



# Learning Limmudim – a word before ...

Now that Limmud-the-conference is entering its twenty-fifth year, it's about time we took another look at the concept that lies at the heart of it all. Perhaps more than any other religion, Judaism puts *limmudim* – studies – at the top of its scale of values: as a way of learning to live our lives properly, as a way of relating to others as teachers and students, and even as a way of encountering God. *Limmudim* are a way of life, a journey of learning that stretches from the cradle to the grave, available to all, whatever their abilities. Even in the darkest periods of Jewish history, we have found time and opportunity for *limmudim* – in the mellahs of North Africa, the shtetls of Eastern Europe, hidden from the eyes of the Spanish Inquisition, or organized secretly in the Warsaw ghetto. *Limmudim* have been inspiration, goal, refuge, *raison d'être*, lifeline – as essential to life as food and shelter.

But what does it involve? What should we study? Do non-Jewish texts and secular subjects fall within the realm of *limmudim*? How can we integrate study into our busy lives? How much time should we devote to it? Should study opportunities be open to everyone? How can we grow through our *limmud*? In spite of the unquestioned centrality of study in Jewish culture, every generation needs to re-examine these and many other related issues, and to find their own answers.

It is significant that the word *limmud* literally means "learning". The idea of *limmudim* is as much about process as about content, and traditional *limmudim* place very little emphasis on examinations or assessments of progress. Learning for its own sake – *lishma* – is

regarded as the highest form of study, and even the wisest scholar never ceases to learn: "You do not have to complete the work – but neither are you free to desist from it" (Mishnah, Pirkei Avot, 3:20).

In **section one, 'The dimensions of study'**, prepared by Miriam Bayfield and Steven Feldman, we consider the centrality of study in the Jewish tradition and also its boundaries – are there places our minds should not wander into in our quest for knowledge and understanding? Can there be too much of a good thing?

In **section two, 'Students'**, composed by Daniel Vulkan and Nicole Berenson, we look at those who study. What qualities are necessary to be a good student? What should a good student do?

**Section three, 'Teachers'**, compiled by Oren Kaplan and Tanya Smollan-Kaplan, deals with teaching – first, the obligation of parents to teach their children, and then the qualities that make a good teacher, a good curriculum and a constructive learning environment.

Finally, **section four, 'Seeking God in study'**, assembled by Daniel Eilon, Dan Rickman and Abbi Wood, examines our encounters with God through study. Here we come full circle to the centrality of study in Jewish tradition, as we explore our intensity and passion for learning and where it can lead us.

As always, putting the Chavruta project together involves a great many people, and we would like to thank them all from the bottom of our hearts:

The teams who put each day's texts together – often engaging in the Torah literally "night and day" – we

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We realize that this project could be seen as a little unnecessary, since the whole conference is itself an opportunity for *limmudim*; but we think that there is a genuine value in returning to first principles and examining the foundations on which the whole glorious enterprise of Limmud is built. As God said to the Children of Israel in the wilderness, "Build Me a Sanctuary so I may dwell among you". We hope that this year's Chavruta project will give you the tools to construct a room of your own in the palace of learning.

**Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz and Deborah Silver**

Project Co-ordinators and Editors