

# HAVRUKA

THE PARDES INSTITUTE OF JEWISH STUDIES | DECEMBER 2025 | KISLEV 5786

#### **HAVRUTA**

The Annual Magazine of the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT

December 2025 / Kislev 5786

As I sit in our Beit Midrash and listen to the sound of Torah being learned, I am reminded of the unique and vital role Pardes plays in the Jewish world. For more than fifty years, Pardes has been a home where Jews from across the spectrum of backgrounds, perspectives, and life experiences come together in a spirit of openness, rigor, and respect. Here, we are bound not by uniformity, but by a shared commitment to uncovering the wisdom of our tradition and applying it meaningfully to our lives.

The cohort from this past year's Beit Midrash Program (our year-long program in Israel) reflects the extraordinary diversity that is Pardes' hallmark. Our students hail from across North and South America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Some come straight from university, while others arrive after years in professional or communal life. Together, they create a rich tapestry of voices—challenging, supporting, and inspiring one another in the sacred work of learning Torah.

The impact of this endeavor is far-reaching. Our alumni serve as rabbis, educators, communal leaders, and thoughtful laypeople, shaping Jewish life in countless ways. They bring to their work the intellectual rigor, spiritual depth, and ethical sensitivity that they cultivated at Pardes. They also carry forward a model of *mahloket l'shem shamayim*—argument for the sake of heaven—showing how constructive disagreement and shared inquiry can strengthen, rather than divide, our people.

At Pardes, we believe that serious Torah study is not only an academic pursuit, but also a profound act of connection—to God, to our people, and to the Jewish future. Thank you for your partnership in sustaining this work and ensuring that generations of Jews continue to draw inspiration, wisdom, and courage from our tradition.

With warm regards,

Zu Mi

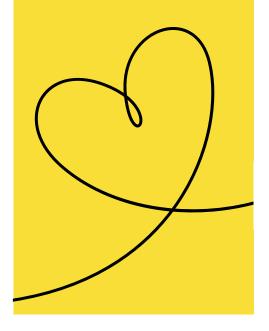




# WITH **GRATITUDE**

At Pardes, we begin this issue with deep *hakarat hatov*, profound gratitude for the safe return of all living hostages. Yet our hearts remain heavy as we continue to await the release of additional bodies for burial in Israel.

We hold their families in our prayers and yearn for peace and healing across Israel and the region. In these painful and uncertain times, we draw strength from our shared commitment to Torah, learning, and community.



# FRESH FROM Ne Paraes

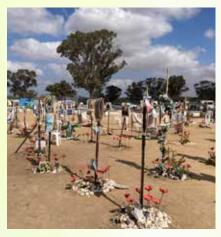
### Bearing Witness: A Journey to the Gaza Envelope



In October, just after the start of the school year and near the anniversary of October 7, Pardes students traveled south to bear witness in the Gaza Envelope. The day began at the site of the Nova Music Festival, where they stood among the memorials and photographs honoring the young lives lost. In Sderot, they visited the ruins of the police station and paused at a lookout facing Gaza, where the proximity of both pain and perseverance was unmistakable. At Tekuma's "car cemetery," they walked among the burned vehicles from that tragic day—each one a searing reminder of the human cost.

Throughout the day, students reflected, asked hard questions, and sat with the weight of what they witnessed.

At Pardes, Torah study and moral reflection meet the reality of our times. This journey embodied that mission—transforming witness into understanding, and grief into renewed commitment. The experience continues to reverberate through our Beit Midrash, reminding us that learning Torah is also about confronting the world with open eyes and an open heart.



# Pardes Pioneers: Alumni Bringing Torah Home

This year, Pardes launched **Pardes Pioneers**, a new initiative created to empower alumni to spark meaningful Jewish learning in their own communities. In partnership with IYUN, 14 alumni participated in the first-ever cohort, receiving training and support to lead six-session learning circles around the themes of *Jewish Wisdom for Life's Greatest Questions, Living the Jewish Calendar*, and *Spiritual Practices for Real Life*.

From California to New York, Toronto to Tel Aviv, Pioneers gathered small groups in homes, synagogues, and campuses—recreating the spirit of the Pardes Beit Midrash wherever they were. The initiative offered alumni a framework to share their learning, strengthen community, and facilitate conversations rooted in lewish texts and values.

Tani Cohen-Fraade, Director of Alumni Engagement, reflected: "We saw incredible success in this first cohort. Pioneers not only created spaces for rich Jewish learning, they also reconnected with their own Pardes experiences in powerful ways. The energy was contagious."

What began as an experiment in alumni engagement has quickly become a promising model for expanding the reach of Pardes Torah. With a second robust cohort already in motion, Pardes Pioneers is poised to become a meaningful bridge between immersive learning in Jerusalem and lifelong leadership around the world.





### A Pop-Up Beit Midrash in the Heart of Europe

This year, Pardes brought its signature learning experience to Prague for the first time, extending the legacy of previous "Pop-Up Beit Midrash" programs in Berlin, Budapest, and Warsaw. Led by Dean Emeritus Dr. David Bernstein, Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield, and Rabbi Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy, the program combined rich Torah learning with immersive cultural and historical exploration.

Over the course of a week in June, participants studied Talmud in the mornings at multiple levels, explored the city's deep Jewish roots in the afternoons, and attended evening lectures connecting Jewish texts to figures like the Maharal of Prague. Highlights included a walking tour of the Jewish Quarter, davening in one of Europe's oldest synagogues, and learning alongside students from the Lauder School—whose insight and depth moved many participants.

On Sunday, the team hosted a sold-out community Beit Midrash day at the Maisel Synagogue, welcoming local learners to engage with texts and teachings from Pardes faculty. Sessions like "Does Orthodox Judaism Need Women

Rabbis?" and "Between Radical Acceptance and Tikkun Olam" sparked powerful conversations and connection across generations and backgrounds.

Brad Grob, Former Chair of the Pardes Israel Board, called the experience "remarkable," adding that it was "a deeply fulfilling, inspirational, and joyful way to connect with others who share a love for Pardes."

Next year's location has yet to be announced—but if Prague is any indication, Pardes learning continues to transcend borders, offering Torah that travels and transforms.

# Global PCJE: Teaching Across Three Continents

From Helsinki to Mexico City to Stockholm, the Pardes Center for Jewish Educators (PCJE) is reaching Jewish communities around the world with powerful tools for



deep, text-based learning. This year, PCJE faculty led immersive professional development and community programming across three continents, responding to local needs with Jewish learning that is rigorous, relevant, and resonant.

In Mexico City, Pardes educators worked with Colegio ORT, a school serving over 1,200 students from diverse Jewish backgrounds. Educators were introduced to "meaning-mining," a Pardes methodology that guides learners to uncover relevance already embedded in Jewish texts. The result: inspired teachers ready to bring deeper engagement to their classrooms.

In Sweden, the Jewish Educators Forum gathered schoolteachers, youth movement leaders, and informal educators for an exploration of God, spirituality, and prayer—a bold move in a secular society. The request came from participants themselves, who, after two years of training in *Mahloket Matters* and meaning-mining, were ready for deeper theological conversations.

Meanwhile in Helsinki, PCJE helped launch a b'nai mitzvah mentoring program that paired experienced Jewish families with less affiliated ones. A follow-up Shabbaton included multi-generational havruta learning, with children and parents reflecting together on texts and identity.

At the core of each of these experiences lies a shared belief: that Jewish life must be rooted in serious engagement with text, and that learning becomes transformative when it also touches heart and spirit. PCJE's global work is making this vision real—one community, one educator, and one conversation at a time.

# Ta'amei HaPardes: A New Voice in Jewish Commentary



This year, Pardes launched the *Ta'amei HaPardes Collection on Sefaria* — a digital commentary on Torah, Mishnah, and Talmud authored by three of Pardes' most beloved and respected faculty members: Rabbi Rahel Berkovits, Judy Klitsner, and Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield.

Each scholar brings a distinct voice and area of focus to this rich new resource. Rabbi Rahel Berkovits offers insights into tractates of the Mishnah, drawing on halakhic and feminist perspectives to illuminate issues of law, justice, and gender. Judy Klitsner contributes commentary on key narratives in the book of Genesis, weaving literary close reading with deep theological reflection. Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield provides Talmudic commentary, exploring the moral and spiritual dimensions of classic rabbinic debates.

Together, their work brings the Pardes style of learning—serious, accessible, and relevant—to the broader public. These commentaries invite learners of all backgrounds to engage with Jewish texts not just intellectually, but personally and spiritually. They are not just study aids, but thoughtful interpretations that speak to contemporary life

while honoring the depth of tradition.

The Ta'amei HaPardes Collection marks a new step in Pardes' mission to make Torah accessible and meaningful to all Jews. We celebrated the launch with a full Beit Midrash event attended by students, alumni, faculty, and friends— a fitting tribute to a project rooted in decades of teaching and learning.

You can explore the collection on Sefaria: sefaria.org.il/collections/taamei-hapardes

# Rooted in Learning: Pardes and New York City

Pardes' relationship with New York runs deep, and this year that bond was strengthened through a series of powerful public learning events across the city.

At Limmud NY, Rabbi Jonathan
Leener, a Pardes alum and faculty
member, led a packed session
on Jewish peoplehood and
conversion. Exploring the evolution
of conversion across history, Rabbi
Leener invited participants to
consider how welcoming others into
the Jewish people deepens our own
sense of identity and solidarity. The
conversation was timely, textured,
and reflective of Pardes' signature
approach—serious learning that
meets the moment.



Later in the year, Pardes partnered with Congregation Rodeph Sholom for a meaningful afternoon of learning titled Zakhor: Why Remember What We Sometimes Try to Forget. Faculty members Rabbanit Nechama Goldman Barash and Rabbi Leon Morris guided the community through rich explorations of memory, moral responsibility, and how the Jewish calendar's memorial days invite us to reflect, wrestle, and grow.

Just across town, JCC Manhattan launched a six-part series with Pardes scholar Rabba Yaffa Epstein called *The Torah of Being an American Jew Today.* From democracy and citizenship to labor and land, each session combined a warm community meal with deep, values-driven Torah study. The program created space for curiosity, connection, and moral clarity at a time when many are seeking purpose and grounding.

Together, these New York events reflect Pardes' expanding global footprint—bringing meaningful, text-centered learning to communities far beyond Jerusalem.

### Mahloket Matters Meets Social Media

This year, Pardes launched the first-ever Mahloket Matters Content Creators Cohort, bringing our signature approach to constructive disagreement into the digital sphere. The fellowship convened a small group of influential Jewish content creators for a series of virtual learning sessions, exploring classical Jewish texts and the Mahloket Matters framework for navigating disagreement with nuance, empathy, and integrity.

Participants included Netta



Asner, Jazzie Morgan, and Amy Albertson—educators and creators with thousands of followers across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Throughout the program, they created original content inspired by the values and sources they studied, addressing challenging topics such as Jewish identity, disagreement in community, and what it means to hold complexity in a polarized world.

Their posts reached thousands of viewers, introducing new audiences to Jewish learning and demonstrating how Torah can speak meaningfully to the questions people are asking today. By translating *Mahloket Matters* into the language of reels, stories, and swipeable content, these creators opened a new channel for Pardes' educational voice—one that is visual, personal, and profoundly relevant.

Rather than holding community projects in physical spaces, as in past *Mahloket Matters* fellowships, this cohort brought their impact online, engaging global audiences through creative, values-driven media. It's a powerful proof of concept: the Beit Midrash isn't confined to a building. With the right tools and training, it can thrive anywhere Jews are searching for meaning—including the scroll of a social feed.

# Summer Learning, Reimagined

Summer at Pardes is usually filled with the buzz of lively hallways, spirited debate between havrutot in the Beit Midrash, and laughter over lunch in the chadar ochel. Our classrooms pulse with energy, alive with learners from around the world diving into Torah and community. This year, due to security concerns and the ongoing war, we made the decision to move both the Summer Program and the Pardes Learning Seminar (PLS) online.

If the last five years have taught us anything, it's how to pivot. Thanks to our incredible staff's quick turnaround and our faculty's collaborative spirit, we created a meaningful online experience that captured the essence of summer at Pardes.

The virtual classrooms buzzed with curiosity and connection. Faculty brought their full selves to the screen, and students showed up ready to learn and grow. Though we missed gathering in person, the pivot allowed us to bring Pardes learning to living rooms, study corners, and kitchen tables worldwide.

We're proud of the Torah that was learned and the community that



formed. And we look forward—with great hope—to welcoming learners back to Jerusalem next summer, to fill the Beit Midrash with voices once again.

# Honoring Debra Weiner: 28 Years of Dedication



In August, Pardes celebrated the retirement of Debra Weiner, whose 28 years of service left a lasting mark on our community. Debra began at Pardes as a social worker for students, offering guidance, care, and support to those navigating life in Jerusalem. She later partnered with Alex Israel to launch the Community Education program, which she directed for many years. Under her leadership, CE blossomed into a vibrant hub of courses, trips, and friendships that brought Torah learning to thousands of community members.

Debra was deeply dedicated to her students. Even while facing personal challenges, including when her son was wounded while serving in Gaza, her devotion to the community never wavered.

As Pardes looks ahead to new ways of welcoming community learners into our Beit Midrash, we are indebted to Debra for setting the bar high—for excellent programming, for meaningful relationship-building, and for creating spaces where Torah and community could thrive. She will be greatly missed, and her legacy will continue to guide Pardes for years to come.

# LEARNING WITHOUT BORDERS

**VOICES FROM THE BEIT MIDRASH** 

Five students from the four corners of the Earth share transformative moments from their year at Pardes in the Beit Midrash Program. Their words speak for themselves. All students attended last year's Beit Midrash Program ('24-'25).





Jake Hayman -Australia

# What made you decide to leave your home community to study Torah in Jerusalem?

"I both love and am deeply passionate about my community in Melbourne, yet its size and relative isolation means that whilst there is brilliant Torah available here, at times it can be scattered and hard to find. I would not be able to engage in the intensive, deep and intellectually challenging Torah available at Pardes in the same way in Australia.

Coming to Jerusalem, a city with Torah floating in the air, allowed me to immerse myself in our text and tradition in a way that simply isn't possible in many other places. I am certain that my time spent in this environment has endowed me with knowledge and skills I can bring back to my home community as we continue to grow."

# Complete the sentence: "Pardes helped me realize that..."

"Being Jewish is fun, serious, scary, beautiful, confusing, overwhelming and incredible all at the same time.

And I wouldn't want it any other way."





Sacha Sampson
-New Zealand

# What surprised you most about learning at Pardes?

"How much I enjoyed my Hilkhot Kashrut (dietary laws) class! I took it because I thought it would be practical but didn't expect how fun and interesting it would be. I really liked that rather than just sitting and rote learning a set of rules, we explored the development and reasoning behind Kashrut practices, from the Torah text through to current halacha (law) and minhag (custom)."

# How has being part of an international student body shaped your experience here?

"Coming from a small community in a country pretty far away from almost anywhere, it was really cool to talk with other students from a wide range of places and learn about their communities. I enjoyed discussing which aspects of our communities were unique, and equally, how many similarities there are between communities all around the world. It was interesting to hear about the challenges they face and to brainstorm and problem-solve those we share. While sad to have to leave each other at the end of the program, it's also nice to know I have a global network of friends, peers and teachers I am connected to!"





Noelia Bernardez -Spain

# Was there a moment in the Beit Midrash that changed the way you see yourself as a Jew?

"It wasn't one specific moment, but rather the daily discipline of it that changed me. Not every day you feel 'inspired,' and trust me, after you've searched for the 27th Aramaic word you don't know, you're ready to give up and ask yourself: why am I doing this? But then something clicks—either in your own mind or in your Havruta's—and suddenly you understand, and you keep going. The act of showing up every day, for hours, teaches you so much about yourself."

# Describe a text or class at Pardes that has stayed with you—and why.

"Just one? I can't! I have to mention both Rahel's Talmud class and Zvi's Philosophy class. Beyond their incredible teaching skills and classroom management—which I think is the best—they bring such passion to what they teach. They can make you interested in any topic, even at 5:29 PM when you really want to go home after a long day, or early in the morning when you're still working on your first coffee. I really feel they love what they do, and when someone does anything with that kind of feeling, it not only shows but becomes contagious."





Yaela Orelowitz -South Africa

# What surprised you most about learning at Pardes?

"I have previous experience with other Torah institutions and met Pardes as something different in the way that the Torah was delivered: without agenda, without guilt, without asking anything in return. Here it is, do with it what you wish. This was astounding, refreshing, perhaps even revolutionary and I greatly appreciate the chance to receive Torah that has spaciousness around it."

# What does 'global Jewish community' mean to you now that you've lived and learned in this one?

"It means unity, it means agreeing to holding different roles and doing things differently, validating the importance of difference, it means respect even when there is no agreement, it means understanding how context influences practice."





<mark>Pe</mark>dro Gouveia -Brazil

# Was there a moment in the Beit Midrash that changed the way you see yourself as a Jew?

"There were many moments, but a moment that springs to mind was when I first witnessed the entire group of people from many different backgrounds singing the Birkat HaMazon (grace after meals) together. The sheer power of that was truly inspiring."

# What's one idea or value from Torah learning that you want to carry with you for life?

"That Torah is alive. And we are the bearers and keepers of a great and holy tradition. Not only do we read what our sages have thought, but it is incumbent on us to carry these timeless discussions further."



How do our texts — from the Torah through the Gemara — reflect the historic tension between living in *Eretz Yisrgel* and in *Chutz La'Aretz*?

**D:** In *Ketubot* 110b, we find a fascinating *sugya* (Talmudic passage) where the *Gemara* (rabbinic discussion in the Talmud) records a debate between Rabbi Zeira and Rabbi Yehuda. Rabbi Zeira yearns to leave *Bavel* (Babylonia) for *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel), but Rabbi Yehuda opposes him, even quoting biblical verses to support his case.

The question I keep coming back to is: was *Bavel* really the *lechatchila* (the ideal or preferred situation) — the ideal place for Torah and Jewish life at that time — or was it only the *bediavad* (a situation accepted after the fact, though not ideal), the default situation until the arrival of *Mashiach* (the Messiah)?

Later in the *sugya*, Rashi comments that a person must remain where the *yeshivot* (rabbinic academies) are. To me, that suggests an acknowledgment that the Torah of *Bavel* carried a kind of unique staying power that perhaps outweighed the spiritual draw of *Eretz Yisrael*.

**M:** I wouldn't go so far as to call *Eretz Yisrael* a backwater, but it does seem that *Bavel* offered something that *Eretz Yisrael* could not at that moment. In *Bavel*, there was a remarkable ability to organize the material, to pull it together in a way that gave it lasting value. And with the hindsight of centuries, we can see just how true that was: the *Bavli* (the Babylonian Talmud) became the foundation of Jewish life. It's possible that Rabbi Yehuda understood this intuitively, that God's will was for a strong community in *Bavel*. As Yirmiyahu (the prophet Jeremiah) puts it,

בבלה יובאו ושמה יהיו – ירמיהו כ"ז: כ"ב

To Babylonia they shall be brought, and there they shall remain - Jeremiah 27:22

Gemara and Tanakh to their own lived experiences — and reflect on why both remain essential to the Jewish future.

**D:** But it raises the deeper question: why not preempt redemption? The verses that Rabbi Yehuda cites became a cornerstone of debate even in modern Zionist times — a textual basis for those who opposed Zionism, who insisted that we must patiently wait for *Mashiach* and not push the process forward.

M: And that's where Esther becomes such an instructive case. When *Hazal* read *Megillat Esther* (the Book of Esther), they didn't see it as a comedy, the way some modern commentators do. They saw it as a tragedy. The story takes place in the long shadow of the *churban* (the destruction of the Temple). It is a quintessential tale of Diaspora life: Jews surviving without sovereign power, constantly dependent on the politics of others. That lack of mastery over our destiny defines the challenge of exile.

D: That approach to Esther — reading it as a cautionary tale about life in the Diaspora — makes it fit with the *Tanakh*'s (Bible's) general vision, which consistently puts *Eretz Yisrael* at the center — from *Shir HaShirim*'s (Song of Songs') ode to the land's beauty, to the covenantal promises woven through so many other books.

But I wonder if there is a traditional text that offers an alternative to the tension in the *sugya* in *Ketubot*, a more constructive relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

**M:** If we take a step back, we see that this tension is as old as *Bamidbar* (Numbers). In chapter 32, the two and a half tribes chose to remain on the eastern side

of the Jordan, raising Moshe's concern that they were abandoning their role in the collective mission. Later in *Yehoshua* (Joshua) 22, their decision nearly led to civil war until dialogue revealed that they wanted to remain part of the people. These texts remind us that the tension between *Eretz Yisrael* and the Diaspora is ancient — and that only conversation and a shared sense of peoplehood can resolve the misunderstandings it creates.

#### How has Judaism's long life in the Diaspora shaped Jewish identity, and what might people who grow up in Israel miss without it?

**D:** One of the other questions that interested me in this whole discussion was: How has the fact that Judaism has been a Diaspora religion for so long affected Judaism positively? When we as *olim* (immigrants to Israel) think about our kids growing up here, what do we feel like they're missing by not experiencing Judaism in *galut* (Diaspora)?

**M:** What I've seen is that sometimes my kids don't have a sense of a larger Judaism, of different kinds of Jews, and also non-Jews — the mission of the Jewish people as part of humanity. We've interacted for centuries with great empires. That's been our history.

Also, in *chutz la'Aretz* (outside the Land of Israel) the *kehilla* (community) is the center of Jewish life. It has such incredible power that it doesn't have in Israel.

- **D:** My daughter just did a year of *Sherut Leumi* (National Service) in Brighton, England. One of the things she realized is in a small community like that everyone counts. In Israel, often you have the sense that somebody else will do it.
- **M:** On the other hand, my kids growing up here have a different sort of Jewish commitment than in *chutz la'Aretz* in that they understand that, ultimately, they will be putting their lives on the line.

# How do we see these similar tensions between Israel and the Diaspora playing out today?

- **M:** The debates of the *Gemara* and *Tanakh* are not just historical; they continue to echo in contemporary Jewish life. Questions of belonging, responsibility, and where Jewish destiny unfolds remain as relevant as ever.
- **D:** I felt this tension very personally. My great-grand-father was born in Jerusalem in the 1860s, and my grandfather in Jerusalem around 1900. But they left once to avoid the Turkish draft during World War I, and later because of severe economic hardship in the early British Mandate. They went back to the States, while some of our cousins remained here. Growing up, I felt

making *aliyah* (immigrating to Israel) was in our family DNA. By the time I finally moved, it seemed clear to me that life here had a much richer Torah environment and a deeper engagement with the Jewish future. At a certain point, staying in the States no longer felt compelling.

- M: My story is a little different. My parents were what I'd call armchair Zionists, so for me Eretz Yisrael was always a mythical destination. As a teenager I came here to learn in *yeshiva*, and the Torah felt so much more vital than it did back home. I decided then that I wanted to make Israel my future, and I've never regretted it. I still feel very strongly that a comprehensive Jewish life that addresses every aspect of being — personal, communal and national — is only possible in Israel. But over time, I've become more understanding of those who don't or can't make *aliyah*. Some people have aging parents, or careers they can't leave, or children who would struggle to adjust. After October 7, we all had a wake-up call that what we thought was the ultimate haven might not be as safe as we imagined. At the same time, I think Jews everywhere are less safe, which reinforces the need for a strong Diaspora alongside Israel.
- D: That resonates. After we made *aliyah*, I saw families who had to return because it simply didn't work for them. Sometimes it wasn't about ideology at all their kids didn't adjust, or they couldn't find work. It made me more aware that it's not ideal for everyone. I wish more people had been told that honestly before making the move.
- **M:** That's why I sometimes think of the moment in *Bereishit* (Genesis) when *Yaakov* (Jacob) prepared to meet *Esav* (Esau). He divided his camp in half

#### והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה – בראשית ל״ב:ט And the camp that is left shall escape — Genesis 32:9

so that survival wouldn't depend on everyone being in one place. *Hazal* say that's the secret of Jewish survival. Maybe it still is. Not all Jews can or should be in Israel, and not all should remain in the Diaspora. The tension itself, managed with humility and solidarity, may be part of what ensures our future.

Thank you for sitting in on this conversation. What began with a *sugya* in *Ketubot* opened into a rich exploration of history, *Tanakh*, and lived experience. For Michael and Daniel, these are not abstract debates but questions that shape their lives in Israel and their understanding of the global Jewish people. At Pardes, conversations like this — rooted in text yet alive with contemporary relevance — are at the heart of our programs.

### **FOUNDATIONS RISING**

# BEIT KAREN

For many years, the pages of *Havruta* have carried updates about Pardes' dream for a permanent home of our own. We are delighted to write about Beit Karen not as a vision or a plan, but as a **construction project in full motion**. After decades of dreaming and careful preparation, the site is buzzing with cranes, cement mixers, and teams of workers bringing this dream to life.

# Visible Progress on the Ground

Full construction has been underway. Steel rebar has been lowered into the five-story excavation, tied by hand, and filled with concrete to form structural floors, walls, and ceilings. Ramps now curve upward, and the outlines of elevator shafts, stairwells, and underground rooms for systems and storage have begun to emerge.

# Watching the **Dream Take Shape**

Our live construction camera, which for years pointed into what was mostly a quiet excavation site, now shows a flurry of activity every day. If you haven't checked in recently, it's worth a look—you'll see the walls going up, cranes at work, and a building beginning to take shape.

# Your Support Is Still Needed

Even as we celebrate this progress, we want to be clear: our work is not done. Building Beit Karen is a major undertaking, and we are still actively raising the funds needed to ensure the completion of Pardes' new home. There are also meaningful sponsorship opportunities available for those who wish to leave a lasting impact on the future of Jewish learning.

Your partnership is what makes this historic moment possible. Together, we are creating not just a building, but a vibrant center for Torah study, community, and leadership that will serve generations to come.

#### **Looking Ahead**

The coming months promise even more visible change as new floors begin to rise towads street level. We are committed to keeping you updated with photos, stories, and live footage as Beit Karen steadily emerges into view and takes shape above ground.



#### **Beit Karen Live!**

Our live construction camera is streaming 24/7—catch the walls going up, cranes at work, and foundations taking shape in real time.



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We are grateful to all of our Campaign for the Generations donors—builders of Jerusalem. The following individuals, families, and foundations generously donated \$5,000+ as of August 2025.

Pardes is 75% of the way toward reaching its \$36 million, phase-one campaign goal. Every gift brings us closer. Exciting building and endowment naming opportunities are available. Contact Michael Emerson, michaele@pardes.org.il, for further information.

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**2024-2025 IN NUMBERS** 



Beit Midrash Program students (Elul, Semester, Year)

from

16
countries

and 10 states





1,773,985 people reached via Social Media

people reached via
MAHLOKET MATTERS
teaching



given in financial aid

6,014

learners in North American programming



6,000 learners in European programming\*\*



**iiii** 138

Summer Online participants



of students said their Pardes experience increased their desire to continue engaging in Torah study

- \* Data source: 2024–25 Student Impact Survey.
- \*\* Includes faculty tour attendees.

# 

# Rachel Isaacs Maine, USA

IMPACT: Groundbreaking
JTS-ordained rabbi and founder of
the Center for Small Town Jewish
Life at Colby College. Leads Beth
Israel Congregation in Waterville,
Maine, shaping vibrant, inclusive
Jewish community.

# Miriam Lorie Borehamwood, UK

**IMPACT:** Appointed to the first-ever female rabbinic position in a UK Orthodox congregation. Serving in community leadership as a rabbi with ordination from Yeshivat Maharat.









# Kyle Savitch NYC, USA

IMPACT: Received rabbinic ordination from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in 2021 and has been a leader in the Harlem Jewish community since 2016, helping found the Harlem Moishe House.

### Candace Mittel Kahn Chicago, USA

**IMPACT:** Producer of Honestly at The Free Press, shaping conversations on culture, identity, and faith. A leading voice in Jewish and journalistic storytelling.

**The Future Starts Here:** Pardes is where Jewish leaders begin. Our alumni lead with depth, vision, and purpose. They transform Jewish life and improve the world. Their roots are in Torah and their foundation is the Beit Midrash. Today, they are shaping the future of Jewish communities across the globe.

# Faustine Sigal Paris, France

**IMPACT:** Enriches French Jewish life through teaching, media, and innovation — from Moishe House to PJ Library France and the TV show Reformed. Now pursuing rabbinic ordination at Hartman.

### Maxim Delchev Sofia, Bulgaria

IMPACT: Director of Jewish
Education for Shalom, the umbrella
organization for Jewish life in
Bulgaria, and president of the
country's Sephardic Orthodox
community. Leading initiatives that
strengthen and connect Bulgaria's
diverse Jewish community.









## Jake Berger London, UK

**IMPACT:** Global Jewish educator with experience in Dubai, London, and Helsinki through JDC Entwine and the Board of Deputies, and Chair of the 2025 Limmud Festival.

#### Raf Dascalu Melbourne, Australia

**IMPACT:** A Melbourne-based researcher and translator. Founder and facilitator of Beit Midrash Oz in Melbourne.

#### THE PARDES

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Sustaining Pardes' Educational Programs, Financial Aid, Online Resources, and More

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of all of our Annual Fund donors, who make Pardes programs in Jerusalem and around the world possible. The following individuals, families, and foundations generously donated \$1,000+ between September 2024 and August 2025.

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"Pardes has given me the foundation that shapes the way I learn, lead, and live as a Jew. I never imagined I'd weave Jewish text into so many parts of my life and work, and I give so future generations have the opportunity to be transformed as I have been."

—Dammara Markowitz Israel Board Chair, PEP 2016–2018

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# BOOK CORNER



Hamishnah shel Rebbi is published in Hebrew by Tvunot Publishing House of Herzog College and is available at books.herzog.ac.il

#### **DOV BERKOVITS**

REDISCOVERING THE ORAL TORAH: A Journey into HaMishnah shel Rebbi



At first glance, the Mishnah appears as a terse legal text, a foundational compilation of Jewish law from the early centuries of the Common Era. But in *Hamishnah shel Rebbi* (The Mishnah of Rebbi), Rabbi Dov Berkovits offers a revelatory re-reading that transforms this ancient code into a profound exploration of Jewish consciousness, identity, and resilience.

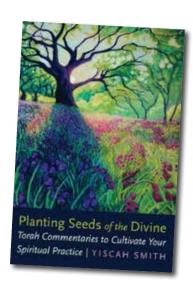
Rabbi Berkovits—an influential voice in Israeli Torah education and the son of the famed theologian Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits—brings decades of scholarship and creative pedagogy to this groundbreaking volume. Berkovits is known for his ability to bridge halakhic tradition with contemporary spiritual, social, and cultural concerns. In *Hamishnah shel Rebbi*, his intellectual rigor is matched by poetic sensitivity.

The book traces the editorial choices of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (known as "Rebbi"), who redacted the Mishnah after the destruction of the Second Temple and the trauma of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Through close textual analysis and philosophical interpretation, Berkovits argues that Rebbi's Mishnah was more than a legal manual. It was a carefully crafted spiritual architecture designed to sustain the Jewish people in an era of rupture and uncertainty.

Rather than offering passive commentary, the author invites readers to become active participants in a journey—one that uncovers the hidden ideas, emotional resonances, and national vision embedded in the Mishnah's compact language. Each section becomes a window into the evolving soul of post-Temple Jewish civilization.

With a voice both ancient and urgent, *Hamishnah shel Rebbi* reframes the Oral Torah as a living, breathing project of cultural and spiritual renewal. For anyone seeking to understand how Jewish tradition was rebuilt in the wake of loss, this book offers insight, depth, and quiet revolution.





Planting Seeds
of the Divine: Torah
Commentaries to Cultivate
Your Spiritual Practice is
published by the Jewish
Publication Society
(JPS) and is available
at amazon.com and at
magnespress.co.il

#### **YISCAH SMITH**

PLANTING THE DIVINE WITHIN: Torah Commentaries to Cultivate Your Spiritual Practice



In a world increasingly marked by noise, fragmentation, and spiritual burnout, Yiscah Smith's *Planting Seeds of the Divine* (June 2025) arrives like a breath of sacred air. With a voice that is both timeless and crucial, Smith invites readers on a transformative journey through the weekly Torah portions—not as ancient relics, but as living texts capable of awakening the deepest layers of the soul.

This is not your standard parsha commentary. Rooted in the contemplative traditions of Hasidic and Neo-Hasidic thought and grounded in Smith's own intimate spiritual practice, *Planting Seeds of the Divine* offers a garden of 47 Torah reflections, each framed by a middah—traits such as humility, compassion, or courage. These traits aren't abstract ideals but seeds to be nurtured through text study, embodied practice, and personal reflection.

Smith, a spiritual teacher known for her authenticity and theological depth, merges classical commentary with her unique experiential insights. The result is a holistic guide that activates intellect, emotion, and spirit alike. Every entry culminates in a hands-on spiritual exercise—an invitation to integrate wisdom rather than merely admire it.

What makes this book especially compelling is its radical message: the Divine Presence isn't something to seek "out there," but rather to recognize "in here." As Smith writes, "Our essence, as a creation by God, is God." With that premise, Torah becomes not just a mirror but a map—guiding us back to the sacred within.

With endorsements from spiritual leaders like Rabbi Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy and Rabbi Dr. Josh Feigelson, *Planting Seeds of the Divine* is poised to become a cornerstone text for 21st-century seekers. For those longing for God-consciousness, this book doesn't just point the way—it walks beside you.

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# An Interview with **Sefi Kraut** on the Transformative Power of Mahloket Matters at Beth Emet Synagogue

When Rabbi Andrea London of Beth Emet Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois, reached out to Pardes, she wasn't looking for a one-off speaker. Her community—like so many others in the post-October 7th landscape—was navigating unprecedented tension and division. She wanted something deeper: a framework grounded in Jewish tradition, relevant to modern challenges, and capable of creating lasting change.

Enter **Mahloket Matters**, Pardes' flagship framework for constructive disagreement. What unfolded at Beth Emet over the course of a year was not just a program but a cultural shift. We spoke with **Sefi Kraut**, Director of the Mahloket Matters program, about how it worked—and why it's so critical today.

## Q: Tell us how the partnership with Beth Emet began.

It began in 2022, when Pardes led a session on disagreement at the CCAR conference in Jerusalem. Rabbi Andrea London was there and remembered the power of that Jewish framework. Two years later, facing tensions in her community, she reached out to bring Mahloket Matters to Beth Emet.

# Q: What did the program look like in practice?

Rabbi London and her lay leaders launched a year-long initiative called *One Congregation, Many Voices*, announced during her Rosh Hashanah sermon. I flew to Evanston to lead a kickoff session for the full community and their facilitators—an uncommon and powerful show of commitment.

#### Q: What made the Beth Emet model distinctive?

They transformed twelve existing book groups into "salon groups" to tackle tough conversations, building on trust already established. Each group used a flexible curriculum, personalized by facilitators. That grassroots ownership made the learning deeply engaging.

#### Q: What were the themes the groups explored?

We built the year around three modules:

#### **Revisiting the Framework:**

A deeper dive into Mahloket Matters principles—Jewish texts, social psychology, and tools for listening and disagreeing constructively.

#### **Intergenerational Dialogue:**

Conversations around Jewish identity, climate change, and gender. One grandmother's talk with her grandchild was so powerful the other grandchildren asked, "When is it our turn?"

#### Israel/Palestine:

The most daunting topic. They framed it not as "how do we solve this?" but "how do we talk about this?" The result was overwhelmingly positive. People engaged without fracturing relationships. Many wanted more.

As a participant later wrote, "The consensus is that it was a home run—in large part due to your kickoff and coaching throughout!"

## Q: Why is Pardes uniquely suited to lead this?

For over 50 years, Pardes has taught Jews how to wrestle—with texts, with ideas, and with each other. At Pardes, disagreement isn't a problem to be fixed; it's a Jewish value with positive potential.

In today's polarized spaces, that message is urgent. We believe Torah can be a blueprint for community, especially in times of division. What we bring is not just a toolbox, but a tradition—a way to disagree constructively while staying in relationship and community.

# Q: What role did Pardes play throughout the process?

I led the opening session and provided support along the way—answering questions, creating a recap video before the Israel module, and consulting as needed.

But the key was anchoring the entire initiative in Jewish tradition. This wasn't just conflict resolution. It was Torah in action. Rabbi London and her team often said that the Mahloket Matters framework "set the stage" for everything that followed. The trust, the tone, the shared language—it all started with Pardes.

# Q: Can this kind of program be replicated elsewhere?

Absolutely. We're already working with synagogues like Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York. Beth Emet's model was ambitious—not every community can build a full curriculum from scratch. That's why Pardes is creating multiple tracks, from one-time workshops to year-long programs. What matters most is a real commitment to culture change.

# Q: What would you say to a rabbi or lay leader considering bringing Mahloket Matters to their community?

If your community is struggling to talk across divides, Mahloket Matters offers a Jewish path forward. It's Torah in action—and with the right intention, it can move communities from division to connection.



Learn more about bringing Mahloket Matters to your community.



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