

HAVRUTA

Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies | December 2023 | Kislev 5784

Resilience & Responsibility

How Pardes Students are Persevering through War

Beyond the Beit Midrash

Learning in Jerusalem in a Year of Political Controversy



TORAH & TOGETHERNESS

HAVRUTA

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From the *President*

October 22, 2023 / 7 Cheshvan 5784

Dear Friends,

During the 2022–2023 academic year, we at Pardes lived and learned through political turmoil. For much of the year, the Israeli government’s attempt to overhaul the country’s judiciary system, and the protest movement that emerged to prevent it, served as backdrops. Then, on October 7, the Hamas terrorist organization launched its brutal attack near the Gaza border, leaving us shocked, horrified, and painfully aware that war was imminent.


These events marred but did not prevent the start of Pardes’ 2023–2024 academic year. Despite the war, most students in our year-long program have stayed in Jerusalem. Our beit midrash remains open. **We are still here, learning together.**

Pardes students, faculty, and staff are persevering under difficult circumstances. We have mobilized as volunteers to support evacuees from Israel’s southern communities, to help children whose parents have been called up to reserve duty, and to provide food, clothing, and equipment to soldiers (see “Resilience & Responsibility” on p. 7). Each day, we pray for those who are grieving, injured, or missing. We are fervently *davening* for the 242 hostages held in Gaza, including Hersh Goldberg-Polin, son of Pardes staff member, Rachel Goldberg.

We have also embraced the extended Pardes community. Since mid-October, we have adopted the tradition initiated by Ezra of gathering on Mondays and Thursdays to share words of Torah. In the Zoom series, “Torah as Light: Wisdom through the Darkness,” we are learning Torah, and providing updates from Israel with all those who wish to join.

By doubling down on our mission, and keeping our beit midrash open for study, Pardes is fulfilling the words of the Talmud, “*Talmidei chachamim marbim shalom ba’olam*”— “Students of the wise increase peace in the world.” **By remaining committed to Jewish learning and to one another, we are fortifying ourselves, reminding ourselves of our purpose, and furthering the mission of the Jewish people.**

With hopes of *besorot tovot*,



Rabbi Leon A. Morris

Pardes *in Bloom*

Rabbi Landes Returns to the Beit Midrash



Pardes' 50th Anniversary Learning Seminar participants received a special treat on June 25, when Rabbi Daniel Landes presented the Seminar's keynote lecture—his first lecture since leaving the position of Pardes' Director and Rosh Yeshiva in 2016.

The standing-room-only crowd fell quiet as Rabbi Landes opened his presentation by reciting the "mechaye hametim" blessing, recited upon seeing an especially dear friend one has not seen in a long time. When Rabbi Landes added, "It's good to be back in the beit midrash," the audience

burst into applause. It remained enthralled throughout the lecture, "Halachic Storytelling in Troubled Times," in which Rabbi Landes gleaned from Talmudic sources to address the moral challenges facing contemporary Israeli society.

"It was very emotional for me," Rabbi Landes said after the event. "It brought back a lot of memories... Along with my family, Pardes is the place in which I have invested most of my life."

Rabbi Landes currently serves as President of Yashrut, a coeducational, nondenominational rabbinical school he founded in 2018. Yashrut has ordained 16 rabbis (Rabbi Landes previously ordained another 29), including the first openly gay Orthodox rabbi in 2019. Yashrut also runs the Classic Talmud Program to help students raise their Talmud skills through traditional yeshiva study in Jerusalem and online.

"Not so many places of learning are interested in notions of vigorous, religious, progressive, spiritual, humanitarian Judaism," says Rabbi Landes. "Pardes and Yashrut share this... It's important

to me to encourage and support like-minded organizations like Pardes... Pardes is a wonderful place with great leadership. I owe a lot to it for the experience and wisdom it gave me. I have only thankfulness and blessings for Pardes."

Listening to Pardes

The podcast world is booming. Nearly 500 million (yes, a half-billion) people listen to podcasts, 100 million of them in the U.S. With numbers like these, and predictions of continued growth, Pardes has rightly jumped on the podcast bandwagon, offering audio programs on everything from Jewish parenting to politics, spirituality, and sexuality.

"Pardes from Jerusalem," a podcast on the weekly Torah portion launched in 2009, is Pardes' longest-running podcast series. Recently revamped to introduce havruta-style discussion and debate between the series' host, Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield, and a rotating lineup of Pardes faculty,



“Pardes from Jerusalem” is one of the most popular Torah portion podcasts available, with 12,000 average monthly streams.

Other long-running series have included Rabbi Michael Hattin’s 48-episode “Crises and Kings,” an exploration of the reigns of Kings Saul and David as described in the Book of Samuel, and Rabbi Mike Feuer’s “The Jewish Story,” a history podcast that recently wrapped up its sixth season.

Pardes also produces limited series podcasts hosted by leading thinkers on an array of biblical, historical, halachic, family, and fun topics. Dr. Avivah Zornberg discussed the spiritual power of biblical women in Pardes’ four-part series, “Women of the Wilderness.” Dr. Jonathan D. Sarna examined the role Jews have played in American political history in “Jews and American Politics.” Rabbi Dr. Levi Cooper looked at farming through a halachic lens in “Halacha of the Harvest,” and a cast of

Pardes alumni led the hip-hop, havruta-style Torah conversation, “Rappers and Rabbis.”

“Good Jewish Lover,” a podcast on how Jewish tradition views relationships, is Pardes’ newest podcast series. Each week, Host Rabbi Brent Chaim Spodek and a different guest use a text as a jumping-off point to discuss relationships and the human experience. Similarly, Rabba Shani Gross will soon launch Pardes’ “Mindful Jewish Parenting” podcast to address the joys and complexities of building an intentional Jewish home.

With a cache of more than 2,000 episodes of high production quality available on Spotify, Apple, Google, and elsewhere, you have plenty of podcasts to choose from while out for a walk, cooking for Shabbat, or whenever you’re in the mood for Jewish learning in the engaged and engaging spirit of Pardes. Happy listening!

Pardes Launches Teacher Fellowship

Building on more than two decades of experience teaching teachers, Pardes has launched the Teacher Fellowship, a new training program for aspiring Jewish day school teachers. The Fellowship represents a re-envisioning of Pardes’ signature Educators Program, which has graduated nearly 200 teachers.

The two-year Fellowship preserves the Educators Program’s year of Torah, Hebrew, and pedagogic study in Jerusalem, but replaces the second year of study with on-the-job training and coaching. The Fellowship will cap off with a summer program in Jerusalem, when students will receive Certificates of Jewish Studies, and will have earned credits toward masters degrees in Jewish education from Hebrew College.



Aviva Lauer, Director of Pardes’ Center for Jewish Educators, says, “We have rethought our teachers program to reflect the needs and concerns of today’s soon-to-be Jewish day school teachers. The new Teacher Fellowship accelerates preparatory training, and adds intensive, on-the-job mentoring, so new teachers can quickly hone their skills and advance in the field.”

Ryan Galer, 34, from Newburyport, Mass., was among the first class of Pardes Teacher Fellows to arrive in Jerusalem in July. After studying art in Estonia and

Yiddish in Germany, teaching English in France, and discovering a love of Jewish texts in Sweden, Ryan is grateful he discovered the Pardes Teacher Fellowship.

“I was concerned that the learning might be too intensive, but it’s really accessible. And unlike academic institutions, the atmosphere is warm. I hope to advance my teaching career, but mostly I’m excited because everyone at Pardes just loves to learn. From day one, I felt I had landed in the right place.”

Torah and the Arts Come Together at Pardes

Pardes has long been interested in the nexus of Torah and the arts. Since 2015, through its Arts and Culture Fellowship, Pardes has invited visual artists, writers, musicians, and others to find creative inspiration in the study of Jewish texts.

This year, Pardes deepened its

commitment to exploring the intersection of Jewish thought, identity, texts, and art when it launched hAvRuTa: A Pardes Torah and Art Encounter Series. Generously supported by the Jerusalem Foundation, the inaugural Encounter Series brought four Jerusalem artists together with three Pardes staff and faculty members for text-based explorations around select themes. Each paired learning journey culminated in a communal event or video, enabling the public to experience the intersection of the textual and the visual.

Multidisciplinary artist Oryan Galster Oren, and Pardes scholar of rabbinics and halacha Rabbanit Nechama Goldman Barash studied narratives and legal approaches to mourning within Jewish tradition. Around Tisha B’Av, the artist presented “Where Darkness Refracts Light,” an exhibition of the ink drawings and sculpture she produced in the period after her father’s passing, and the two led a discussion of

how Judaism’s mourning rituals shape our experiences of loss.

Pardes’ arts programs will expand even further when the Institute moves into its new home, Beit Karen. There, a gallery space will allow Pardes students and local artists to display their work, and a 250-seat auditorium will host Pardes’ annual Student Arts Festival and other cultural events.

Ilana HaCohen, Program Director of the Encounter Series, says, “Pardes has always emphasized the multiplicity of perspectives found within Judaism. By bringing the voices of artists into the conversation at Beit Karen, Pardes will increase that multiplicity, enrich students’ engagement with Jewish texts, and open up meaningful dialogue with the local community.”

“Torah of Gathering” Energizes Communities

Having experienced how vibrant Jewish life and learning can be during their time at Pardes, alumni hold the potential to build thriving, Torah-learning communities. To help them realize this potential, Pardes ran daylong “Torah of Gathering” workshops in Denver and the Bay Area in May and June. More than 30 alumni and friends came





to gain inspiration and skills for building community through the study of Torah. They left “hopeful,” “reinvigorated,” “better equipped,” and “more connected.”

Pardes staff members, Rabba Shani Gross, Rabbi Jessica Minnen, and Aviva Lauer, led participants through the “Torah of Gathering” curriculum, which they creatively modeled after the main themes and narrative arc of the Torah itself. Using select texts and experiential exercises, they explored how to build a world of Torah study (Genesis), craft a lesson’s journey (Exodus), develop layered questions (Leviticus), embody the text (Numbers), and stay connected (Deuteronomy).

Jackie Schwartz, who attended the Denver workshop says, “The experience helped me realize I have the ability to lead Jewish learning opportunities for adults. I loved being able to dive into texts surrounded by peers whose life experiences added to the richness of the learning session.”

Noam Green, who attended the Bay Area workshop says, “I left feeling rejuvenated by a day of deep Torah learning, and with concrete skills to more effectively

plan and execute Jewish learning programs.”

Following the workshops, Pardes provided fellowships to select participants to transform their “Torah of Gathering” learning and inspiration into Torah-centered gatherings in their local communities. With modest funding, periodic training, and ongoing coaching, these individuals will help others experience the unique power of communal gatherings in which Torah study is from, and at, the heart.

Alumni Retreat Rekindles Community

From August 25–27, Pardes alumni and friends gathered at the pastoral Pearlstone Retreat Center in Maryland for an Alumni Retreat marking Pardes’ 50th year. Alumni aged 20 to 80, from the East Coast to the West, prayed and played together. There were spirited songs, wholesome meals, and invigorating hikes, services

led by Musician-in-Residence Rabbi Deborah Sacks-Mintz, and study sessions with Pardes faculty, Rabbis Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy, Shani Gross, Zvi Hirschfield, Jessica Minnen, and Brent Spodek.

Participants were delighted to reconnect with faculty and friends with whom they had developed formative relationships at Pardes. As one participant put it, “Pardes is the home where I started my Jewish journey many years ago. The retreat allowed me to come home again.”

But the retreat offered more than nostalgia; it gave alumni the opportunity to participate in Judaism’s ongoing conversation, in Pardes’ inclusive style. One alumna said, “The highlight of the retreat... was the intergenerational, communal learning. The convening of people from all walks of life, ages, and backgrounds was truly unique. That’s the special quality of Pardes. What a rare and meaningful blessing to have in one’s life.”



COVER STORY

Resilience & Responsibility

How Pardes Students are Persevering through War

By Sheryl Abbey, *Havruta* Editor

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” —Joshua 1:9

As *Havruta* was about to go to press, the Hamas terrorist organization launched its brutal attack in southern Israel, setting off the Israel-Hamas War. The Pardes community was profoundly affected. Hersh Goldberg-Polin, the 23-year-old son of Rachel Goldberg, Pardes’ Student Support Coordinator, and Ditza Heiman, the 84-year-old grandmother of alumna Cliel Shdaimah, were among those kidnapped and taken to Gaza. More than 30 family members of Pardes’ faculty and staff—husbands, brothers, sons, and daughters—were called into Israel Army service.

In reaction to the fear, horror, and grief, some Pardes students understandably returned home. Others temporarily relocated to Europe with the hope of returning soon. Still others remained in Israel. As of this writing in mid-October, the majority of year-long students—50 of 70—had chosen to remain at Pardes.

Pardes has quickly adapted to the new reality. Committed to the principle of “uninterrupted Torah,” it is offering in-person, online, and hybrid classes without stop. For students who are temporarily abroad, including a group of London-based students, Pardes is offering tutorials, counseling sessions, and check-in meetings.

In Israel, Pardes is caring for its students as it contributes to the war effort. Israeli staff and faculty are facilitating wide-ranging student volunteer efforts—from babysitting children whose parents have been called up to reserve duty, to refurbishing neighborhood bomb shelters, and donating blood. There are regular prayer gatherings, communal lunches, and Shabbat meals to give students a sense of solidarity, and counseling, writing workshops, yoga classes, and movie nights to relieve stress.

On October 17, ten days after the Hamas attack, and with Israel’s ground operation in Gaza looming, I met with students gathered around simmering pots of hot chocolate in the Pardes dining room to ask them why they had decided to stay at Pardes, and what the experience of being in Israel at a time of war was like.

Rachel Harris, 36, from London, said she had decided to stay, because she felt “invested in Israel,” now that she was in her second year of studies. “Plus,” she said, “people back home won’t get it.” Others nodded in agreement.

Gilli Cohen, 24, from Toronto, who had arrived at Pardes the day before we met, as part of a pilot trip to select a yeshiva at which to study, echoed Pardes’ commitment to “uninterrupted Torah.”

"I want to contribute to the country," Gilli said. "Study is one way to do that. If we give up on it, it's as if the country will have lost a limb."

Others described finding meaning in performing acts of *chesed*. Along with other students and Pardes staff, Samantha Cooper, 25, from Saskatchewan, Canada, had organized a food and clothing drive for families displaced from the south, and soldiers without families in Israel.

"It helps to feel productive," she said. "It's like praying with your feet."

Several students agreed that Pardes' caring environment made staying possible. Nikolay Uvarov, 37, from St. Petersburg, Russia, had ironically "left one war for another." Nonetheless, he had not considered leaving Pardes.

"I want to support people. My place is here, even in such dark times."

Avigal Weizman, 24, from Melbourne, Australia, summed it up:

"Pardes is a supportive community, whose students, staff, and faculty have come together in ways that just wouldn't have happened anywhere else."



Top to bottom:

Painting a local elementary school bomb shelter

Reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan

Cooking for and with one another

Bringing cheer to residents of a local nursing home

Hanging posters of hostages taken by Hamas

Preparing care packages for soldiers

Sharing hot chocolate in the Pardes dining hall





COVER STORY

Beyond the *Beit Midrash*

Learning in Jerusalem in a Year of
Political Controversy

*“At a time when the community is suffering, no one should say,
‘I will go home, eat, drink, and be at peace with myself.’”*

—Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 11a

Learning at Pardes has always taken place in two arenas. Primarily inside the beit midrash, students develop intellectual skills and spiritual practices. Primarily outside the beit midrash—through daily encounters with Israelis and on periodic field trips—they refine their relationships to Israel.

But this year, as a result of Israel’s judicial overhaul controversy, the distinction between Pardes’ “inside” and “outside” classrooms was blurred. At times, students explored issues of Israeli sovereignty and democracy in the beit midrash. At others, they gave voice to their religious beliefs at public protests.

To Be Involved or Not to Be Involved

The controversy began in January, when the Israeli government announced that it planned to overhaul Israel’s judiciary by limiting the power of the Supreme Court and granting the governing coalition a majority on the committee that appoints judges. Protests erupted in Tel Aviv, and soon spread to

Jerusalem, Haifa, and Be’er Sheva. By late March, in “days of national resistance,” hundreds of thousands of protestors blocked roads throughout the country, and the Histadrut, Israel’s largest labor organization, announced a general strike. In the months that followed, the Israel Medical Association and other employment sectors followed suit. Meanwhile, weekly protests in the country’s major cities and towns were unremitting.

Pardes students’ reactions varied widely. Some perceived the struggle as an internal one, and believed that those who were not Israeli citizens should not get involved, regardless of their political leanings. Others were impressed by the protests, but chose to sit them out. Some students attended protests occasionally, while others became regulars.

Brooklyn Michalowicz, 27, from Granada Hills, Calif., was a Pardes Year Program student who wanted to understand and connect with the protest movement.

“I was a sociology major in college, and now I’m a rabbinical student,” says Brooklyn. “Ultimately, I want to understand people, to understand what causes

them to think the way they do. I want to be a rabbi for everyone.”

Matthew Filderman, 28, from Memphis, also chose to get involved. He lived next door to the President’s House, where the Jerusalem protests were held each Saturday night throughout the year.

“I grew up in a politically active family,” says Matthew. “My dad, a lawyer, is very involved politically. Naturally, I was aware of what was going on, and I wanted to engage with it.”

An Historic Moment

Well aware that this was an historic moment, Pardes felt a responsibility to help students understand the context within which the proposed judicial overhaul was taking place. Faculty members held a variety of personal opinions, but encouraged students—as always—to develop their own, nuanced perspectives based on knowledge. All the Pardes faculty and staff agreed that the controversy provided an opportunity for students to interact with Israel in a uniquely powerful way.

Jamie Salter, Pardes’ former Director of Israel Education, devoted extra time in his “Contemporary Israeli Society” course to relevant subjects, including the Supreme Court and the Basic Laws (Israel’s de facto constitution). Jamie and other faculty also provided interested students with periodic updates on the proposed legislation.

“I tried to teach the material with no outcome in mind,” says Jamie. “My approach was to give students who had elected to take my class the facts they needed to be informed about the issues, and to facilitate open discussion around them.”

As always, faculty brought relevant texts into the discussions. Rabbi Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy, Director of Pardes’ Year Program, taught portions of Deuteronomy that place limits on government, and caution against judicial corruption. She also used examples from Jewish history to help students consider the dangers of social polarization.

“Fortunately, Jewish tradition provides us with an approach to resist and overcome the grave dangers of polarization,” Meesh says. “The key, I believe, is to replace binary identities with multiple identities, and to recognize that all of these identities, though they may compete, ultimately serve a singular purpose.”

According to Matthew, “The faculty gave us updates, shared stories from both sides, and showed how much they cared, which made it very real. They made me feel connected to the political situation, grounded, and purposeful.”



The Protest Experience

Though she never considered herself a political activist in the U.S., Brooklyn felt compelled to attend many of the weekly protests in Israel.

“It felt like Israel was in a fragile state, and since I am very invested in the country’s well-being, I felt called to go. Attending regularly from the start made me realize the importance of showing up and using your voice.”

As for the experience of being part of the protest movement, Brooklyn says, “The protests were hopeful and powerful... When you attend a political protest, you speak your truth, so it’s a very positive experience, even if it’s emotionally challenging. It was beautiful to see the thousands of people, young and old, on a mission that felt deeply personal, emotional, and shared all at once.”



Pardes students Brooklyn Michalowicz and Matthew Filderman at a Jerusalem protest

“[The protests] were hopeful—like street parties, full of pride, even joy. It just felt right to be there.”

—Matthew Filderman, Pardes Year Program student

Jamie Salter remembers the dilemma Pardes faced.

“The building became eerily quiet. It was clear that it was going to be difficult to hold classes. I, along with many students and faculty, decided to go to the protest, which, at the time, felt like a turning point in the crisis. But I left the protest early in order to be with the students who opted not to attend.”

Communal Support and Constructive Dialogue

Communal support was ongoing. Pardes and its students organized events at which they sang, read psalms, and recited prayers for the well-being of the country. Staff made space for students to express their beliefs, concerns, and opinions.

“We felt safe talking through our ideas as they developed,” says Brooklyn, “because at Pardes, openness and inclusion are shared goals. It’s built into the Pardes infrastructure that when someone states an opinion, others respond with curiosity, not judgment.”

Pardes also assisted students in engaging in respectful political debate with one another. For this, it had an excellent model: the pioneering “Mahloket Matters” program, which Pardes launched in 2018 to improve political discourse in an era of polarization. The “Mahloket Matters” curriculum has been used in dozens of communities, and hundreds of rabbis, teachers, and community leaders have taken “Mahloket Matters” courses, which combine

Matthew also attended some of the protests. He was struck by the contrast between them and American protests in which he had participated.

“First, I was surprised by the thousands of flags. They were a sign to me that Israelis are deeply patriotic, despite their country’s current situation. It was also surprising that the protests felt more pro-democracy than anti-legislative overhaul. They were hopeful—like street parties, full of pride, even joy. It just felt right to be there.”

In addition to the local, weekly protests, a major protest was scheduled to take place near the Knesset building in Jerusalem midday on February 13, the date the Knesset was slated to hold its first vote on the proposed overhaul. Predictions were that 100,000 people would attend. (Jerusalem’s weekly protests usually drew a few thousand.) Many students expressed interest in attending, if only to have a window into Israeli society. Many faculty wanted to be there, too.

social psychology with the study of complex and contradictory Jewish texts.

Using the “Mahloket Matters” methodology, students analyzed biblical stories of conflict, classic commentaries, and contradictory historical precedents to address questions currently under political debate. The emphasis was on form as much as content, so that students would strive for “arguments for the sake of heaven”—Judaism’s conflict resolution ideal, in which each side respects the other and is humble in the pursuit of truth.

“Pardes forced us to have uncomfortable conversations, which is what allows us to truly understand one another,” says Matthew.

“It’s built into the Pardes infrastructure that when someone states an opinion, others respond with curiosity, not judgment.”

—Brooklyn Michalowicz, Pardes Year Program student

Lessons Learned

When the spring semester wound down in June, Israel remained in political deadlock. Matthew briefly returned home to Memphis. Brooklyn stayed in Jerusalem for a summer internship, and continued to attend the weekly protests.

Their year—both within the walls of the Pardes beit midrash and beyond—had been transformative. Brooklyn and Matthew learned, firsthand, the challenges of building and maintaining a modern, Jewish, and democratic state. They learned about political activism in the Jewish context, and Judaism in the Israeli context.

Matthew says, “My political activism wasn’t a

distraction from Pardes. It was part of the whole experience. I’m glad I was there for it... Pardes is a great building block, where deep, important conversations are to be had—Jewishly, socially, and politically.”

Brooklyn and Matthew also learned a great deal about themselves.

Matthew says, “I used to look for short-term gratification. This year, Pardes gave me the perspective I needed to appreciate the ‘long game.’ I am really happy to have helped plant a tree, even though I may not be among those who will get to see it grow.”

“This year taught me to be a better listener,” says Brooklyn. “Through havruta study, Talmud study, and healthy debate, I came to appreciate that we all make mistakes when we don’t listen carefully. It was a humbling experience that enabled me to learn so much more. I can honestly say that Pardes changed my life.”

Join the “Mahloket Matters” Movement

Pardes is expanding its efforts to help repair societal rifts by offering its Mahloket Matters Fellowship on an ongoing basis. The program includes group study, individual mentorship, and financial support to help participants develop local, community initiatives inspired by the “Mahloket Matters” approach. The course takes place online, once a week, over eight weeks. Participants are organized into cohorts of rabbis, teachers, community leaders, Pardes alumni, and others. The program is often run in partnership with other organizations.

Contact Sefi Kraut, sefik@pardes.org.il, to learn how you can become a Mahloket Matters Fellow, and can add your voice to the growing movement to foster respectful dialogue.



FEATURE

An Extraordinary Era

Joshua Chadajo Reflects on 18 Years as Pardes' North American Executive Director

On September 30, Joshua Chadajo stepped down as Pardes' Executive Director, North America, marking the end of a remarkable 18-year tenure. Josh worked with staff, faculty, board members, alumni, and donors. His efforts left a mark on every aspect of Pardes' operations, from fundraising to personnel and financial management. With characteristic modesty, Josh spoke with *Havruta* about Pardes' past, present, and future.

You were a Pardes Year Program student in 2001–2002. How did that experience shape your Jewish identity?

When I arrived at Pardes back in 2001, I barely knew what Jewish text study was. By the time I left, I had developed a real understanding and appreciation for it. It was an eye-opening experience. I discovered the depth and breadth of our heritage, which stimulated my curiosity. Pardes' nonjudgmental environment also made it an ideal place for me to experiment with different elements of religious observance, and Pardes' extraordinary teachers became my role models for how to be a mensch.

Why did you choose to work at Pardes?

Most North American Jews are not exposed to the kind of Jewish study that Pardes offers. It's a remarkable combination of intellectual integrity,

deep reading of the texts, and openness to different viewpoints. What each student brings to the conversation matters.

My experience as a Pardes student meant so much to me on a personal level that I wanted others to have similar experiences. I chose to work at Pardes to help expand Pardes' capacity to reach and teach more people in more places.

What is your proudest achievement?

When I joined the staff, Pardes' educational expertise surpassed its administrative and fundraising capabilities. Over the years, we strengthened and refined this side of things. There is always room for improvement, but I am pleased that Pardes now operates on a more professional level, both internally and externally.

Beit Karen, Pardes’ future Jerusalem home, is certainly among the Institute’s most ambitious undertakings. What was your role in the project’s development?

For years, our staff and Board of Directors wanted Pardes to have a proper home in Jerusalem. We knew that such a home would be a world-class learning environment filled with much-deserved *kavod*, and that it would allow Pardes to accomplish more than it ever had. Many people know that I have played a role in raising funds for the construction and operation of Beit Karen. Fewer probably know that I was part of a team that helped give Pardes the confidence it needed to embark on this ambitious project, in its current form, when the time was right.

What has changed and what has remained the same during your 18 years at Pardes?

Of course, technology has changed dramatically. 18 years ago, I had to call a tech guy in New Jersey to come fix some computer issue we were having in New York, then wait for hours or days until the problem was solved. It’s laughable now, but the technological changes that have taken place over the last two decades have revolutionized the way we work, and enabled us to reach a larger audience.

“...people associated with Pardes have always cared deeply about the Institute and about one another—I suspect, in part, because so many of us are Pardes alumni.”

—Joshua Chadajo, Executive Director, North America

Organizationally, we have changed how we view ourselves. Pardes is no longer a Jerusalem institute with an American “friends” organization. While we maintain two, separate, legal entities, we have intentionally come together over the years to operate as one organization. We are all Pardes.

What has remained the same is the tremendous dedication of our staff, faculty, and boards. Outsized egos and individual agendas rarely make appearances. At times, we disagree about what is best for Pardes, or how best to achieve certain goals, but it is always with the greater good of Pardes in mind.

One aspect of Pardes that I have always appreciated and encouraged is its openness to change—not change for its own sake, but change in the sense that doing things differently could mean doing them better, and achieving greater results.

Also, people associated with Pardes have always cared deeply about the Institute and about one another—I suspect, in part, because so many of us are Pardes alumni.

18 is quite the important number, Jewishly speaking. Where do you see Pardes 18 years from now?

I see Beit Karen hopping. I see it becoming a must-visit Jerusalem destination. I see Pardes North America flourishing, with more programs attracting more and more people. And I see our online programs growing exponentially. In 18 years, Pardes will be everywhere. You won’t be able to get away from Pardes—and that’s a good thing.



Joshua Chadajo with David Shapira, and Libby and Moshe Werthan, Pardes board members, and lead donors of the Campaign for the Generations

FEATURE

Jerusalem of Green

Beit Karen Sets a New Standard for
Environmental Design in the Holy City

Even the stork in the sky knows its seasons, and the turtledove, swift, and crane keep the time of their coming... —Jeremiah, 8:7

Before Pardes' staff, faculty, and Boards of Directors knew what Pardes' future home in Jerusalem would look like, what it would be called, or how it would be funded, they knew the building would be environmentally progressive. From the beginning of the development process, Pardes committed itself to building a facility that would improve energy efficiency, maximize use of sustainable materials, and contribute to the city's urban fabric. Especially given the building's location in Jerusalem's Talpiot commercial/industrial area, Pardes wanted Beit Karen, as it would eventually be named in memory of former Pardes board member Karen Shapira z"l, to help "green" Jerusalem.

Alan Adler, Pardes' Building Committee Chairperson, says, "We wanted to give the same, careful attention to Beit Karen's natural and urban environments as we have always given to Pardes' learning environment, which thrives because it is built on diversity."

Now, Pardes' vision is becoming a reality. Veteran project architect Matti Rosenshine is finalizing the details of the building's design in consultation with

ESD, a pioneering Israeli environmental consulting firm. According to Matti, "The new Pardes campus will set a new standard for environmentalism in Jerusalem."

While new buildings in Jerusalem are required to earn a two-star environmental rating (on a scale of one to five), Pardes is committed to achieving four-star status. Joel Weiss, Pardes' Executive Director, Israel, says, "Very few buildings in Israel meet the four-star standard. Beit Karen will be among the first to do so in Jerusalem."

"We wanted to give the same, careful attention to Beit Karen's natural and urban environments as we have always given to Pardes' learning environment..."

—Alan Adler, Pardes' Building Committee Chairperson

The more than 50,000-square-foot facility will be clad in local Jerusalem stone. Exterior lighting will be downlit to prevent light pollution. An underground parking garage will be fitted with electric car charging stations, and a bicycle parking lot (and shower stalls inside) will encourage students to pedal to Pardes.

Throughout Beit Karen's interior, including 18 state-of-the-art classrooms, offices, and a 250-seat auditorium, smart systems will manage water, lighting, electrical, and HVAC use. Sensors will determine to what extent each room is occupied, set the systems accordingly, and immediately identify items in need of repair—saving energy and reducing costs. The double-height beit midrash will be glazed with large windows to make the most of Jerusalem's abundant sunshine, and will be outfitted with shading devices to keep it cool in the summer months.

Beit Karen's high environmental ranking is also a result of its extensive contribution to the urban environment. The building's mixed educational and residential use will reinforce the city's recent mixed-use designation for the Talpiot neighborhood. Located directly on a planned light rail line, it will reduce car traffic. And the building will open itself up physically and programmatically to the neighborhood: a landscaped, outdoor plaza will visually invite in the public, and an auditorium will serve as a cultural hub for southern Jerusalem.

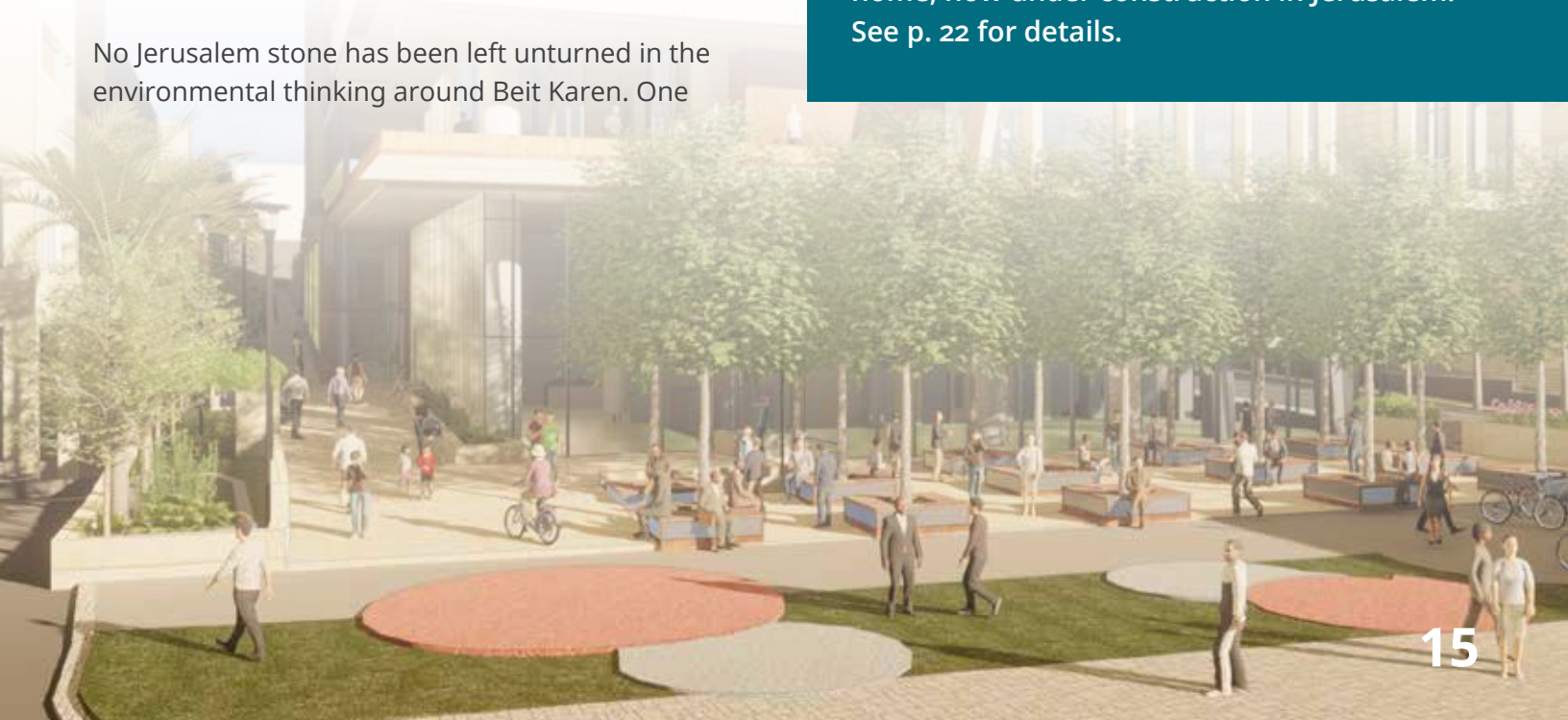
No Jerusalem stone has been left unturned in the environmental thinking around Beit Karen. One

example: nesting boxes will be fitted beneath ledges on Beit Karen's upper floors to attract swifts, the small birds that return from Africa to Jerusalem every February—religiously, as it were—and famously nest in the crevices of the Western Wall. With Jerusalem's rapid development in recent years, the swifts have had an increasingly difficult time finding protected areas in which to lay their eggs. In consultation with Israel's not-for-profit, Friends of the Swifts, Pardes has designed boxes with small entry holes, and has selected high altitude locations to address the swifts' specific breeding and nesting habits. With such attention to detail, Pardes will undoubtedly serve as a home-away-from-home for the birds during their formative time in Jerusalem, just as it always has for its students.

Pardes President Rabbi Leon Morris says, "Pardes has proudly committed itself to sound environmental principles in the design of its future home. Given that this commitment is based on Jewish values that urge us to be *shomrei adama* (guardians of the earth), we will undoubtedly raise the remaining resources needed to make our vision a reality."

Help Pardes "Green" Jerusalem

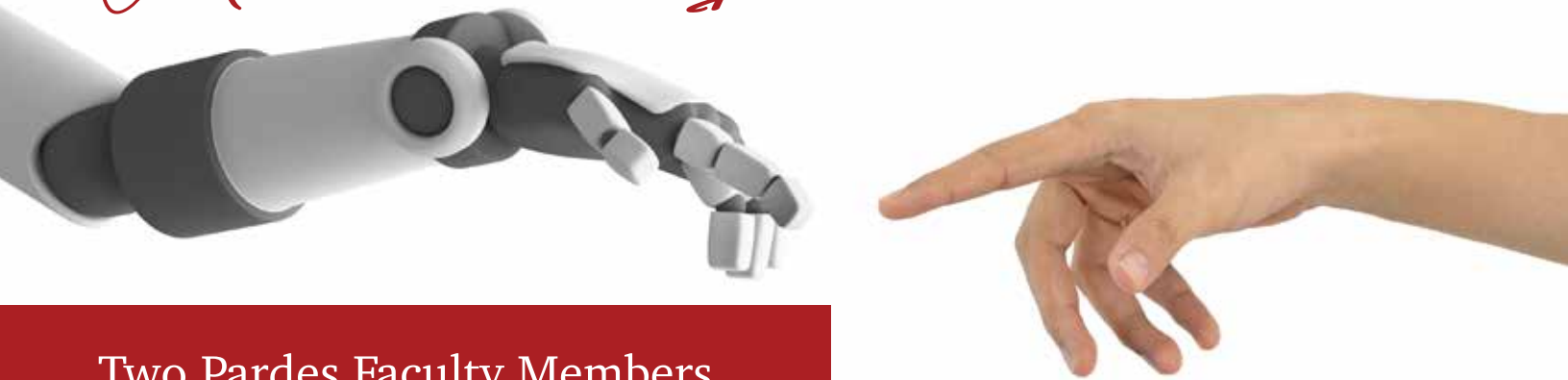
Join more than 2,500 friends of Pardes who have contributed to Beit Karen, Pardes' future home, now under construction in Jerusalem. See p. 22 for details.



HAVRUTA

What it Means to be Human in an Age of

Artificial Intelligence



Two Pardes Faculty Members Discuss This Year's Study Theme

Technology has advanced to the point that artificial intelligence (AI) is now convincingly, demonstrably real. AI can process vast amounts of knowledge at levels beyond the capacity of human beings, sparking debate about the differences between machine and human intelligence, and the uniqueness of the human experience. In the 2023–2024 academic year, Pardes students and faculty are mining traditional Jewish sources to bring wisdom to this very current issue. Here is a taste of what they are discovering.

AI and I

By Rabbi Dov Laimon



The rapid development of artificial intelligence raises several profound issues and concerns: the challenge to human uniqueness, the concept of AI achieving human-like intelligence, the question of the essence of the human soul and its distinctiveness.

—ChatGPT, the AI-powered chatbot

Thank you, ChatGPT. Aside from your painfully bland expression, I appreciate that you have touched on

issues I considered before I met you. Allow me, Chat, to relay a story.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa was staying at an inn in Danzig. The Jewish businessmen knew him as a learned chasid. Once they asked him, after all these years, why does he continue to spend time and money traveling to see tzadikim; what could they possibly teach him at this point in his accomplished life? He didn't answer. Later that day they invited him to join them for a night at the theater. He declined the invitation, but when they returned late in the evening, he asked what they had seen. "We saw remarkable things! Things we have never seen before!" "Oh," said Simcha Bunim, "I know about those things

already! I saw an advertisement for the show!" "No!" they replied, "you can't possibly have any notion of what we actually saw." Simcha Bunim responded, "Exactly! The same thing is true of my visits to tzadikim."

—From *For the Sake of Heaven*, Martin Buber

The businessmen assume that knowledge and wisdom are static commodities, represented by recognizable words. But Simcha Bunim understands that the words themselves are the outermost marker of a unique human reality. The words are not false, but, as is often the case, they fail to be true. The words represent intelligence, but lack the dynamic of genuine, human experience. We are often, unknowingly, the Danzig businessmen.

Chat, consider this: the external nature of a scribe's occupation is distinctly noncreative. He writes prescribed texts without improvement, editing, or comments. He writes letters that conform to highly specific shapes, words with specific spelling, even paragraphs with specific forms.

Yet mechanical arms, printing presses, or robots, which can convey the information more reliably and at less expense, are not good candidates for the job, because they lack *kavana*, an inner world, that must be engaged.

Sifrei Torah, tefillin and mezuzot must be written with great *kavana*, for the sake of the mitzvah. One must declare before beginning to write, "I am writing this Torah in order that the kedusha of a sefer Torah will be upon it." And similarly for tefillin and mezuzot. Each letter must be written "lishma," with intent. If a letter is completed by an accidental drop of ink, the letter (and the sefer) are not kosher.

—Keset HaSofer, Chapter 4

The scribe, a trained craftsman, is central to a kosher, holy scroll. His soul must be present for his work to reach its purpose. If the scribe is merely a craftsman who produces a product, the result is a

Chumash—an accurate text, but one that lacks the essential holiness of a sefer Torah.

Rabbi Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch (1860-1929), head of the yeshiva in Telz, Lithuania, asks, "What is genuine intelligence?" In *Shiurei Daas*, he sets out an answer in the form of a three-step progression. First, the student gathers knowledge and becomes a *chacham*. Second, he acquires a deep understanding of the knowledge he has come to possess and becomes a *navon*. The third step takes him into the realm of *de'ah* (intelligence). This is "when the knowledge and understanding gather together and become one with his inner self. At this point, the genuinely human is realized. The student's will emerges as something *true to self*. His motivations and actions are then the direct results of the integration of knowledge, understanding, and soul. Only then are they his own." For Rabbi Bloch, a person with knowledge and understanding, but without a genuine connection to the soul, is incomplete. But a person with intelligence has everything.

One who has intelligence has everything. One who does not, what does he have?

—Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 41a

Chat? Are you there?

What Makes Us Human

By Rabbanit Nechama Goldman Barash



Surprisingly or not, the idea that people might create entities capable of mimicking their physical and cognitive abilities did not exceed the imagination of our halachic predecessors.

Rava created a person and sent it before Rabbi Ze'era. He [Rabbi Ze'era] spoke to it, but it would

not reply. [Rabbi Ze'era] said to him: You are from my colleagues, return to your dust.

—Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 65b

The Talmudic sage, Rava, creates a being that is able to understand and follow directions, yet is unable to respond or interact, leading Rabbi Ze'era to destroy him.

Unlike the being Rava created, today's AI responds to human questioning. Ask a question of ChatGPT, and it will provide an answer. But the nature of that responsiveness—how AI reaches its conclusions—contrasts dramatically with how humans do so.

In his commentary on Deuteronomy, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes of the uniquely human characteristic of choice:

Moses insists on three things. First, we are free. The choice is ours. Blessing or curse? Good or evil? Faithfulness or faithlessness? You decide, says Moses. Never has freedom been so starkly defined, not just for an individual but for a nation as a whole. We do not find it hard to understand that as individuals we are confronted by moral choices. Adam and Eve were. So was Cain. Choice is written into the human condition.

—Covenant & Conversation: Deuteronomy, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Because we are human, the choices we make are unpredictable. Despite a constant onslaught of information, ideas, and opinions, we often reach conclusions or make decisions that are counter-intuitive, based on emotions rather than facts, or affected by factors beyond the issue at hand. This is certainly a more temperamental, unreliable form of decision-making than that which AI employs, but it is also one that is deep, complex, and, yes, uniquely human.

Deuteronomy also emphasizes the need to pursue social justice. It mandates the appointment of judges, the prevention of corruption, and our responsibility to care for the poor and vulnerable.

These are distinctly human responsibilities that require distinctly human empathy. AI may “know” when someone is in need based on its collection and interpretation of data, but only humans can act. Regardless of where technology takes us, we must continue to cultivate human empathy and action.

Unlike unchanging machines, human lives are cyclical. Judaism embraces our cyclical nature by providing daily, weekly, and yearly mitzvot to mark our passages through time, to shape various aspects of our lives, and to foster connections among us. By contrast, the AI-driven robot, with its cool, data-based efficiency, may be constant and “immortal,” but it is forever alone.

Recently, when a friend tragically lost her son, I was reminded of how Judaism particularly recognizes our need to connect with one another at times of loss. Jewish burial and mourning rituals guided the grieving family from the moment they received the terrible news through the funeral and shiva, when they sat low to the ground, cocooned and nurtured by family and friends, before rising up to return to their forever-altered lives. For all their potential, robots will never authentically mitigate the human experiences of pain and loss the way we humans can.

AI holds the potential to open new pathways to sound decision-making and social responsibility. But only human beings can act through the experience of learning Torah as a living text, and inviting the *shechina* to join them as *havruta* partners. Only we have the consciousness to pray. Only we can connect to the expression of God in this world that we see in one another.

Rabbi Dov Laimon is a scribe who teaches Pardes' scribal arts class.

Rabbanit Nechama Goldman Barash teaches Talmud and contemporary halacha, with a focus on gender.

By the *Numbers*



5,500+

**Students &
Program Participants**

3,000+ In-person | 2,500+ Online



100

**Semester &
Year Program
Students**

from 9 Countries & 18 US States



300,000+

Social Media Followers

A Look at the 2022–2023
Pardes Student Body



3,000+

**In-person Students &
Program Participants**

1,800+ Israel | 750+ Europe
700+ North America



Ages

20–90

200

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 —Jody Blum, Jerusalem

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The Capital and Endowment Fund Drive for Beit Karen, Pardes' Future Jerusalem Home

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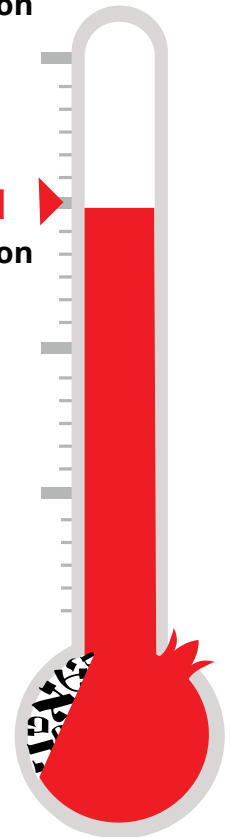
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\$36 million

Raised \$27 million



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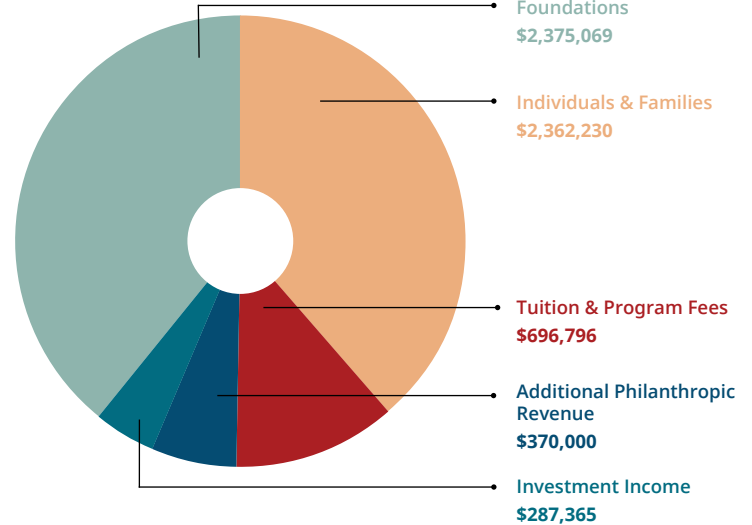
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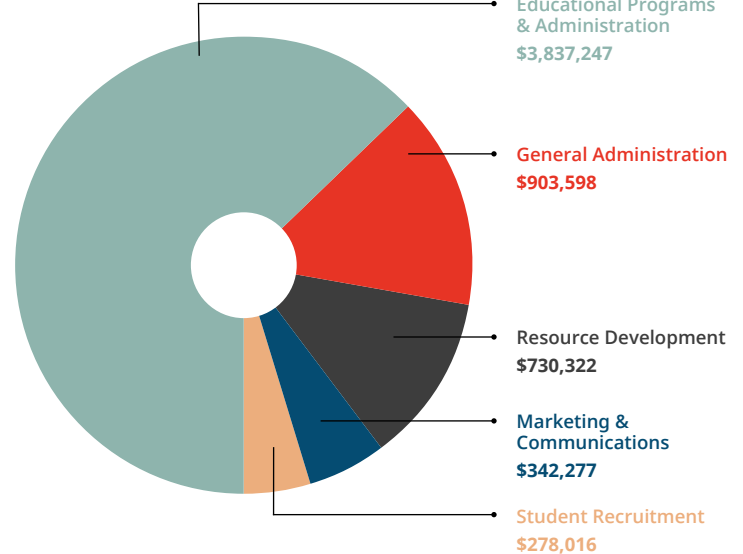
2023 Projected Revenue

\$6,091,460



2023 Projected Expenses

\$6,091,460



Bridging Freedom & Faith: Exploring Jewish Traditions on Choice versus Commitment

In-Person Experience | Summer 2024

PARDES LEARNING SEMINAR

Communal Leaders. Professionals. Lifelong Learners. You.

Jerusalem | June 30-July 4, 2024

LAST LOOK

We've Got You Covered

A Guide to the Head Coverings in the Pardes Beit Midrash

What could better illustrate Pardes' hallmark student diversity than the variety of head coverings in its beit midrash?

A glance into the study hall reveals fedoras, Panama hats, berets, baseball hats, and paperboy caps. Scarves wrap long locks, and twist into gauzy bands. Kippas dot the room—crocheted, embroidered, and suede, with rainbow vibrancy and muted tones, as large as frisbees and as small as hockey pucks.

No matter how students cover their heads—or don't cover them at all—they are welcome at Pardes, where the only dress code is, "Come as you are."



Fedora

For the fashion-conscious



Rainbow kippa

A statement of pride



Bukharan kippa

Ethnic style with staying power (no kippa clip needed)



Kotel kippa

For those in a Jerusalem state of mind



Beret

The intellectual, artistic, or hipster choice



Crocheted kippa

Says observant and current



Suede kippa

Keeps people guessing about your religious/political leanings



Headband

Alludes to religious observance



Paperboy cap

Adds vintage flair



Baseball hat

Expresses team spirit(uality)

YOUR TORAH YOUR JOURNEY

PARDES YEAR/SEMESTER IN JERUSALEM

- Master Jewish wisdom, ideas and texts.
- Join an inclusive and inquisitive community of learners.
- Find *your* Beit Midrash.

September 2024 – May 2025.



[PARDES.ORG.IL/YEAR](https://pardes.org.il/year)

The Many Ways to Learn *at Pardes*

Jerusalem

Long-Term Programs

Year Program
Semester Program
Kollel
Shana Bet (Second Year) Fellowships
Arts & Culture Fellowships
Social Action Fellowships
Research Fellowships
Netziv Fellowships
Bloom Fellowships
Global Leadership Fellowships

Short-Term Programs

Summer, Winter, Southern Hemisphere Summer
& Elul Programs
Learning Seminars
Travel Experiences

Center for Jewish Educators

Teacher Fellowships
Experiential Educators Program
In-Service Teacher Training Program
Senior Educator Learning Fellowships
Jewish Educator Summer Workshops
Mentor Matching
Essential Judaism for Educators Course
Ma'alot Torah Teaching Course
Anatomy of a Shiur Course

Community Education

Fall, Spring, Omer & Elul Programs

North America

Mahloket Matters Cohorts
Torah of Gathering Workshops
Community Batei Midrash
Spirituality Retreats
Alumni Micro-grants

Online

Classes
Podcasts
Blogs
Elmad Digital Library

Find out which program is
right for you at pardes.org.il

