I'm really looking forward to this upcoming year--starting off right away with Rosh HaShanah on the first night of classes. I'm excited to spend the holidays with the Colby and Beth Israel community. Colby students will join with the synagogue for an Erev Rosh HaShanah meal, for building a sukkah for Sukkot, for a Shabbat meal where temple families will invite us into their homes to celebrate, and on many more occasions! Colby students will also be able to become members of the synagogue this year, which I think will really bring our communities together. I'm also excited for some new events we're hoping to host, including a Challah-making tutorial, apple picking for Sukkot, and possibly a night of Israeli dancing! We're also planning a Shabbaton with the Hillel groups at Bowdoin and Bates. Can't wait to start the new year!

L'Shana Tova!

Laura Rosenthal ’15
Hillel Co-President

Hanukah at Beth Israel Congregation. From left to right: Ben Zurkow ’15, Lyndsey Pecker ’14, Andrew Fabricant ’13, Jacob Marx, ’13, Sarah Rockford ’15, Avram Reisman ’13, Solon Arguello ’15, Miles Decklurk ’13
As I stood on the bridge of Pulver before the year’s last Shabbat dinner, freshly cooked, fluffy challah in one hand and a Dixie Cup of purple grape juice in the other, I began to reflect back on my first year at college and on the large, irreversible ways in which Hillel had already shaped my time at Colby. On a tangible level, weekly Shabbat dinners had become a given part of my, and many of my friends’, weekly routines, as obvious and integral as attending class; yet, Hillel had also played a much bigger role, connecting me with a community of people with diverse backgrounds and interests, who all enjoyed celebrating Jewish holidays, cooking and eating traditional meals, and learning about and discussing Jewish texts and traditions.

Becoming involved in Hillel was both easy and exciting from the start. No matter how busy each week may have been, there was a comfort in knowing that there would always be a group of people standing on the second floor of the Pugh Center at 5:30 every Friday, eager to expand the circle, add another voice to the Ha-Motzi, and add a seat to the dinner table. In this sense, Hillel served to ease the adjustment to college life; among an endless slew of exams, papers, and other events, Shabbat seemed to balance out each week, offering a relaxed environment conducive to meeting new people, connecting with friends, and taking a break from the repetitive dining hall food to enjoy a home-cooked, family-style dinner.

Apart from Shabbat, Hillel hosted other important, memorable events like Thai and Torah, which fostered intellectual, philosophic conversations about a wide range of topics related to Judaism. Such conversations encouraged us to discover the links between ancient texts and modern day issues, pushing us to examine and discuss Jewish values and opinions of current and ever more relevant topics, ranging from abortion to Israel. Yet, perhaps more importantly, these discussions managed to merge the academic with the social, creating an open dialogue to form and add our own opinions to those of our peers, connecting us on a higher, more meaningful level.

These interpersonal connections – whether formed at the dinner table on Shabbat, discussing a Talmudic passage, or over chicken nuggets at a Yom Ha’atzmaut barbecue – were at the core of the Hillel community. True, any one of us could bake challah, read the Torah, or recite prayers on our own, but without the support and connections formed within the group, we wouldn’t gain the warmth and encouragement that come from a team. In other words, the challah would be burned, the Hebrew would be butchered, and the songs would off-tune.

At my first Shabbat dinner, I was shocked to see that the prayers and songs that I’d learned at home were the same – plus or minus some melodies – as those of my new friends from across the country. As it turned out, we had much more in common than our quick conversations before class had led us to believe. As I took a bite into my last piece of challah for the year and looked around at a circle of familiar faces, I realized that it was in this way that Hillel had played such a large role in my freshman year experience; it provided a venue that not only kept me in touch with my life at home, but which allowed me to branch out and meet new people with whom I already had so much in common – religion, values, and, of course, a (fabulous) taste in food.
Over the past two years, Colby Hillel has grown exponentially and continues to exceed expectations. With weekly Shabbat dinners, joint holiday celebrations with the local synagogue, explorations of classical texts over Thai food in the Hillel room, community service with the Office of Religious and Spiritual life, and Shabbat lunches in my campus apartment, Jewish life is full and vibrant at Colby College.

One of the greatest parts of being a member of Colby Hillel is the relationship that we share with the Jewish community of Waterville. That relationship will be nourished and strengthened this year with the creation of the Waterville Jewish Leadership Initiative, funded by Colby College Hillel parents. Three student leaders will work to strengthen the bonds between the two communities, and enrich the spiritual lives of Jews of all ages in mid-Maine. One student will work as an aid in the Beth Israel Hebrew School, one will be a bat mitzvah tutor and work on first year outreach, and the other will work on communications and development with me. You can learn more about our fellows here: https://web.colby.edu/hillel/waterville-jewish-leadership-initiative/

We are also expanding our programming this year in exciting and new ways. We will have a Colby Hillel table at the homecoming football game, sharing Jewish food with our friends and cheering on our co-president Ben Zurkow ’15! The first weekend in November, we will invite Bowdoin and Bates Hillels to join us in the celebration of a special Shabbat with the Kirtan Rabbi, who integrates eastern chanting with traditional Jewish liturgy. And of course, we will continue with our successful programs from years’ past that you can read about here.

It is a blessing to watch these students grow, and deepen their commitment to the Jewish people and our traditions. Please consider supporting this holy work, providing guidance and sustenance to another generation of Colby students.

With warm wishes for a joyous and sweet new year!

Rabbi Rachel M. Isaacs
TO THE COMING YEAR

After two years at Colby College, I can unequivocally say that Mayflower Hill has become my second home. Yet, I often find myself doing so many things that everything seems to be out of hand. Between classes, football, and track, there is always one more task that needs to be done. Hillel balances my equation. When the world around me starts to move faster than I can handle, I can always slow down and relax when I’m with the Hillel community—a community which is always welcoming and always interested. Hillel has become a big part of who I am at Colby, and this year I am particularly proud to be in a position where I can share the experience I’ve had with others. Colby has meant so much to me over the past two years, and I look forward to spending another year with Colby Hillel.

Sincerely,
Ben Zurkow ’15
Hillel Co-President

OUTSIDE THE BUBBLE

Sometimes Mayflower Hill can feel like its own little bubble. So we thought it would be a good idea to share some of the things that our peers at other colleges around the country are involved in. TAMID is a group which focuses on creating economic ties between American college students and Israeli companies.

The TAMID Israel Investment Group is a student-run organization on college campuses connecting students with the Israeli economy. TAMID was founded in 2008 by students at The University of Michigan who sought a more relevant, tangible, and mutually beneficial avenue to connect with Israel. The TAMID program consists of three phases: education, business application and a summer fellowship. Our education semester focuses on key aspects of business as they relate to Israel’s unique and flourishing economy such as venture capital and technology entrepreneurship. The business application phase of our program consists of an investment fund that serves as an educational tool supplementing their finance courses and various consulting teams that work directly with early stage Israeli start-ups on projects ranging from market research to sales and marketing strategy. Lastly, our most dedicated students are offered a fully funded summer internship with one of our partner companies in Tel Aviv where they live with TAMID Fellows from our other campuses. We currently have chapters at Michigan, Maryland, USC, Berkley, Brandeis, Harvard, Illinois, Penn, Cornell and Miami and are expanding to include Lehigh, NYU, UF and Emory in the Fall. For more information please visit our website: www.tamidgroup.org or email caleb@tamidgroup.org.
COMING OUT AS JEWISH WITH CLIFF KATZ ‘11

“... you’re neither Muslim, nor Protestant, nor Catholic, so what religion are you?”

I was cornered. Religion was the single topic my parents warned me to avoid after I announced my Peace Corps assignment to Azerbaijan, an oil-rich secular Muslim state sandwiched between Russia and Iran on the Caspian Sea’s western shore. As a proud Hebrew-school dropout, I often forewent high-holiday services for quality time in Diamond and ignored Jewish activities during my Upper West Side residency, but lying about my religion violated principles I didn’t know I possessed until confronted with the dilemma. These dinner hosts weren’t the religious crazies I arrogantly disregarded, but rather village residents eager to know the new celebrity. Here, internet and transport are unreliable, but gossip about Peace Corps Volunteers runs on a high speed bandwidth, and I wasn’t prepared to lie for two years.

“err...man yehudiym.” “I’m Jewish.”
“Oh. You don’t eat pork either?”
“Nope.”
The conversation moved on.

Peace Corps Volunteers often struggle to balance sharing American culture with respect of local customs. I don’t plan to partake in Jewish activities and don’t actively discuss my religion, but I now know I don’t have to hide my heart when asked.


We at the Colby Hillel are continually looking for new ways to reach out to new members and connect with existing members. We hope that you have enjoyed this glance into our Jewish life at Colby College. Any and all comments on this newsletter can be directed to Ben Zurkow at bezurkow@colby.edu. We welcome your opinions as a way for us to improve our communication with you in the future. If you would like to support our Hillel, please contact Rabbi Isaacs at risaacs@colby.edu. Thanks for reading!