to live there. There is a growing body of evidence that diversity contributes to the growth of individual companies as well (Friedman, Friedman & Leverton, 2016).

Lesson Three (Positive Patriotism): Compassion for One's Country and Community

The Midrash (*Ruth Rabbah 1*) observes that Elimelech, a wealthy landowner, left his homeland because he realized that the famine in Israel would result in an increase in the number of impoverished people and he did not want to have to provide them with assistance.

He [Elimelech] was one of the notables of the realm, one of the sustainers of the generation. Still, when the years of famine came, he said to himself: Now all of Israel will come knocking at my door [begging for food], one with a large basket, and another with a small basket. So he got up and ran away from them (*Ruth Rabbah 1:4*).

His greed and lack of compassion for his people caused him to abandon his homeland and go to Moab with his wife and two sons. His punishment was that he lost his life as well as his wealth. His two sons, Machlon and Chilion, also died in Moab. Naomi went from being a wealthy woman to a penniless widow with no children. It is ironic that he went from a town in Israel known as Beth-Lehem (or Bethlehem) in Judah. In Hebrew, Beth Lehem means house of bread.

A CEO of Exxon was asked by an executive from another firm to consider building additional U.S. refinery capacity for security against possible supply disruptions. His response was, "I'm not a U.S. company and I don't make decisions based on what's good for the U.S" (Gore, 2013). This trend to not caring about what is good for the United States is spreading to other companies.

For the first time, many of the country's most powerful political actors are companies whose headquarters may be located in America but whose profitability does not primarily depend on the fortunes of American society. Foreign sales now account for 48 percent of the S&P 500's total corporate revenues. Among recent ALEC member corporations, Exxon Mobil, Caterpillar, Procter & Gamble, Pfizer, Dow Chemical, and IBM all earn more than 60 percent of their revenue outside the U.S. This marks a new departure in American politics: Some of the most influential actors in the legislative process have political interests that are increasingly disconnected from the fate of the country's citizens.

Corporate politics in the 21st century are further marked by a fundamental pessimism about the American economy. The United States is an economy in decline, with an increasing number of Americans unable to support their families at a minimally decent standard of living. In just three years, the post-2008 Great Recession erased two decades of growth in average household income (Lafer, 2017).

It is becoming apparent that many corporations are not good citizens. They are using the political system to find ways to enrich themselves at the expense of the United States. Corporate America exploits the tax laws and various loopholes to avoid paying taxes. Currently, corporate taxes account for less than 10% of federal government revenues; in 1952 it was 32.1% (Hickey, 2014). Some of the methods used by corporations to reduce their taxes include tax inversions (where an American company acquires or merges with an overseas company where corporate taxes are low so that it can reincorporate and lower its tax bill); becoming S-corporations to avoid corporate income taxes; and keeping money abroad to avoid paying the

taxes (Apple and General Electric each keep more than \$100 billion offshore) (Lobosco, 2014). Another prevalent tax avoidance tactic is known as “earnings stripping.” Under this tactic, a corporation creates tax deductions in the United States on income it earns in the low tax countries by making intercompany loans. The interest is deductible in the United States company’s operations, and the income is taxed at the lower rate in the foreign company’s operations (Clarke & Friedman, 2016). Only 6% of corporations today (as opposed to 17% in 1980) are traditional corporations that are required to pay the corporate income tax. As much as \$2 trillion in earnings of American companies has not been repatriated to the United States in order to avoid paying the taxes (Ayres, 2014).

American companies that engaged in these tactics benefit from an educated workforce, a reliable military force, an effective legal system, local police and fire protection, and a strong political system without paying their required taxes. In so doing, they rob the government of funds that could be used not only to provide services for the public but also to support scientific research that could benefit corporations and shareholders. In short, these companies not only shift the burden of taxation to others but also deprive the country of funds that could be used to support economic development.

CEOs have to care about their own employees. Outsourcing jobs to other countries and tax avoidance schemes are the modern ways of emulating Elimelech. American CEOs have to show compassion for employees as well as their own country and do whatever is possible to save American jobs and also pay their fair share of taxes. They must also do everything possible help the local communities in which they do business. Friedman & Friedman (2009) assert that a virtuous firm must establish and maintain strong ties with the local community in which it conducts business. This includes hiring employees from the local community, doing business with local companies, and supporting local schools. If the local community thrives, it will benefit all companies that are based there.

Lesson Four: Caring for One’s Employees

From the story, it is clear that Boaz was close to his employees. He greeted his harvesters first and used the name of God in his greeting:

And behold, Boaz came from Beth-Lehem and said to the harvesters:
“May the Lord be with you!” And they answered him: “May the Lord bless
you!” (Ruth, 2:4)

Although he was a wealthy man, he performed labor alongside his workers. This is equivalent to having a CEO work with his fellow employees on the assembly line. Winnowing is difficult work and requires a great deal of exertion. No wonder Ruth found Boaz fast asleep at the end of the grain heap (Ruth 3:7), rather than in bed in his house. Ziegler (2015: 197) asks the question: “Why does Boaz come to his field? For what purpose would an affluent proprietor come to his field at the height of the harvest?” She suggests that he might have been checking on his reaper’s adherence to God’s laws (leaving the gleanings to the poor). This may be hinted at his response: “May the Lord be with you!”

There is a growing body of evidence that compassionate leadership can help a company prosper (Baker & O’Malley, 2008; Fox, 2010; Rynes, 2012; Seppälä 2016; Williams, 2012). Boedker conducted a major study in Australia involving 5,600 people in 77 organizations examining the link between profitability and leadership styles. He found that compassionate

leadership had a positive impact on profitability and productivity (Global Focus, 2016; Business Think, 2012).

Lesson Five: Importance of Corporate Philanthropy & Paying Fair Share of Taxes

Friedman and Friedman (2009) state that CEOs should ensure that their firms are engaged in corporate philanthropy. It is surprising how stingy corporations have become. In 1986, corporations gave about 2.1% of pretax profits to charity; by 2012, the percentage has plummeted to around 0.8% (Stern, 2013). The Book of Ruth shows how serious Boaz was about the laws of gleanings described in the Bible. The gleaners were taking their share of stalks that fell out of the harvesters' hands while they were reaping. This is tantamount to allowing beggars into the factory. One might think that after a serious famine, people would be lax with the laws of gleanings. Apparently not!

Gleanings are only one of several entitlements the Hebrew Bible allows the poor. There is also *peah*, a corner of the field was not harvested and left for the poor (Leviticus 19:9). Also, if a bundle of grain was accidentally left in the field during the harvest, the owner was not permitted to return for it. This sheaf had to be left behind for the poor: "It shall be for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow." (Deuteronomy 24:19).

The biblical view is certainly not consistent with the opinion of Milton Friedman (1970) regarding the social obligation of business. The biblical view is that "CEOs have the obligation to lead the charge and transform companies into those with spiritual values" (Friedman, Friedman, and Kass-Shraibman, 2008). What makes life consequential is helping people, providing productive and meaningful jobs, not increasing the pay of top management.

Lesson Six: Women as Decision Makers

The Book of Ruth is unique in the biblical canon as essentially the story of two women, Naomi and Ruth. Elimelech, Machlon, and Chilion make the wrong decision and decide to stay in Moab, even after the famine in Israel has ended and are punished with death as a result. Naomi is the mastermind who instructs Ruth on what to do to find a husband, i.e., sneak into the threshing floor at night and lie down next to Boaz's feet (Ruth 3: 1-2). Ruth makes some slight modifications to her instructions and openly asks Boaz to spread the corners of his robe on her and be her redeemer, i.e., marry her. Boaz was obviously a kind man but would not have thought of marrying Ruth without the involvement of Naomi and Ruth.

This story occurred 3,000 years ago when women had few rights and no education. Despite all this, Naomi and Ruth had insights that the men did not possess. This is certainly true today. Companies that do not remove the glass ceilings and encourage women and minorities to be part of senior management are going to be at a big disadvantage in the knowledge economy where global competition can be fierce and come from anywhere in the world. The contribution that diversity makes to managerial decision making is priceless. People from different backgrounds and cultures can come up with solutions that a homogeneous board of trustees will fail to notice.

One study that examined relationships between gender diversity on corporate boards and financial performance, found that organizations that had women on their board of directors had better growth and higher average returns on equity than those that only had men. This was a global study that examined 2,360 companies (Phillips, 2014). The collective intelligence of a

group is not additive; it is the social sensitivity of group members that determines how well the group, as a whole, will function. According to Thompson (2015):

A general collective intelligence factor explains a group's performance on a wide variety of tasks. This "c factor" is not strongly correlated with the average or maximum individual intelligence of group members but is correlated with the average social sensitivity of group members, the equality in distribution of conversational turn-taking, and the proportion of females in the group.

Women seem to be better than men at social sensitivity, i.e., the ability to correctly perceive, interpret, and respect the feelings, viewpoint, and opinions of others in the group. This is why having females in a group improves its "c factor", i.e., it becomes smarter (Thompson, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The leadership of the Soviet Union as well as much of the world was taken by surprise by the fall of the Soviet Union. The main reason for the downfall appears to have been the total indifference to the needs of the people. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev stated in 2012 that "The best investment [the state can make] is Liberty and the Rule of Law. And respect for man's Dignity" (Aron, 2011). Senator John McCain from Arizona, avers that America's values "are our strength and greatest treasure." He states that "we are a country with a conscience" and "We saw the world as it was and we made it better" (McCain, 2017). It is our values that will make us thrive.

We tend to forget that Communism was a huge failure everywhere it was tried. The number of people who died in Communist countries from such factors as famine, execution, and labor camps was about 70 million (White, 2012: 453-457). Thirty million people died in China during the Great Leap forward (1958- 1962) which resulted in the worst famine in history (White, 2012: 433). Communism was a utopian system that was supposed to help working people. What went wrong? The answer is exactly what Medvedev avowed went wrong with the Soviet Union: Communism failed because it was not based on compassion for people. It was just as heartless as the worst capitalistic countries. Leaders were more concerned with their own needs than the needs of their people. Mao had fifty villas built all over China for his personal gratification. He also had beautiful women selected to be his pleasure women (White, 2012: 432).

The Book of Ruth has one overarching message: the importance of caring for others, especially the poor and unfortunates of society. The ideal leader is a servant leader, the antithesis of the autocratic, authoritarian leader who believes in "leader first." Servant leaders are not self-centered and concerned predominantly with personal aggrandizement. Rather, their focus is on the people in their organization: they have empathy and care about others, empower employees, are facilitators, see themselves as stewards whose job is to serve others, and want all of their subordinates to be successful (Greenleaf, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Spears, 2004).

CEOs should not believe that that capitalism is only about free markets, maximizing profits, and maximizing shareholder wealth. In fact, this is not what Adam Smith believed. Adam Smith was a believer in capitalism based on morality. Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate and renowned economist, and others see Smith's two works – *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations* - as complementing each other: capitalism only works when combined with ethics and morality. Unfortunately, Smith's philosophy has been distorted by people who insist

that he believed in unfettered, predatory capitalism without a moral foundation. Sen (2010) was opposed to the idea of separating ethics from economics:

Second, since the ideas presented in *The Wealth of Nations* have been interpreted largely without reference to the framework already developed in *Moral Sentiments* (on which Smith draws substantially in the later book), the typical understanding of *The Wealth of Nations* has been constrained, to the detriment of economics as a subject. The neglect applies, among other issues, to the appreciation of the demands of rationality, the need for recognizing the plurality of human motivations, the connections between ethics and economics, and the codependent rather than free-standing role of institutions in general, and free markets in particular, in the functioning of the economy (Sen, 2010).

Models based on the belief that people are entirely driven by greed are wrong. There is quite a bit of evidence that people are altruistic and enjoy helping each other (Ricard, 2015). More than 30 years ago, Robinson (1977) observed that the pursuit of self-interest has caused much harm to society and that Adam Smith should not be associated with this doctrine. In actuality, Smith believed that “society, however, cannot subsist among those who are at all times ready to hurt and injure one another.” Voracious self-interest without a foundation of morality is not what Adam Smith is all about.

Compassion and caring can be the secret ingredient that makes an organization thrive (Dutton & Workman, 2015; Dutton, Workman & Hardin, 2014; Frost, 1999). Peter Frost was among the first scholars to demonstrate that compassion will not interfere with the productivity and efficiency of an organization and will actually improve them (Frost, 1999). This is why an organization that wants to succeed should strive to be compassionate. Frost relates the story where he was in the hospital and witnessed a nurse going out of her way to comfort a patient who was “humiliated, depressed, [and] defeated.” This action was not only beneficial for the patient but helped the morale of the entire organization. As Dutton & Workman (2015) assert: “Certain types of positive experiences, like giving, receiving, or witnessing compassion, may activate positive spirals, increasing positive effects.” The idea that capitalism must have a soul in order to succeed has been broached by a number of scholars (Bogle, 2005; Greider, 2003; Hindery 2005).

The research on compassion is evocative of the theory of care ethics developed by Held (2006). Held believes that society cannot function properly if it is solely based on the profit-motive; care ethics is about introducing compassion and caring into society. Held (1993: 228-229) contends that “Many enterprises would gain if they resembled families more and groups of hostile strangers less.” She argues that “the markets are unable to reflect and actively advance values beyond the economic, such as mutually shared care and concern” (Hawk, 2011).

Both Ruth and Boaz would agree that only a society built on a foundation of caring and compassion will thrive. The Messiah is from the Davidic line and a descendant of Ruth. The Messianic vision of Isaiah and Amos (Isaiah 2:4; Isaiah 11:1-10; Amos 9: 13-15) is one in which humankind sits around being productive — “they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks”; “the mountains shall drip sweet wine ... They will plant vineyards and drink their wine and they shall cultivate gardens and eat their fruit” — and is a vision of world peace with everyone employed (Rae, 2004). Swords are transformed into working implements, not couches; and property is not owned by the state. It is also a vision of

everyone getting along: “The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the goat; the calf and the lion and the fatling [will walk] together, and a young child will lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). Clearly, it is not about the people at the top of the economic ladder enriching themselves at the expense of those at the middle and bottom of the ladder. As noted above, Ruth came from the bottom of the economic ladder. She was a pauper who collected the gleanings of Boaz’s field.

King David, Ruth’s great grandson, understood what leadership was really about. In Psalm 72 in his Book of Psalms he states what a true leader is supposed to do:

For he shall save the needy when he cries, and the poor who has none to help him. He will pity the poor and destitute, and will save the souls of the destitute. From fraud and violence he shall redeem their soul; and precious shall their blood be in his eyes (Psalm 72: 12-14).

If the goal is to make America great again, then we have to heed the messages of the Book of Ruth. Without selflessness and compassion on the part of leaders as well as citizens a country will not thrive.

APPENDIX: BRIEF SUMMARY OF *BOOK OF RUTH*

From Birnbaum & Friedman (2012), With Permission

The story begins with a famine in Israel. Elimelech, a wealthy landowner from the town of Bethlehem, abandons his homeland and takes his wife Naomi and their two sons, Machlon and Chilion, to Moab (this is a distance of about 30 to 60 miles). The original intent was to sojourn in Moab until the famine ended but they decided to stay permanently, which turned out to be a decade. During that time, Machlon and Chilion married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Probably as a divine punishment for their sin of abandoning their mother country and people, Elimelech dies followed by Machlon and Chilion. Machlon and Chilion die childless and Naomi is left alone with her two daughters-in-law.

After the death of her husband and children, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem. Naomi tells Ruth and Orpah to return to their Moabite families and try to remarry. Orpah leaves, albeit reluctantly; she is also abandoning the religion of her deceased husband and Naomi. Ruth, however, states (Ruth 1:16-17): "Do not entreat me to leave you, or to turn back from following you; For wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people, and your God is my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. The Lord may do so to me, and more also, if anything but death separates you from me." Naomi and Ruth embark together on the journey back to Bethlehem.

When they arrive in Bethlehem, the residents are surprised. They cannot believe that this is the same, aristocratic lady, Naomi, whom they had known. Naomi declares (Ruth 1: 20-21): “Call me not Naomi (which means pleasant one in Hebrew), call me Marah (bitterness); for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full and the Lord brought me back empty.” Naomi, who left as a wealthy lady does return “empty,” she returns as a widow, without her two sons, and in dire poverty.

It is the time of the barley harvest, and in order to provide food for her impoverished mother-in-law and herself, Ruth goes to the fields to glean (gathering grain left behind by the reapers) in

the fields. Biblical law (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22) allows paupers to glean. Thus, ears of grain falling from the hands of the reapers must be left on the fields for the poor. Coincidentally, the field where Ruth goes to glean belongs to a wealthy relative of Elimelech's, Boaz. Boaz seems to have a very close relationship with his workers. He enters his fields and greets the workers with a blessing (Ruth 2: 4): "May the Lord be with you." They respond: "May the Lord bless you." He notices Ruth among the gleaners and asks who she is. The commentaries note that he probably noticed that she, a Moabite, looked different from the other gleaners, after all she was a Moabite, and she also dressed in a different garb. An overseer remarks that she is a Moabite woman and that she returned with Naomi from the fields of Moab. Boaz approaches Ruth and instructs her not to glean in any other fields since he wants to make sure that she will be treated with respect and tells her to drink from the jugs supplied for the field workers. One can assume that the beggars who gleaned the fields while the reapers were working were not treated well by the laborers. Ruth is surprised by Boaz's kindness, since she is a foreigner. Boaz invites her to eat dinner with him. He also instructs his workers to make sure that Ruth is treated with kindness and instructs them to purposely pull out stalks from the bundles and leave it behind as gleanings for Ruth.

When Ruth returns to Naomi she relates her experiences in the field of Boaz. Naomi informs her that Boaz is a *go'el* (kinsman/redeemer). Biblical law gives the *go'el* the right to purchase property being sold by a relative so that it stays in the family. Naomi instructs Ruth to secretly go to the threshing floor at night where Boaz is winnowing. As wealthy as Boaz was, he helped with the winnowing. Naomi tells Ruth to "uncover his feet" while he was sleeping. Many commentaries suggest that uncovering Boaz's feet was a reminder that a man who refuses to perform levirate marriage (see Deuteronomy 25: 5-10) has his shoe removed. Levirate marriage was encouraged when a husband died childless. The widow married the deceased husband's brother so that "the name [of the dead brother] should not be blotted out from Israel." Ruth does as instructed, awakens Boaz in the middle of the night by lying next to his feet, and reveals what she wants (Ruth 3: 9): "I am Ruth your handmaid. Spread the corner of your robe over your handmaid; for you are a *go'el*." Boaz indicates that he is willing to "redeem," i.e., marry, Ruth; however, there is a closer relative who comes first as *go'el*.

The next morning Boaz goes to the gate of the city where the court met. He meets the other relative and explains that Naomi and Ruth, because of their desperate financial situation, are trying to sell a field that was part of the Elimelech estate. Ruth insists that the *go'el* who buys the field must also marry her since Ruth wants to "perpetuate the name of the deceased," i.e., of Machlon, her late husband (Ruth 4:5). Boaz's relative is willing to purchase the field from Naomi but is unwilling to marry Ruth. Boaz marries Ruth and they have a son, Obed who is the grandfather of David. Naomi becomes Obed's nurse and her neighbors declare: "a son was born to Naomi." Apparently, Naomi became like a mother to Obed; she was no longer empty, bitter, and devoid of hope.

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