



**MANDEL**  
Mandel Leadership Institute



# HUMANITIES, LIBERAL ARTS AND LEADERSHIP

PROF. JONATHAN COHEN

FOREWORD BY DR. ELI GOTTLIEB

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## About the Mandel Foundation

*“The hallmark of our philanthropy is our commitment to invest in people with the values, ability and passion to change the world.”*

Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel

The Mandel Foundation was established by Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel, of Cleveland, Ohio. Its primary mission is to help provide outstanding leadership for the nonprofit world.

The Foundation supports leadership education programs in its own institutions and at selected universities and organizations. The Foundation has these areas of priority: Leadership, Management of Nonprofits, Higher Education, Jewish Education & Continuity, and Urban Neighborhood Renewal.

The Mandel Foundation’s approach to philanthropy is characterized by a conviction that exceptional leaders, professional and volunteer, are the critical factor in contributing significantly to community and society. Such leaders are guided by a powerful vision of the future that is illuminated by clear purposes, inspired by profound ideas and energized by imaginative resolutions to today’s challenges.

In the summer of 2012, the Mandel Foundation approved an \$18 million grant for the building of the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as well as an annual grant of \$2.5 million for programs. The school will spearhead a revival of the humanities across Israel and at the Hebrew University in particular, where it will anchor the Faculty of Humanities' efforts to strengthen its five new disciplinary schools of History, Philosophy and Religion, Literatures, Arts, and Language Sciences. The Mandel School will be located on the northern edge of the Mount Scopus campus, next to the Yitzhak Rabin Building, which houses the Mandel Institute of Jewish Studies. The construction of the School is expected to be completed in 2014.

### **About the Author**

Professor Jonathan Cohen has served as Chairman of Academic Studies and as Director of the Hebrew University's School of Education. He is a senior faculty member at its Melton Centre for Jewish Education. He holds a doctorate in Jewish thought and education and his main research areas include philosophy of Jewish education, the interpretation of classical Jewish texts and curriculum theory. Prof. Cohen is a graduate of the second cohort of the Mandel Jerusalem Fellows program, and is a member of faculty at the Mandel Leadership Institute.

## Foreword

The Mandel Leadership Institute is best known for the exceptional quality of its graduates, hundreds of whom now lead influential educational institutions in Israel and Jewish communities worldwide.

A lesser known feature of the Mandel Leadership Institute is its unique approach to leadership development. Our programs are designed not only to identify outstanding individuals and to support their professional growth, but also to provide them with opportunities to grapple with competing ideas about the ideal society, the educated person and the worthy life. It is our belief that the process of articulating and justifying one's own vision in the face of serious alternatives forces one to become clearer about one's strategic priorities and core commitments, helping one thereby to become a more effective leader. Put more boldly, the Mandel Leadership Institute's programs rest on the assumption that combinations of talented individuals and profound ideas can ultimately change the world for the better.

If this is true of an individual leader, it is no less true of a leadership institute. Jonathan Cohen's monograph is an attempt to articulate and justify the Mandel Leadership Institute's view of the role of humanities in leadership development. It is not intended as a last word or a definitive statement. Instead, it is intended as a spur to further deliberation and argument among those concerned with the cultivation of educational and social leadership. It has two intended audiences. The first is Mandel faculty, fellows and graduates. It is our hope that the ideas contained herein will provide them with a well-articulated frame of reference within which - and in reaction to which - to conceptualize the kinds of learning that we seek to promote through our programs. The second is anyone working today

in the fields of leadership development or the humanities. It is our hope that the portraits Cohen paints of the possible and the desirable will inspire others to explore the rich and largely untapped potential that the humanities hold for human improvement.

Though the Mandel Leadership Institute has published occasional monographs in the past, this is the first time that we have prepared one exclusively for free, electronic distribution. We invite you to share this document with colleagues and students. When citing the work, please refer to it as such:

Cohen, J. (2012). *Humanities, Liberal Arts and Leadership*.  
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I congratulate Professor Cohen on the elegant, compelling and succinct articulation of his ideas. I look forward to sharing with you future such monographs by additional Mandel faculty members about other aspects of our work.

Dr. Eli Gottlieb

Director, Mandel Leadership Institute

Vice-President, Mandel Foundation-Israel

# Humanities, Liberal Arts and Leadership

Prof. Jonathan Cohen

No one need question the commitment of the Mandel family to the advancement of the humanities in higher education, to the education of leaders, to the liberal arts – to the arts. There is ample evidence for this commitment all around us – here at the Mandel Leadership Institute and at the Hebrew University, to mention only two of the better-known sites. This brief paper represents a modest attempt to suggest some **connections** between these areas of commitment adopted by the Mandel family – between the humanities and liberal arts on the one hand, and the education of leaders on the other. Even more specifically, I would like to make some remarks on the place of the study of the humanities in the curriculum of the Mandel Leadership Institute.

When we think of fine leaders, we think of people such as Chaim Weizmann, a portrait of whom was superbly drawn by Prof. Jehuda Reinhartz in a lecture he gave recently at the Hebrew University. Certain leadership qualities, qualities that Chaim Weizmann had in abundance, come immediately to mind: the capacity to **inspire**, the capacity to **persuade**, the capacity to **wield influence** (with or without power), a capacity for **organization** and **implementation** – as well as overall qualities of **persistence**, **commitment**

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and what some call **stick-to-it-iveness**. The question presents itself, however, to lead... towards what? What social or educational vision should **direct** the energies and talents of the leader? In what **direction** should all this talent and ability be

mobilized? How can we know which ends, goals and visions are good and worthy, and which are not?

There have been many talented and charismatic leaders who could inspire, persuade, wield influence, organize and implement with great commitment and persistence, but the

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ends and the goals that they were driving towards were anti-humanistic, de-humanizing and destructive.

Can we leave the question of the good society and the question of the proper ends of education to intuition or to inertia? Perhaps at one time - but certainly not in our time.

In traditional societies, people shared a common world-view, and most were not exposed to alternatives. A traditional Jew, for example knew what a *mensch* was, what a *tzaddik* (or righteous person) was, what a *talmid chacham* (a wise person learned in Jewish law) was, or what a *chassid* (a particularly pious person) was. It was also clear what kind of knowledge – intellectual knowledge and practical knowledge – a person needed in order to become one of these traditional types. It was to be found in the Torah and its commentaries, as transmitted by the wise sages of each generation.

Beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and more intensely in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the self-enclosed nature of traditional society became, at different paces in different places, less and less self-understood. People were exposed to alternative visions of the good person and the good society, as well as to different kinds of knowledge that were needed to **grow** these new types. Not only the *talmid chacham*, the *tzaddik* and the *chassid* were looked up to. The enlightened Jew (the *maskil*),



the Zionist pioneer (the *chalutz*), the scientist, the artist, the entrepreneur, the thinker, the statesman and the social activist – all these types were looked up to as well. Not only the Torah and its commentaries, but the traditions of philosophy, science, political thought and practice, the arts – all became sources and resources for the cultivation of the good person and the good society. Once all these options opened up it became necessary, for those ever-increasing numbers who were now free to construct their own vision and their own identity, to make an educated choice between alternative visions.

After much reflection, thought and soul-searching, many thoughtful people came to the conclusion that different visions did not necessarily cancel each other out. One could be both a *talmid chacham* and a scientist. One could even be a *chassid* and an artist! (Chaim Potok in his wonderful book *My Name is Asher Lev* paints a vivid portrait of such a type, and some of the new religious poets now active in Israel give ample evidence of this option). One could certainly be both a traditional Jew and a philosopher. One could be both an entrepreneur and a social activist. Still – these different visions were also felt to be in tension with one another. It wasn't always so easy to blend them, since each one by itself demanded an almost total dedication.

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The main thing, I believe, about leadership in the open society is that the vision directing any leader's actions can no longer be taken for granted. Commitment – to be deeply held – cannot be merely visceral or instinctive. The vision one is committed to must be **articulated** and **justified**, and it has to be justified in light of the alternatives, both past and present. A worthy vision – worthy of the human being, a being

possessed of both rational intelligence and a moral will – must be articulated and justified first and foremost in the mind and heart of the leader him/herself so that it can then, in turn, be articulated and justified in the minds and hearts of the community of people he/she wishes to lead.

This is where the humanities and liberal arts come in. John Stuart Mill, the great political thinker, in his inaugural address as rector of St. Andrews University in 1865, spoke the following words: “Human beings are human beings before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible human beings, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers and physicians. What professional people should carry away with them from a university (he meant an undergraduate college) is not professional knowledge, but that which should **direct the use** of their professional knowledge.” By this he meant a **world-view** and a **value-system**.

I might add: Neither should a university, as a pluralistic, open institution, nor, for that matter, should a pluralistic

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institution like the Mandel Leadership Institute, impose any **particular** world-view or value-system on its students or fellows. It should, however, provide them with fine examples of well-grounded world-views and value-systems.

This should have the effect of setting a standard of excellence against which the potential leader should be encouraged to measure him/herself – since, in our times, outstanding and effective leaders must act on the basis of a world-view and value system that is well-thought-out,

clearly formulated and thoroughly grounded.

If we look at some of the subject areas traditionally associated with the humanities, we can understand how they could contribute to the cultivation of leaders such as those we have described above. A serious study of **history** would introduce one to a whole cavalcade of leaders in different areas of human pursuit such as statesmanship, science, the arts or the economy. One would learn not only of their accomplishments, but also of their visions, as well as the **rationales** for those visions. A serious study of **philosophy** would introduce one to explicit, systematic visions of the good life – for the individual, for society – and to conceptions of truth and knowledge (whether those of Plato, Maimonides or John Dewey). It should also ignite a passion for the pursuit of truth, as do the sciences in a different way. A serious study of **literature** would introduce the learner to a whole series of imagined worlds as well as a vast array of human characters. This would serve to cultivate empathy for life-situations and human types very different from those one has known before. It tells us not only what the human being **has** been, but what he/she conceivably **could** be.

At the Mandel Leadership Institute we cannot provide a full program in the humanities or liberal arts. We would hope that more and more of our fellows would have already benefited from the perspective that could be gained at premier humanities faculties like the one at the Hebrew University. Unfortunately, this cannot always be taken for granted. We believe, though, that a series of sessions on issues in moral and political philosophy – sessions that deal with plural conceptions of the good person and the good society (led by Prof. Moshe Halbertal), a series of sessions on educational visions, presenting conceptions of the educated person and an educated public (led by myself), as well as sessions in which small groups of fellows read some of The Great Books of the Western and Jewish tradition – are

essential elements of a leadership curriculum. They present our fellows with plural visions that can then serve as a basis for their own choices. They allow our fellows to experience how the best minds articulated and justified **their** choices. It gives them grist for the mill as they develop their own world-views and value-

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systems. The advantage of studying the great thinkers is that they have given special attention and a lot of thought to clarifying and grounding their visions in an especially comprehensive and systematic way. When our fellows come to articulate and justify their own visions, they have a high standard against which

to measure themselves. We know, for sure, that most of our fellows will not become philosophers. But our curriculum gives them the opportunity to internalize what systematic, clear and well-grounded thinking looks like and feels like.

Another very important reason why a liberal arts perspective is essential for social and educational leaders is one that I learned from Prof. Seymour Fox, of blessed memory – and one that he learned from his great teacher at the University of Chicago, Prof. Joseph Schwab. There is a clear and present danger that democratic societies, like Israel and the United States, are on their way to turning into **technocracies**. The kinds of decisions that have to be made by elected representatives, community leaders and appointed officials in our time require access to a high level of expertise. We live in an age of the increasing specialization of knowledge. No leader in a democratic society can single-handedly master all the

expertise he would need to have at his/her disposal in order to make an intelligent decision on the most important issues of the day. For example: should we give priority to increasing our nuclear stockpile, our space exploration program or our social programs? By what criteria should the poverty line be determined? Even if we confine our perspective to issues having to do with education, leaders must confront many questions they have not necessarily been trained to deal with, such as: How much informal programming should be included in a formal educational program? In what proportions should a school system emphasize academic success or character formation? What criteria should we use to determine which students should be considered “disadvantaged?” What should be considered “healthy” relations between the school and the community, between educational professionals and parents? Which methods best help children get a sense of mastery in languages, in mathematics, in the sciences – and which do not?

Now on all these questions, and many others, there are going to be different schools of thought. Experts in sociology, psychology, in teaching and learning processes – all will have different theories and will recommend different courses of action. Often, these experts overwhelm the decision-makers with their theories, diagrams, facts and figures – and manage to “sell” them approaches that don’t show the whole picture. A liberally

*A liberally educated person knows that in any subject area there are competing theories and approaches.*

educated person, however, **knows** that in any subject area there are **competing** theories and approaches. He/she has first-hand experience of plural and competing approaches – even in the “hard” sciences, certainly in the social sciences and in humanistic disciplines like history, literature and philosophy.

He/she understands that no one approach to an issue can be considered absolute. All well-argued approaches shed some light on one aspect of an issue, and leave other aspects out. He/she therefore learns how to question the experts. He/she is not intimidated by them, since he/she knows what to ask – for example:

- What are the other approaches in your discipline and how are they different from yours?
- What are the advantages of **their** approaches – as distinguished from yours?
- What is missing in your approach, and how do other approaches complete yours?
- What does your approach add to the discussion?
- How would you answer the representatives of other approaches?
- How would **they** answer **you**?

Such questioning helps to return power to leaders of constituencies. It allows these leaders to turn to experts as important resources, without leaving the decision-making process to be **dominated** by the experts. These are some of the abilities so necessary to citizenship in a democratic society that can be gained through education in the liberal arts – abilities mentioned by Mr. Mandel in his address at the dedication of the new Mandel Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the Hebrew University.

I would like to conclude by mentioning just one more reason why the humanities are so important to the cultivation of leadership. A humanities perspective does not merely mean specialization in this or that discipline. It directs one to **ask the human questions** in all disciplines and in all situations. It

teaches one to read any text in any field, or “read” any situation that calls for decision-making, from a humanistic perspective. “The humanities”, then, is not just a set of disciplines, but a way of reading and seeing. A humanist cannot help but ask questions like: how can science and technology, or this particular scientific or technological project, humanize the condition of the people who are going to be affected by it? Maybe the project could have the opposite effect, and end up being **dehumanizing** – once we consider all of its implications? What is the place of this particular subject matter in the personal growth of a young person who is also going to be a citizen? How will it sensitize him/her to others who come from a different background? Could it conceivably have the opposite effect at this stage? Maybe it should be studied at a later stage? What does this subject – whether mathematics, physical education or literature – teach young people about the human condition – its possibilities and limitations?

*“The humanities”, then, is not just a set of disciplines, but a way of reading and seeing.*

We would hope the graduates of the Mandel Leadership Institute would be encouraged to ask these “human questions” as a matter of course. We would hope that the asking of such questions might come to be regarded as typical of Mandel graduates.

For all of the three reasons mentioned – the articulation and justification of visions, the possibility of questioning the experts and returning power to community leaders, and the importance of asking the human questions in all situations – we believe that the humanities and liberal arts are a most essential part of a program for the cultivation of future leaders. We are proud to belong to the faculty of an Institute supported by the Mandel family, one that regards the humanities as a crucial

component of its curriculum. The Mandel family has always had a deep awareness of the connection between humanities, liberal arts and leadership. I hope I have been able, in some way, to make that awareness more explicit.