

# Maimonides Institute

## Award to First Responder Inc.

Dr Benjamin Blech, MD, presented the Maimonides Award to two prominent first responders in New York, to Dr Douglas King and Dr Rodney Leibowitz of First Responder Inc. for their important role especially during and after September 11.

Dr. Blech referred in his presentation, to the history of Maimonides and the very important role it has to play today in the world of terrorism.

The Maimonides Institute, is named after a very special man. This illustrates the appropriate role of the Institute in today's challenges of terrorism and bioterrorism.

Maimonides was born in Cordoba, Spain in 1138 and his family moved several times in his early years in order to escape forced conversion by the Moslems. Eventually he settled in old Cairo, Egypt where he acquired a world-wide reputation both as a doctor (physician) and as a Rabbinic scholar-philosopher.

Maimonides is worth examining in detail, not only because of his intrinsic importance but because no one illustrates better the paramount importance of Torah scholarship in medieval Jewish society. Among the Jewish traditionalists there were three ingredients that were essential to acquiring authority: the family that mattered, commercial success and, most importantly, scholarship. Maimonides had all three. While fame could be won through family and commerce, as his family did, scholarship and learning were the elements in which the Jews had unshakable faith. Maimonides revived a tradition lost among the Jews since the second century, even until modern times, and his efforts were not left to be lost

in antiquity. Since the dry climate of Egypt fostered the natural preservation of documents, the works of Maimonides were left intact for later scholars to recreate the eleventh- and twelfth-century society which formed the background to his works and ideas. He was part of the pre-Renaissance which affected Jewry as well as the Arabic world and Christian Europe. Maimonides' capacity to absorb masses of difficult material, sacred and secular, was developed early



in life. He saw his lifework in a two-fold sense: to reduce the complexity of Torah Law to order and to re-present it on a thoroughly rational basis. To accomplish this he wrote both a code and a commentary.

In 1170, he undertook the codification of talmudic law and the fourteen volumes of the Mishneh Torah took him ten years to finish. By this time, the death of his brother who had supported him, forced Maimonides to take up the practice of medicine. In 1185, he began his most important philosophical work, Guide of the Perplexed, which explained the fundamental theology and philosophy of Judaism and it was finished in 1190.

As an active judge among the Jews, he became the unofficial head of the Egyptian Jewish community and was known by Jews worldwide as well as by many notables



Dr Benjamin Blech

within the Arab world. He wrote extensively on diet, drugs and treatment, ten of his medical works still surviving today. As a physician, he attended some of the most important Arabs of that time and was considered by them to be one of the leading doctors of the world, with particular skill in treating psychosomatic cases. An Arabic verse circulated at that time said: "Galen's medicine is only for the body, but that of Maimonides is for both body and soul." He was heroic in the equality of his treatment of both rich and poor. By the year 1200, Maimonides found it impossible to continue making visits, but he still held his medical, judicial, and theological court until his death in 1204 in his sixty seventh year.

Maimonides' life was devoted wholeheartedly to the service of the Jewish community, and to a lesser extent, to the human community as a whole, in accordance with the central social tenet of Judaism.

With this in mind, Dr. Blech concluded: "It has been said, that the most potent force for changing the world, is not a message, but a model." The model the Maimonides stands for, is very applicable in the times that we are living.