# FROM THE EDITOR

WWW.JEWISHLIFE.CO.ZA

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Last month's feature, "Feeling the Pinch", which profiled a couple of families struggling to make ends meet, received a phenomenal response, with many coming forward to share ideas, offer assistance via, for example, free training for those in need, and even donate money. However, there were also some who were angered by the piece:

*"I think it's absolutely obscene that a certain family in Joburg can't manage on R75 000 per month! WHAT ON EARTH DO THEY EAT AND WHY MAKE A SIMCHA TO MAINTAIN STANDARDS? WHO ARE THEY TRYING TO IMPRESS? SOMETHING IS WRONG!"*

*"I cannot believe that you could quote two families 'struggling' financially on such large monthly incomes. I would like to draw your attention to the actual poverty that is out there in the community…You have the chutzpah to quote an income of R75 000 and still short of R15 000 to R20 000 per month!!! Maybe you should do your research in the real world!"*

*"I find your article distasteful and an insult to those who are truly indigent. My clients have no assets, no property, no car, no policies, and no investments. They make use of the state health facilities as medical aid is a luxury. They rely on food and clothing parcels, meals on wheels, and a contribution to their accommodation and a small cash component to see them through the month…The families you wrote about are in their position through choice. They now need to downgrade their standard of living. Family and community members who are funding this family's shortfall are remiss; they are enabling them to continue to live a high standard of living. Their money can rather be channelled to those who are in genuine need."*

The goal of the article was to bring to the attention of the community the on-going financial stresses and struggles being borne in shame and silence by large numbers of Jewish families. Many are under the mistaken belief that such struggles belong only to those who earn very little each month, without realising that even those generally classified as the "middle class" or even "well-off" are not coping and actually drowning in day-to-day living expenses. The simple fact is that when one sits down and considers the basic monthly expenses of an average-size Jewish family – rent/mortgage payment; utilities (water/electric/gas); telephone/internet/cell; health (and other) insurance; private school fees; car payments/maintenance/petrol; food; clothing; etc. – and how rises in cost-of-living have outpaced income, it's just not possible for a family to make it without earning a salary that is far above the average monthly income.

Although much is already being done to help people – eg, school subsidies, interest free loans, etc. – it's simply not enough and many people in the community desperately need further, on-going, and urgent intervention to cope with this devastating crisis. With this in mind, we sought to give hope to those in need, encourage people to speak out (by participating in a short survey at www.affordablejewishlife.co.za), and ask those who could help in some way to step forward. The fact that we chose to highlight a segment of the community not typically associated with being in need should in no way imply that we are unaware or, chas v'shalom, insensitive to the many who find themselves in far worse financial positions and facing even greater daily struggles than those who were profiled.

It's also important to remember the teachings of our Sages regarding how the mitzvah of tzedakah applies to one who has fallen on hard times. The mitzvah of tzedakah is not one-size-fits-all. The Rambam explains[1] (and the Shulchan Aruch codifies[2] it as the halacha) that even if it was the way of a person to ride on a horse with a servant running before him (ie, he was a wealthy person), and such a man became poor, we must buy him a horse to ride upon and a servant to run before him, since the Torah obligates us[3] to provide for a person "…the lacking that he is lacking." The Talmud tells of just such a person and how the great Sage Hillel bought him a horse to ride upon and a servant to run before him. On one occasion, however, Hillel could not find a servant to run before the man and so he did the job himself!

Please G-d, may we find ways to assist all those in need within our community and to provide for each in accordance with what he lacks. May these and other efforts be successful in bringing about long-term solutions that benefit everyone and may we find no poor among us.

**ROBERT SUSSMAN,**
EDITOR

[1]Hilchos Matanos Aniyim 7:3.
[2]Yoreh De'ah 250:1
[3]See Devarim 15:8


**ON THE COVER:** A CONCEPT IMAGE OF LEADERSHIP, WITH ONE FIGURE SELECTED TO STAND OUT FROM THE REST. BIGSTOCKPHOTO.COM

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