

JCDS at 25: First in a Series

TRADITION, TRADITION!

השנה ה-25 למסורת JCDS



By Naomi Gurt Lind,
parent of Akiva '18 and Gideon '22

Our beloved JCDS is almost 25 years old! The anniversary year is about to begin. I have been around the school a long while (this is our 11th year) and have such warm memories of what my family considers the old days: the bathtub in the Gan Nitzan classroom, reading the white board with my sons as they came into the classroom each morning, the first-day-of-school *She-hecheyanu* (sanctifying a moment in time) and all-school gathering (back when I wasn't embarrassing to my kids!), Sunrise Shacharit, parent volunteers decorating the school for Matters of Taste, and so much more. The traditions of JCDS have been a touchstone for our family for more than a decade now. It is wonderful to see them continue and flourish, and to see new traditions begin to grow.

While in some ways I feel like a bit of an old-timer at JCDS, I wanted to learn more about how this magical place started. I recently sat down with Arnee Winshall, the JCDS Founding Chair, a long-time trustee, and a nationally recognized visionary in Jewish Education, to get a glimpse of the school's beginnings. Arnee generously shared with me the process in which she and her co-creators engaged as they put the pieces in place. What she described sounded so *heimishe* (warm), so in the spirit of JCDS! A small group of families that would become the founding board held meeting after meeting with the goal of finding a way to provide their children with an innovative Jewish education that was vastly different from anything offered at the time.

Arnee, her husband Walt Winshall, and their founding board, Naomi Bar-Yam, Yaneer Bar-Yam, Rabbi Susan Harris, Mark Kramer, and Vardit Ringvald, dreamed of a school that put Hebrew learning at the center rather than treating Hebrew as one subject among many, was built around project-based learning (before project-based learning had a name),



integrated subjects in creative ways, fostered familiarity and connection with Israeli life and culture, and inculcated Jewish values as not just something you learn about in the classroom, but something that forms the very basis of a life well-lived. The founders envisioned a school that felt like a community and that made space for all kinds of learners to grow and thrive in their own way and at their own pace. They believed that a child is not a vessel to be filled, but rather a flame to be kindled.

Interestingly, the intentional pluralism that has become so much a part of our identity as a school was something they discovered in the early discussions about the school. A moment came, in the midst of all this dreaming about a new vision for Jewish education, when they looked around the room and realized that as a founding group they represented a range of practice and tradition, and yet all of them were looking for the same things for their children: a framework that was strong enough to provide a great education and flexible enough to meet children where they were in order to help them grow. The realization that this goal was shared across denominations and practices only strengthened the vision, as it has strengthened the school in these past 25 years. That pluralism, like the educational vision that inspired it,



Then and Now

ABOVE: JCDS students in class in 1997

BELOW: JCDS at its founding in 1995 with Arnee Winshall, Founding Chair (far right), standing next to Founding Director, Sageet Bar-Yam, and founding board member Yaneer Baryam sitting on the grass on the left

RIGHT (clockwise): JCDS welcomes students to its new building in 2003

Arnee Winshall, Founding Chair (2nd row, far right) and Vered Singer, Art Teacher (top right), and Founding Director Sageet Bar-Yam (top left), along with JCDS' first students and staff in 1995

The JCDS Kol Echad Choir performs at Matters of Taste in 2007

JCDS welcomes back students (from left) Jessie, Emma, and current Trustee Sophie Gildesgame at the start of its third year in 1998



has deepened and grown over the two and a half decades since.

For a non-traditional school, JCDS has many beloved traditions. I think of tradition as a story that keeps telling itself: at once growing and remaining recognizable. Like the Yiddish production of *Fiddler on the Roof*, which is currently enchanting the New York theatre audience, JCDS has this wonderful timeless quality, coupled with originality and innovation. In fact, perhaps the most important tradition we have at JCDS is the tradition of innovation. As we read in our liturgy: *Chadeish yameinu k'kedem* (Renew our days, like before). Here's to another 25 years of innovation, lifelong learning, and being in community! 🔥

