HAVRUTA

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Celebrating 50 YEARS OF PARDES

ESTABLISHED 1972

מכון פרדס לחנוך יהודי ע"ר

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A LETTER FROM *the President*

One of my favorite rabbinic texts is the description found in the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael of the way in which Moses remembers to take the bones of Joseph with him as the children of Israel escape from Egypt. The midrash offers a vivid visual description of two *aronot* – arks – being carried side-by-side for 40 years as the children of Israel make their way to the Land of Israel. In one ark are the *luchot habrit* (the Ten Commandments). In the other are Joseph's bones.

As we celebrate a half-century of Pardes, how might we hold on to our past in a way that helps us to move forward? The image of the midrash runs counter to how we usually think about what it means to hold on to the past. Holding on to the past usually means being stuck in past and not being able to move forward. But for the children of Israel, holding the ark with Joseph's bones is embracing the past. It helps them proceed and leads them to new realities. It allows them to be transformed into a nation, and reach the promised land.

Like the bones of Joseph, Pardes's rich history can be the basis for our bright future. Our year-long celebration is not just about the past; it is about a vision for Pardes's future and a vision for the future of the Jewish people. Our past will be the impetus to move forward, to embrace the opportunities of new realities, and it will be the basis for our own transformation.

How might we hold on to the past in ways that lead us forward? First, we will need a clear sense of direction. It isn't enough to know where we are. We also need to know where we are headed. Over the past year, Pardes has been developing a three-year strategic plan as a road map of where we want to be in 2025 and beyond. The past five decades of Jewish learning have been marked by openness, passion, Jewish knowledge, and inclusivity. Our mission has never been more relevant and

necessary to the long-term sustainability of the Jewish people than it is right now.

We are committed to serving greater numbers of students in both our immersive and short-term programs. Through Pardes North America, we will work with partner organizations to increase Jewish knowledge among all lay leaders and to foster the "beit midrashification" of Jewish life – where study is the way that Jews connect to their tradition and to each other.

We will invest in our alumni, a community of 9,000+ people who are ready to deepen their Jewish lives and to transform their communities. Pardes Torah will reach farther and wider in the marketplace of ideas. Like the children of Israel, our future is one in which we too come home, to a new world-class facility in Jerusalem. Beit Karen, will serve as a destination for locals and visitors alike.

Second, holding on to the past while moving forward means acknowledging how different our destination is from anything we've experienced thus far. For the children of Israel, the contrast between Egypt and the Land of Israel could not have been more pronounced. Egypt was fertile with an endless supply of water. The Land of Israel was dependent upon God's blessings for water. In Egypt, we were dominated and exploited. In the Land of Israel, we are called to build a society where no one is exploited.

Jewish life in the Diaspora has changed significantly since Pardes was founded in 1972. Likewise, in 50 years, Jewish identity will be different from what it is today. There will be far more hybridity and fluidity in Jewish life. The denominational framework of the past 150 years will likely be transformed. A numerical increase in both the Haredi population and those who define themselves as Jews of no religion will widen the gulf within the Jewish community. The majority of Jews will live in Israel for the first time since the days of the Second Temple. While our year-long immersive programs will certainly continue to be the signature offerings of Pardes, our commitment to learning will need to adapt and expand to these new realities. Our destination will be so different from our original place of departure. Acknowledging this enables us to move forward.

Finally, our ability to move forward while holding on to the past will be because of the strength of those who walk alongside us. Moses didn't carry the ark with Joseph's bones himself. It was carried for 40 years by numerous people who stepped up to help. What a blessing it is for Pardes to draw from the strength of those who walk alongside us:

Our Board members, who are deeply engaged and committed to our success.

Our dedicated staff, whose hard work powers every aspect of our institution and its growth.

Our incredibly talented faculty, past and present, who teach, inspire, and care for our students.

Our supporters who make it all possible. Planning for our future requires greater financial resources than ever. Donor investments enable us to reach more students, to deepen their sense of belonging and commitment to Jewish life, and to cultivate a love for our texts and tradition.

And we walk alongside our students and alumni, whose counter-cultural decisions to enter into our Beit Midrash is building stronger, more educated, more vibrant Jewish lives around the world.

Let's carry our history with us. Let's grasp on to this ark and march toward the future with the roadmap we have carefully laid out. Let's prepare ourselves for new and unfamiliar realities that lie ahead. And let's continue to lend our strength to carry the past half-century with us as we venture toward our next 50 years.

Rabbi Leon Morris *was appointed President of Pardes in 2017 and is an alumnus of the 1995–1996 Year Program. This letter was adapted from remarks delivered at Pardes's 50th Anniversary Kickoff event on September 19, 2022 in Jerusalem.*

Jay Schlesinger (Fellow '22–'23) from Scotland poses with Rachel Harris (Year '99–'00 & '22, Summer '18) who is a Pardes Global Leadership Fellow from England, at the 50th Kickoff event.

50 Years of Pardes

1970s

1971 Michael Swirsky lays the groundwork for Pardes with support from the WZO.

1972 Pardes officially opens with 26 Students at Rechov Gad 10 in Baka, making Pardes the very first Beit Midrash open to men and women of all Jewish backgrounds.

1973 Dov Berkovits is appointed Director.

1977 Levi Lauer is appointed Director.

1980s

1985 Pardes grows significantly with 90 Year Program students enrolled.

Evening classes are added.

The Summer Program launches, providing more opportunities to attend Pardes. It grows quickly with 70 students enrolled just two years later in 1987.

Pardes is awarded the Yacov Agrest Prize for Innovative Jewish Education by the Israeli government.

1989 Working with a $553k budget, Pardes becomes independent from the WZO.

1990s

1990 Pardes moves to Shivtei Yisrael 22 in the Musrara neighborhood.

The alumni community in Israel grows and explores starting its own yishuv.

1991 Pardes's budget grows to $861k with projections to hit $1M the following year.

1992 The Summer Program marks a new high with 114 students from 6 countries.

1993 Pardes again moves, this time to its current location at 29 Pierre Koenig in Talpiot.

1994 Levi Lauer retires from his Directorship after 17 years and Baruch Feldstern becomes Acting Director.

1995 Daniel Landes is named Director of Pardes.

Pardes goes digital, opening its first two email accounts, one for Israel and one for the American Pardes Foundation: pardesinst.@jer1.co.il and apfsg@aol.com.

1996 The Year Program attracts 102 students.

The Summer Program boasts 150 participants.

Rae Janvey is appointed Director of North American Affairs, the first US office opens, and the budget reaches $1.3M.

1998 The Pardes (Executive) Learning Seminar debuts with 29 students.

David Bernstein is appointed Dean.

Arye Strikovsky offers Pardes's first classes in advanced rabbinics.

Pardes partners with the Federation of Pittsburgh to create LISHMA, The Pittsburgh Learning and Leadership Development Project.

1999 The Fellows Program for 2nd-year students is launched.

2000s

2000 The Pardes Educators Program (PEP) launches with 15 students with the support of the AVI CHAI Foundation.

Jayne Rosengarten becomes the head of the American Pardes Foundation.

2001 David Bernstein leads the first annual Pardes trip to Poland.

2002 250 attend the first Pardes Alumni Shabbaton in New York.

Pardes launches its first website.

Pardes mourns the loss of students Ben Blutstein z"l and Marla Bennett z"l, who are killed in the Hebrew University bombing.

2005 Joshua Chadajo is named Executive Director of the American Pardes Foundation, the first alum to hold this position.

The Pardes from Jerusalem weekly parsha podcast debuts and soon tops the Religion charts on iTunes.

2006 The Pardes Educators Program partners with Hebrew College to offer an MA in Jewish Education.

2008 Pardes takes ownership of the adjacent lot on Pierre Koenig Street upon which it plans to build a new facility.

2010s

2010 350 attend the "Entering the Orchard of Pardes" gala at Ramat Rachel, honoring Libby & Moshe Werthan.

2011 The Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution is launched.

2012 Michael Rosenzweig is named President & CEO.

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators (PCJE) is established and the Pardes Experiential Educators Program (PEEP) is launched.

The first *Awakening the Divine* Jewish spirituality retreat is held in January.

2013 Elmad, Pardes's online digital library, goes live.

2016 Rosh Yeshiva, Daniel Landes, leaves Pardes after 21 years.

Michael Rosenzweig, President & CEO, steps down, and David Bernstein is named Acting Director.

2017 Leon Morris is appointed President of Pardes.

2018 A groundbreaking ceremony is held for Pardes's future home, Beit Karen.

The Online Tefilah Education Database for Jewish Educators goes live.

2019 PCJE launches the Jewish Studies In-Service Teacher Training Program.

Pardes North America is established to reimagine Pardes's educational role in North America.

2020s

2020 Pardes commits to "Uninterrupted Torah" despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

Meir Schweiger retires after 43 years.

Michael Uram is appointed as Pardes's first Chief Vision and Education Officer to lead Pardes North America.

The Mahloket Matters Fellowship selects its first cohort.

2022

Pardes celebrates its 50th anniversary at an event featuring Natan Sharansky and President Isaac Herzog.

50 YEARS פרדס PARDES
YOUR TORAH. YOUR JOURNEY.

How Pardes Upholds the *Legacies of* RABBI HIYYA & REISH LAKISH

By Leah Rosenthal

I began teaching at Pardes in 1988, 34 years ago. Many things have changed over these 34 years. I've changed, the world has changed, and Pardes has changed. One thing that has *not* changed, though, is Pardes's philosophy on Torah. Pardes is deeply committed to the study of Torah with the strong conviction that Torah, Jewish tradition, and Jewish texts are the heritage of every Jew. Pardes believes that every Jew should have access to these texts, should *engage* with these texts, and in particular, become part of the conversations, debates, and *mahlakot* (constructive disagreements) that naturally develop in a Beit Midrash where Jews of different backgrounds, nationalities, and ideologies study Torah together. Pardes believes that these conversations are invaluable for the continuity of Jewish life and tradition.

A short passage in Masechet Sukkah of the Babylonian Talmud cites Reish Lakish, one of the dominant and outstanding rabbinic figures in Eretz Yisrael of the second generation of Amoraim. He was active alongside his colleague and havruta, Rabbi Yochanan, and both their teachings fill the pages of the Talmud Yerushalmi and the Talmud Bavli. In this passage, Reish Lakish tells us something about Jewish history, framing a time period of 600 years of historic events and learning.

תלמוד בבלי, מסכת סוכה כ ע"א

דְּאמַר רֵישׁ לָקִישׁ: הֲרֵינִי כַּפָּרַת רַבִּי חִיָּא וּבָנָיו, שֶׁבִּתְחִלָּה כְּשֶׁנִּשְׁתַּכְּחָה תּוֹרָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל – עָלָה עֶזְרָא מִבָּבֶל וְיִסְּדָהּ. חָזְרָה וְנִשְׁתַּכְּחָה – עָלָה הִלֵּל הַבַּבְלִי וְיִסְּדָהּ. חָזְרָה וְנִשְׁתַּכְּחָה – עָלוּ רַבִּי חִיָּא וּבָנָיו וְיִסְּדוּהָ.

...as Reish Lakish said: May I be the atonement for Rabbi Hiyya and his sons, as initially, when the Torah was forgotten by the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael, Ezra ascended from Babylonia and reestablished it. The Torah was again forgotten in Eretz Yisrael, and Hillel the Babylonian ascended and reestablished it. When the Torah was again forgotten in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Hiyya and his sons ascended and reestablished it.

What does Reish Lakish want us to know, and why is it so important that we understand what he is conveying?

This text has been on my mind for quite a while. It's clear that Reish Lakish is drawing a historical narrative with a recurring theme. Time and again, the Torah is nishtaka, forgotten. And time and again, a heroic figure arrives, reestablishes Torah, and saves it from being forgotten. In particular, Reish Lakish is emphasizing that Torah is forgotten in Eretz Yisrael and it is saved by figures from Bavel, Babylonia. He cites three occurrences.

The first takes place near the end of biblical times. Ezra the Scribe leads his people back to Eretz Yisrael after years of exile in Babylonia and finds the First Temple destroyed and the land desolate as a result of the Babylonian conquest led by Nebuchadnezzar. The once vibrant Jewish community had been dispersed, and Ezra, slowly and with difficulty, revives both the Jewish presence in the Land of Israel and the Jewish commitment to Torah and its commandments. He sets in motion the process of rebuilding what we now call the Second Temple.

400 years later, during the final decades of the Second

Temple, Torah is again in danger. The Hasmonean kingdom is in decline, the Roman conquest of Eretz Yisrael is on, and Herod is appointed as king and sovereign. There is great factionalism. *Perushim* and *Tzedoqim*, Pharisees and Sadducees, and others contend both with each other and external challenges. The world of Torah is dramatically weakened to the point of being nearly forgotten.

This time, Hillel HaBavli comes up from Bavel and finds the community in crisis. According to the rabbinic historical narrative, he revives the world of Torah study and Torah commitment in Eretz Yisrael, is appointed to be the first *nasi,* patriarch, and establishes a dynasty of patriarchs who preside for 400 years. Under Hillel's leadership, this generation will mark the beginning of what we now call the classic Tannaitic period, which will last until the completion of the Mishna six generations later. Again, at a critical moment in Jewish history, a man of stature comes forth from Bavel and revives a broken community in Eretz Yisrael.

The third occurrence cited by Reish Lakish takes place about 200 years later, just a generation or two before his own time. Rabbi Hiyya and his sons come from Bavel to Eretz Yisrael and they too find a community desolate of Torah study. Again, saviors emerge from Bavel to revive Torah in Eretz Yisrael.

What is astonishing here is that Rabbi Hiyya is an associate, colleague, and disciple of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, who at this time is redacting the Mishna. In other words, Torah study is *flourishing* in Eretz Yisrael at this time. How could Reish Lakish possibly suggest that, had Rabbi Hiyya not arrived in Eretz Yisrael, Torah might have been forgotten?

This question puzzled me for a long time until it occurred to me that there are, perhaps, two ways that Torah can be forgotten. Torah can be forgotten under weak leaders whose communities are likewise weak. But Torah can *also* be forgotten under *strong* leadership because a charismatic and authoritative leader's voice in the world of Torah can ultimately exclude the voices of others.

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, by redacting the Mishna and establishing it as a central text, *by definition* marginalizes other texts. Rabbi Hiyya, as a counterbalance, emerges as a master of *Baraitot*, the excluded texts. Rabbi Hiyya insists on collecting and preserving these texts, attributing to him, according to Talmudic traditions, the redaction of what we call the *Tosefta*. Rabbi Hiyya *reincludes* the voices marginalized by a powerful, charismatic, and authoritative figure.

In our passage of Talmud, Reish Lakish says, "May I be the atonement for Rabbi Hiyya and his sons." According to Rashi, this is an expression of honor and respect reserved for one's parents or revered teachers. Reish Lakish invokes the honored legacy of Rabbi Hiyya and his sons in order to emphasize the importance of preserving Torah in ways that do not marginalize voices. He is insisting that no voice in the Beit Midrash should be muted, because even under strong leaders and within strong centers of Torah—maybe even *precisely* in these circumstances—Torah can, in fact, be forgotten. And, if we perceive this to be the case, we are obligated to reintroduce these voices back into the Beit Midrash.

It may be that Reish Lakish has a personal investment in this idea as well. The Talmud Bavli describes him as a gladiator and criminal in his youth, making him an anomaly amongst the rabbis. This perhaps contributes to the value he places on outsider perspectives. In this way, he is similar to Rabbi Hiyya, who comes from Bavel also understanding the reality of multiple perspectives. Moreover, Reish Lakish's partner is Rabbi Yochanan, who is authoritative like Yehudah HaNasi, perhaps giving Reish Lakish a firsthand sense of how Torah can be forgotten under powerful leaders.

I believe Pardes has truly internalized the message of Reish Lakish and Rabbi Hiyya. At Pardes, we insist that sincere and serious voices not be marginalized in our Beit Midrash, even while we purposely locate ourselves in Jerusalem, in Eretz Yisrael, the strong center where the vibrancy of Torah and Torah study is unparalleled in Jewish history. Not only is it painful to those whose voices are pushed aside, like Rabbi Hiyya and Reish Lakish, Pardes believes that when committed and genuine voices are marginalized, Torah itself suffers.

Leah Rosenthal *is a senior faculty member at Pardes, where she has taught for 34 years.*

Adapted from a speech delivered at Pardes's 50th Anniversary Kickoff event on September 19, 2022 in Jerusalem.

THE FIRST TO ENTER THE ORCHARD

SELECTIONS FROM 1972 ADMISSIONS ESSAYS

From what I have said here it must be clear to you why your program attracts me so. To spend an entire year studying Hebrew texts is indeed, as you recognized in your folder, to take a risk. But at this point in my life, it seems a better risk than most anything else would be.

I am trying to become more religious but I need to understand a mitzvah before I observe it. Someone who really knows must teach me—with more an explanation than simply "it is written."

For the past 2 or 3 years I have semi-consciously been flirting with Judaism at a distance; I think I should have a full affair (experience) with it. Now is the time to take this opportunity;a year or so later, I might have new responsibilities and commitments and no longer will be able to take the time.

Although I practice a portion of Halacha my actions are based on shaky ground; their roots have not completely taken hold. Now is the time for me to seriously study directly from the sources in a modern, questioning approach.

I cannot remember a time when religion was not an issue for me. I do not know whether I am fighting my way towards it or away from it. Sometimes—often—I have wanted to put an end to the struggle. Like the knight in Ingmar Bergman's Seventh Seal, I have wanted to kill the image of God inside me. But I have never been able to. I say to myself that I fail thus because I do not really want to succeed.

What is a Jew? I don't know. But I don't want to know from Jean-Paul Sartre or Oswald Spengler or Martin Luther: I want to hear how we, the Jews, define ourselves, and myself. My world view, my morals—they are all Western. I wish to learn to think Jewish.

In my search for Jewish identity in Israel I have often felt alone and confounded. I should like to meet and study with others who are also looking.

PARDES'S FIRST BROCHURE

Below is the original brochure text used to recruit students for Pardes's inaugural year in 1972.

You are a Jew, a questioning Jew. You are heir to an ancient tradition, and you want to know in what ways it can shape and guide your life. To find out, you are prepared to study, seriously and thoughtfully. You do not know where this study will lead, whether it will be a path to a rich new life or a blind alley, or something in between. But you are prepared to take the risk of investment of time and energy that a serious spiritual quest requires.

We are a group of Jewish teacher-students who are likewise in search. We have already devoted a good deal of our lives to Jewish study and have already made commitments to live with and within the Jewish tradition. But for us, too, many questions remain unanswered. How can we relate to the authority of the past? What forms of thinking and living are appropriate for Jews in our own time? What would we like to pass on to our children? What is to be the cement that will bind the Covenant People together in the future?

We have no axes to grind-Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or any other. We seek the answers to our questions, not in the formulation and propagation of ideologies, but in the way that Jews have always sought their way out of perplexity—through the study of Torah. There, in the quiet, disciplined interaction between the inquiring mind and the text, in the intimate personal and communal synthesis, is where each of us will come as close as any man can to finding final answers. That, at least, is our view.

We would like you to join us in this enterprise, to learn together with us. What we offer is a new full-time, one-year curriculum in basic Jewish disciplines, geared to the needs of those whose previous exposure to Judaism has been minimal or inadequate. The program is probably unlike any other program of Jewish studies now being offered. It is neither the almost exclusively Talmud-centered program of the yeshivah, with its insistence on personal observance, nor the impersonal, academically-oriented program of the university.

Through intensive study of selected texts—Biblical, Rabbinic, medieval and modern; Halakhah, Aggadah, philosophy, mysticism and liturgy—we hope to provide a meaningful introduction to the major elements of traditional Jewish thought and practice. There will be an attempt at synthesis of a variety of texts from a variety of periods, so as to give a sense both of diversity and of a coherent whole. In the process of teaching, we too hope to be learning...

...The effect of the year's study on your life will rest largely on your own motivation to learn and inclination to appropriate what you have learned. Hopefully, after having spent a year with us, you will have achieved sufficient competence to proceed to study on your own or to enter a more advanced program of study elsewhere, should you decide to do so.

We are looking for mature, intellectually-able men and women for whom this program will fill a personal need. If you think you are such a person, if you have already had at least a year of college, and if you can devote a year to sharing this experiment with us, we hope you will be in touch. Deadline for submitting applications and letters of recommendation for the 5733 school year is May 15, 1972.

Let us hear from you soon.

PARDES'S FOUNDING *Father*

Pardes President, RABBI LEON MORRIS, sat down with Pardes founder, RABBI MICHAEL SWIRSKY, to discuss the early days of Pardes and what led him, in 1971–72, to build something new.

Tell me about your journey to *aliya* in 1970.

I'm a typical third-generation American Jew. My Russian-born grandparents arrived in America as children at the turn of the 20th century. There, they rebelled against their religious upbringing. As a result, my parents received very little Jewish education. They did belong to a Conservative shul and sent me to Hebrew school, but it was minimal. Yet somehow, as a teenager, I got some kind of religious bug. Though my parents weren't enthusiastic about it, they allowed me to go to Camp Ramah, and that was decisive.

As a student, I came to Israel several times, first as a volunteer to pick potatoes in a kibbutz, which was not terribly rewarding. I returned right after the Six-Day War for a year at Hebrew University, which wasn't great either. Next, I came as a counselor for a group of American teenagers in a Ramah seminar, and that was a real turning point for me. I saw the American culture they represented, and I saw the Israeli world to which I was introducing them, and I realized that I identified more strongly with the latter.

I decided I would look for an opportunity to come back and try actually living here. After a year in a Jewish religious commune in Boston (Havurat Shalom), I came here in 1970 and have never regretted doing so. I found a sense of meaning, of making a difference, of being a privileged participant in something historic and unique. And that's only gotten stronger over the years.

What led you to found Pardes?

I had been lucky enough to study at the University of Chicago, with its broad, coherent, liberal-arts undergraduate curriculum. It was exciting. But when I graduated, I realized something significant had been lacking. My education there hadn't included anything Jewish. Even the Bible, undoubtedly the most important book in the Western tradition, was never even mentioned! So I set about looking for a place to fill that gap.

A yeshiva, with its Orthodox agenda and mindset, would be spiritually serious but confining. And academic study of Judaism, available then at only a few universities, would be intellectually open but inhospitable to questions of a spiritual nature. I decided to sit at the feet of the great scholars then at the Jewish Theological Seminary, which seemed to offer a middle way. However, it turned out to be, in a sense, the worst of both worlds: both dry and religiously restrictive. Nevertheless, I persisted there for six years, until ordination.

After making aliya, I met many young people who had come here in a search similar to the one I myself had embarked on seven years earlier. Israeli universities offered

Jewish studies that were intellectually open but merely academic, and the yeshivot were religiously oriented but prescriptive and intellectually confining. So I decided that a framework was needed that offered the best of the two systems. And that's really how it came about.

How does a recently ordained 29-year-old new immigrant start a new institution?

Well, being young, you have a kind of chutzpah. If we all waited until we felt perfectly qualified to do something, many important things would not get done. That's number one. Second, I was not exactly new to questions of Jewish education, having already been involved in them for some years as a teacher. Most important, though, was that the institution I had in mind would, in its very essence, have to reflect the aspirations and concerns of the learner and seeker, such as I still was, rather than those of the educator.

The process started in 1971. Fortuitously, my first job in Israel was in a department of the World Zionist Organization headed at the time by a remarkably able, broad-minded man, the late Mordechai Bar-On *z"l*. Moraleh, as he was known, had formerly been the Chief Education Officer of the IDF but was also an intellectual and, later, a historian and political activist. Though not formally religious, he had a deep commitment to the future of the Jewish people and its heritage.

I went to him with my idea, seeking advice. He listened carefully for half an hour and then said, "This is a good idea, and I want to help you." It so happened that the department was just then planning to vacate several buildings in Jerusalem. One was on Rehov Gad, not far from where Pardes is today. He said we could use it, with the WZO covering the overhead and my salary. There would not even be a need to publicly acknowledge this help. All we needed to do was charge tuition to pay the teachers. "So drop what you're doing now and go for it"—that's pretty much how he said it. That arrangement lasted for ten years, until Pardes became a fully independent institution.

How did you get figures like Adin Steinsaltz *z"l* and David Hartman *z"l* to teach?

Approaching teachers was actually not difficult. I had a clear idea of what I wanted, and I did some research to identify gifted teachers—famous or not—who were likely to be responsive to it. Everyone I approached warmed to the idea of teaching highly motivated students Torah *lishmah*—for its own sake—in a completely open-ended setting, quite unlike the institutions where most of them were then working. It wasn't a hard sell.

Sadly, all five members of the original senior faculty are now gone. Adin Steinsaltz was then only in his late thirties but was already well known as a *talmid hakham*. Eliezer Schweid was a prominent professor of Jewish thought. Aryeh Toeg was a promising young Bible scholar. (We lost him, unfortunately, a year later in the Yom Kippur War.) David Hartman, a new oleh from Canada, had a reputation as a philosopher and charismatic rabbi. Mike Rosenak was a well-known educator.

They were all learned, enthusiastic teachers. But also important to me was that, personally, they represented a broad spectrum of diverse Jewish models for the students: Steinsaltz and Schweid, native Israelis from "secular" backgrounds who were devoting their lives to the study of Jewish texts; Hartman from the East-European and American yeshiva world but unconventional in his religious thinking; Rosenak from a liberal-Orthodox German-Jewish background; Toeg from an Iraqi family that had migrated to the Far East before settling in Israel.

The teaching assistants—I called them tutors—were a diverse group as well, and several subsequently became prominent as scholars, educators, and leaders too, among them Dov Berkovits, Aryeh Strikovsky *z"l*, and Menachem Froman *z"l*.

Where and how did you recruit students?

I had a lot of friends in the Hillel network, and I sent out a poster to put on bulletin boards.

We started in the fall of 1972 with 27 students, nine women and eighteen men. Most came from the US and Canada. Some were living here. Most were graduates of elite universities. But from a Jewish and religious point of view, they, too, were very diverse.

Why the name Pardes?

The word actually comes from Farsi, meaning garden. It's similar in Hebrew: an orchard or grove of fruit trees. It crept into the Indo-European languages as the word "paradise," the Garden of Eden. But in Rabbinic tradition, pardes was given a metaphorical meaning: the inner world

(Continued...)

of Jewish knowledge. Also, the four letters of the Hebrew word were said to represent four levels of interpreting the Torah: the plain, literal meaning; the allusive meaning; the homiletical meaning; and the esoteric, mystical meaning. Again, diversity was an essential part of the Pardes idea.

Describe the ideological orientation at the outset.

On the second-year recruiting brochure, there was a significant heading, "Our goal is Jewish learning." It's not what you do with what you learn. That's open-ended. Come through the door and we'll show you the texts and teach you to read them. But what you do with them is up to you.

Rabbi Maurice Pekarsky *z"l*, who was a mentor to me as an undergraduate, once said that we need to look at our students as human beings with their own aspirations and life trajectories, not just as means to a larger institutional or collective end. We have to start with their needs, not ours. That was one of our major principles at the start, and I believe it is still the case. The agenda is the students' agenda.

When you look back over 50 years and the impact that Pardes has had on Jewish life, how do you process that?

Obviously, it's tremendously gratifying. What else can I say? It was unexpected. The beginnings were extremely modest. A small group of students and a small building. It was totally obscure. Almost no publicity. Only one full-time employee (yours truly). Teachers who gave only one class a week. It was very small scale. But now there are thousands of Pardes alumni, contributing to the Jewish future as rabbis, educators, communal leaders, parents. One of those alumni [Leon Morris] is sitting here next to me.

The growth is not a tribute to me. It's a tribute to devoted, long-serving teachers; cohort after cohort of wonderful students; fifty years of outstanding people, energy, and enormous effort. It surprises me over and over again. And to see the construction site...it's thrilling. I was shown the site recently. I was actually in tears. That's a tribute to all of you, and your predecessors who contributed so much. And I have every confidence that it will continue.

What's your *bracha* for all of us on our 50th anniversary?

Pardes stands for a certain way of thinking about plurality and diversity, and about mutual respect, which is such a rare commodity in the world today, including within our Jewish communities. The Torah belongs to every Jew, to all kinds of Jews. That should be the motto of the Jewish world, not just of Pardes. That's going to be an ongoing struggle, but Pardes will, I hope, continue to foster that ideal.

Current student Ikenna Maduno celebrates the arrival of a new Torah to Pardes on November 3, 2022.

50 for 50

In celebration of Pardes's 50th, we are highlighting 50 standout alumni whose accomplishments exemplify the rich texture of the Pardes community worldwide.

A new alum is featured weekly.
Follow along at www.pardes.org.il/50-for-50.

David Richman
Judge, Colorado Court of Appeals

"Since my second full year at Pardes ('01–'02), I have continuously learned and taught Torah and Talmud in our community in Denver, mainly in memory of Marla and Ben, who were tragically deprived of their desires to teach."

Tony Westbrook, Jr.
Director of Jewish Service Learning, Repair the World

"This was my first introduction into the world of Talmud. Meesh [Hammer-Kossoy] made the rabbis, the discussions, jump off the page and really come to life. She modeled what it meant to add one's own voice to centuries-old conversations and what it means to grapple with the text—a skill and a gift I use with my students!"

Gali Cooks
President & CEO, Leading Edge

"I remember the first time all of us assembled in the Pardes Beit Midrash and an engagement of two other students was announced. Everyone exploded into dance and the joy was palpable. I remember thinking, will the community do that for me and my future wife? When we got engaged some years later, indeed, we were listed in the "Pardes Personals" section of a newsletter, and it felt like the ultimate sign of belonging."

14 PARDES WOMEN AND THEIR PATHS TO THE RABBINATE

By Manya Ronay

Rachel Goldberg (Year '20–'21, Fellows '21–'23) and Chana Borow (PEP '20–'22) might not seem like the typical havruta (learning pair). Rachel is a Reiki Master and rabbinical student at Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal. Chana started rabbinical school at Yeshivat Maharat to become her family's 12th generation Orthodox rabbi—and the first woman.

Still, Rachel and Chana have much in common. From their love of learning to their nuanced perspectives on halakha (Jewish law), they prove that commonalities do exist across denominations.

"I didn't expect us to see Torah in a similar way," Chana said. "We both play the peace-maker role in our communities, but from different sides of the spectrum."

Chana tries to help Modern Orthodox Jews understand that less-observant Jews are still valid members of the community. "They deserve an equal amount of space in the Jewish community and in the Beit Midrash," she said.

Meanwhile, Rachel encourages people in her community to enter the Beit Midrash. She thinks learning is essential to develop a solid foundation of Jewish knowledge and make educated halakhic decisions. "I want to make sure my practice is informed," Rachel said. "I don't want to just make things up—I want to have deep roots to pull from."

Through their exploration of rabbinic texts, they both realized that Jewish law is more flexible than many people think. "All you have to do to understand this flexibility is open up any daf of gemara (page of Talmud) ever written," Chana said. "We're the only tradition I know of that preserves minority opinions. I realized very quickly that halakha was never meant to be black and white."

Rachel and Chana believe that halakha became rigid after centuries of persecution and wandering. Strict rules kept the community intact and provided distraction from external turmoil, they explain. "Rabbinic Judaism was established as a survival tool," Rachel said. "The mind is a place to retreat when it's very painful in the heart and the body." In fact, Rachel is developing a new body of work called Trauma Informed Torah to help people live holistic Jewish lives by reconnecting to their bodies, hearts and souls.

"I don't want to dishonor the generations that came before me, but I want to acknowledge that they came from a wounded place," Rachel said. "Can I compassionately bring healing and redemption in my own Torah?"

A PARDES PARADISE

This past year, at least 14 women attending or soon entering rabbinical school studied at Pardes. Their schools spanned denominations and regions, yet each found a home at Pardes. "Pardes is like Gan Eden—it's really paradise," said Sarah Klein (PEEP '20–'22), a student at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles. "All the educators are incredible. The community is so open and warm."

Others echoed the sentiment, including Phoebe Ana Rabinowitsch (Year '16, Part Time '21–'22), a recent Yeshivat Maharat graduate. "I experienced the Pardes Beit Midrash as the most encouraging, supportive and non-judgemental learning environment," Phoebe said. "The student population represents all different expressions of Judaism and shows there is not one correct way to be a part of Am Yisrael."

From the left: Lexie Botzum, Chloe Zelka, Rachel Goldberg, Sarah Klein, Chana Borow, Aliza Schwartz, Audrey Honig, and Jessica Spencer.

Audrey Honig (Summer '20, Year '21–'22), a rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College, also loved the diversity that has long been a hallmark of Pardes. "I got to spend all day improving my text skills and building friendships with people who grew up quite differently than I did," she said.

THE RIGHT TO BE A RABBI

Some of these students grew up with no female role models in their synagogues, whereas others weren't aware communities existed *without* female rabbis. All acknowledge the importance of gender diversity in the rabbinate.

"Women's voices have been left out of Torah scholarship for the vast majority of Judaism," Chana said. "The more voices we bring into the Beit Midrash, the more inclusive, understanding, and relevant Torah can become."

Sarah has wanted to be a rabbi since her Bat Mitzvah when a rabbi helped her navigate a complex family situation. She plans to bring her unique liveliness and spirit to the pulpit, noting that these qualities are often missing in synagogues. "I think the rabbinate really *needs* more love, warmth and welcoming," Sarah said.

To Audrey, it feels obvious that women should be rabbis because we'd miss important insights learning Torah just from men. "My Jewish and feminist identities feel so tied up with each other. I couldn't imagine being a rabbi without being a feminist," she said.

Sarah, Audrey, and Chana each won a prestigious fellowship from the Nachshon Project, which provides $30,000 a year during their rabbinic training. Notably, each of the three represent a different denomination: Chana is Orthodox, Sarah is Conservative, and Audrey is Reform.

Fifty years ago, the first American female rabbi, Sally Preisand, was ordained. Chana's maternal grandfather was on the board of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati when they admitted her.

Nearly forty years later, one of the first Orthodox female rabbis, Sara Hurwitz, was ordained. Rabba Hurwitz went on to found Yeshivat Maharat, where Chana is now training.

"I feel very lucky to have been born during this time," Chana said. "I never had a female role model like me growing up. Now, I get to be one of them."

***Manya Ronay** is a freelance writer in Jerusalem and an alum of part-time learning opportunities at Pardes.*

PREP FOR RABBINICAL SCHOOL AT PARDES

To learn more about attending the Pardes Year Program to prepare for rabbinical school, visit **www.pardes.org.il/year** or email **year@pardes.org.il.**

RABBINICAL SCHOOL + EDUCATOR TRAINING

Pardes partners with rabbinical schools across denominations to provide specialized training for to-be rabbis interested in day school and/or experiential education.

Learn more at: **www.pardes.org.il/rabbieducators.**

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Pardes thanks the many donors who have generously contributed to the Campaign for the Generations.

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When you make a gift to the Campaign for the Generations in support of our future home, Beit Karen, you are inscribing your name not just among the supporters of Pardes, but also among the builders of Jerusalem.

To the right are just a few of the building and endowment naming opportunities available.

Visit **www.pardes.org.il/beitkaren** to see all naming opportunities or email Joshua Chadajo at **joshua@pardes.org** or Jackie Frankel Yaakov at **jackief@pardes.org.il.**

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A Conversation *with* DR. DAVID I. BERNSTEIN

By Mili Leitner Cohen

In September of 2021, David stepped down from his post as Dean after 24 years. He remains actively involved as Dean Emeritus.

Mili Leitner Cohen recently sat down with Pardes's Dean Emeritus, Dr. David I. Bernstein, to discuss his tenure at Pardes. The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

Tell me about your Jewish upbringing.

My parents came to the U.S. after the war, having lost their families in the Shoah. They knew six languages—Yiddish, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, German, and Hebrew—but not a word of English. They learned "yes" and "no" on the boat while crossing the Atlantic. My upbringing was Jewishly minded if not religious, but my parents' decisions to send me to day school and summer camp helped me to become Jewishly literate.

What inspired you to become a Jewish educator?

Education has been part of my entire adult life. I've always loved the idea of having an impact on young people and helping them grow as people and as Jews. When you teach people regularly, share a building with them every day for years, watch them grow, and develop a relationship with them, you have a real impact on their lives. Nothing beats that feeling.

What attracted you to Pardes in 1998?

I loved my previous position as Director of Midreshet Lindenbaum, but after eleven years I felt that the great crusade of Orthodox women's learning had been won. Studying Talmud in a Beit Midrash was no longer controversial in mainstream Orthodox worlds. I wanted a new challenge.

I came to Pardes to dedicate myself to increasing Jewish literacy, which is Pardes's *raison d'etre.* Most people fear environments where they lack literacy because it's vulnerable, uncomfortable, and challenging work. Jews are disproportionately represented in higher education, yet so many are unaware of their heritage and unable to engage Jewish texts. Pardes students—from beginners to Kollel students—proactively put themselves in an environment where they lack knowledge, which I deeply admire.

I was also attracted to Pardes's agenda of Klal Yisrael, of recognizing that every Jew has the same right to the Torah. At Pardes, we don't need dialogue groups because we are constantly practicing mutual respect. Here, one is very likely to have a havruta partner who practices Judaism differently, classmates who attend very different shuls, Shabbat guests who hold different beliefs. That open, self-selecting environment that places Torah at our core, drew me to Pardes.

How has Pardes evolved during your tenure?

I've been at Pardes for almost half of its 50-year history. I've noticed the need to balance, on the one hand, staying true to our mission and core values, and on the other hand, knowing when to adapt. That is the secret to the longevity of anything, including Judaism. But, two areas of change stand out in particular.

Pardes has always been inclusive, groundbreaking, and excellent at welcoming students as individuals. Something we've improved is our ability to recognize groups. When I arrived, the egalitarian minyan was unofficial, student-led, didn't have a faculty advisor or faculty participants, and wasn't allowed to daven in the Beit Midrash. All of that has changed. It was important to me to mainstream groups and bring them to the center of Pardes life. That desire for greater inclusivity has extended to faculty too. I have tried to foster an appreciative atmosphere where faculty are encouraged to carry out initiatives.

Pardes is bigger now, in terms of both students and offerings. In my first year, we had 30 students and we had the Year Program. Now we have dozens of programs and hundreds of students. Pardes has become a wonderfully complex institution to run and manage.

What classes do you enjoy teaching?

Most of my Pardes teaching has focused on modern Jewish history, which is a long-time passion. My parents never read bedtime stories. Instead, they told me about their lives in Poland before the war and their narrow escapes during the Shoah. I was imbued as a child with an appreciation for the story of the Jewish people in the modern era with all of its inspiring, challenging, remarkable, and difficult moments. Studying history reminds us not only to be rooted in the present and the transitory, but to notice patterns that recur, and to learn from them for the future.

What led you to lead tours in Europe?

Teaching Jewish history in the place where things happened is the ideal teaching environment! The history of these places is fascinating and an important part of how the Jewish people developed over time. We experience the richness and variety of Jewish life in the past and the present. In Poland, for example, seeing the community's revival post-communism tells a remarkable story of Jewish resilience, vibrancy, and growth.

Is there a Pardes moment that stands out?

In my first week, my colleague Joanne received an email. We only had one email address back then so she had to print it out and hand it to me physically. It was from an alumna letting us know she had just become engaged. Being new, her name was unfamiliar, so I showed it to Meir Schweiger and Aryeh Ben-David and they responded, "She's a terrific person. You have to meet her!" When I asked what she does, they told me that she's a Reform rabbi. Meir and Aryeh are, from the outside, on the right of the Pardes denominational spectrum. Often, when people learn that an acquaintance has chosen a different

(Continued...)

denominational path, they are quick to say, "wonderful person, too bad." Right then, I realized that Pardes's culture genuinely celebrates one another's victories without competition or judgment.

What challenges lie ahead for Pardes?

A personal failure is not successfully bringing in more Israelis. It's a loss for Israelis and for our students from overseas and we are starting to address it seriously. Between language limitations and a lack of social relationships with Israelis, many students miss out on Israel's flourishing culture; on truly understanding Israeli society. The challenge ahead is maintaining our incredibly tight-knit community, and the deep relationships created here, while also encouraging students to develop ties to Israel and Israelis beyond the walls of Pardes.

Pardes is in good hands. We have exceptionally strong leadership in Israel and North America, so we will continue to impact people's lives, and we will keep being the place where wonderful lifelong relationships are formed, for faculty and students alike. We have faced huge challenges during my tenure, including the tragic loss of Ben Blutstein *z"l* and Marla Bennett *z"l* in the 2002 bombing at Hebrew University, and the Covid-19 pandemic, but we emerged from those challenges stronger. I feel confident that Pardes will continue to rise to whatever challenges it may face in the future.

How has Pardes affected you?

Pardes rubs off on you. It has made me a more open and inclusive person. I still have a long way to go, but it has certainly changed me for the better.

What are your plans for the future?

I'm planning to spend plenty of time with my family while continuing here as Dean Emeritus and leading tours of Jewish Europe. I also have some exciting new projects that I'm not quite ready to share—watch this space!

Mili Leitner Cohen *is a Pardes alumna living in Jerusalem. She earned her PhD in Ethnomusicology from the University of Chicago and was the first woman appointed to an Orthodox rabbinical position in Australia.*

BELOW: During Pardes's 50th Anniversary Kickoff event on September 19, 2022 in Jerusalem, Libby Werthan announced that the Aron Kodesh (holy ark) in the Werthan Beit Midrash of Pardes's future home, Beit Karen, will be named in David Bernstein's honor. David is pictured below with both Libby Werthan, who announced the honor, and Moshe Werthan.

Succulents anonymously placed by the entrance to Pardes.

FOUNDING FACULTY MEMBERS WHO WE LOST IN 2022

RABBI DR. ARYEH STRIKOVSKY *Z"L*

In May 2022, Pardes lost one of its most beloved teachers, one who had accompanied the Institute for most of its history, enriching and illuminating the lives of countless students over a period of more than forty years and exemplifying in his teaching and his life all that Pardes stands for: Rabbi Dr. Aryeh Strikovsky זצ"ל.

Aryeh was, to begin with, a true *talmid hakham*, with an encyclopedic knowledge, at his fingertips, of the entirety of Jewish sacred literature, from the Bible through the Talmud, Midrash and Codes, to the Kabbalah, Hasidism, and modern philosophy. Torah, and the love of Torah, filled his life, his every waking hour.

Yet it was not only erudition and wisdom that distinguished Aryeh but his generosity of spirit: the willingness to share his knowledge, to teach, answer and help all who came to him with questions and a desire to learn. He did this with extraordinary empathy, openness, and warmth. No question was too elementary or too audacious, no questioner too naïve or too bold.

Perhaps Aryeh's greatest attribute, however, was the least conspicuous: his exceptional humility. Always quiet, gentle, good-humored, and self-effacing, he bore his great accomplishments lightly. As the Torah says of Moses our Teacher, he was "the humblest of men." If the world is in fact sustained by the Thirty-Six Righteous, our Aryeh was surely one of them. יהי זכרו ברוך.

Rabbi Michael Swirsky *is the founder of Pardes.*

PROFESSOR ELIEZER SCHWEID *Z"L*

Eliezer Schweid, like the other teachers I was privileged to study with in Pardes's first year, didn't fit into a neat pigeonhole, sociological, theological or otherwise. He was the only Pardes teacher who did not wear a kippah. But his personally chosen teaching assistant had rabbinical ordination from an Orthodox yeshiva. At age 43, Schweid had already emerged as a popular teacher and leading professor of Jewish philosophy at the Hebrew University. His decision, then, to participate in an uncertain, unprecedented educational experiment outside the university was itself remarkable.

Raised secular in Jerusalem, Schweid was a passionate Zionist who taught, wrote, and lived this idea: the life-blood of Israel and the Jewish people flows from engagement, both collective and personal, with the textual sources of Judaism, ancient, medieval, and modern. He was a critic of what he saw as the empty secularism of his upbringing but also of rabbinic authoritarianism.

In Pardes's carefully crafted curriculum, Schweid chose to introduce students to the daunting teachings of Maimonides. His approach was focused, lucid, and deep. He selected one text from the Rambam's commentary on the Mishnah for the year. The course wove together theology, ethics, and psychology. Students were challenged to pay attention to linguistic subtleties, the nuances of meaning. Most importantly, he challenged them to consider what the words might mean today, for the Jewish people and for themselves.

Later in life, Schweid received the esteemed Israel Prize and emerged as the preeminent Israeli philosopher in the academic world. But, shortly after his recent death, his wife Sabina wrote to me that Elie's true life-work, his great love, had been for Jewish education and the renewal of the Jewish people. He had been especially concerned about reaching young people. She included a photo of Elie, age 91, in his study, engaged in conversation with college-age students; a young woman animatedly speaking, Elie attentively listening.

Dr. Bernie Steinberg *wrote his doctoral dissertation in Jewish philosophy at the Hebrew University under the guidance of Professor Schweid.*

PARDES IS ENRICHING NORTH AMERICA

One Partnership at a Time

By Rabbi Mike Uram

Pardes North America (PNA) sees its mission as nothing less than transforming North American Judaism by connecting thousands of Jews with opportunities to study Torah in intimate groups, in ways that help them access the profound wisdom of Jewish tradition, and in ways that inspire them to accept greater levels of commitment to Jewish life and to making our world a better place.

How does Pardes North America do this? One of our most promising strategies is building embedded partnerships with major Jewish organizations that can help PNA reach thousands of Jewish leaders in all areas of North American life. PNA is becoming the "Intel inside" for these organizations, helping them to dramatically expand and deepen their Jewish educational offerings.

PNA has been approached by over a dozen organizations to build these types of partnerships. We are focusing on a small handful that are the most aligned and influential. It has been an unexpected surprise to see just how much demand there is for Pardes to be the embedded partner for these kinds of organizations. There is a broad sense that Pardes's style of Torah study, our commitment to pluralism, our ability to make text come alive for anyone, and our reputation as humble and relatable educators make us the perfect partner.

The most well-developed of these partnerships is with The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA). One of the highlights this year was the "Generative Leadership" course we created with JFNA that was designed to use the texts and values of PNA's *Mahloket Matters* curriculum to help Federation leadership better navigate the complex and divisive time we are living through. The story of one participant best exemplifies how PNA is helping to transform the very operating systems of Jewish life in North America:

Samantha is a senior volunteer leader at an important Federation in North America. She has been overwhelmed with the challenges of leading in politically divisive times. She sees conflict on so many levels of the Jewish community. There are tensions among the board and between the professional and volunteer leaders. She explained that "everything has gotten harder. Even simple things like choosing an honoree for the annual gala are now charged with political tensions regardless of whether that honoree is a Democrat or a Republican." She sees so many political landmines when it comes to making decisions about which programs to fund and about which issues the Federation should take a stand on. Rather than leading from a sense of hope and vision, she often finds she is leading from a position of fear and risk management.

Samantha sees this tension showing up in more personal ways too. There have been more than a few times that political tensions have threatened to ruin family gatherings like their big Seder or an upcoming wedding. She also expressed feeling exhausted by all of it. It feels like nearly every day there is something in the news that makes her angry, frustrated, or hopeless. Samantha entered our course looking for ways to be proactive and to take the conversation back from the most extreme and strident voices that seem to dominate every issue.

Samantha was part of a group of nearly 25 Federation leaders from across North America who took part in an in-depth online course about how to lead in difficult times. While each session was built around deep Jewish text study and the exploration of some of the leading secular thinking on how to heal our broken discourse, we also invested significant time in teaching how to apply these principles in real life, how to lead with values, and

how to use these values to avert political crisis and build a more muscular middle that can be vocal, proactive, and pragmatic. This is just one example of how PNA is using Pardes Torah to reach thousands of North American Jews in ways that use the power of Jewish learning to help Jewish leaders be more inspired and more inspiring. This past year, PNA also taught a course for BBYO, Hillel International, JFNA Changemakers, JFNA Board Chair and CEO training, and National Young Leadership Cabinet.

Below is a small sample of some of the ways in which PNA embedded partnerships are changing the way Jews lead in North America.

"Connecting with other top-level, like-minded leaders to learn with an incredible scholar helped me learn how to solve real-life issues through practical solutions guided by our values and the Torah. Hearing what other leaders are experiencing in other communities is always truly an invaluable resource."

"I have been feeling continuously re-triggered by any sort of disagreement, conflict, or difference of opinion, and it has felt much healthier to disengage from such conversations —with congregants, with family members, and with friends. This fellowship helped me get over some of those negative feelings by re-introducing me to the ideals of constructive dialogue in a safe and nurturing space."

"The Mahloket Matters Fellowship was my favorite class during my time at Pardes. It was engaging in content and structure, and I found myself very energized by the topic and conversations we were having."

How likely would you be to recommend this kind of learning program to a friend?	**9.77**
This learning program positively affected the way I feel about Jewish learning.	**9.22**
This learning program has better equipped me to engage in difficult conversations.	**9.33**
This learning program has helped increase my ability to hold conflicting viewpoints.	**9.33**
This learning program helped increase my ability to empathize or relate to those with opposing viewpoints.	**9.11**
This program has increased my interest in future learning opportunities with Pardes.	**9.33**

1=Strongly Disagree 10=Strongly Agree

Rabbi Mike Uram *recently stepped down from his position as the first Chief Vision and Education Officer of Pardes North America and now serves as Chief Jewish Learning Officer of The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA).*

Pardes incubates innovative learning initiatives, like Mahloket Matters. PNA leveraged this work to launch the Mahloket Matters Fellowship, which teaches North American leaders to apply the values and skills of constructive disagreement, to today's divisive issues. Learn more at **www.pardes.org.il/mahloket-matters.**

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TORAH IS A *Language*

REFLECTIONS ON THE PARDES LEARNING SEMINAR

By Michael Greenfield

When I say, "language barrier," you know exactly what I mean. Why is it that we don't have a phrase for its opposite? We take for granted those moments when a shared language unexpectedly connects us to one another.

My Hebrew is strong enough to get by in Israel, but not strong enough to fully navigate Jerusalem's public transit app, which is why I asked the man next to me – black hat, long black coat, zero English vocabulary – when, exactly, to scan the QR code to board the bus. He explained, I scanned, and we sat down opposite each other.

After a quiet moment, he looked at me quizzically and then asked me the Talmudic question that was printed in Torah-font Hebrew on the front of my Pardes t-shirt, "Who is wise?"

I suspect he was wondering if I, with my bare head, knew Ben Zoma's answer to that question, as he surely did. (He had not yet seen the back of my shirt, on which Ben Zoma's answer was prominently stamped: "The one who learns from everyone.") I did know the answer, and when I ribbed him for asking me a question, the answer to which he obviously already knew, he laughed and a barrier was broken.

Torah is a language. This is one-third of the secret sauce behind the magic of Pardes, and I hope they'll forgive me for laying bare their IP. To finish the recipe, you just need to define Torah as broadly as humanly possible and then find teachers who speak the language of Torah as fluently as possible – though each may have a different dialect – and who have devoted themselves to plumbing its depths.

It will lead to moments of disagreement, to wildly divergent views, and to endless encounters with holiness. My friend on the bus asked me about Pardes and, not knowing the Hebrew word for pluralistic (*plurolisti*...I should have guessed that it was a loan word from English), I simply painted a picture for him of men and women, secular, Orthodox, and everything in between, all studying together in one Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. His eyebrows went up and his jaw dropped a bit, but he never lost his smile. I understood. It's how I first reacted when I heard about it.

There is a thing that happens in Israel that I find incredibly beautiful, something I haven't experienced elsewhere. In a class on Israeli poetry, our teacher, Rachel Korazim, named it for me so succinctly that it felt like a light turned on: *Secularizing the holy and sanctifying the secular.*

For me, that is Israel. When studying *shmittah* (the biblical commandment of the sabbatical year), it quickly becomes obvious that the language of Torah is both literal and metaphorical, and is written into everything that happens in Israel. Everything. Secular and holy aren't opposites, they are alternate ways of seeing any given moment, and it does us well to know how to see them both, because they are each always present. This is a teaching I've encountered over and over at Pardes.

The gift of learning from the Pardes faculty is experiencing their ability to pull so many disparate threads, both secular and holy, from an astounding and diverse wealth of texts, ancient and modern, and then weave them together such that the threads become a map, and the concept they have been guiding you towards all along suddenly appears in your mind, at the very moment they are naming it.

At the conclusion of two consecutive classes with faculty member Gila Fine, spanning the literature of multiple continents, she reached a final teaching—We are most useful to God here on Earth where we can do the one thing that God cannot do: *become better*—which is beautiful all on its own. What I can't share with you in writing, though, is how that final teaching reverberated backwards, through all of the texts we had just covered, in a way that sanctified the secular and secularized the holy, and then pulled me forward to places of my own.

Even the classes themselves are in conversation with each other, not necessarily through overt planning but in their exploration of shared truths in the common language of Torah. Because Torah is a language. And Pardes has created a unique and beautiful and holy/secular space in which to encounter that language.

I am always better for having entered into that space.

Michael Greenfield *is the Director of Education at Temple Har Shalom (THS) in Park City, Utah. He attended the Summer 2022 Pardes Learning Seminar.*

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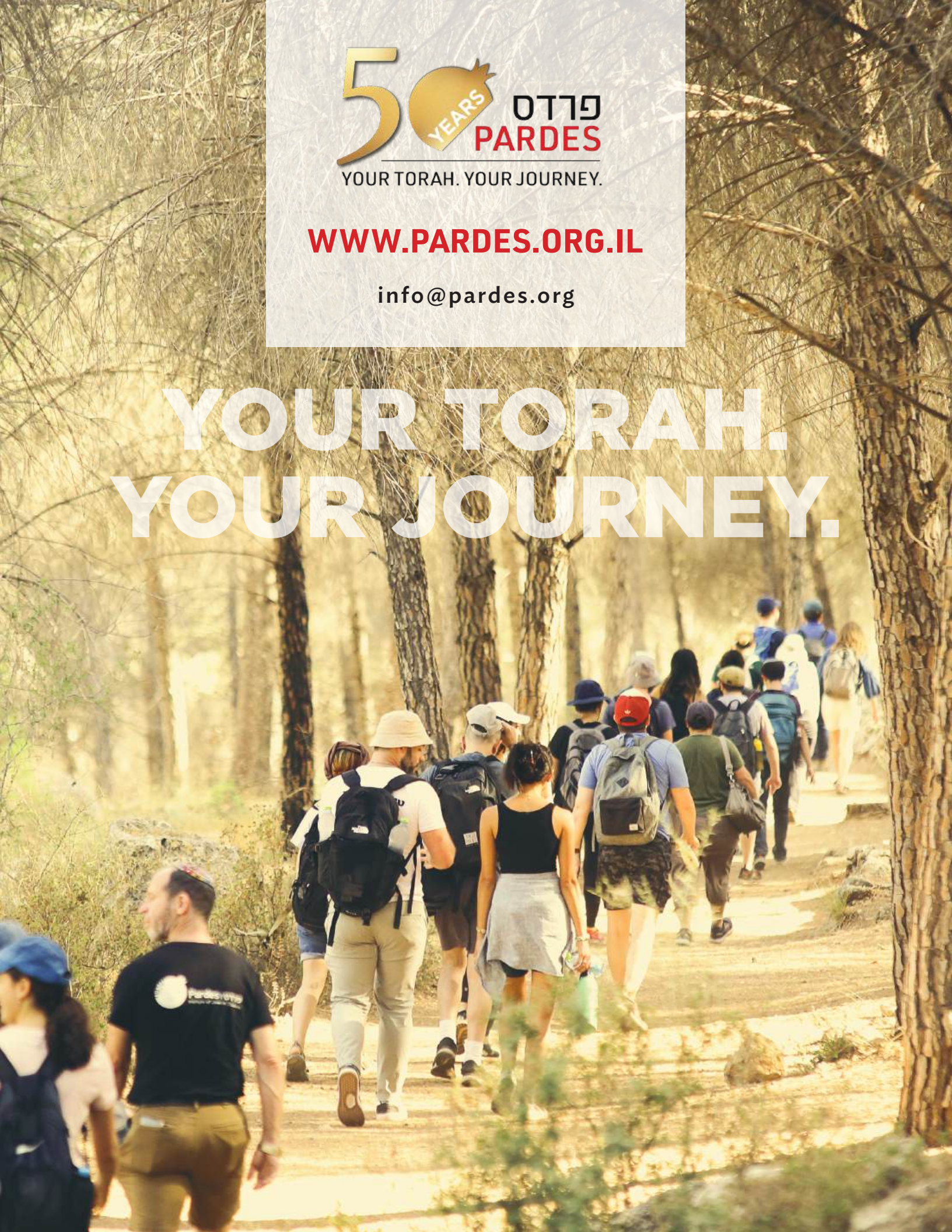
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