Once upon a time….

There was once a time when Limmud just meant the people who turned up at a conference in England in December. It was attended by a few hundred. It was a well kept secret enjoyed massively by those who went. It was a big enough change when the rest of British Jewry found out about and decided to come too.; today the Jewish world has discovered Limmud and they all seem to want to do it!

It seems hard to believe that when I became the founding Chair of Limmud International, just four years ago, there had only been one Limmud in the USA, only one Limmud in Central Europe, Limmud FSU was but a twinkle in the eye of Chaim Chesler and Sandra Cahn, and there were less than a handful of Limmud groups around the world. In total the Limmud family has grown exponentially in the last few years. There are now nearly ten times the number of people involved in Limmud outside the UK as in the UK. As I finish my term and hand over to my successors, I am honoured to have been the Chair of Limmud International and wish my successors continued success in developing the next chapters in the story. The Limmud family continues to grow and we are committed to igniting new groups, nurturing teams as they grow, mentoring those teams as they lead their first events, reflecting with them, evaluating and training. We are committed to developing resources and building the Limmud International family into an important resource and partner for world Jewry.

It has been a pleasure to work with the leaders of these groups who started as Limmud participants and today are co-owners of the destiny of Limmud, shaping us as they shape themselves. It has also been an honour to have worked and been supported by some tremendous stalwarts of Limmud, who after their time of leadership in Limmud in the UK have taken on the challenge of building Limmud around the world. The support of Elliott Goldstein, the Chair of Limmud, Kevin Sefton, the Limmud Executive link and the whole of the Limmud Executive has been crucial. The work of the Limmud Office and Noa Hundert, our Project Co-ordinator who took over from Mariano mid-year has been outstanding as has been the mentoring and support given by Raymond Simonson, the Executive Director.

2009 has been another strong year, highlighted by the appointment of Avraham Infeld as our volunteer Roving Ambassador. We have begun to get our teeth into evaluation, spread out the new branding, opened new communication channels such as Twitter. There is so much we can do if we can find the funds. We believe Limmud to be a real answer to many questions posed by communities about how to communicate, how to work with the community, how to develop leadership and how to approach young adults … and we have shown worldwide it can be done for so much less than can be imagined.

From the Chair - Andrew Gilbert
Limmud in Western Europe started in Amsterdam then Basel. Limmud now also takes place in Paris, Lyon, Berlin, Munich, Stockholm, Budapest and Zurich. In March 2010 Cologne will be added and there are planning groups in Frankfurt and Helsinki. So whether it is “le forum de la vie juive” or “en cultuurfestival voor Joods” or “judiskt identitetsstärkande evenemang för alla vuxna”, it is also Limoed, Limoud or just Limmud! Twelve communities with Limmud events reaching 5,000 Jews. Discussions have also taken place for future initiatives in Brussels, Copenhagen, Athens, Gibraltar, Barcelona, Prague, Vienna and Milan, so there are yet many more communities where Limmud will be launched in years to come.

Limmud in Central Europe (with great thanks to our partner and friend the JDC) started in Vilnius in Lithuania in a Limmud that alone attracts 1,500 people from across the Baltic states with a total Jewish population of just 25,000. Today our partnership has spread to Warsaw, Sofia, Subotica (Serbia), Bucharest, Timisoara (Romania) and Iasi (Romania). The partnership events touch communities that have re-emerged since 1989 and the fall of the Soviet Union. In total these events attract over 4,000 in these 7 centres. We are glad to announce that we have agreed with the JDC to continue our agreement to work together in Central Europe and South America. Alberto Senderey and his team have been special partners.

When I first heard from Chaim Chesler about the possibility for Limmud in the former Soviet Union I am not quite sure I believed it. Together we have been on an exciting journey. Chaim and Sandra Cahn with some great local activists have continued to stretch imagination and create a modern Jewish history. Today Limmud FSU has groups in Moscow, Ukraine, Belarus, Russian Far-East, Israel and now a Taste of Limmud in the Hamptons. The role of Matthew Bronfman and others who have been excited by the vision suggests that the over 5,000 who were involved in 2009 could be just a small number compared to the future plans.

In North America, first came Toronto and then New York and now Limmud is also in Los Angeles, Colorado, Atlanta, Philadelphia and 2010 will also see Limmud events in New Orleans, Chicago and Boston. Initial discussions are happening with Miami (there is already a Facebook group “bring Limmud to Southern Florida” with over 150 members), St Louis, Montreal and San Francisco. Excitingly there are also discussions going on with Mexico City.

Last year we reached South America with the first gathering in Buenos Aires in Argentina and we are delighted that last month Limmud made its first appearance in Brazil in Sao Paolo. Whilst this is the latest area of Limmud growth we are looking forward to working with the JDC and others to expand Limmud across the continent.

In Israel, Limmud Galil goes from strength to strength. This year saw the first Russian speaking conference in Jerusalem from Limmud FSU. There are now new Limmud groups in Arava, Negev and Modiin all holding their first events in the last months of 2009. Arava attracted 120 people. There are still those who want to see a big Limmud Israel conference but who knows what the future holds?

From the “Commonwealth” We have already mentioned Toronto. The first group outside the UK was Sydney and in recent years they have alternated with Melbourne. We are delighted with the progress being made by South Africa which in its third year in three venues goes from strength to strength. We are trying to work with a Limmud-like group in New Zealand to bring them into the family. We are also working with Hong Kong and look forward to its first activity in 2010.

In the Middle East and North Africa, so far the only group is the wonderful Limmud Turkey, which for the last 6 years has gathered over 1,000 people in Istanbul each year - a remarkable success.

Next year Limmud will be in 50 centres worldwide, it is an astonishing and - for those of us who go back to far earlier days - an unimaginable story!

For me it has been an honour to Chair Limmud Conference and the Limmud organization through the 1990s, and it has been an amazing privilege to again have found myself at the centre of another chapter of Limmud’s ongoing and wonderful journey. In Limmud, one of the secrets to our success has been the need to regularly refresh our leadership before it becomes typecast, too much of a burden or before one is stale and burnt out. I pass on the baton to my successors sure that their watch will be stimulating, exciting and fulfilling. Involved with Limmud is addictive and it is creative, memorable and we achieve so much together!

B’vracha,
Andrew Gilbert Chair Limmud International
Proposed New Chairs for Limmud International

Helena Miller

*Helena Miller is the Director of Research and Evaluation at United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA). She has a PhD in Jewish Education and has taught and written widely on many aspects of Jewish Education over the years. She is, and has been, significantly involved in many Jewish Education initiatives in the UK and overseas.*

“I went to Limmud first in 1981 - the second Conference - and by the next year, my husband Steve was running Conference! Since then, I have attended every Limmud Conference in the UK and have also been at all the Limmud Fests apart from the first. I have never had an official role on a Limmud team but always teach sessions at Limmud events, and am often a Chavruta facilitator. I have also mentored members of the Limmud Conference and Fest teams for a number of years. I joined the Limmud International Team in 2009, originally to develop a structure for evaluating the programme. I have attended one overseas Limmud event - in Serbia in 2008, where Steve and I both taught (in English!) over the weekend. My work in Jewish Education takes me into an international arena, mainly through Arachim - the European Educators’ Network - and the Network for Research in Jewish Education, a North American Network for academics and practitioners.

Co-chairing Limmud International will be a challenge, and one which I am very much looking forward to undertaking. It is a hard task to follow Andrew - I know that without his enormous efforts Limmud International would not be the exciting and huge success it has become. I look forward to helping to take Limmud International onwards. I also very much look forward to meeting many of you before the end of this year at Limmud Conference.”

Uri Berkowitz

*Uri has been a Limmud volunteer for over ten years. During that time he has been able to learn about programming, signage, team work, Shabbat, people management, community, timetabling and the powers of caffeine. He is currently a volunteer trainer for Limmud International. Professionally, Uri is a graphic designer.*

“I’ve been a Limmud volunteer for over ten years starting with various roles on Limmud Conference core teams/steering groups. In 2003 I was Limmud Conference Programming Co-Chair. From 2005-2008 I served as a Member of Board of Trustees of Limmud in the UK (The Limmud Exec). Over the past couple of years I’ve been deployed on Limmud International training events with a particular connection with Limmud Hungary. I’m happy to have been involved with providing support, development, training and mentoring to Limmud volunteers in the UK and overseas, from which I have gained as much as I have given.

Professionally I am partner of a small London based graphic design studio. I’m proud to have designed the Limmud logo in 2000 and the Limmud International logo more recently. I am conscious that the challenges raised as a volunteer rival any I have in my work life! I am continually amazed by what volunteers can achieve when working together for something we believe in.

Limmud in the UK is almost three decades old and over the last ten years has proudly seen the development of Limmuds all over the world. Limmud International is a relatively new response to the growing need to nurture, support and connect both new and old Limmuds, wherever they are. It’s been a great privilege to be involved in training teams and to connect with many international Limmud volunteers at events over the years. Our aim as Co-Chairs over the next year or two is to harness the amazing goodwill already out there and continue the achievements of Limmud International launched and spearheaded so ably by Andrew. Our focus will be to consolidate and build on what is there is and plan for the needs of the current and next generation of Limmuds.”
Limmud Conference 2009
Inspiring communities

Conference 2009 is approaching and is has been in unprecedented demand! All the rooms on site have sold out more than a month in advance and there is a big buzz in the air. On the international side we will have close to 100 delegates from more than 30 different groups around the world! We in Limmud international are very excited about the opportunity of having so many delegates together sharing their experiences and forming what we hope will be fruitful, long-lasting relationships! To make the experience even more beneficial we have scheduled dedicated training sessions for the international delegates, planned and facilitated by presenters and Limmud activists from all over the world.

Taking Limmud Back Home - Fundraising in a Global Economic Crisis:
Limmud’s unique spirit and character makes it one of the most successful and popular ‘brands’ across the Jewish world, and many people will immediately view Limmud initiatives with goodwill. However, funding is scarce and a smaller pool of donors are confronted with an increasing array of claims on their time and money. We’ll listen to, and learn from, the experience of practised players in this field and debate the most effective ways to make the case for investment in Limmud.

Taking Limmud Back Home - Love Your Budget:
The budgeting and pricing process is a fabulous opportunity to empower and motivate volunteers, generate ideas and create the event that works for each Limmud community. It’s the first thing any team has to do before embarking on any event. We’ll discuss how teams might prioritise spending and decide on pricing. We’ll look at various models, including an insight into Limmud Conference’s own budget thinking, and what factors to base these on, and explore how every aspect of the budget has to reflect the Limmud ethos.

Taking Limmud Back Home - Interactions With the Wider World:
How far does ‘helping each Jew take one step further on their own Jewish journey’ include encountering non-Jews and the wider community? Over the years, a range of initiatives have been tried at various Limmud events, including developing encounters with Christians and Muslims, engagement with key charities and causes in the area where the event is being held, dialogues and interviews with relevant politicians, testing media attitudes to Israel, and big issues on which Jews have something (distinctive) to say. We’ll consider the extent to which this is an important part of a Limmud programme or just a luxury add-on.

Taking Limmud Back Home - Should Limmud be Mainstream or Alternative?
Without doubt perceived as counter-cultural in its origins and for many years, Limmud is now recognised in the UK as a key part of the communal calendar where a range of leaders know it is in their interests to be seen and to listen. Of course, Limmud continues to surprise with its innovative programming and its capacity to attract Jews who would not connect with anything else Jewish, but how far should Limmud seek to become ‘part of the Establishment’ or should it insist on its place ‘outside the mainstream’?

Taking Limmud Back Home - Don’t Curb Their Enthusiasm: Motivation, From Theory to Practice:
There are over 3,000 highly motivated Limmud volunteers across the Limmud world, putting in many thousands of hours of effort into creating world-class Jewish learning events. How do we keep that motivation high when the going gets tough? What we can learn from the motivational theories of two Jews and a couple of Catholics - four of the 20th Century’s leading social psychologists - as well as some Jewish sources? Come enthused, leave motivated!

Limmud International Core Principle:
Enabling connections to be made: we strive to create opportunities for connections across communities and individuals, by providing the space for these to happen.

And what better place than Conference?! This year we will have over 2,500 people from more than 24 countries!
International Chavruta Project

‘One’ Global Chavruta Project

Combine globalization and technology and what do you get? Limmud Conference’s first worldwide, 100% virtual team!

The Co-Chairs of Limmud’s 2009 Chavruta Project span four continents across sixteen time zones – from New York to Sydney. They include: David Biton (Galil), Hannah Kaye (London), Karen Radkowsky (New York) and Paul Turner (Sydney).

The idea for an international collaboration came from David and Karen, who have been chavruta partners at Conference since 2005. Kevin Sefton, the Limmud Trustee responsible for Limmud International, helped jumpstart their four-year dream of a global chavruta book by kicking off the project and bringing together the four co-chairs.

For those unfamiliar, chavruta means ‘friendship’ or ‘partnership.’ It is a form of traditional Jewish learning involving pairs of people, usually with similar levels of ability and knowledge, exploring texts together. At Limmud, these can range from ancient materials to modern scholarship, song lyrics and more. Everyone is welcome, whether they have studied texts before or not, and knowledge of Hebrew is not required.

A Limmud chavruta session can see hundreds of participants filling a room with discussion - some pairs are engaged in quiet consideration, while others burst with energy as they battle with the ideas in front of them. This makes for learning which is more empowering than most standard teaching methods.

Since early spring, the team has been working together entirely via Skype, phone and email to develop this year’s chavruta materials, with the support of volunteers from each of their communities. Despite the challenges of time and distance, as well as the fact that most have never met face-to-face, they have worked together seamlessly as one team. Thus, it is most fitting that they selected ‘One’ as the theme of this year’s Chavruta Project. The program will kick-off with ‘One Language’ on Day 1, followed by ‘One God’ on Day 2, ‘One People’ on Day 3, and closing with ‘One World’ on Day 4.

Sections of the book have already been tested in Atlanta, at team weekends, and over the web.

Following Conference, the chavruta book will be made available for use at Limmud events around the globe. Limmud NY (January) and Limmud LA (February) have already signed on. Through Conference, the books will be priced at an introductory cost of £5 each (a 50% discount), and copies pre-ordered in time can be collected at Conference. Inquiries should be addressed to Noa Hundert: noa@limmud.org.

While this year’s chavruta book is primarily in English, with some texts in Hebrew, it is hoped that next year’s book will include additional languages. If you or someone in your community may be interested in taking part, please contact Hannah Kaye who oversaw coordination and editing of the 2009 book: hannah.kaye@gmail.com.

And be sure to join us for the launch of Limmud’s 2009 Chavruta Project at Limmud Conference - Monday morning, 28 December, at 9:15 in Rootes Panorama.

Karen Radkowsky is one of the four co-chairs of the international Chavruta Project, and a member of the Limmud International Team. She is the founding president of Limmud NY, which will hold its 6th annual conference January 15-18 (www.limmudny.org ).
Limmud International Recognised in “Compass Guide”

Compass is a new and timely guide designed to introduce, inform and enlighten about some of Europe’s most vital, innovative, effective and sustainable Jewish organisations and programmes.

An initiative of the Westbury Group, a network of more than 20 international foundations with a shared interest in enhancing Jewish life in Europe, Compass reflects the breadth and depth of Jewish activity across the cultural, historical and religious spectrums of European Jewish life in 15 countries.

This directory – the first of its kind to focus on European Jewry, including the FSU – was inspired by and modeled on Slingshot in North America.

The 36 organisations and programmes featured in this first edition of Compass reflect the breadth and depth of communities that are innovative, creative, effective and sustainable.

In addition to showcasing these programmes, Compass is hoping to encourage those who share a concern for the future of European Jewry to step forward and help these projects generate the resources necessary to continue the important work they have begun.

Limmud International is thrilled and honored to have been chosen from amongst hundreds of potential organizations to be included in the guide. The assessors wrote that Limmud International is “one of the most impactful programmes in the world” which is “firmly embedded in Europe”. They praised Limmud as “a role model for other organisations” especially in “attracting unaffiliated Jews and mobilizing a vast army of volunteers”.

To view the full guide please see http://www.compasseurope.org/downloads.php
A Limmud conference in the city, from September 10-12, gave 300 members of the Jewish community in the region - the site of Stalin’s proposed Jewish homeland in Russia’s Far East - a chance to come together and learn about topics as varied as politics, feminism and biblical history, emerging as a group both engaged and strengthened.

The conference coincided with the 75th anniversary of Stalin’s official establishment of the Independent Jewish Oblast, his attempt at a Jewish state, which proposed to give Jews the opportunity to pursue Yiddish culture in a socialist framework. Jewish immigration to the remote region on the border with China began in 1928, when Jews came from around the Soviet Union and the world under the slogan “Forward to the State of the Jews.” Birobidjan is the region’s capital.

The rough conditions, as well as two Stalin-led purges and eventual aliyah, have left the Russian Far East today with only a small Jewish community, one that is largely assimilated with the rest of the population. Birobidjan is home to some 70,000 residents, somewhere from 1 percent to 5% of them Jewish.

Enter Limmud: Established five years ago, Limmud FSU has already run events in five countries, on three continents. The conferences are run based on a formula that has proven to be successful around the world. They are volunteer-based, pluralistic events with lectures and workshops from community members and experts, which let each participant build his or her own experience.

Said Limmud FSU founder Chaim Chesler to the 300 participants in Birobidjan at the opening ceremony, “We don’t tell you what to experience, we give you a platform to create your experience.” He later said that Limmud exemplifies “power to the people. They control their own destiny.”

Participants ranged from young children to the elderly, with students making up the largest contingent. All were full of incredible energy and enthusiasm to learn, teach and experience.

Chesler has wanted to bring a conference to Birobidjan since the first Limmud FSU event in Moscow. His enthusiasm and passion make up for his lack of Russian, and together with a group of dedicated young volunteers from Moscow, he came to the Far East to show that there is, and can be, more to Jewish life in Birobidjan than the remnants of Yiddish culture. At the Limmud opening ceremonies, they sang along to Israeli Eurovision favourites from the ’70s along with Yiddish classics and “Gesher Tsar Me’od.” They joined together for Kabbalat Shabbat and havdala services, following along with Hebrew prayers transliterated into the Cyrillic alphabet. It’s clear that for many of them Judaism is an important part of their identity.

Said Chesler, looking back at the conference, “[It was] an overwhelming success certainly. To have been in one of the most remote regions of Russia with the level of participation, enthusiasm, and excitement that we had indicated an intense hunger for Jewish engagement and learning and connection among those in the Russian Far East. These are young Jews who stepped forward to own this event, and they learned the skills and gained the confidence to be builders of Jewish community going forward. One young woman told me how privileged she felt to be part of this, and to use this experience as a building block for further involvement in building and sustaining Jewish community. She had tears in her eyes. How much more impact can you ask for?”

Excerpt. For full article see http://tinyurl.com/ylgre6t
Limmud festival combines study with fun
by Atara Beck - Jewish Tribune
Tuesday, 03 November 2009
For the full article see: http://tinyurl.com/y983fa4

TORONTO – Lois Lilienstein of Sharon, Lois and Bram fame is not only a great entertainer. She makes the most wonderful blintzes, as anyone who attended last week’s Limmud program, where she demonstrated the art of creating the perfect crepe, would agree.

Limmud is the Hebrew word for study. The Limmud festival of Jewish learning was launched in Britain almost 30 years ago and attracts thousands of participants. Non-denominational and non-political, it offers a unique blend of formal and informal education, drawing on resources from all sectors of the Jewish community – from the orthodox to the unaffiliated. Local accountant Peter Sevitt brought this non-profit, volunteer-run organization to Toronto in 2004.

Titled ‘Food and Eco-Judaism’, a recent Limmud event, which took place in a casual atmosphere in a north Toronto home, touched upon the Jewish perspective on food and ecology.

Rabbi Adam Cutler of Beth Tzedec Congregation led an enlightening session titled What do you mean my cashews are treif? Kosher challenges of an industrialized and globalized world.

According to Rabbi Cutler, “we will see more and more questions in coming decades on genetically modified food.”

Debbie Field, executive director of Food Share, led an inspiring talk on Good healthy food for all: Building a new system so everyone has access to affordable healthy food. The crowd, ranging in age from early 20s to late middle age, concluded the afternoon with a delicious, simple and healthy vegetarian buffet dinner.

Sharoni Sibony, local chair of Limmud, said the organization is built on three principles: Jewish learning, Jewish diversity and volunteerism.

Limmud Galil to Limmud FEST in UK

The article can also be read at: http://tinyurl.com/y8eyq6q

Between 25-31/08/09 we, Aliza Biton and Moti Abargel, members of Limmud Galil, took part in the Fest Limmud delegation in the UK. The aim of the delegation is to meet with the international Limmud members, who arrived from the USA - Los Angeles & Chicago, Germany, Holland, South Africa and more, and to share common experiences of the “Limmudim” – each in his or her own country, to discuss different issues and dilemmas within the Limmud, and most importantly to try to find ways to deal with and solve these issues.

Of course the "Limmud Galil" served as a role model and a source of pride. We are the only group, besides Limmud UK, that organize a Limmud trip. We enjoy joint Shabbatot, and places for Torah study, and our crowning glory – the central gathering – and of course the friendships within these gatherings.

We met with speakers from Limmud UK, such as Clive Lawton, Helena & Steve Miller from the UJIA, who are our "Mother & Father" and many others. On the first evening, upon our arrival at FEST, together with the members of the Limmud delegations, we baked pita bread in an outdoor oven around the fire, accompanied by singing and dancing, with the rain keeping everyone cool and content. On Friday evening we sang songs to welcome the Shabbat, and the atmosphere was incredible.

The things that left us at first speechless, and then with foot ache, was the SILENT DISCO. After 11:00PM we were each given a pair of earphones, out of which the music sounded, so we had the music playing in our ears. When we decided to talk, or enjoy some silence, we simply had to remove the earphones – a perfect solution.
LIMMUD IN THE MEDIA

19 November 2009

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Learning Amidst Diversity: Wexner and Limmud

In this special issue of the Wexner newsletter, we are delighted to explore the link between the Wexner Heritage Program and Limmud.

As some of you may know, Limmud is an international concept of a volunteer-run festival of Jewish learning, defined very broadly, and bringing diverse parts of the local Jewish community together. The first Limmud was held in the UK, and continues to be each year; over the last few years, Limmuds have sprung up throughout North America and indeed, through the world. We at The Wexner Foundation have long known that our alumni are very active in Limmud, in many cases spearheading their launch in their communities. In many ways, this shouldn’t be surprising: there is a natural synergy between the 2 concepts, as both initiatives hold Jewish study, whether text study or whether defined more broadly, as a supreme and a consequential value.

The idea behind this special issue of the newsletter is to highlight for our 2000 members, fellows and alumni the wonderful efforts of our alumni in spreading the magic of Limmud. We have asked the leaders of Limmud LA, Limmud Atlanta, Limmud NY and Limmud FSU, all Wexner Heritage alumni, to share their stories with us. What was it that attracted them to Limmud? How did their Wexner experience inform their leadership? And what exactly do they gain from the wonderful efforts of our alumni in spreading the magic of Limmud. We have asked the leaders of Limmud LA, Limmud Atlanta, Limmud NY and Limmud FSU, all Wexner Heritage alumni, to share their stories with us. What was it that attracted them to Limmud? How did their Wexner experience inform their leadership? And what exactly do they gain from the Limmud concept? We are particularly pleased that Rabbi Shoshana Gelfand, an active Limmud attendee, scholar and leader, formerly Acting Vice President of the Wexner Heritage Program and herself a Wexner Graduate Fellowship alumna, has framed this dialogue for us.

Wexner and Limmud: Separated at Birth?

By Shoshana Boyd Gelfand, an alumna of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship Program who is Executive Director of the Movement for Reform Judaism in the UK.

19 November 2009

In some ways, it was inevitable that Limmud and Wexner would intersect one day. They are, in some ways, like twins separated at birth; similar genetics, but different upbringings. For example, they differ significantly in their target audiences: Wexner is unabashedly elite, a leadership program, while Limmud is adamantly democratic and open to all who wish to attend. At their core, however, both embrace a single unifying value, what I call “Passionate Pluralism” – an approach to Judaism that celebrates difference and complexity. Passionate pluralism moves beyond the notion of “tolerance” of difference. Rather, it recognizes the value of creating community with those who share certain core values, but differ in how those values are actualized. Instead of presenting a monolithic answer from a higher authority, passionate pluralism convenes diverse groups of Jews and allows multiple answers to emerge from their dialogue with each other. Passionate pluralism believes that well-educated Jews are best positioned to enhance Jewish life, but does not offer a single model for that education. Rather, passionate pluralism provides a platform for engagement, where the participants define the limits of the conversation. The dialectic process of differing voices generates the passion, while the diversity of the community guards against that very passion disintegrating into fundamentalism and extremism.

It is my experience of both Limmud and Wexner that has helped me to develop this concept of passionate pluralism and the principles which underlie it. Those principles consist of the common factors required for passionate pluralism to flourish, and they are present in both Limmud and Wexner programs:

1) Personal choice – Individuals have the autonomy to navigate their own way through a multiplicity of choices. There is no one pathway that everyone must follow to be authentic. Each person must be true to him or herself while engaging with others to form a community of seekers.
2) Egalitarianism – While men and women are not necessarily seen as identical, they are treated equally in terms of access to leadership, learning and engagement. Each person’s individuality is acknowledged (with their gender being part of that individuality), but no one faces discrimination or limits based on his or her gender.
3) Inclusivity – Instead of raising barriers to participation, the institutional culture invites people in. Efforts are made to welcome people and help them deepen their Jewish commitments and learning, without expending energy on defining the boundaries of who is in and who is out.
4) Engaging deeply with Jewish texts and tradition – the authentic Jewish voice is maintained through an unmediated engagement with Jewish texts and tradition. Participants are expected to study and grow by engaging with Jewish texts and each other. Different interpretations are welcomed, and critical thinking encouraged.

In short, I view Wexner and Limmud as the flip sides of a coin. Wexner is about leadership training while Limmud is for everyone. Wexner is funded by major donors, while Limmud’s magic depends on its culture of voluntarism. Yet, both initiatives demonstrate that passionate pluralism creates a vibrancy and an energy that enrich Jewish lives and leaves both leaders and followers inspired.
Wexner Heritage Alumni Limmud Volunteers

Matthew Bronfman: Chairman of the International Steering Committee of Limmud FSU

Matthew Bronfman is a Wexner Heritage alumnus from New York.

Our most recent Limmud was July 1-3 in Jerusalem, for Russian speaking Israelis. In all, we will have 5 Limmuds this year for Russian speaking Jews in the US, Israel, Ukraine and Russia. I became involved in this project 4 years ago when I was in Cordoba, Spain for a World Jewish Congress meeting. Chaim Chesler, the founder of Limmud FSU, convinced me that my support as well as that of the World Jewish Congress would help him obtain the necessary funds to launch this dream.

Linda Fife, Limmud LA

A Wexner Heritage alumna from Los Angeles, Linda is a Jewish educator and co-founder of Limmud LA. Linda is known as a “community activist” with a variety of leadership roles in her synagogue (Adat Ari El), Camp Ramah and the Los Angeles Federation.

I love the idea of bringing Jews from across the spectrum to engage with one another. My Wexner experience was most powerful because of that opportunity. As we sat at the table learning together, we also had the opportunity to learn about one another. We were no longer “a Conservative Jew” or an “Orthodox” Jew or a secular Jew or a “Reform” Jew; we were simply Jews engaged in dialogue and learning with one another and about one another. But Wexner, as Shoshana mentioned, is limited to small numbers of participants, while Limmud is open to all. I wanted others to have that same opportunity I had to learn with Jews from all segments of the community.

Michal Hillman, Limmud Atlanta

Michal Hart Hillman, a Wexner Heritage alumna from Atlanta, is a community volunteer.

Growing up in the South, every one is an aunt, uncle or cousin or kissing kin! Families and friends are intertwined and interrelated. Limmud is an opportunity to recreate southern hospitality minted with learning. Many Limmud teachers had family in their classroom, some for the first time! Old friends reconnected at Limmud. Two women who grew up in South Carolina literally bumped into each other on campus. Both are living in Atlanta (within 4 blocks of each other) and neither one of them knew the other was in town and both had been here 40 years!

Jodi Mansbach, Limmud Atlanta

Jodi Mansbach, a Wexner Heritage alumna from Atlanta, has been involved in many Jewish volunteer activities but she is most passionate about starting new things like Limmud. When she is not volunteering in the Jewish community, she can now be found at Georgia Tech where she is working on her Master’s Degree in Urban Planning.

I love Rabbi Gelfand’s comment about passionate pluralism. The organization I had previously helped launch was all about passionate pluralism as well. It’s something that comes naturally to me but something that I’ve found hard to communicate among the leadership and funders here in Atlanta. What appealed to me about Limmud was that I would not be going it alone. I joined a group of people internationally who are committed to the same ideals. Having that emotional support, technical assistance support has made all the difference in sustaining me as a leader and our organization overall.

Shep Rosenman, Limmud LA

Shep Rosenman is a Wexner Heritage alumnus from Los Angeles.

When I wrote my application for the Wexner Heritage Program, my focus was on how important it was to build a post-denominational Judaism that ranged from the secular through the observant community. I had been involved in several efforts to build such a community in LA, all of which had failed. The first time I ever heard of Limmud was at the 2002 Wexner Heritage Summer Institute. Nigel Savage, one of the founders of Limmud UK, us off our feet with his description of a post-denominational Jewish community that was centered on volunteerism and learning.

Jeffrey Schwarz, Limmud NY

Jeffrey Schwarz is a Wexner Heritage alumnus from NY. Jeffrey is a member of the Board and Vice President/Treasurer, as well as having been a founding Co-Chair of Limmud NY. He is also a member of the Board and the Treasurer of Moving Traditions (one of Slingshot’s 50 Most Innovative Jewish organizations in North America).

For me, as I look back on my Jewish journey over the past two decades, it is clear that the road I’ve been on originated at 375 Park Avenue, the building where my Wexner seminars met, and led directly to the Hudson Valley Resort, the site of the first annual Limmud NY conference, albeit with a brief detour to Nottingham, England. As my teacher and friend, Rabbi Shoshana Boyd Gelfand put it more succinctly than I ever could: Wexner and Limmud are flip sides of the same coin.
Limmud Events Around the World

Limmud Atlanta— Atlanta Fest 4-7/9/2009

Birobidjan 10-11/09/2009

Argentina 15/11/2009

EX-YU 14-15/11/2009
All events June 2009—December 2009:

Limmud Bulgaria 3-5/6/2009
Limmud OZ 6-8/6/2009
Limmud Newcastle 14/6/2009
Limmud FSU - "Scholom Aleichem" - Jerusalem 1-3/7/2009
Limmud South Africa - Capetown 31/7-2/8/2009
Limmud South Africa - Durban 3-4/08/2009
Limmud South Africa - Johannesburg 9-10/8/2009
Limmud Fest 28-31/8/2009
Limmud Atlanta 4-7/9/2009
Limmud FSU - Birobidzhan 10-11/9/2009
Limmud Arava 15/10/2009
Limmud Poland 23-25/10/2009
Limmud Hungary 6-8/11/2009
Limmud Turkey 13-15/11/2009
Limmud France 13-15/11/2009
Limmud Leeds 15/11/2009
Limmud Keshet Argentina 15/11/2009
Limmud.de Berlin Volunteers Day 15/11/2009
Limmud Sweden 21-22/11/2009
Limmud EXYU 21-22/11/2009
Limmud Brazil 29/11/2009
Limmud Negev 13/12/2009
Limmud Galil 15-16/12/2009
Limmud Conference 27-31/12/2009

Upcoming Events

January 2010
15-18 Limmud NY — www.limmudny.org

February 2010
12-15 Limmud LA — www.limmudla.org
14 Limmud Chicago — www.LimmudChicago.org
14 Limmud Scotland— http://www.limmud.org/day/
15 Limmud Negev — www.limmudnegev.org.il
18-19 Limmud Arava — http://limmud.arava.gonegev.co.il

March 2010
7 Limmud.de Cologne — www.limmud.de
6-7 Limmud Philly — www.limmudphilly.org
13-14 Limmud NOLA — http://www.limmudfestnola.org/
14 Limmud Atlanta — www.limmudatlanta.org
15-18 Limmud FSU Ukraine — www.limmudfsu.org

April 2010
15-18 Limmud FSU Moscow — www.limmudfsu.org

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