

# Halachic Perspectives on AIDS\*

**Lord Immanuel Jakobovitz**

In trying to bring some Halachic perspectives to bear on AIDS and its ramifications, I see our role as Jews here at a three-fold level. First, we are halachically under an obligation to promote all human beings to be subject to the “*Sheva Mitzvot B’nei Noach*,” to the seven Noachide commandments, the fundamental moral order which includes laws on sexual morality, on incest, on adultery, and on anything that constitutes a violation of those normal constraints within which we are perfectly entitled to exercise our sexual drive. There is, then, the obligation to do whatever we can to promote the understanding, the knowledge and the study of these laws, and the submission to them – this is part of a halachic dictate laid down in the Rambam, in his Code of *Hilchot Melachim*, as a religious obligation: “*Lachuf et kol ha’olam*” – to compel, as far as we have it in our power to do so, the whole world to abide by these laws.

So to begin with, we are directly under a religious obligation to share our moral commitments with our fellow humans, beyond the confines of our own people.

Secondly, there is the element of *Kiddush Hashem* which is quite distinct and separate, that we ought to be seen as Jews to be in the forefront of the moral pioneering, ethical engineering, in fulfilling our national purpose, which is to blaze a trail of moral advancement for the world. In the past, we have been conscious of this assignment and have contributed enormously to the enrichment of the human experience, in moral terms. Ideas which today are commonplace and taken for granted the world over, were initiated by our people. Concepts like brotherhood of man, social justice, human rights as we call them today – all of these are part of our Jewish heritage. After centuries and millennia of aloneness in the commitment to these values, they are only now beginning to be shared by the rest of the human family. We are charged to fulfill the promise as given

---

\* Revised Transcript of Address to Union of Jewish Students Hillel House, London

towards the end of the blessings and curses in the Torah:

“And all the nations of the world shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you – *ki shem Hashem nikra alecha*,” viz. that we live a Godly life, an exemplary life within our home life, our family life, with integrity, and moral values. This in itself is a second assignment given to our people, and therefore should give us a sense of urgency and importance in seeking to be heard and seen in any public argument that impinges on moral considerations, whether on abortion, or on AIDS, or on anything that is of moral nature, we should be seen as Jews to play our due part to contributing to public enlightenment and to the elevation, the ennoblement, of public life and of the social atmosphere within which we live.

Thirdly, and above all, Jews owe it to themselves to know what their heritage has to say. We shouldn't have to learn from newspaper articles and from other faiths that have borrowed many of our moral concepts from us: we should not be dependent on absorbing and cultivating moral values from those who were themselves originally nourished, sustained and inspired by our Jewish education, that we turn out young people who have been to Hebrew classes, and sometimes to day schools, but who are utterly alien in terms of understanding Jewish teachings. And I think that this is one of the saddest comments on the failure and indeed bankruptcy of Jewish teaching on basic moral values relating to our present-day experience. This is catastrophic! We have failed! Yes, we do teach them about observances of different kinds relating to Sabbath and prayers and laws of Kashrut – but to imprison Judaism in the kitchen, the Synagogue, the cemetery, is doing violence to the very basis of Jewish teachings: and if you just leaf through the pages of the Tanach and the Prophets, you will see that very little space is given there to matters of ritual, and the bulk is given over to moral and social relations between man and man based on decency, honesty and moral values.

So, on all three scores, we are here under a direct challenge to participate, to enrich our own understanding and research into how we would respond to what is, after all, an unprecedented scourge that now menaces the entire human race. Perhaps not yet sufficiently appreciated is the scale of the calamity that threatens us. I am told that it is anticipated that, if the present trends are maintained for the rest of this century (which is another 14 years or so), it can be expected that the number of fatal casualties from

AIDS will amount to more than the total number of dead in the two World Wars, in excess of 40 million – worldwide of course. So we are dealing here with a calamity of such enormity in terms of numbers, not to mention the suffering that goes with it prior to death, that it staggers the imagination. Moreover, it is, I suppose, the first time since the days of Noah's Flood that we have such a universal visitation of suffering. There were, in the Middle Ages, plagues in vast epidemics; but they were localised pockets of outbreaks that ravaged whole populations, and yet limited to different parts of Europe at one time, occasionally elsewhere, nothing like the universal plague that is now manifest in the depths of Africa, in the United States, in this country, in Europe and, alas, also in Israel. So the universality of the phenomenon in itself is something entirely unprecedented.

Now, I wish to make at least a passing reference to a sensitive aspect of AIDS, and its victims – and I think we ought to be clear about this. One of my criticisms of the Government campaign is precisely that it fudges the issue and tries to blur the facts that stare us in the face. 96%, I gather from medical literature to-date, of the fatalities so far from AIDS are to be found among the homosexual community, or among so-called “high-risk” groups. And it has spread beyond, and the dangers are great that the contagion will increase. But at the moment, it is clearly a highly selective form of visitation, and therefore obviously raises the most profound theological and moral problems of interpretation of cause and effect, of the role of the supernatural, of God, of Divine Justice and punishment.

I will merely say, as I put it in my article in *The Times*, that from my reading of Jewish sources, it would appear that under no circumstances would we be justified in branding the incidence of the disease, individually or collectively, as punishment that singles out individuals or groups for wrongdoing and lets them suffer as a consequence. We are not inspired enough, prophetic enough, we have not the vision, that would enable us to link, as an assertion of certainty, any form of human travail, grief, bereavement or suffering in general with shortcomings of a moral nature – especially our generation, living as we still do, in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, where millions of Jews were done to death with the most unspeakable brutality. We certainly should beware of ever identifying specific forms of grief, suffering, or anxiety with specific

moral or any other shortcomings. It is not part of the Jewish doctrine of reward and punishment to so identify individual cases with individual experiences of great anguish. I therefore do not go along with, but on the contrary, strongly reject and oppose those preachers or would-be preachers who declare that it is Divine vengeance, that the wrath of God is being visited on those who deserve it because they live in the cesspools of evil. On the contrary, we should seek to stretch out whatever hand of help, of understanding, of solace, of compassion one can to sufferers, not to inflict, in addition to the agony through which they go, the additional humiliation and indignity and reproof of saying 'you deserved it.' This is utterly un-Jewish, and is utterly to be rejected. But having said that, we should at the same time add, that certainly we can see here that the particular visitation that now devastates people potentially by the million, is a consequence of a form of life that is morally unacceptable, and utterly repugnant to us.

It is one thing to speak of a consequence, and it is quite another thing to speak of a punishment. The illustration I used was if you warn a child not to play with fire, lest he gets burnt, and the child then gets burnt, then the burning may not be a punishment for not listening, but it certainly is a consequence. Likewise, I think until we make clear that AIDS is a consequence, we do not get to the root of it. I think we should declare in very plain and explicit terms indicating that our society violated some of the norms of the Divine Law, and of the natural law, and that as a consequence we pay a price, and an exceedingly heavy price. This certainly is Jewish doctrine. So there is a clear line of demarcation between punishment and consequence to be drawn. I need hardly spell out to an informed audience, certainly one that is likely to know the rudiments of Jewish teaching, that any form of sexual gratification outside marriage cannot be condoned by Jewish law. Whether this is pre-marital, or extra-marital, or whether this is altogether unnatural in the form of homosexuality – we utterly disapprove of this as an abomination. It is treated by Biblical law as a moral aberration that we cannot come to terms with.

Some argue that there are innate, instinctive, natural inclinations or aberrations which some of us are born with; they do not follow the norms of heterosexual love of most of the population. It is also claimed that a genetic condition can predispose towards an irregularity in the form of homosexuality. Therefore, it is argued

that we have to accept this, it is a fact of life that this exists. We cannot accept this argument. One might as well say that it is only a natural drive, a natural urge, that accounts for any unusual or abnormal passion or instinct within us. So that, if a married man is suddenly attracted to someone other than his wife to gratify a sexual urge – can he then also claim that this is just a normal drive which should therefore be condoned or sanctioned? Yet we still will maintain the need for exercising self-control and discipline to prevent extramarital relations. By succumbing to temptation because it is natural one could justify the breach of all the Ten Commandments. Killing a marriage, and killing a human being (murder and adultery) are placed side by side in the Torah because they are regarded as equally heinous. In other words, the fact that an act is natural does not make it any less abhorrent or criminal.

This is consistent with a very fundamental Jewish belief. We believe that we are created as human beings in order to master our lusts, our passions, our natural drives and urges. And that is precisely the uniqueness of man, that we are not to become the defenceless victims, slaves, to our instincts, surrendering to them. We have the ability within us to exercise the moral control that enables us to “discriminate between right and wrong,” even if it is against our natural urges. And, just as we occasionally have to overcome the natural urge of hunger, by having to fast, which requires an act of self-discipline, or by abstaining from any number of normal pursuits that the constant exercise in self-discipline requires of us. so here also, the mere fact that some urge is natural is not an excuse for surrendering to it.

Now, let me turn to some more specific problems raised by AIDS in a Jewish context. The other day, I saw a disturbing article in an American orthodox publication dealing with some Halachic ramifications of AIDS (“*AIDS: A Traditional Response*,” by Rabbi Barry Freundel, in *Jewish Action*, Winter 1986/87, pp.48-57). Evidently reflecting rather more panicky public attitudes prevailing in certain parts of the United States than they do here, the author, a very respectable and erudite Rabbi, suggests that because of the danger that may be involved in passing on the contagion, those who are known to be carriers of the AIDS virus can be denied, and possibly should be denied, the normal rites of *Tahorah*, of purification on death by the *Chevra Kadisha*.

For the “*mis'askim*,” the (usually volunteer) officiants of the

*Chevra Kadisha*, cannot be expected to expose themselves to even the remote danger of catching it, therefore they can deny this precious and sacred entitlement to those who may be so affected. Similarly, the suggestion is made that if there are children who happen to be carriers, (they can even be congenital carriers by birth as we now know), one would not only be entitled, but required to exclude them from Jewish schools, from Jewish instruction under public auspices for fear that they may transmit the virus to others.

From medical information as far as it is available to me, there is no justification whatsoever for either suggestion; therefore Halachically such a ban would not be warranted since AIDS cannot be passed on under the conditions mentioned here if normal precautions are taken such as by the members of the *Chevra* wearing gloves. Certainly, we would not want to contribute to creating a sense of public hysteria which may itself undermine the resilience of society to a situation as threatening as this. Of course, were it to be established by some future research that indeed such danger does exist, unless public measures are taken to exclude all forms of contact between those affected and others, then there would be no question that it would become a Halachic imperative to prevent this.

Such a situation would involve an important Halachic principle. If there were five people in a boat, remote from land, and one of them, it would be discovered, suffers from (let us say) the bubonic plague, which is highly contagious, threatening the lives of the other four, then he becomes in Halacha a "*Rodef*," a "pursuer." Now, a pursuer or an aggressor does not have to be guilty. He can be an innocent party; so long as he pursues someone else's life, he forfeits his life and may be killed to save his victim or victims. In other words, you may save an innocent life at the direct cost of the pursuer's, innocent or guilty, in the fulfilment of the normal Torah regulation on the law of "*Rodef*," of aggressor or pursuer. To prove that a party need not be guilty to be a pursuer, or to come within this category, I would refer to the ruling of the Rambam – who mentions it expressly as based on a passage in the Talmud which seems to imply this – whereby an unborn child threatening the life of the mother may be destroyed deliberately if necessary, because the child is a "pursuer." Although the child is certainly innocent – the child did not deliberately set out to threaten the mother's life – nevertheless, its claim to life is set aside because of its categorisation as a "*Rodef*." in order to save a life that is threatened, that is under

attack. Accordingly, in respect of innocent bystanders, third parties, exposed to the risk of infection, then those who deliberately or innocently pass on that infection would come within the category of "*Rodef*," and society would be entitled to protect themselves against any such threat to their lives. So far the Halacha, at least in theory.

Whether this could ever be implemented in practice, merely from the point of view of social realities. I frankly cannot see. There are, of course, also weighty counter-indications, such as the danger that AIDS sufferers may regard *themselves* as victims of "pursuit," and therefore intent on spreading the infection deliberately, thereby protecting their own lives by seeking safety in numbers. I do not think there are any ready-made answers on how to deal with unprecedented situations of these proportions. Other problems, too, are baffling and defy any definitive answers: for instance, whether, as widely advocated, we should increasingly think of compulsory testing of people to discover if they are carriers or not. Considering that the incubation period can extend up to eight years, and during that time the illness can be transmitted, when would one be subject to such test? And to whom would one communicate the result – the patient on whom one would thereby inflict a shattering trauma, or others who would then ostracize the patient or otherwise discriminate against him? All these are frightful questions for which no immediate and reliable answers can yet be found.

Other practical issues, too, cannot easily be resolved. Assuming we do have compulsory testing, what do we do with those identified as carriers? Make them wear labels? Or, as has already been suggested in some quarters, tattoo them in certain parts of their bodies to brand them with recognisable marks? This, again, staggers the human mind at the moment. Therefore I do not think that one should glibly and superficially reach out for answers that will require, first of all, the careful cultivation of a social conscience, of a moral conscience, in the world, before one can begin to find socially and morally acceptable answers to questions of this magnitude. But, Halachically, the law certainly would be that those whose lives are in any way threatened have the right to take every measure to protect themselves under the law of "*Rodef*."

I now come to my final and main point. My major criticism of the current campaign, as I expressed it the other day to the Secretary of State for Health, Norman Fowler, is that we are too readily prepared to promote the second best, instead of in the first

instance advocating the ultimate and ideal solution. I have read in *The Jewish Chronicle* what Jewish young people are supposed to think: the overwhelming majority of views, as recorded in the interviews held, seemed to be that one cannot expect young Jews and Jewesses today to live a truly clean life, to live an absolutely moral life according to Jewish doctrines of modesty and of self-control; therefore one must come to terms with the fact that people will have pre-marital adventures and the like. I could not think of a greater slur on our young generation, a greater offense to the dignity and integrity of young people than to make such a generalised accusation, assuming the inability of young people to live up to what used to be the most treasured virtue of our Jewish heritage, and that is the sanctity and the stability of the Jewish home. I think we are underestimating the power of resistance and of resilience or indeed even the capacity of society generally retracing its steps and going through some kind of a moral revolution. Nothing could be more defeatist than simply to surrender faith in the rising generation, believing that we can never restore the norms of decency by limiting any form of sexual intimacies to relations within marriage exclusively.

And as I reminded the Secretary of State, I have no doubt that at present, the damage done of to the fabric of society by the erosion of marriages – in terms of the number of misfits resulting from divorce, of young people being raised without a father and a mother, without the love and compassion with which they should be raised, plus the social irritations with their enormous cost to society, to the nation, incurred by broken homes and single parents – that damage is far greater, at the moment, than the damage done by AIDS; marriage breakdowns cost the nation appreciable more than AIDS. Therefore the black cloud of this scourge may have its silver lining, as it were, challenging us to restore the respect for marriage – above all, by education, by properly training and preparing for marriage. The whole attitude requires a thorough revision. Currently, it is utterly irresponsible. We simply allow people to have fling trying out one marriage, and if it does not work, tomorrow they will have another fling. The lightheartedness with which people enter into it, flows from not being prepared for the earnestness of it, and the responsibilities that are involved. If we could invest only a fraction of the resources that currently have to be spent on a colossal scale on looking after AIDS victims, if we could spend that



on fortifying home life, we would probably contribute more to containing AIDS and help to overcome the tragedy that faces us.

Altogether, the campaign presently conducted over the media and by leaflets dropped into every home is in some respect misguided, and in others perhaps even counter-productive. The slogan “Don’t die of ignorance” is completely misleading. Ignorance is not a fatal disease. People die of high-risk behaviour, not of ignorance. Moreover, the condom campaign in effect condones immorality.

Telling people “protect yourself against the consequences of doing the wrong thing” is just like saying to them “we will send you into a contaminated environment, but we will provide you with gas masks and with protective clothing so that nothing will happen to you.” It is, I think, utterly irresponsible to say “go and do whatever you like, but we will give you advice on how to protect yourself against the consequences.”

Worse still, the campaign may well give a false sense of security. Not only is the condom itself not always absolutely reliable, but in the end, when the moment of temptation comes, the lovers at the height of their passion will forget about the protection, and therefore relying on it will contribute to spreading this plague instead of containing it, as the campaign seeks to do. So the dangers are great, and the whole focus here may be wrong.

Let me conclude with a more general observation of some relevance to our situation. The Biblical record begins before and at the dawn of the Patriarchal period with a striking contrast. There was Noah, who lived at a time of universal corruption: “*ki hishchit kol basar*” – precisely the same kind of corruption that we encounter today – and he saw a whole world drowning and yet did not care. He built his own ark, safe for himself, but he did not pray for the world, did not work to prevent the spread of the contagion and looked on safely from the security of his shelter. That has to be contrasted, ten generations later, to Abraham, who also faced a city that was corrupt. Sodom. From this derives the word “sodomy” which is the very reference to what we are talking about. Abraham could not tolerate this. For him the city’s doom was something that stirred his conscience. There was not a single Jew in Sodom; nevertheless, he pleaded against the destruction of Sodom. That is how Jewish history begins, because no Jewish heart can be indifferent to people suffering, deserved or undeserved, corrupt or not corrupt. When

fellow human beings are in danger, we are to plead for them, to work for them, to have compassion, to extend our feelings of empathy to them.

Similarly, the very last message of the Biblical reading on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the holiest days of the year, is the story of Yonah's mission to Niniveh. Here, a prophet of God is sent out from the land of God to a pagan city, Niniveh. Miles away from his own homeland, across the ocean he was told "go and warn the population" to ward off the doom that would be theirs. The erosion of moral values would eventually rob them of salvation. The prophet tried to deny his mission and escape from it. But he was eventually forced back to it because our responsibility extends to pagan cities just as much as to our own community. We cannot simply wash our hands and say "it is not our business" and we are not concerned. That is the final and ultimate message of the whole of the High Holidays.

However, before that, the reading of the Law for Mincha on Yom Kippur before the Haftarah is read, is the passage from Leviticus dealing with sexual morality and immorality. How does that relate to Yom Kippur? What has this to do with Yom Kippur? Yom Kippur is the one day on which we must not have intimate relations even with our own wives, let alone with outsiders. The real Holy of Holies of life is how we conduct ourselves in the most intimate moments. We are to be aware that God watches us, not only how we deport ourselves outside, in public, but in the most intimate moments of our existence. Someone watches, and we are accountable. That is the final message of the Torah readings on Yom Kippur. It is of no value to go through the whole procedure of atonement on Yom Kippur, of reconciliation with God, spending a whole day in Sanctuary, if we are not first and foremost to have a "send-off message," as it were, of Yom Kippur, a message on inner cleanliness, on purity of thought and of mind, on the controls which sanctify us, and which make us different from the brutes. The very heart of the Jewish message is, as I have put it, that more important than clean needles are clean thoughts and clean conduct.

If we as Jews are not going to represent this message, if we are going to despair of rescuing a generation that is afflicted and faces a colossal calamity, if we are simply going to surrender faith that it can be done, then we are guilty of a betrayal of our own people, and by extension of our fellow men. I think an enormous opportunity, as

well as challenge, faces us to vindicate our survival after 4000 years. For if we did not still have something unique to contribute to the betterment of the human condition, and to the elimination of vice and crime and immorality from the world, then we might as well bow out. We have not had such a bad run, 4000 years as a people, we have done pretty well. Other bigger peoples than ours have come and gone and joined the limbo of history. Unless we are still indispensable by making incomparable contributions to the advancement of the human order and the progress of the moral law, we have nothing further to do, and we should have no complaints if the world now would shed no tears over the disappearance of our people.

If, however, we do justify our continued existence, vindicating our claim to survival by still making ourselves indispensable, and creating something that used to be exemplary (even Goyim used to hold up the Jewish home and its stability as an example), if we do that, then maybe, we will merit once again the final conclusion of that verse: *“V’ra’u kol amei ha’aretz ki shem Hashem nikra alecha v’yar’u mimekah”* – and all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they will have respect for you.” We will regain that reverence, that awe, and that respect which will ultimately ensure our physical as well as spiritual safety. By virtue of our contribution to the moral integrity and physical safety of all human brothers, for whose well-being we care desperately, we will merit our own security and assure the fulfillment of our purpose.

### **Memorandum on AIDS**

Submitted by the Chief Rabbi to the Social Services Committee of the House of Commons

*This memorandum deals specifically with the public response to the challenge of AIDS, with special reference to the Government campaign as projected through the media.*

*I realise of course that there will be many new complex moral problems to be faced beyond those to which I have addressed myself. They will concern, for instance, questions on compulsory testing, the identification of carriers, the right of insurance companies or employees to obtain medical data otherwise protected by confidentiality, the risks to life in experimenting on possible cures or vaccines, and numerous other such perplexities. I do not know how far the remit of the*

*Committee includes considering such questions. Nor could I readily produce answers for which I could claim moral authenticity in the light of Jewish teachings. But I am prepared to probe into these issues if invited to give an opinion on them.*

The Government is to be applauded on the urgency, boldness, and effectiveness manifest in its campaign. It appears to strike the right balance between hysteria and complacency, between alerting, even alarming, the population on the potentially awesome threat posed by the scourge, and reassuring citizens against undue panic which could lead to communal neurosis already widespread in the USA.

It is also important to consider the possible effects of causing the "high-risk" groups to sense that they may be threatened by mounting discrimination in employment, education and social integration. Such a feeling, if allowed to become acute, could well encourage a sense of despair and resentment, breeding the desire to seek safety in numbers, even by deliberately spreading the contagion. The utmost care is therefore needed in dealing with the affected groups compassionately and with understanding, individually as well as collectively, so as to ward off the danger of major social tensions erupting into violence and other threats to the population at large.

On the other hand, I am disturbed by the general thrust of the publicity campaign, as epitomised by the slogan "Don't Die of Ignorance." Ignorance is not a fatal disease, and the real source of the danger through irresponsible behaviour ought to be far more explicitly spelt out.

Of course, I appreciate that a government cannot take a moral stance, particularly on an issue on which public opinion is widely divided, and which affects so delicately the most intimate human relations. I accept the need for moral neutrality. But I cannot accept anything which publicly condones or encourages immorality. The present campaign does.

By speaking of "safe sex" or "safer sex," and by advising on recourse on condoms "unless you are sure of your partner," the campaign officially accepts some form of extra-marital relations as the norm. This introduces into millions of perfectly moral homes, and especially of children and young people hitherto sheltered from exposure to indecency and marital faithlessness, notions that had been utterly alien and unknown to them. This itself is immoral, and

may in time prove a source of major moral corruption for the very element of society most concerned to preserve its immunity to pernicious influences of this kind. The slant of the campaign also provides justification for deviations from moral norms for those who may have hitherto looked on “casual sex” and promiscuous conduct with some degree of disquiet or even guilt. This, too, is immoral.

Altogether, in effect the campaign encourages promiscuity by advertising it. It tells people not what is right, but how to do wrong and get away with it – much like sending people into a contaminated atmosphere, but providing them with gas-masks and protective clothing. It quite wrongly assumes some inability to exercise self-control, which is clearly the ultimate answer to the spread of the affliction.

Equally worrying is the sense of false security promoted in the campaign. By creating the impression that condoms are an effective safeguard, one can ultimately only increase the danger. Neither are condoms absolutely reliable when used, nor are they always likely to be used in moments when passions are aroused. Condoms cannot replace self-discipline as a shield against infection, and any pretense to the contrary is dangerous in the extreme. By promising safety, the campaign would only increase the spread of AIDS in the long run.

Moral attitudes are clearly already undergoing some significant changes, as borne out in the latest Gallup Poll (commissioned by the Bradman Charitable Foundation and issued in February 1987). It shows that 74% of the sample (1.115 people aged 16 and over) agreed that the only way of avoiding AIDS was to stick to one faithful partner, whilst 96% wanted schools to warn children about the dangers of casual sex. The Government should not do anything to inhibit this trend or to impede its gaining momentum.

It should also be realised that far greater than the suffering and expenditure imposed by AIDS on society is the social damage and financial cost caused by marriage break-downs or “alternative lifestyle” – in particular the appalling predilection to crime, violence and drug-addiction among children raised in the absence of a loving home, as well as in terms of inefficiency, anxiety and sheer desperation while at work among people afflicted by marital failure or unhappiness. Apart from the astronomical economic cost of this drag on output and social services, the resultant depression in turn drives people to sexual adventures outside marriage which cannot but aggravate the incidence of AIDS. The public campaign should

therefore be thoroughly revised and redirected towards emphasising marital stability as the only “safe” norm. Encouragement should be given, if only by token contributions to marriage training and counselling agencies, to some intensive preparation for the responsibilities of marriage inside and outside schools, eventually as a prerequisite for marriage registrations, in much the same way as driving courses leading to successful tests are taken for granted as a condition for the issue of driving licences to prevent damage and injury through inadequate training or recklessness. Sex education at schools should be specifically geared to preparation for marriage, including the avoidance of pre-marital sex which cannot but undermine a subsequent marriage as an anti-climax.

At the same time, it is not enough for the positive aspects of the campaign to be more explicit to the point of encouraging fidelity in marriage (not “stable partners” which is a circumlocution for immoral non-marital relations). The negative aspects, too, need to be spelt out more directly. With all the publicity of statistics, the population does not know that 96% of AIDS victims are in the “high risk” groups, and that these are made up overwhelmingly of homosexuals with the rest through promiscuity and drug abuse. These facts must not be concealed by suppression or be fudged by euphemisms. They are as essential in public enlightenment as the knowledge that the virus may be transmitted by unclean needles or infected blood.

In short, the campaign should say plainly: AIDS is the consequence of pre-marital sex, marital infidelity, sexual deviation and social irresponsibility – sacrificing enduring happiness for momentary pleasures, and putting selfish indulgence before duty and discipline. In today’s climate of moral questioning and a greater readiness to revise personal “life-styles,” the message will not go unheeded, and the long-term effects in repairing the social fabric based on solid marriages may prove to be enormous in defending society against and far transcending the awesome ravages of AIDS.

*Source: ASSIA – Jewish Medical Ethics,  
Vol. II, No. 1, January 1991, pp. 3-8*