

**Institute News:
Science and G-d**

Professor Yaakov Friedman, former Rector of the Jerusalem College of Technology and Professor of Physics, recently spoke for the Institute on the topic of "Classical mechanics, quantum mechanics, relativity theory and the unity of G-d and Creation". Father-in-law of local Rabbi Dudu Lider (Chabad House for Israeli Backpackers, Melbourne), his talk followed a series of earlier talks by leading scientists and mathematicians on science and religion, Professor Avraham Hasofer, Professor Emeritus of the University of New South Wales and Professor Yaakov Brawer, McGill University Montreal. In all of these speakers there is the common theme of the ultimate convergence of science and Torah. To hear an audio file of the lecture, please go to: <http://www.ijc.com.au/files/2010-04-01.mp3>



Professor Yaakov Friedman

Breakfast seminars on the Noahide laws

The Institute is holding a series of breakfast seminars on several of the Noahide laws. Several State and Federal politicians are among the participants. Two seminars are to be opened to the general public: on the prohibitions of idolatry and blasphemy, explaining their content and significance. The seminars are to be held 8-9 am on 7 and 14 May. For further information and registration see: <http://www.ijc.com.au/flyers/2010/2010-05-07.pdf>

Reprint of Institute publications

The Institute is currently reprinting two monographs. One, *Perspectives on the Noahide laws – Universal Ethics*, by Rabbi Shimon Cowen, which sets out the world view of the Noahide laws from philosophical, religious, psychological, social and political perspectives. The second monograph, *Maimonides Principles*, also by Rabbi Shimon Cowen, sets out the 13 principles of faith written by the great medieval Jewish codifier and philosopher, Maimonides, as a system, illuminated through the teachings of Chassidic thought.

ESSAY



Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen
Social policy: core and symptom

Medicine speaks about cause and symptom. If a person is fundamentally inwardly healthy, then a mere symptom of ill health – a headache, a runny nose, a cough – could be treated with an aspirin, a spray or a lozenge bought over the counter. A doctor would judge that because there is no deep underlying health problem, it is enough to *manage* the symptoms. If the symptoms become serious, or they indicate that something is systemically wrong, one has to look at the core health of the person, for an *inner* malady.

Carrying the analogy to society, the inner health of society is its values, the external symptom of ill health is socially dysfunctional behaviour. A healthy society can cope with the individual dysfunctional behaviour by managing it through police, welfare agencies and so on. A society with rampant dysfunction and breakdown makes a serious mistake by seeking simply to manage the symptoms. It must examine its inner health: the values by which people actually live.

We see in our society increasing phenomena of social illness: youths carrying knives, a spiraling drug-driven and alcohol-heightened life of crime. One answer is to put on more police, to punish offenders more severely. Another, complimentary answer is to find the root of the crime, which tends over and over again to be shattered families, or families without a clear transmitted moral education. The utterly false happiness of drugged or alcoholic bliss replaces the quest for meaning. The solidarity, security and warmth of a strong family life is replaced with the miserable solidarity of gang friendships or street fraternity.

Our society participated in a global financial crisis driven by greed and indifference. It was successfully managed by stimulus spending, but has the possibility of its recurrence been treated through inculcation of an ethic of social corporate responsibility? There is a significant rate of teenage and other "unwanted" pregnancy. "Unwanted pregnancy" was treated in Victoria in 2008 by one of the world's and history's most radical laws of abortion on demand, featuring compulsion of non-compliant doctors. It did not seek to address or redress the core reasons why these pregnancies occur, or why they are "unwanted".

There are many features of social breakdown, which are not necessarily expressed through violence or aberrant outward behaviours. There is youth and adult depression, a culture of nihilism and despair, a hollow hedonism, which does not necessarily come to health breakdown or suicide. A writer says of Australian society some fifty years ago, that a young person stepped out into a life where family was strong, society was stable and there was a human climate of *optimism*. None of these are *manifest* today. But it has not been widely registered in political consciousness that anything is wrong at the core, or if so, that politics needs to tackle the core – the corrosion of values.

Servicing the symptoms and redrawing the core

The disinterest in the core – the lapsed values, the broken relationships and human institutions – and exclusive preoccupation with the symptoms or behaviours themselves, has a paradoxical result: aggravation of the crisis at the core. The provision of abortion on demand with forced compliance for doctors only services the ongoing decline in commitment and a norm of promiscuity. The abortion law effectively teaches that pre-nascent life does not seriously factor. Concerning sexuality in the context of commitment and responsibility, which could produce and make children “wanted”, the law is absolutely silent. By default, the law endorses the sexualisation of society, which is already given celebrity status through the antics of the “stars” in magazines at every supermarket checkout. On the value of a freely coupling and uncoupling *de facto* culture, there is no judgment. But there was a Relationships Bill passed in the Victorian Parliament overhauling the law of *de facto* unions to endow them with all the benefits (and some may not have realized, also the liabilities) of marriage and make it a vehicle for a functional equivalent of homosexual marriage.

There has also been a political scramble to service the trend created by the new social default position, subject to little discussion and at variance with thousands of years of religious tradition, which has granted equal normativity to homosexual practice. Aside from the Relationships Bill, Government programs now go into schools to “validate”, which means in effect to cultivate, homosexuality in the unformed sexual identities of young teenage children. In order to produce children for homosexual couples, legislation is passed for the “commissioning” of children through IVF and surrogacy for homosexual couples, single parents and persons to whom the child bears no biological relationship. Implicitly or explicitly all this service legislation redefines one human norm and institution after another: a replica of marriage for homosexuals, the permission to destroy unborn babies on demand, and the definition of what a child and what a parent is, under the

new IVF and surrogacy laws

Government with single-minded commercial interest promoted a culture of gambling, glamorizing it by making a Casino the centrepiece of a world city, Melbourne. Its worry since then is not with the damage at the core (glamorizing a not very constructive activity), but with the symptoms, limiting the social and family breakdown caused by “problem gambling”. It embarked upon a program to “metropolitanize” the city by making alcohol available through many new outlets including hairdressers and cafes. Having stimulated a drinking culture, it is then focused only on damage control, the issue of extra police to cope with violence derivative from increased drinking. Its preoccupation with the symptoms and its servicing of the trends, and its blindness or indifference to the damaged human core, has only compounded the illness at the core, the crisis in values, which produces the trend.

The needed political agenda: strengthening the human core

Politics must now be concerned with the human centre, which is the reflection upon, and the affirmation of, the highest values which civilization possesses. It must return to basic relationships and institutions, to the ideal of marriage and family and the value of the effort, commitment and self-giving which make relationships work and endure; to a culture of responsibility and self-control; to the value of human life including pre-nascent human life; to the knowledge that economic relationships are human relationships and cannot be governed by deception and greed; to the value of social stability, which means the abhorrence of violence and wariness of the cultures which undermine it.

The life of the human spirit, which has been made a matter of embarrassment through a culture of ongoing secularization, must be recognized again. Arguably there is no greater succour, no greater inner resource a young (or old) person can possess than the strength of the spirit and the power of self-transcendence, responsibility and commitment to altruistic ideals. The values ideal in our society has been helped into decline because the family which transmitted it, has broken down, and because it is starved of education. People who come from stable homes, and homes which moreover communicate a self-transcending vision, will most likely not take drugs, not practice violence on the streets, not steal, not treat those with whom they are in business with deceit. They will not be wasteful of resources or cruel to animals, because these are deliberate works of their Creator. They will more likely not be afraid, not be depressed, they will embark upon and embrace a life worth living. The relationship to core values must become the key criterion and consideration of social policy and legislation.