



THE *four* ELEMENTS

Learning Elements

The Limmud Chavruta book has been learnt over four days at Limmud Conference for many years, and each year the main theme of the book has been split into four sections.

This year, we chose instead to choose a subject already divided into four parts, the classical elements: Earth, Water, Air and Fire. These, according to ancient Greek science, were the fundamental, indivisible, non-composite constituents of all materials that exist. Maimonides, who was a student of Greek philosophy, helped bring this idea (among many) into Jewish tradition, and through them even to Christian Europe. Indeed, the idea of four (or sometimes five) basic elements of the universe was very common and found in Babylonian and Chinese tradition, among others. And though today we now know of over a hundred elements, we can still describe a lot of matter by the four main phases: solid (earth), liquid (water), gas (air) and plasma (fire).

Maybe this principle of four has more applications. For instance, let's apply it to the Limmud Chavruta book itself. The content of the book is built upon four constituents: right-hand traditional sources, left-hand modern sources, the points to consider and the connections. It is built upon four types of sources: traditional Jewish, modern Jewish, secular prose and songs and poems. This great variety and eclecticism is one of the greatest strengths of the Limmud Chavruta tradition.

Each Limmud Chavruta session is made up of four parts: the introduction in small groups, the

in-depth chavruta study, the presentation at the end and of course, the breakfast throughout. Each of these contributes to making the experience enjoyable, interesting, enlightening and fulfilling.

One could even argue that the goals of the Limmud Chavruta project are fourfold.

1) **Learning**, the meaning of Limmud itself. Where else can hundreds of people come together first thing every morning to study Jewish texts together?

2) **Facilitation**, or making the learning as accessible as possible. Experts and beginners alike can both find insight and interest from the huge range of sources available.

3) **Inspiration** – planting those new thoughts and fresh outlooks that we so cherish from the Limmud experience, and taking them into our daily lives.

4) **Friendship**. Within the intensity of chavruta study, connections can be forged to last a lifetime!

Just as Seder night at Pesach is replete with 'fours', with dining and discussions that continue long into the night, we hope that this book will provide you with ample food for thought and continued debate during Limmud, and even onto the rest of your lives! And we hope that these four elements of chavruta contribute to that.

Section One, 'Eretz – Earth', led by **EJ Cohen**, with **Guy Wittner** and **Yusmin Kilim**, explores our close relationship to the earth and what that means for us, in life and in death.

Section Two, 'Mayim – Water', led from Limmud NY by **Karen Radkowsky**, with **Ze'ev Felsen**, **Ellen Flax**, **Rachel Geller**, **Yuliya Mazur** and **Adam Tilove**, uncovers stories involving water from Jewish tradition.

Section Three, 'Ruach – Air', led from Limmud Vienna by **Alexander Grodensky**, with **Elisabetta Abate** and **Margot Schatz**, investigates the relationship between ruach as a spiritual concept, meaning 'soul' or 'spirit', and its literal meanings of 'air', 'breath' and 'wind'.

Section Four, 'Esh – Fire', led from Limmud Galil by **David Biton**, with **Merav Arbel**, **Emily Rich**, **Herzel Habosha** and **Ilana Levi**, considers how and why God is revealed through fire. From the Burning Bush to Mount Sinai, from sacrifices in the Tabernacle to the fire that is within us.

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has had a part in bringing the International Chavruta Project 2011 together.

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**Hannah Kaye and Jeremy Tabick
Chairs, Chavruta Project 2011**