

# THROUGH THE LIBERAL LOOKING GLASS: *Stories from our heritage*

## TEACHER/FACILITATOR GUIDE

If you'd like to lead this series – or a one-off session – you can contact **Rabbi Leah Jordan at the Liberal Judaism main office, 020 7580 1663**, to go through the Jewish textual material and discuss themes, characters, and questions that arise.

### **BLURB:**

Interested in getting to know some of the most beautiful and fascinating stories – from our greatest storytelling collections, the Talmud and Midrash – from the inside?

Would you like to take more ownership of our rich literature, as progressive, discerning Jewish adults?

### **SUMMARY:**

Come study and discuss what those texts might tell us about ourselves, as Jews and as human beings. Through the Liberal Looking Glass offers six sessions of discussion and text study, guided by a teacher, on a range of wonderful Talmudic and Midrashic stories (and connected contemporary reading) from our Jewish tradition.

The series will deal with many of life's great questions: death, good and evil in the world, forgiveness and repentance, creation, divisions in the Jewish community, relationships with the wider non-Jewish world, the nature of Torah, the relationships between students and teachers, parents and children, religious dissent, and much more.

### **SIX DIFFERENT SESSIONS:**

- 1) The Oven of Achnai: The Torah is Not in Heaven (Talmud, Bava Metzia 59a-b)  
*Our human right to interpret for ourselves*
- 2) The Death of Rabbi Eliezer: Sequel to the Oven of Achnai (Talmud, Sanhedrin 68a)  
*The Torah (and Judaism) is expansive and we grow it day by day in our own lives*
- 3) Elisha ben Abuyah: Judaism's Ultimate Heretic (Jerusalem Talmud, Chagigah 2:1, 77b-c)  
*Struggling with why evil and suffering exist in the world*
- 4) Make Your Ear Like a Hopper: The Multivocality of Torah (Talmud, Chagigah 3a-b)  
*How to live the tension of divergent opinions*
- 5) Two Creation Stories: The First Human Being vs. The First Things God Created (Talmud, Avoda Zara 8a vs. Midrash Genesis Rabbah 1:4)
- 6) The Deposition of Rabban Gamliel: Egalitarianism & Democracy in the Beit Midrash (Talmud, Brachot 27b-28a)  
*Opening the community to the marginalised/excluded*

## **GUIDELINES**

### **6-part series or stand alone sessions**

**Length of session:** 1-1/2 to 2 hours (one hour and fifteen minutes minimum)

**Group size:** 25-30 participants maximum, as it's discussion based

This 6-part series was first given as a weekly session in February and March 2014 at Finchley Progressive Synagogue in London – open to any adults in the community who wanted to participate, all learning backgrounds welcome. The teacher can choose to do the whole series, or any one of the sessions can stand alone. As a series, it works well, as there are several recurring Talmudic characters and themes. It works best as a study and then discussion-based series, of 1-1/2 to 2 hours each, with at most 25-30 participants, in which the group works through the material either all together or in chevruta/study partners, with the teacher's guidance, and then discusses the questions and themes that arise, again guided by the teacher.

Each session focuses on a particular passage (or *sugya*) of the Talmud which is *aggadic* (*story-based*) in nature. A general overview of what Talmud and Midrash are at the start would also be useful for participants.

### **Session Outline**

**5 minutes: introductions**

**10 minutes: introduction of particular sources, texts, characters, themes that participants will need to know**

**Majority of session time: chevruta/study partners (or as a group) to work through main source, with discussion**

**5-10 minutes: conclusion and discussion of further questions or themes to explore**