



# HAVRUTA Magazine

The Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies

December 2011 / Kislev 5772

**Catch Up  
with  
Alumni**

**The True Meaning of  
Jewish Education**

**Who Knows 6?**

**Grappling with Israel in a  
Post-Modern, Post-Zionist Age**

**The Tent of Rivka**

*Exclusive Excerpt  
from Michael Hattin's  
New Book*

Talia Kushnick (Year '10-'11) and Jessica Silverman Gindea (PEP '10-'12) gleaning the fields of Leket Israel, the country's largest food bank and food rescue network, as part of the Pardes Yom Iyun Shel Hessed 2011. Read more about Pardes Social Action Projects on page 9.

## Educating Educators



Hillel professional **Akiko Yonekawa** (Summer '11) studied at Pardes as part of the 2011 Summer Educators Track

As part of the 2011 Pardes Summer Program, a select group of Jewish educators participated in a Summer Educators Track, funded by the Crown Family Foundation, whose aim was to enhance the Judaic knowledge of the participants, and give them tools for teaching about Israel. In addition to their regular Pardes studies, they toured historical sites in and around Jerusalem and attended six Israel education seminars. Students grappled with issues including Judaism as religion or nationality, commonality and diversity in Jewish life, separation of religion and state, and the meaning of diaspora Jewish life. **Ethan Bair** (Summer '11), rabbi at USC Hillel, who participated in the program said at the end, *"I hope to encourage my students to invest in their own relationships with Israel – and to add to the various, nuanced ways that we can hold conversations about these sensitive issues."*

## Overwhelming Response to Matching Grant Challenge

What can 78 friends of Pardes do in 11 days? Quite a lot! For the second consecutive year, Pardes was awarded a challenge grant that would match new and increased gifts totaling up to \$25,000. In just 11 days in August, Pardes reached this goal – twice as fast as the previous year! Of the 78 contributions, 69% were made by Pardes alumni and nearly half were made by new donors. Thank you to everyone who generously participated in this effort.

## Pardes Hosts Yeshivat Talpiot

During the month of Elul, Pardes hosted Yeshivat Talpiot, an egalitarian yeshiva for Israelis. Their principles include committed and critical learning of traditional texts and complete egalitarianism of women and men. The 17 students, almost all of them native Israelis, studied in *havruta* with Pardes students and provided support and guidance for the egalitarian minyan. They organized *mifgashim* (encounters) over lunch to discuss current issues and joined Pardes for some Israel related programs. **David Levin-Kruss**, Director of Special Programs, said, *"It was a wonderful opportunity for our students to meet real Israelis who have similar interests to them and to strengthen the Israel-Diaspora bond."*




Yeshivat Talpiot students at Pardes

## 5 of 101 Reasons to Study at Pardes in 2012/13

- #17** Learn with students from all different denominations, backgrounds and ages.
- #22** Calf muscles! Ride your bike to and from Pardes, taking on Jerusalem's hills.
- #36** Make your voice heard: Explore contemporary and controversial Israeli issues in an open setting.
- #49** Live minutes away from Emek Refaim - a hopping boulevard with shops and cafes.
- #65** Because the students say the best part of Pardes is the teachers, and the teachers say the best part is the students.

Look out for more reasons as part of our 2012-2013 recruitment campaign! You can submit your reasons to [reasons@pardes.org.il](mailto:reasons@pardes.org.il).



# THE RODEF PURSUING PEACE IN JUDAISM SHALOM:

## From 'Track' To 'Center'

We are excited to announce that the Pardes Peace and Conflict Track founded two years ago by faculty member **Daniel Roth**, is currently being transformed into *The Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution*. The goal of the new center is to imbue participants with knowledge and skills to better understand and transform interpersonal and intergroup conflicts through the joint study of Jewish texts and conflict resolution theories.

The Center is piloting two programs for the current academic year. *The Rodef Shalom - Pursuing Peace in Judaism* course, in partnership with the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, will include monthly classes in five cities throughout North America, a national retreat, and an online course co-taught by Daniel Roth and Marc Gopin. *Mediation and ADR in Theory, Practice and Judaism*, in partnership with Bar Ilan University's Law School and Program for Conflict Management, will be a summer executive program geared towards lawyers and mediators. Future plans include a full-time year program engaging students in the study and practice of Judaism and conflict resolution.

## Pardes of the Future

In addition to providing the typically powerful Pardes experience for the current crop of students, during the last academic year we also carved out time to think about the Pardes of the future. The boards, faculty and staff spent unprecedented time together, which included a two day retreat, two day-long workshops, and six working groups. While it was clear that 'Open Beit Midrash-style' learning would remain at the core of Pardes, there was a lot of creative energy in the air as we tackled how to further engage alumni, foster diversity, explore the role of Israel programming and how to use current technology effectively. Stay tuned as concrete results of these conversations continue to emerge. Read the results of the alumni survey that was part of the effort at [www.pardes.org.il/alumni/survey](http://www.pardes.org.il/alumni/survey).

## New Pre-Rabbinic Track



Miriam Berkowitz

With Pardes graduates embarking on rabbinical school in ever increasing numbers, Pardes has decided to take a more proactive role in helping students who decide to pursue the rabbinate as a career choice.

The new Pre-Rabbinic Track, directed by recently appointed faculty member **Miriam Berkowitz**, will help students form their concept of what a rabbi's work can be, evaluate their individual paths, decide on the right rabbinical school and navigate the application process.

The Track will offer opportunities for the group to meet with interesting rabbinical personalities and to broaden and deepen their appreciation for the varied possibilities and challenges of the rabbi as Jewish leader. In addition, the program will bring together students of different religious observance patterns and belief systems who nevertheless are embarking on parallel paths with similar and complementary goals. Miriam Berkowitz said, "*We hope that this group will become a valuable network in the future, especially when cross-denominational interactions become less accessible for rabbis.*"

The long-term hope is that as the rabbinical schools and Pardes develop even closer ties, the schools themselves will encourage more students to come to Pardes and study for their preparatory years.

# ALUMNI: Where Are They Now?



## JUST FOR LAUGHS

Those who attended Pardes in 1994-95 are sure to remember the legendary Purim Spiel run by **Rob Kutner (Part Time '94-'95)**. As it turns out, Rob's wit was professional grade and led to a career in comedy. Rob was a writer for The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and currently is a writer for Conan O'Brien's show CONAN on TBS.

For Kutner, Pardes was so much more than a venue to try out new material. "Pardes gave me a grounding for much of the 'Jewish praxis' of my life - from the way I observe kashrut, Shabbat and holidays, to the way I prepare a drash for my minyan. It also gave me a community of friends, many of whom I am still in touch with." Rob is an active member of Los Angeles' Shtibl Minyan. He is married to **Sheryl Zohn (Part Time '96-'97)** and they have a three year old daughter, Sasha. Rob anticipates that Sasha will attend Pardes in 2030 and says that "she is looking forward to learning with her robot havruta."

## THOSE WHO CAN



Eleven years ago **Tamar Rabinowitz (PEP '00-'02)** came to Pardes to start her career as a Jewish educator and her passion for teaching is still fresh. "I am proud that I have stayed in this profession for a decade and that I still find joy and fulfillment in my career as a classroom teacher," says Tamar,

who teaches Tanakh at the Jewish Community High school of the Bay in San Francisco. "I am proud that I am in a career where I am always reflecting, learning, growing and changing."

Tamar praises Pardes for continuing to be an important resource for her as a teacher. "The one constant I have experienced, besides teenage angst, has been the support of the Pardes community." From her Pardes mentors and friends she receives help with practical pedagogical techniques and with content. It has given her a place to voice her challenges and fears and an address to receive professional development. "Today I can call on a large body of Pardes educators, who help me continue to grow as an educator."

## A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Pardes can now boast two Israeli Ambassadors among its alumni. Earlier this year **Daniel Taub (Year '87-'88)** became Israel's Ambassador to the UK, joining alumnus **Michael Oren (Year '78-'79)**, Israel's Ambassador to the United States, in Israel's highest diplomatic ranks.

Taub has been a member of Israel's negotiating teams in both the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Syrian negotiations. As a legal expert he has represented Israel in many international fora, including the hearings on Israel's security fence in the International Court of Justice, and on the flotilla incident at the United Nations.



Taub, who was born and grew up in the UK, holds degrees from the universities of Oxford, London and Harvard, where he was a Wexner Fellow. He has taught extensively in the fields of international law, negotiation theory and Middle Eastern issues. He also wrote a popular Israeli TV drama show called HaChatzer about ultra-Orthodox Jews.

## BILLS, BILLS AND MORE BILLS



Now living in Jerusalem, **Efrat Hakak (Kollel '03-'04)** is part of the legal team at the Knesset. Her role includes preparing and drafting legislation for the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee and providing legal counsel as needed. Most recently she has been working on anti-terror legislation and constitutional rights. A graduate of Columbia University and a Dorot fellow, Efrat came to Pardes before completing her Masters in International Relations and LLB at Hebrew University.

Reminiscing about her Pardes experience she says, "It was a wonderful place to study, and my eyes were opened to new methodologies and looking at the texts in fresh ways. The teachers are second to none – and I made friendships for life."

## OUT OF AFRICA



When **Andrew Ginsberg (Year '99-'00)** arrived at Pardes, he had no idea just how deeply the year would impact his future. "I did my Pardes community service obligation at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Jerusalem. I didn't think that it would later be my career," says Ginsberg. His internship led him to Uganda where he now lives with his wife, Chanda and daughter, Rivkah and where he is the Resettlement Officer for the UNHCR in Kampala. This year he had the opportunity to spend Rosh Hashana with the Abayudaya Jewish community in Mbale.

## LAWYER MEETS GOD



"Pardes is directly responsible, in many ways, for my decision to leave law and become a rabbi," says **Josh Ratner (Year '98-'99)**. "Pardes showed me experientially that I don't have to compartmentalize my Judaism into certain portions of the day, week, or year, and that is something I will always cherish." Josh attended Columbia for both his undergraduate and law degrees and is now in his final year of Rabbinical School at JTS. Additionally, he blogs for a website of progressive religious seminarians, entitled

State of Formation, and writes for an online family magazine, discussing contemporary parenting issues from a religious perspective.



## START UP NATION

"Although I've only participated formally in one executive seminar, Pardes has been a seminal institution for me," says **Shoshana Boyd Gelfand (ELS '99)** who is Director of Jhub in London, an incubator for Jewish start-up organizations that provides office space, professional development, consultancy and networking opportunities for people engaged in Jewish social action and innovation. "Pardes's commitment to serious Jewish learning in an open environment demonstrated to me that pluralism does not mean watered down learning."

Shoshana was a member of the first Wexner Graduate Fellowship class and received her rabbinic ordination from JTS in 1993. She directed the Wexner Heritage Program for eight years and notes that she often sent graduates of the program to study at Pardes as a next step in their Jewish learning. "Even for those of us who do not have the benefit of Pardes on our doorstep, it continues to enrich our lives and the global Jewish community as well," says Shoshana.



# Hanuka and its Place Among the Jewish Holidays

## Gmar Hatima Tova

by Levi Cooper

"*Gmar hatima tova*" is a greeting associated with the High Holy days. After being inscribed in the Book of Life on Rosh Hashana, we wish each other *gmar hatima tova*, may you be completely sealed for the best. Traditionally this blessing is offered from Rosh Hashana through Yom Kippur. The blessing may also be offered until the final day of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah, when there is one last opportunity to add a note to the Book of Life and be sealed for the best in the coming year.

The ever optimistic Hasidic tradition recognized one further opportunity: one of the early Hasidic masters, Rabbi Aharon of Zhitomir (d. 1816), wrote that Hoshana Rabbah continues until Hanuka. Strange as it may sound, there is justification for offering the *gmar hatima tova* wish right through Hanuka!

Speaking at a gathering to commemorate the anniversary of the death of his father-in-law on Hanuka 1951, Rabbi Yaakov Friedman (1878-1957) cited this hasidic tradition. Rabbi Yaakov Friedman – often known by the title of his work *Oholei Yaakov* – was a scion of the regal Ruzhin dynasty and served as leader of the Husiatyn Hasidim in Tel Aviv during the formative years of the State of Israel. He was born in Bohush, Rumania, married in Husiatyn, Galicia and with the outbreak of the Great War he fled with his family to Vienna, Austria. In Vienna, R. Yaakov was active in Zionist circles. In 1937, together with his father-in-law who was the incumbent leader of the Husiatyn Hasidim, and together with the rest of the family, he moved to British Mandate Palestine. The family settled in the first Jewish city, Tel Aviv. To avoid the humidity and heat, the family would move to Jerusalem for the summer months, but the center of the Husiatyn Hasidim was established in Tel Aviv. To this day, the building on Bialik Steet remains standing as the bastion of the Husiatyn legacy in Tel Aviv.

*Levi Cooper teaches Bible, Maimonides and Hasidism at Pardes. Levi was recently awarded his PhD by the Faculty of Law, Bar Ilan University. His dissertation dealt with the interaction between Hasidism and Halakha.*



R. Yaakov's father-in-law and predecessor, Rabbi Yisrael of Husiatyn (1858-1949) was a respected leader, known for his quiet, sincere and noble manner. Contemporaries would later recall the noble figure of R. Yisrael on his daily walks through the streets of Tel Aviv. Prior to his death, R. Yisrael was asked for his opinion on the fledgling State of Israel. Without hesitation, the Hasidic master responded: "It is *at'halta degeula*, the beginning of the redemption."

Returning to R. Yaakov speaking at a gathering in memory of his father-in-law and mentioning the Hasidic notion of wishing *gmar hatima tova* until Hanuka, he commented: Today we need a *gmar hatima tova* in two senses of the blessing. First, in the classic Hasidic sense: even though we have reached Hanuka, it is not too late to be sealed for good life this year. Second, on the national level: we have already merited "the beginning of the redemption." The establishment of the State of Israel reflects a physical redemption for our People. The ultimate goal remains: a physical redemption accompanied by spiritual salvation. For this too we wish *gmar hatima tova* – may what was begun be completed for the best.

R. Yaakov continued that this blessing is eminently appropriate for the festival of Hanuka: in Hasidic lore, the light of the Hanuka candles reflects the Light of ultimate good that is reserved for the End of Days. We could add a further dimension to the connection between Hanuka and the beginning of the redemption as reflected by the establishment of the State: since 1949, the official emblem of the State of Israel is the seven-branched Menorah.

So for the festival of Hanuka, we offer the blessing *gmar hatima tova*: may we still be sealed for a rain-filled good year, and may what was started with the establishment of our national homeland, be completed for the best.

# The Power of Light

by Yaffa Epstein

Kislev is a very significant month in the Jewish calendar. On the one hand, it is the month with the shortest days, and the darkest nights. Yet, in the month of Kislev, the Jewish people have created Hanuka, a holiday whose essence is the celebration of light. *But, is simply adding light enough? What is the nature of this light that we are celebrating?*

The Gemara in Tractate *Shabbat* spends a considerable amount of effort and energy describing the exact wicks and oil that may be used for the Shabbat lights. On Daf 21a an interesting dispute arises as to whether these same laws are applicable to the Hanuka lights. Rav Huna claims that in fact, the wicks and oils that are prohibited for Shabbat are prohibited for all of Hanuka. Rav Chisda states that these wicks and oils are prohibited for the Hanuka lights lit before the Shabbat, however on the weekdays of Hanuka, they are permitted.

A third opinion (that of either Rav Matneh, or Rav) states that any wicks and oils may be used for Hanuka candles. The *Sfat Emet*, Rebbe Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, in his lectures on Hanuka has a beautiful explanation of this Gemara. He quotes his grandfather, the first Gerrer Rebbe, the *Chidushei Harim*, who explained this Gemara by saying that the fact that a person may use any kind of wick or oil on Hanuka shows the greatness of the Hanuka lights. These Hanuka lamps, even if they are of poor quality, have the power to draw up oil. He compares this to the souls of the Jewish people, and specifically states that even souls that are disconnected can be drawn up on Hanuka. In other words, there is something special about Hanuka, a hidden power in the holiday itself, which allows all Jews to be able to connect.

The *Sfat Emet* explains his grandfather's words and attempts to understand the power that Hanuka possesses. He compares Hanuka and Purim with the holidays that are mandated by Torah law and explains that there is a fundamental difference between Biblical and Rabbinic holidays. Biblical holidays, because they are commanded by God, are testimony to God's faith and relationship with the Jewish people, however, Hanuka and Purim, Rabbinic holidays created and instituted by the Jewish people, are different. He states: "Hanuka and Purim are holidays that the Jewish people merited by their actions, and this is called *Torah SheBeal Peh* - the oral Torah. They are testimony to the fact that the Jewish people chose God..."

According to the *Sfat Emet*, the fact that the Jewish people acted, and declared Hanuka a holiday, is the Jewish people's statement that they are in relationship with God. God did not command these holidays. The Rabbis, in an act of recognition and appreciation of the miracles that had befallen them, together with the Jewish People, create and sanctify time for God. This act of testimony to God gives the people ownership over the holiday of Hanuka, and as such makes this holiday accessible to all Jews no matter who they are or how disconnected they may feel.

Hanuka therefore becomes a holiday which is indeed about light. Not necessarily the light from a flame, but rather the light of acting positively, acting to enhance the world, acting for God. What is the result of this action? That the entire Jewish people are able to unite, to come together! And what greater light can we bring to the world than Jewish unity? May we merit to take positive and important actions in this world, and to witness the uniting of the entire Jewish people.

*Yaffa Epstein teaches Talmud & Jewish Liturgy at Pardes.*



# The True Meaning of Jewish Education by Joshua Chadajo



We hear a lot these days about the importance of 'Jewish education', without actually spelling out what we mean by it. Unsurprisingly then, people use 'Jewish education' to refer to many different things, including Jewish values, Jewish holidays and other Jewish cultural elements.

Perhaps we would be better suited if we avoided such buzz words, and instead spelled out precisely what we have in mind. Ruth Wisse, Professor of Yiddish Literature at Harvard, has suggested that instead of using the term Holocaust, we refer to "*the destruction of European Jewry*." In a similar vein, from the Pardes point of view, instead of referring to 'Jewish education' we should refer to 'the study of classical Jewish texts.' To be sure, the above-mentioned areas of Jewish life are important, even crucial, but they should flow from the study of Jewish text, not replace it. Too often Jewish text study is on the periphery of 'Jewish education'; with this definition, however, it is the very essence.

It is no great insight to say that as a whole, Jews in North America are particularly literate secularly, yet not particularly literate Jewishly. Most of us are more likely to know the home team's starting lineup in this week's NFL game, or who is most likely to be voted off of American Idol in the next episode, than we are to know what the weekly Torah portion is.

Pardes is changing that reality. The impact of a Pardes experience goes well beyond the individual student having one. In fact, whether you know it or not, chances are you have been touched by Pardes. Whether it is the rabbi at the nearby synagogue, a graduate of the Pardes Educators Program teaching at one of North America's Jewish Day Schools, a professional at Hillel, a volunteer at a Jewish – or non-Jewish – organization, or a founder of any number of Jewish organizations or *minyanim*, there is an excellent chance that they learned at Pardes.

For those who have attended a Pardes program, you know how powerful the experience can be. For those who haven't – yet – know that a lot can be accomplished in even a short period of time. Having learned in the Year Program in 2001-02, I attended my first Pardes Executive Learning Seminar six years ago. I will never forget the conversation I had at the end of that five-day program. Walking to the closing dinner with a woman who had signed up for the program

primarily at her husband's urging, I asked her how her experience had been. She replied, without hesitation, "I feel like Pardes gave me the keys to unlock my heritage."



Pardes Educator Ris Golden (PEP '07-'09) teaching elementary school pupils at Hannah Senesh School, New York, NY

If I hadn't been there myself, I might have thought the story was made up. How could a five day experience make such an impact? The key, I think, was that Pardes had managed to remove both the mystery and the anxiety surrounding these ancient Jewish texts. She now understood that these

texts belonged to her as much as they did to anyone else. Importantly, Pardes provided access to the texts, a way in. Was she now Jewishly literate? No. But she had taken the first couple of steps, whereas before the week had begun, she didn't even know where the path was.

*Joshua Chadajo (Year '01-'02) is the Pardes Executive Director, North America.*



## From Mevasseret Zion With Love by Ben Heligman

Pardes Social Action Projects are an integral part of the Pardes Year Program experience, motivating students to put the values they encounter through Jewish text study into practice and enabling them to connect with other sectors of Israeli society. Weekly activities include tutoring at-risk youth, packaging food for the homebound elderly, singing at a residential facility for Alzheimer's patients, working in a community garden and teaching African refugees.

Riding into the Mevasseret Zion absorption center for recent Ethiopian immigrants for the first time, I know I am arriving somewhere special. Women dressed in traditional garb, kids everywhere, four of them laughing and kicking a stuffed sock attached by a dangling string to a pole. Creativity, culture, contrast fill my vision. I am excited and nervous; my heart is pounding. As I pass two girls, probably six years old, one says to me *"atah madrich?"* (Are you a counselor?). I have no idea if I'm a counselor. Is that what a volunteer is called? But I nod my head and a huge smile fills her face. She jumps on my back and the other girl grabs my hand and we walk together down the hill to the main square of the community. With one smile the kids of Mevasseret Zion let you into their world; I am no longer a volunteer, but a friend.

My time with these kids over the next six months would become my most meaningful volunteering experience to date and an integral part of my learning at Pardes. Every Tuesday afternoon, I board a van alongside eight or nine other Pardes students. Our transportation comes courtesy of the Yaakov Maimon organization, which has supported various immigrant groups since before the founding of the State of Israel. As the weeks progress, our creativity and confidence grow, and we show up armed with a growing supply of recycled materials for fabulous and colorful projects. Sometimes we spend time in pairs with our assigned families; but more often, we find ourselves congregating in the park or indoor communal space.



Student Ben Heligman working with Ethiopian immigrants in Mevasseret Zion

At Pardes, I am blessed to spend my days learning text, discussing Rashi and Ramban and conversing with the *Tanaim* and *Amoraim* of the Mishna and Gemara. However, every Tuesday, I live the text. To these kids, who find themselves in a shockingly new world, I am a friend, a role model and a jungle gym. We look different. We are learning new languages. Our cultures are nothing alike. So we use our hands, sing songs and laugh a lot.

My time at Mevasseret Zion provides the spiritual charge that ignites me through the week and I am humbled by their generosity, inspired by their stories and melted by their smiles. Each week, I meet Animo and Kananat at their house. They open the door, put some sunflower seeds in my hand, grab their sneakers and we're off on an adventure. Freedom, joy and thankfulness arise from giving my time at Mevasseret Zion. As it says in Mishlei (Proverbs) 12:14: "גמול די אדם ישוב לו" – "One is repaid in kind for one's deeds." I have been repaid in multitudes.

*Ben Heligman (Year '10-'11, Fellow '11-'12) is a Binghamton graduate originally from New Rochelle, NY.*

# Who Knows

? by David Levin-Kruss

Israeli soldiers from the elite Duvdevan unit study with Pardes students as part of the Parallel Lives program



During the past few years a new kind of student has started studying at Pardes. They are neither trenchantly right nor critically left, but rather ambivalent. They are not sure why we need a Jewish state but know Israel is important. They believe Israel behaves badly towards the Palestinians, but also believe Jews have a right to defend themselves. They don't like particularism, but do like that special feeling that comes with being around Jews. Add to this mix the AIPAC Jews, and those to the right of AIPAC, and the J-Street Jews, and those to the left of J-Street, and we have a spirited student body that wants to learn more about Israel, but is not satisfied with simplistic or uni-directional messages.

## 1. Aim for excellence

Our job at Pardes is not to create a 'good-enough' Israel program, but to form something that works for our students and can also be a model for others grappling with Israel education in a post-national, post-modern, post-Zionist age.

## 2. This is not our core and yet we need to do it well

Pardes is primarily an institution that creates opportunities for Jews of all stripes to meet and interact with classic Jewish texts. This needs to remain our *raison d'être*. However, given some students who are ambivalent and some students whose viewpoints do not fit into the mainstream Zionist narrative, we cannot afford the luxury of the ivory tower and need to go out of our comfort zones to create robust programs that answer our students' needs.

## 3. We're all in this together

Much of the past year has been spent speaking to the experts, and what I have found is that the experts themselves are not sure what the next stage of Zionist education will look like. All we know is that Israel education is going to look very different in ten years from what it looked like ten years ago, in the same way as diaspora Jewry's relationship to Israel has changed in the last decade.

## 4. Our students will tell us what to do

One of the major stumbling blocks in speaking about Israel is the tendency to demonize. Rather than placing students into boxes or writing them off because of radical or hesitant viewpoints, at Pardes we seek to engage and learn from them. We allow them to bring us into their world so they can teach us what kind of education they want.

## 5. Safe space

More important than any particular program are our efforts to create safe space – space that allows students to share their concerns, but also expects them to engage in sustained listening to viewpoints that are very different from their own.

## 6. Our teachers are our best resources

No outside expert, however erudite, has the ability to reach students the way our instructors can. With this in mind, teachers participate in Israel programs, and discussions of Israel are integrated into the classroom and halls. Our instructors have experience in teaching texts in a way that is committed, deep, and open. We are learning to treat Israel as a large Jewish text and to use our texts skills when talking about and teaching Israel.

Israel programs at Pardes reflect some or all of these elements. An example is the Parallel Lives meetings with Israeli soldiers where students built a program together with soldiers. *David Levin-Kruss is the Director of Special Programs at Pardes.*

# The Tent of Rivka by Michael Hattin

From *Passages: Text and Transformation in the Torah*, due out in early 2012 (Urim Publications). Books on sale from [michaelh@pardes.org.il](mailto:michaelh@pardes.org.il) or via the Pardes office. Michael Hattin is the Director of the Beit Midrash for the Pardes Educators Program.



After Sarah's demise, Avraham dispatched his servant in search of a wife for Yitzchak his son. The servant journeyed to Charan and at the well he encountered kind-hearted Rivka. After negotiating with her wily brother, the servant brought Rivka back to the land of Canaan, so that she might marry Yitzchak:

*"Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother. He took Rivka as his, and she became his wife and he loved her. Then was Yitzchak comforted for the death of his mother" (Breisheet 24:67).*

As surely as Yitzchak was the embodiment of every value that his father Avraham held dear, so too Rivka entered the "tent of Sarah" to perpetuate her role. Yitzchak ceased to mourn for his mother Sarah, not because he no longer felt the grief of her passing, but because he recognized in Rivka the possibility of continuity. The Midrash of Breisheet Rabbah describes the transition:

*"As long as Sarah was alive, a cloud was affixed to the entrance of her tent. When she died, that cloud ceased. But when Rivka arrived, the cloud returned. As long as Sarah was alive, the doors were opened wide. When she died, that generosity ceased. But when Rivka arrived, the generosity returned. As long as Sarah was alive, a blessing was associated with the dough. When she died, that blessing ceased. But when Rivka arrived, the blessing returned. As long as Sarah was alive, a lamp burned from one Shabbat night until the next. When she died, that lamp ceased. But when Rivka arrived, the fire returned" (Breisheet Rabbah 60:16).*

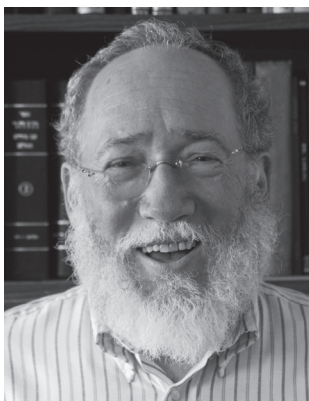
All of the elements of Sarah's tent are known to us from another context: the *Mishkan*. According to Sefer Shemot (ch 25–27), the *Mishkan* was a portable building of gilded acacia boards, roofed with finely embroidered textiles and protective hides. These coverings were secured at the base with bronze pegs, giving the entire edifice the appearance of a tent. For that reason, the *Mishkan* was often referred to as "*Ohel Mo'ed*" (the Tent of Meeting).

Inside the *Mishkan* were a number of precious vessels. The Ark occupied the Holy of Holies. In the outer space was a golden altar used for incense, whose fragrant smoke ascending heavenwards symbolized the people's prayers. On either side were the golden menorah and the table of showbread. This menorah was kindled daily with pure olive oil, symbolizing God's vital role in illuminating the human mind. The gilded table, perpetually covered with 12 loaves of bread, signified God's constant involvement in providing physical sustenance. The *Mishkan* itself was covered by a cloud, a tangible symbol of God's mysterious presence.

The link between the Tent of Meeting and the tent of Sarah and Rivka is clear. Both tents were essentially "homes", the former serving as the august locus for the God-man encounter, the latter duplicating it in more mundane reality. Both highlighted the essential role of God in securing sustenance – the former had the table of the showbread and in the latter "*the dough was blessed*." Both emphasized God's role in providing inspiration – the former had the perpetually lit menorah, and the latter had the "*lamp that illumined from one Shabbat night until the next*." And both, were surmounted by the cloud, the elusive expression of God's presence in the world. In essence, our Midrash suggests that Sarah and Rivka, by virtue of their righteous deeds and recognition of God's involvement in their lives, had fashioned "Jewish homes" as mirror images of God's own abode.

The tent of our matriarchs serves as a challenge to us: what are our homes like? Are they centers of ruthless ambition for securing more possessions, in our futile belief that wealth confers immortality? Or are they focal points for declaring that materiality is but a means to a nobler end? Are our homes centers of learning and spiritual growth, bright beacons radiating the God-idea into the surrounding moral darkness? Or are they instead hubs for banal and mindless living, hollow shells kindled by lifeless screens of glass? To adopt the tent of Sarah and Rivka as our paradigm is to recognize the true secret of Jewish continuity: satisfaction with our material achievements, inspiration that comes from learning and growth, and the welcoming of God into our lives.

# The Last Word by Daniel Landes



One cannot have the last word without first considering the first word, which for us is *BeReisheet*. Translation: *In the Beginning* or *At the Beginning* or simply, *When* (JPS). The problem is translating that pesky preposition *Bet*, a connecting word which begins the very first sentence of all – the sentence of creation. The

Rabbis, right off the bat, (Midrash Rabbah 1:1) creatively puzzle at where and how *it* all begins. They split the word, isolating *Reisheet*, beginning, and apply it to a verse describing the Torah itself, proclaiming (Proverbs 8:22) “The Lord made me as the BEGINNING of His way.” Torah was there at creation! Indeed “in human life, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill, but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his own head, but rather employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and windows” (Midrash Rabbah 1:1). Thus the Torah holds the plans for the construction of the world, and the rabbis with skilled understanding of those plans are, if not the architects, then the master builders and constructors of a moral universe. The word *BeReisheet* thus should be interpreted as *With Reisheet* = With Beginning = With the Torah. Both God and the Rabbis are involved in a never ending construction.



**The Torah holds the plans for the construction of the world and the rabbis...are the master builders and constructors of a moral universe.**



We at Pardes are also the building crew in this intellectual, spiritual and moral building project. At Pardes we prize (to mix our religious terminology) as the ‘Holy Grail’ the plain *meaning* of the text – *Peshat*, a notoriously difficult reading to achieve. And then when it is achieved, provisionally, after much analysis and discussion, we arrive at the other readings of פַּרְדֵּס – PaRDeS – *Remez, Derash, Sod* – which functionally are the readings of meaning in various dimensions. And the readings of meaning are also subject to a multitude of arguments and analyses as is *Peshat*; indeed they seem to multiply on themselves.

All this from the first word – even the first letter! I have noticed two things when Pardes students learn. Firstly, as they enter, sit down in the Beit Midrash, arrange and open their *Sefarim*, they hesitate for a split second in a kind of acknowledgement that they are entering a special sacred moment of infinity of *Peshat* and its meaning in the construction of a moral edifice.

The second regards alumni, when we get to learn again in a ‘satellite shiur’. Invariably they will at some point evoke a teaching they heard from Meir or Judy or Baruch or ..... and then they begin to agree or disagree, citing chapter and verse and holy hermeneutics.

So...the last word – that’s the point with Pardes learning. There is no last word – we are always at the shimmering, staggering promise of *BeReisheet*, the very first word.

*Daniel Landes is the Director of Pardes.*



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**4** 'Has Modern Biblical Scholarship Killed the Bible?' presented by **James Kugel**  
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**9** Community Education  
Spring Semester begins

**15-20** Poland Trip

## March

**22-26** Pardes Educators Alumni Retreat  
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## April

**23** Community Education  
Omer Series begins

## May

**26** Tikun Leil Shavuot

## June

**1-3** Pardes Center for Judaism and  
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## July

**1-5** Executive Learning Seminar

**9-30** Summer Program

**10-24** Pardes Educators Summer  
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**29** Tisha B'Av Program

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