Learning Money

Money, wealth, prosperity, possessions, plenty – all are contested concepts in both Jewish and Western systems of thought. From the moment that God created humans ‘to till the soil’ (Genesis 2:5), we have struggled to deal with the surplus we create. Torah sets out frameworks of private and public ownership, allowing profit, inheritance, and accumulation. Yet at the same time, Jewish tradition requires (rather than merely encourages) charitable giving, is impassioned in its support for the poor and destitute, and sometimes mandates radical redistributions of wealth.

For this year’s Limmud Chavruta book, we have picked a topic of ancient Jewish concern and huge contemporary relevance – Money. Over the four sections of this book, you will have the chance to develop, challenge, and deepen your understanding of the meaning of money, our relationship to it, and its place in the world.

There is a vast body of Jewish source material about money, and the Chavruta team have been working hard for the past year to cut it down to a manageable size. The bulk of this book is made up of traditional Jewish sources (on the right hand pages) and other, non-traditional and sometimes non-Jewish, sources (on the left hand pages). We have also included Points to consider, as starting points for discussion, and multiple suggested paths through the book, via the Connections. We do hope that you will find these useful but not limiting. There are myriad ways to study with this book, and if you find our questions or connections limiting, feel free to ignore them! It won’t cost you a penny.

We have been lucky again this year to have collaborated with four incredible teams, all of whom are affiliated to their local Limmud. All of them, but particularly the Day Chairs, have truly toiled to produce this book. You will notice that each section has its own particular style and its own distinctive message, as designed by each team. We are proud that this project is truly international, and hope that everyone studying it will benefit from this cosmopolitan authorship.

Section One, ‘Prosperity’, led from Limmud Galil by David Biton, with Merav Arbel, Emily Rich, Elana Levi, Hertzl Havosha, and Tirtza Poplinsky, asks fundamental questions about value, worth, and the relationship between the spiritual and the material.

Section Two, ‘Work’, led from Limmud in the UK by Adam Frankenberg with Joseph Symons-Smyth, Benji Stanley, and Jeremy Tabick, investigates the nature of employment, and asks what the benefits and stresses of work actually are.

Section Three, ‘Consumerism’, led from Limmud NY by Karen Radkowsky with Zvi Bellin, Ellen Flax, Rachel Geller, Yuliya Mazur, and Mark Solomon, explores our attitude to shopping and possessions, asking if there truly is an ethical form of Jewish consumerism.

Section Four, ‘Tzedakah’, led from Limmud Hungary by Réka Eszter Bodó with Gábor Balázs, Zsuzsa Fritz, Detti Gárdos, Pál Hegedüs and Ármin Langer, surveys the laws and dilemmas that arise from the Jewish duty to support the less fortunate.

We would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has had a part in bringing the International Chavruta Project 2012 together.

In addition to the team members listed above, we would like to thank Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz for proofreading the English text; Yuval Keren for setting and proofreading the Hebrew text; Colin Eimer for checking the Hebrew; Neil Janes for detailed feedback; and Uri Berkowitz of Maven Design for the graphic design of this book. Last but not least, we would like to thank all of the wonderful people who agreed to facilitate on the day, as well as all of you who came along to learn. Limmud exists because of all you amazing participants and volunteers!

The aim of the Limmud Chavruta Project is to present Jewish perspectives on a topic that will capture the imagination of all Jews. We hope that the theme of Money will both inspire and enthuse people to learn, and provide the space and energy for discussions that are truly l’shem shamayim (for the sake of heaven), but also give people the tools to consider and reflect upon their own relationship with money.

Robin Cooke and Robin Moss
Chairs, Chavruta Project 2012