FROM THE EDITOR

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People's attachment to money and all things material doesn't just seem to be increasing – it actually is. For over 50 years, the CIRP Freshman Survey has conducted studies in the US on incoming university students regarding, among other things, the reasons that motivate those students to attend college in the first place. Since the study was first conducted, the number of incoming freshmen who consider "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" an essential or very important motivation has plummeted from 86% in 1967 to just 45% in 2013 – while simultaneously the desire to be "very well-off financially" has steadily and dramatically increased from 42,2% in 1967 to an all-time high of 81,9% in 2015.[1]

It's a complete and utter reversal, but there's more to the story. Back when the Freshman Survey first started, "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" was number one on the list of reasons expressed for attending university, while being "very well-off financially" ranked significantly further down the list, in sixth place. Over the years, however, the two values have completely traded places, with being "very well-off financially" now ranking number one on the list and "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" having dropped down to sixth place.

We've often talked in these pages about how everything that a person possesses was given specifically to him by Hashem for his unique purpose in this world. But there's one big question that remains: why are some people blessed with so much in terms of money and material possessions – certainly more than they could possibly ever need – while others are blessed with so little, actually less than they really do need?

The Vilna Gaon teaches[2] that, "All that Hashem gives to this [person] more than that [person], it is in order that [the one who has been blessed with more] will have mercy on his fellow and cause [the one who has been blessed with less] to benefit from his property." Or, to put it another way[3], "Hashem gives money to a person to do chesed (kindness), [and the money] belongs to the person as it would to a gabbai [ie. someone who manages the collection and distribution of communal funds]" – in other words, the money has been entrusted to a person for the purpose of being dispensed by him to those who are in need.

Rabbi Azriel Chaim Goldfein, ztz"l, would often tell over a story that took place when he first arrived in South Africa. Rabbi Goldfein had gone downtown to visit a certain businessman. When he arrived, he found the man flustered, out of breath, and absolutely distraught. The businessman was in bit of a daze and sat, holding his head in his hands, repeatedly saying, "It's never happened before. It's never happened before." Eventually, the businessman was able to explain that he had recently hired a new receptionist. A meshulach (someone sent to collect tzedakah, generally on behalf of an organisation) had come to see the man, but he had been in a meeting. Unfamiliar with how she should handle such a situation, the new receptionist told the meshulach that the businessman was busy and simply sent the meshulach on his way. As soon as the businessman finished his meeting and heard what had transpired, he darted straight out into the streets of downtown Johannesburg, running up and down block after block, to try and find the meshulach so he could bring him back to his office and give the man something. But, try as he might, he failed in his attempts to find the man. The businessman explained that, in all of the time that he had been in business, he had never had someone come asking for money who was turned away without having received anything.

That's what it means to see one's money as belonging to Hashem – and to see oneself as being a gabbai regarding that money. We're not doing people a "favour" or being "generous" by sharing "our" money with them – it's the very reason and purpose for which Hashem gave us that money in the first place.

It is with much sadness that we must note the passing of Neil Jacobson, a"h, who had been responsible for the distribution of *Jewish Life* since our very first issue almost 10 years ago. Neil always went above and beyond the call of duty for us – a truly loyal, dedicated, hard worker, and a mensch. He will be sorely missed. On behalf of everyone at JL, we wish his wife Merle, his children Yakira and Meiron, and his sister Sharlyn long life. May Hashem comfort them.

ROBERT SUSSMAN,
EDITOR

[1] See The American Freshman – 30 Year Trends (1997) and https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/06/in-defense-of-a-try-hard-generation/394535/ and http://time.com/money/4216707/college-freshman-survey-jobs-cost-student-protests/
[2] Peirush to Megillas Rus
[3] Peirush to Sefer Yonah

PHOTOGRAPH: SUPPLIED

ON THE COVER: A BAR GRAPH ILLUSTRATING LOSSES AND GAINS OVER A PERIOD OF TIME - ONE OF THE STANDARD TOOLS USED FOR TRACKING FINANCIAL SUCCESS AND DETERMINING WHEN AND WHERE TO INVEST.

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