



# Curriculum (Discussion)

## PaRDeS

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### Summary

1. Format: Discussion & Activities Lesson
2. Audience: High school and up
3. Objective: To introduce teenagers to an ancient Jewish spiritual practice, both to give them context for how Paul and contemporaries would have learned scripture and to empower their own study of scripture.
4. Supplies needed: bibles
5. Two-sentence description: This lesson will introduce teenagers to the ancient Jewish spiritual discipline of PaRDeS, which is still practiced to this day. PaRDeS is a creative, structured bible study process that allows for teenagers to engage with scripture in a new way.

Time Allotment: 1 hour

### For Leaders

#### Introduction to Ideas

PaRDeS (yes, it's really capitalized that way) is an ancient Jewish spiritual tradition, and the system that Paul, the Gospel writers, and even Jesus would have used to interpret the Hebrew Bible. It is a version of biblical interpretation that is equal parts serious and mystical and is defined by four phases: P'shat (literal meaning), Remez (metaphorical meaning), D'rash (applied concept), and Sud (hidden or secret meaning). The word PaRDeS, is an acronym of these four steps in their traditional order.



## Theological Basis

It may be confusing to some of our teenagers that we're using Jewish spiritual disciplines in this course, because they may see them as not relevant to our Christian faith. The fact is that the divide between Christianity and Judaism is not that simple. The practice we're learning today, Midrash, can be not only spiritually enriching but provide insight into how our faith came into being and make all of Scripture feel more accessible. Paul's construction of original sin is a Midrash, Matthews quoting of Isaiah is an example of PaRDeS, and Jesus' exchanging of questions with legal experts is classic Havruta! If it was good enough for them, it stands to reason we have much we can learn from these practices.

PaRDeS is built off the Jewish idea of the gem. Rabbis often referred to the Tanukh (Hebrew Bible) as a diamond or gem, which shone differently with every turn. Jewish scholars have a much looser, freer relationship with their sacred text than much of modern American Christianity, and believed that you could understand scripture not only literally (P'shat) but as an allegory (Remez), wisdom to apply to daily life (D'rash), or even a window into a secret, Spirit-revealed wisdom (Sud). They encouraged understandings of the text that were varied, evolving, and deeply ambiguous, and we hope that by teaching teenagers this ancient process, we can open up new ways of understanding scripture.

## Outline of Lesson

Part I: Opening

Part II: Introduction to PaRDeS

Part III: Practice PaRDeS (Group)

Part IV: Practice PaRDeS (Solo)

Part V: Conclusion

## Additional Notes

Christianity has a complex history of anti-semitic attitudes embedded in how we teach and talk about Judaism. While this practice is ancient, it is still in practice today by Jewish people in our communities. If you have the opportunity to learn this and other practices from practicing Jews in your area please do so! You can also check out accompanying lessons on Havruta and PaRDeS.

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## Part 1: Opening Activities

Take this time to give teenagers an opportunity to briefly talk about their week by doing Highs and Lows or some other opening ritual.

**Ask:** After teenagers are done sharing, transition into opening the class with the following questions:

- Do you read the bible regularly?
- When you read it, what parts do you usually read? Why?
- How do you tend to understand it? Literally? Metaphorically? As it applies to your life?
  - Do you think there's a right way to do it?
  - How have you heard other people read it?

## Part II: Introduction to Practice

**Say:** Today we're going to be continuing learning about ancient Jewish practices and today's is called PaRDeS. PaRDeS is an acronym for four Hebrew words for the steps of scriptural interpretation: P'shat (puh-shot), Remez (RE-mes), D'rash (drash), and Sud (soad).

Jewish scholars have used these for steps for thousands of years, and PaRDeS is older than Christianity itself. Actually, when you look at places in the New Testament which quote the Old Testament, PaRDeS is the structure the writers are using to do it!

## Part III: The Practice (Group)

### P'shat

**Say:** We're going to walk through the steps, with John 13:1-9, Jesus's washing of the disciple's feet. First is P'shat – it just means “meaning.” In the P'shat, you just seek to understand the literal meaning of the text.

*Have a student read John 13:1-9*

**Ask:**

- What is literally happening in this story?
- Who are the characters?

- What is the setting?

## Remez

**Say:** Next is the Remez, which in Hebrew means “hint.” The Remez is usually understood as the meaning of the text as revealed in metaphor, allegory, symbolism, and imagery.

**Ask:** English pop quiz!

- What is a metaphor?
- What is an allegory?
- What is a symbol?
- What is an example of a metaphor in pop culture? What about symbolism?

**Say:** We’re going to read the text again, and then do the Remez step.

*Have a different youth read John 13:1-9*

**Ask:**

- What metaphors, symbols or imagery did you hear in this story?
- What do those things mean?

## D’rash

**Say:** Third is the D’rash, which is Hebrew for “concept.” The D’rash is basically the real-life application, or, if you had to give a sermon based on this passage, what would your point be?

We’re going to read the text a third time, and keeping in mind all that we’ve talked about so far, try the D’rash.

*Have a third youth read John 13:1-9.*

**Ask (share answers with a partner, then go around as a group):**

- What, in your opinion, is the *D’rash* of this passage?
- How can this passage apply to your life?
- How might you live differently because of this passage?
- What could it be calling you to do?

## Sod

**Say:** The fourth and final step is also the most mysterious and complex. It is called the Sod. Sod is Hebrew for “secret.” The idea of the Sod is not that you figure it out, but that, as you meditate on the text, the Sod arrives and presents itself to you. The Jewish faith doesn’t have the same beliefs around the Holy Spirit as we do, so they would not describe it this way, but in Christian language, the Sod is the meaning that the Spirit reveals to us.

This idea may sound really abstract, so let's dig into it a bit.

**Ask:**

- Have you ever had a thought just come to you out of nowhere?
  - What was it about?
- What about a gut instinct about something that turned out to be right?
- Has the answer to a problem, or a creative idea, ever just occurred to you all at once?
  - What was that like? Tell us the story.
  - Where do you think the thought, idea, or answer came from?
- Do you ever feel like the Holy Spirit has guided you or showed you the way at some point in your life?
  - What was that like? Tell us the story.
- Do you ever feel like the Spirit, or God, has spoken to you directly?
  - What about through art or nature?
  - What about through a loved one?
  - What about through scripture?

**Say:** The Sod is definitely the most mysterious part of PaRDeS, but it's really not any more mysterious than all the other ways that God speaks to us in our daily world. The most important distinction between the Sod and the other parts of PaRDeS, particularly D'rash, is that it's not something we arrive at through cognitive thought, but rather, through listening to what God would reveal.

Sometimes that Sod feels like a natural outgrowth of what has already been discussed, sometimes it comes out of nowhere, and sometimes the Sod doesn't arrive at all, and that's all ok.

We're going to read the scripture twice this time, with a break in the middle and then spend 2 minutes in silence, seeing what, if any, Sod arrives.

*Put some light music on and have each leader read John 13:1-9, with several seconds of silence between the readings. After the second reading, allow for 2 minutes of silence. It's going to feel really long.*

**Ask:**

- Would anyone like to share what Sod arrived for them?
- What will you leave here thinking about?

## Part IV: The Practice (Solo)

*Feel free to skip if less than 5 minutes remain in class*

**Say:** Now we're going to give you all a few minutes to practice PaRDeS on your own –

you are welcome to work in pairs or groups of 3 as you work through a text. We'll regather you near the end of class to debrief.

## Part V: Conclusion

### Ask:

- How was PaRDeS different from other ways that you have read scripture?
- How is it the same?
- Which of the four steps was easiest for you?
- Which was the hardest?
- In which step do you feel like you were learning the most?
- What was your biggest takeaway from today?

Say: All throughout scripture, when you see authors in the New Testament quote the Old Testament, they are using one or more of the steps of PaRDeS. Matthew explaining that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah is an example of Remez, Jesus quoting the “golden rule” from Deuteronomy is an example of D’rash, etc. As you read scripture, look out for these examples, and don’t be afraid to look at the same creative, intentional way that our Jewish forefathers did. God seeks to speak to us, including through the reading of scripture, and PaRDeS is just yet another way we can listen.

**Close in Prayer:** *God, thank You for being with us in this time. Thank You for the ways You have been present with us and revealed Yourself to us, using your Word. May we continue to seek and rest in Your presence as we end this time, and may what we have learned carry with us back into our days, weeks, and lives. Amen.*

## Additional Materials and Activities

