



חיים  
LIFE

# Learning Chayim

When a group of Jews meet together for a drink, the first word that comes out of their mouths is *Lechayim!* – To life! *Chayim* is central to Jewish tradition and thought. The Torah narrative opens with an account of the beginnings of life. The Jewish people are exhorted to choose life, and the Torah itself is fashioned as a blueprint for life: the commandments are given with the instruction *'vechai bahem'* – 'and you shall live by them'. The sanctity of life is one of Judaism's highest values – and even God Himself is described as *el chai* – the living God.

Today, we live in a fast-moving world. Our generation has seen many improvements in the quality of life and life expectancy. Advances in technology, and especially in medicine, mean that too often we fail to remember the wonder of life itself – and it can come as a shock when we are suddenly confronted with the fragility of life.

Further, do the improvements in our physical life come at the expense of our spiritual lives? How often do we take a step back and ask: what are we here for? Is it about creating a better world, or ensuring that there is a next generation to follow us? Is there some kind of life-long mission, or are the efforts of our life, in the end, meaningless, as Kohelet might suggest?

This book gives us the opportunity to explore some of these questions. **Section One, 'The roots of life'**, compiled by **Annette Boeckler** and **Golda Zafer-Smith**, considers the beginnings of life. What are the sources of life, when does life

begin, and what are the connections between our physical and spiritual lives?

**Section Two, 'The meaning of life'**, compiled by **EJ Cohen**, **Benji Stanley** and **Roni Tabick**, addresses the big question: how should we live our life? We consider our relationships with others, the place of study in our lives, our mission in the world and whether our actions in this world are rewarded in the next.

In **Section Three, 'Preserving life'**, compiled by **Eiran Davies** and **Tanya Sakchnovich**, we examine the value of preserving life. Are we responsible for the lives of others? Should life be preserved at all costs? Should we also be concerned with the preservation of spiritual lives?

Finally **Section Four, 'Life and Death'**, compiled by **Markus Lange** and **Debbie Young-Somers**, confronts our own mortality and that of others. We consider the relationship between life and death, the mechanisms we have to cope with death, and the choices that we must make to 'choose life'.

We would like to thank all those who have helped bring life to this year's Chavruta book. The authors of each section worked and studied together over a nine-month period collecting sources, compiling questions and debating the meaning of life, bringing together the compilation of texts you see before you. Without the help of a number of others, though, our collection of texts would not have made it into book form. Libby Burkeman helped us to put our team together. Maureen Kendler and Gila Sacks

gave invaluable feedback on draft material. Uri Berkowitz, of Maven Design, guided us through the publication schedule and brought his professionalism and talent to designing the pages of this book. Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz edited the final drafts, and Clare Rees, Irit Burkeman and Julian Gilbey proofread texts. Emma Rozenberg provided a link to the Limmud Exec and gave us valuable guidance.

At the heart of the Limmud experience lies the development of our own Jewish lives and the life of our vibrant community. From the most mundane everyday life to the biggest questions life confronts us with, we hope that you will find materials here to inspire and challenge you as you delve into the mysteries of life. *Lechayim!*

**Yuval Keren and Abigail Wood**  
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