

Mort Meyerson

BA '61, ECONOMICS AND PHILOSOPHY, FORMER CHAIRMAN & CEO, PEROT SYSTEMS (1992-98; \$100 MILLION TO \$1 BILLION); FORMER PRESIDENT, EDS (1975-86; \$200 MILLION TO \$4.4 BILLION)

AS TOLD TO ARUNI GUNASAGAREM



When I first retired in 1986 at 48 years old, I asked myself the question, “Is this all there is to life?” I had been a CEO, I had financial security, I had great friends and a devoted family. I wasn’t unhappy, but I didn’t feel fully successful given my financial and work success.

So I began a search to understand the meaning of life, and through my search I have come to define success in a different way. I began by

studying the framework of the Jewish philosophy of tzedakah.

Tzedakah has twin objectives. One is to help people in need, whether it is financial or emotional, a need for shelter or food. And this is an obligation, a commandment from God that if you have excess you must help other people, period. The second piece of tzedakah is that your objective should be to create a society that doesn’t have needy people, and that’s very different from taking care of needy people.

I decided that I would actively work toward tzedakah through the Morton H. Meyerson Family Foundation. I had always given to charity, but I did it by sending checks. Now I also try to send myself with the money. I evaluate the people I plan to help as if I were going to hire them. I find out what they do well and how they are going to take care of the money I give them. In this process, I am looking for tzaddikim, or holy people, and when I find them, I support them in whatever manner is most appropriate to their cause. I also try to connect them with other people who will help them.

The first tzaddik I found was an ex-prostitute who runs a home for throwaway children in Tel Aviv. Most of the kids come from abusive families, and she provides a safe haven for them.

Another tzaddik is Rev. Bruce Buchanan, a Presbyterian minister in Dallas who runs the Stewpot, a soup kitchen for the homeless. Not only does he provide food, he also supplies dental and medical care, drug and alcohol counseling, and many other programs that are absolutely vital to these people. What’s really amazing is that he does all of this with an annual budget of only \$1 million.

So now our foundation strives to be a node in a neural network called the greater community of human beings trying to help each other. I am a connector. It’s interesting that that’s what I did in business for 40 years. So, I have been applying part of my business expertise within the tzedakah perspective, and I find it very rewarding. Through the concept of tzedakah, I’m beginning to feel more whole, more successful, than I did in 1986 when I retired from EDS and in 1998 when I retired from Perot Systems.

Every one of the tzaddikim I know could be doing something else — living a more comfortable life — but they don’t because they are committed to helping other people. My sense is that they are doing it with a huge sense of satisfaction, and they are connected, and they feel successful.

As for myself, I feel like I’m still on the path, still trying to be a completely successful person.

This is the first in a year-long series co-produced for THE ALCALDE by Aruni Gunasagarem, BBA '92, MBA '98, an entrepreneur (Babble Soft) and Pam Losefsky, a freelance writer and editor.