

# Navigating Unity, Diversity and Constructive Conflict: Pardes as a Case Study

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As you read through the documents below, consider:

- What commitments or values resonate most?
- How might these principles be useful to you as you build or participate in communities?
- What do you find most challenging?

## A) Community Communication Covenant

### Community Communication Covenant 2024-25/5785

1. **Pardes Mission:** Pardes's mission is to share the beauty, value and relevance of Torah with Jews of all kinds. We believe that both Torah study and the Jewish world is enriched when learning takes place among diverse Jews with a range of beliefs, viewpoints and opinions.
2. **Becoming Part of the Solution:** Pardes decries the polarization, demonization, and dismissiveness that has become part of the social and political climate in recent years. We see ourselves as part of the solution to this dangerous societal trend.
3. **Our Values:** We consider the Jewish values of אהבת ישראל *ahavat Yisrael* (love for our fellow Jew), כבוד הבריות *kavod habriot* (mutual respect for all human beings), and ענוה *anava* (humility) as prerequisites to joining the Pardes community. These values necessitate that members communicate in constructive and compassionate ways.
4. **How We Engage in Constructive Conflict:** Part of our commitment to creating an open, diverse and inclusive community stems from a belief in מחלוקת לשם שמיים *machloket leshem shamayim*, which, for our purposes, means "constructive

conflict.” Disagreements borne out of exposure to multiple perspectives can represent a positive opportunity to expand our understanding of an issue, and to deepen relationships.

This is only possible when we train ourselves to listen to each other with curiosity and humility and when we learn to recognize that no one has access to absolute truth or to a complete range of facts and experiences. It also demands that we assume good intentions on the part of all community members.

5. **Behaviors We Avoid:** We intentionally refrain from disparaging, denouncing or disrespecting others or their beliefs whether they be students, Pardes professionals or visiting speakers. Similarly, we do not exclude others on the basis of their beliefs. We also refrain from imposing our personal beliefs on any other community member.

By avoiding these behaviors we are respecting the boundaries of anyone who does not wish to engage in a particular conversation. To this end, we encourage everyone to communicate directly if a conversation crosses a boundary or becomes uncomfortable.

6. **Social Media:** While not technically binding beyond internal Pardes communications, we ask Pardes students, faculty and staff to also be mindful of these guidelines in their personal social media postings because of their potentially negative impact on the community. In addition, because strong opinions can ignite emotions even within these guidelines, we encourage ourselves to be mindful of who we follow and how we follow one another on social media, if at all.

7. **Hate Speech and Discrimination:** Bullying, hateful speech, actions, or discrimination including on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, mental health, disability, personal characteristics or religion are unacceptable in our community.

8. **Participating Beyond Our Comfort Zone:** To support an open and diverse community, Pardes strives to offer programs, classes and activities that represent a wide range of ideologies and experiences. We as Pardes students commit to participating in programs with an open heart and a willingness to be reflective and to learn from viewpoints and experiences that are different from our own. Participation in programs that are challenging to our beliefs as individuals, be they religious, political or spiritual, is a core component of both personal growth and

being in community. We commit to pushing ourselves to participate even beyond our comfort zone.

9. **Extenuating Circumstances:** Some programs, activities or tiyulim may push some of us too far, physically, emotionally or ideologically. If we have *concerns* about particular programs being offered, we will raise them *directly with the organizer in advance* of the program. A student who feels the need to *opt out* must discuss with their *Faculty Advisor* (Mehanechet or Mehanekh). We will trust each other, remaining cognizant of the way both institutional and personal decisions impact others beyond ourselves. We will strive at all times to act as loving members of the Pardes community.
10. **Recognizing our Imperfection:** We as a community recognize that we are all human and that we will occasionally fall short of the commitments laid out above. First and foremost, we will try to assume good will on the part of all parties and try to avoid an "Us versus Them" attitude. As a general rule, conflicts should be resolved between the concerned parties, making reference to this covenant where relevant.
11. **Addressing Violations:** For exceptional circumstances, Pardes has established a committee of students and Pardes employees to serve as third party arbitrators/mediators/peacemakers. The purpose of the committee is not to police but to create a venue for constructive resolution. Community members who feel there is a need can address any member of the committee. For any particular incident, if the committee deems their involvement appropriate, they will take responsibility for moderating. Committee members will recuse themselves when there may be a perception of non-neutrality. In general, the committee will aim to mediate between the conflicting parties, reminding them of guidelines for future communications. Where necessary, they may suggest other next steps as well.
12. **Institutional Responsibility:** The committee will serve as the primary address for complaints. However, the administration reserves the prerogative to intervene when deemed necessary.
13. **Membership is Consent:** Being part of the Pardes community entails an active commitment to the principles enumerated above. We collectively take responsibility for making our community a place of respectful, inclusive, authentic and open-hearted learning and communicating.

## B. Pardes Culture Document

### Pardes Culture

*This is an iterative document to be further developed by faculty, staff and returning students. Each principle will be workshopped and further iterated during orientation, with the goal of creating a graphic display with which we can continue to interact as a community throughout the year.*

Four principles on which Pardes Culture Rests:

1. Dignity and Diversity
2. Humility and Curiosity/ Multivalent Meaning Making
3. Community and Chesed
4. Commitment and Covenant

#### **I. Dignity and Diversity (Learning from EVERY HUMAN)**

*בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר (תהלים קיט) מכל מלמדי השכלתי*

*Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from every human, as it is said: "From all who taught me have I gained understanding" (Psalms 119:99). [Avot 4:1](#)*

We strive to be a **diverse** community, including Jews across the religious map, while simultaneously respectful of Jewish heritage. This reflects our commitment to universal human **dignity** as a primary Jewish value, as well as our conviction that our Torah is enriched by all of our voices.

We hope this aspiration manifests as:

- A community that embraces diversity
- Eschews hate speech of any kind
- Displays curiosity about each of our narratives
- Seeks to define ourselves positively rather than negatively
- A space safe enough for everyone to share
- A space brave enough for tough conversations to take place

## II. Humility and Curiosity (49/49)

*Rabbi Yanai said:*

*The Torah was not given in a clear-cut manner, rather on every statement God said to Moses, God would say 49 reasons (panim, lit. faces) the matter could be pure, and 49 reasons why the matter could be impure. **Midrash Psalms 12***

Torah is multivalent, **even pluralistic to an extent**, and assumes disagreement. None of us has the full truth.

This demands an approach to learning which is:

- Humble
- Curious
- Respectful and non-judgmental of narratives and readings other than our own
- Gives others the benefit of the doubt
- Emphasizes listening, compassion and empathy.
- Trusts that we can hold both our own convictions and the convictions of others even when they conflict

## III. Community and Chessed

כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה. ספרא, בחוקותיי ז:ה

*All of Israel is responsible for one another. Sifra on Behukotai 7:5*

We seek to build a community that is:

- Rooted in chessed (kindness and love) within our community and beyond its borders
- Strives to meet individual's needs for the sake of the community as well as the individual
- In which all members seek to contribute to the extent of our abilities

## IV. Commitment and Covenant

בְּכָל־לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֵדְךָ:

*with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־לִבְבְּךָ:

*Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day.*

*אֲשַׁנְתֶּם לְבָבְךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשֹׁבְתֶךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:*

*Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. [Deuteronomy 6:5-7](#)*

This is a “year on,” rather than a “year off.” Accomplishing our goals demands communal dedication to the Torah, the highest academic standards, responsibility and accountability to our classmates and *hevrutot*, teachers, as well as attention to Jewish growth and living.

To accomplish our goals we must:

- Take responsibility for our own learning
- Feel entitled to experiment and try on a variety of Jewish practices and identities
- Live a rich and diverse Jewish communal life
- Display intense commitment to immersive Jewish learning, our *hevrutot*, and our classes
- Engage with the classical canon
- Value both creative innovation and inherited tradition

***For more information about Pardes’s immersive learning offerings and community, visit [www.pardes.org.il/](http://www.pardes.org.il/)***

