

Colby Hillel Newsletter

News about Jewish Life on the Hill



Reflections from our Hillel Presidents

It's Erev Shabbat and 30 Colby students are circled around candles, challot, and kosher wine above the Spa in Pulver Pavillion. After introductions, blessings and a short *d'var Torah*, the group moves to the Hillel room for a delicious homemade dinner prepared by a pair of Hillel students. Warm conversation consumes the time as the candles slowly burn. We finish the meal by *bentching*, singing prayers to give thanks for our food. Every week, Colby

Hillel continues this important Shabbat tradition, which gives students a chance to relax after a long and stressful week and spend meaningful time with friends.

Over the past spring semester, Colby Hillel has continued to grow, becoming one of the most active student groups on campus. With multiple events every week, Hillel offers Jewish and non-Jewish students alike the unique experience of building a community

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Represent Colby Hillel

This year members of the Colby Hillel board came up with this design for Hillel t-shirts inspired by Israeli graffiti. Why a llama, you ask? In Hebrew, למה means “why,” and it also sounds like the animal’s name, “llama.” Our llama למה shirts embody the *kavanah* or the intention we strive to live with as Jewish students. Judaism constantly prods us to ask questions and dig deeper. Engaging with our Jewish heritage empowers Hillel students to become more critical thinkers and engaged members of the community at Colby and beyond. If you find yourself on campus, stop by the Hillel room in the Pugh center to purchase your own Colby Hillel t-shirt!

of young adults who are committed to the Jewish tradition. Our ongoing series, Thai and Torah, continued to be a huge success with Rabbi Isaacs and Mel Weiss leading thoughtful discussions. We also hosted special Shabbatot with other Pugh Center groups, including SOBHU (Students Organized for Black and Hispanic Unity) and the Bridge (Colby’s LGBTQ organization), to forge a stronger community between our organizations.

Beyond Colby’s campus, we joined our friends at Beth Israel Congregation for services, including a lively night on Purim and a Home Hospitality Shabbat, a night when congregants invite students to their houses for a home-cooked meal. During Passover, Colby Hillel hosted a Passover Seder, which was attended by approximately 100 students, faculty and community members. In line with the theme of Passover, professors led small discussions at the Seder table about injustices occurring throughout the United States and the world.

From April until the Maine Conference for Jewish Life in June, Colby hosted Tel Aviv-based artist, Shirel Horovitz, as an artist-in-residence. Shirel held inspirational programs for Colby students and the greater Waterville community, which incorporated her own style of art into education about global affairs. Shirel’s guidance allowed students to challenge themselves creatively while also thinking critically about the world around them. Looking forward to next semester, we are extremely excited to expand upon the growth we experienced over the past year. Upon returning to Colby, we will be thrilled to cook in our newly renovated kitchen, equipped for cooking both meat and dairy meals. Planning is underway for the numerous events throughout the semester, in addition to High Holidays and Sukkot. Most of all, we look forward to welcoming the Class of 2019 to the Hill and sharing our experiences of Jewish learning, culture and celebration with them!

- Cara Goldfarb ‘17 and Ryan Weeks ‘16 2



Thai and Torah: Jewish Learning at Hillel

One of my favorite things about Hillel at Colby is the onus students take on to craft their own Jewish curricula. As chair of the Education Committee this past semester, I sat down with Rabbi Isaacs, and our two co-presidents, Cara and Ryan, at the beginning of the semester to plan out what we, as a Hillel wanted to learn. Thai and Torah is easily one of Hillel's most popular events, and one of my favorites. We order Thai food, and Rabbi Isaacs or Melanie Weiss lead discussions on topics ranging from the Jewish stance on abortion, tattoos, or sexuality according to Jewish texts and traditions. One of the best things that I have learned from Thai and Torah is that it is a *shanda* not to have sex with your spouse on a Friday...who ever thought I would learn that at a Hillel event!? Thai and Torah is such a successful event not only because of the delicious food that we always have, but mainly because Rabbi Isaacs engages Hillel students and pushes them to be more critical and informed thinkers. It's the kind of thought-provoking conversation you hope to encounter in your best college courses.

This semester, the headlines for Thai and Torah included Zionist Thinkers, Jewish Understanding of the Afterlife, Jewish Folklore, and Episodes in Jewish History. We were also lucky enough this semester to have Israeli artist-in-residence, Shirel Horovitz, step in to teach Hillel students. She taught workshops on art and activism and understanding Israeli society through graffiti.

As a senior who has just graduated, I feel extremely lucky to have had the opportunity to learn from Rabbi Isaacs and all of the other people who have offered their evenings to teach us about the ways that Judaism intersects with the rest of our lives. Despite all of our commitments and homework and classes, it always impressed me that people made time and chose to come to Thai and Torah to eat, laugh, and learn together. Because I never went to Hebrew school, Thai and Torah and Hillel gave me a little slice of what I may have missed as a kid without traditional Jewish education.

- Sonja Hagemeyer '15

Pictured: Dean Lori Kletzer blesses students at Passover Seder.



First Year Reflections

Reflecting on your first year of college is difficult. In some ways, it was exactly how you expected. In others, it couldn't be more different.

I came to the first Hillel event of last year with a string of dark-haired and Bar-Mitzvahed relatives, an extensive vocabulary of Yiddish curse words and colloquialisms, and certain dietary restrictions that bar me from eating pork. I'm not sure what I expected I would get out of Hillel.

The night before I said goodbye to my mom, she told me she was afraid that when I moved out, I would lose Judaism. She said that now that she wasn't dragging me to synagogue and forcing me through too-long seders, all of my *emuna* (faith) would just die out. I wasn't sure how exactly to comfort her, because honestly, I'd been thinking the same thing – nobody was

making sure I didn't go for the pepperoni pizza or trying to introduce me to potential Jewish boyfriends, I was eighteen now, and I could do what I want.

And for a while, that's exactly what happened.

I found myself focused on other things – primarily, the massive amounts of homework that high school hadn't prepared me for.

So it's almost a surprise that what ended up eventually happening was so different – I found myself rediscovering Judaism, reprocessing it in ways on my own that weren't just the things my parents had told me about it since I was little.

I'm not sure when exactly this change happened – probably somewhere around fall home hospitality

Shabbat – but I found myself going to Hillel events because *I* wanted to, not because anyone else asked me to.

Looking at the Judaism I practiced back home in Denver, Colorado enabled me to notice some of the problematic things that had confused me in a vague sense as a kid, which is okay. Because now the Judaism I practice is something that I wholeheartedly believe in.

So, reflecting on my first year as a member of Colby's Hillel, I'm excited and ready for the next. I guess I'd like to thank Colby Hillel for giving me a second family, a second set of relatives to have Shabbat dinner with, and teaching me that there is more than one way to have *emuna*.

- Jess Greenwald '18



Here, Colby Hillel students join in Purim festivities at Beth Israel Synagogue in Waterville for a night of grogger noisemaking and Megillah reading.



Colby Hillel Students at AIPAC



The weekend was coming to an end and our week was yet to begin... we couldn't have been more anxious and excited to get on our plane from Portland to Washington D.C for AIPAC Policy Conference. Unfortunately, we began receiving flight cancellation emails on Saturday night. We were flying into DC when ice was covering the whole city. Due to our traveling inconveniences, our original group of five participants soon turned into a group of three. Rabbi Isaacs, Ben Zurkow '15, and I managed to hop on a 12-hour overnight train to get into DC. Luckily we got into the city right in time for Prime Minister Netanyahu's AIPAC speech, which

addressed the Iran nuclear deal. It was great to hear such positive words about the friendship between Israel and the United States.

It was incredible to be at a conference where we had the opportunity to learn about topics related to Israel and the Middle East -- through breakout sessions, quick 30-60 minute policy briefings, panel discussions, and scholar-in-residence sessions. I learned so much about the BDS movement (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) and ways to stand against such a harmful effort. There were also engaging plenary sessions where U.S. and Israeli officials (such as Ambassador Samantha Power and

National Security Advisor, Susan Rice) addressed contemporary issues.

On the final day of Policy Conference we lobbied Maine's senators and representatives (Sen. Susan Collins, Sen. Angus King, Rep. Chellie Pingree, and Rep. Bruce Poliquin) regarding the Iran nuclear deal. I felt privileged to meet all of them in person and see what lobbying on the hill is really like (Hint: it involves a lot of running through underground tunnels and long waits in offices).

Overall, the AIPAC Policy Conference was an incredible experience and I am so glad I was able to attend. It was a real hassle to get to DC (and get back to Maine) and it's unfortunate everyone who planned on going wasn't able to make it because of the flight cancelations, but there's always next year!

- Alex Wolansky '17



Above: students listen to Rabbi Isaacs tell the Passover story at Colby's Passover Seder. Below: Hillel students shake the dust off of their Four-Questions-asking skills



Wholeness and Judaism: A Tikkun Led by Shirel Horovitz



Pictured from right to left, Lauren Gluck '16 and Ryan Weeks

Wholeness and brokenness, children's toys, hot glue guns, Babylonian Talmud, and a hammer. While these things may seem unrelated, they all played an important part in Shirel Horovitz's vision. Waterville's own Israeli artist-in-residence, Shirel Horovitz, wanted her students to rethink what they viewed as "whole," and "broken," aided by a lens of Jewish religious interpretation. Sitting together in an education room located on the bottom floor of the Colby College Art Museum, Shirel explained excitedly that she wanted us to break apart children's toys, and then using a variety of other materials purchased at Mardens, create something that we viewed as whole. We gathered our materials and worked diligently, cracking jokes, proudly showing our work to Shirel who would respond temperately "is it whole to you?"

As we finished our artwork and sat back down together, we took glances at each other's oeuvres, and listened to each other's explanations as to why we did, or didn't find our pieces whole. "Because I think it's whole." "It isn't whole because I don't think I am done." "It is whole I think because I don't know what else to do to it."

As we read through the sheets of Talmud Shirel handed over to us, we began exploring Rav Nachman's ideas on wholeness, void, and how his Talmudic interpretations of those things could be utilized to deepen our own personal understandings. We bounced ideas off of each other, and Shirel helped structure the conversation, highlighting the importance in digging into and understanding the hidden meanings behind the Hebrew words in the text. We made pairs for *chevruta* (Jewish learning partner) and we delved deeper, emerging with more complex, albeit incomplete, understandings of how we conceptualized wholeness.

By blending different media for learning, from tactile art to *chevruta*, Horovitz allowed us to participate in her conceptual explorations of Judaism, and her own art. We left with some questions answered, and some questions still articulating themselves in our heads, fueled by new understandings of Judaism, art, and self.



Words from the Rabbi

This is my senior year at Colby College, but I am not graduating. I have spent four years with incredible students who inspire and nourish me, and I have just witnessed my first-year class graduate. This past spring has been bittersweet, rejoicing with students that have become family to me and Mel, and mourning the thought of a Hillel without their leadership and contributions. The summation of this year has made me reflect on the accomplishments of Hillel; achievements that evoke feelings of pride as a rabbi, teacher, and mentor. These past four years have made me fully understand the Talmudic wisdom of Rabbi Chanina who remarked, "I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and the most from my students." (Ta'anit 7a)

The year got off to a strong start (under the leadership of Hillel co-presidents Jane Weisenberg '16 and Gabi Cortez '16) with students reading Torah during the High Holidays, building the Waterville community sukkah, learning during our bi-weekly Thai and Torah learning sessions, and rejoicing together with students from Bates and Bowdoin Hillels during our annual Colby-Bowdoin-Bates-Beth Israel Shabbaton which featured the Jewish bluegrass band, "Jewgrass." Over 100 people were in attendance, singing the melodies of Kabbalat Shabbat with a semi-urban/country twang.

The spring surpassed our strong fall (under the leadership of Cara Goldfarb '17 and Ryan Weeks '16) with energy and innovative programming as we welcomed Israeli educator and artist Shirel Horovitz for over a month of programming. Joining us from South Tel Aviv, Shirel taught on topics ranging from "liberation and slavery," to "Understanding Israel Through Graffiti." Purim was an absolute blast with record

attendance, a hilarious spiel co-written by Ben Zurkow '15 and Lydia McLeod Nicholson '16, and several Colby *megillah* readers who wowed the congregation with their mastery classical Hebrew chant. We invited professors from across the disciplines to join us during our annual Passover seder, each of whom led in-depth discussions with student participants on oppression and redemption in our contemporary context. It brought new faculty friends into the Hillel community, and injected fresh, relevant perspectives into our traditional liturgy.

Even more important than the programming Colby Hillel offered were the relationships forged and strengthened through our organization. The brightest and most impactful moments of Jewish life on campus are found in the cross-class friendships forged over Shabbat dinner, the songs we sing together after Shabbat lunch, the conversations we have while waiting for the challah dough to rise and doing the dishes. These are the moments that make Colby Hillel what it is, and why I relish them with each generation of students.

B'vrachot (with blessings),

Rabbi Rachel Isaacs

The vibrant and active Jewish community we nurture at Colby Hillel is made possible by the support of our greater Jewish community. The Talmud teaches us, "by the breath from the mouth of school children the world is sustained" (Shab. 119b). Please consider showing your support for our incredible programming.

You may consider sponsoring:

A Hillel Movie Night: \$100
 A Kosher for Passover Meal: \$100
 Sponsor a Thai and Torah: \$150
 A Shabbat Meal: \$175
 A Shabbat Lunch \$200
 Rosh HaShannah Dinner: \$500
 Colby-Bowdoin-Bates Shabbaton: \$750
 Yom Kippur Break the Fast Meal: \$300
 Passover Seder: \$3000

If you are interested in making a contribution, please be in touch with Rabbi Isaacs at risaacs@colby.edu. *Todah Rabah* - Thank you!

Comments about the newsletter? Please e-mail Sarah Rockford at sjrockfo@colby.edu