

*Toward a Renewed
Ethic of Jewish
Philanthropy*

EDITED BY
Yossi Prager

Robert S. Hirt, Series Editor

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Series Editor's Preface

Especially in a time of economic stress, the sage Hillel's maxim, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, and if for myself, what am I, and if not now, when?" aptly frames our challenge for establishing priorities for Jewish philanthropy. The focus in our society on personal achievement, rather than on responsibility for the community as a whole, is evident in young people's career choices and in the decline of interest in supporting organized, institutional Jewish life.

This is no less true in the realm of religious life, when personal growth commands greater attention than concern for the welfare and holiness of communal life. Seeking spirituality is essentially a private matter; pursuing holiness (*Kedusha*) is an aspiration achieved in a communal setting. As an example, the recitation of *Kaddish*, an act of holiness (a *davar shebkedusha*), can only take place in the presence of a minyan—a quorum of ten—symbolically representative of the Jewish people (*Knesset Yisrael*) as a whole. While individual growth and supporting one's own ideological group are praiseworthy, concern

for the communal welfare is a paramount Jewish value for advancing our people's mission in the world.

This volume, the nineteenth in the Orthodox Forum Series, capably edited by Yossi Prager, Executive Director of The AVI CHAI Foundation in North America, invites us to rethink the way we go about allocating our philanthropic resources. Will we choose to lend support only to those entities that benefit Orthodox Jews and strengthen Orthodox Judaism? If so, what would Hillel say about sectarianism within the Jewish People? Proverbs 3:17 reminds us: "The Torah's ways are pleasant, and all its pathways promote peace." If the thrust of Orthodox Jewish philanthropy is primarily inner-directed, will respect for our Torah way of life be enhanced or diminished in the broader community? The sensitive philanthropist, regardless of his or her own personal or ideological commitments, will feel the pain and the need not only of other Jews, but of fellow human beings—all created in the image of God. The implication of this vision should guide the way we educate in our schools, synagogues, and institutions.

It is our hope that the thought-provoking articles in this volume, authored by scholars in diverse disciplines, drawing upon both classical Jewish and contemporary sources, will provide the reader with new insights to inform the philanthropic choices we make individually and as a community.

Robert S. Hirt
October 2009