



from the Center

2009–2010



Touching Lives | Teaching Leaders | Transforming Community

From the Rabbi:



This has been a challenging and extraordinary year for Tufts Hillel. Like every institution, we feel the impact of the economy and have made difficult decisions in our commitment to be fiscally responsible. At the same time, we are seeing more students than ever at Hillel: on Shabbat, in a wide range of values-centered discussions and social justice programming, at Jewish/Muslim/Christian dialogues, in thoughtful programming on

Israel, in innovative Jewish learning, and much more. For years, we have been laying the groundwork for this growth and we are making significant progress toward our ambitious goal of doubling the number of students meaningfully engaged in Jewish life at Tufts. We believe it is essential to be here for our students when they explore, question and deepen their Jewish identity. When times are difficult, more students come forward to discuss and consider the values that really matter.

Hillel has been full of discussion: about choices, friendship, family, community, money and satisfaction in life. I have been giving a series of talks at Hillel on Shabbat called "Torah for Tough (Economic) Times." These can be found as text and podcasts on our website: www.tuftshillel.org. In these talks, and other discussions, we've been drawing from Jewish tradition to discuss the relationship between wealth and self-worth, the relationship between money and happiness and the connection of wealth to what is important in life.

Together, we've discussed how Jews are no strangers to difficult times. We've gotten through these times because we have been sustained by strong communities, by the values of our tradition, by friends who watch out for one another, and by families who pay attention to our health and well-being. The investments we make in these precious people—partners, children, parents, friends—are more important now than ever. Our tradition has stressed that relationships with those we love will be sources of strength, wisdom and perspective. These relationships will provide solid ground when, like now, we are confronted by challenges.

We are blessed that while we have had to make difficult budget cuts in certain areas, generous donors and foundations have recognized and invested in our programs. With support from the Jim Joseph Foundation through the Hillel Schusterman International Center, we have hired Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg as Tufts Hillel's Senior Jewish Educator. Rabbi Ruttenberg was recently ordained from the Conservative Movement's Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies and is a published author with three books to her credit. We welcome her to Tufts Hillel.

Tufts Hillel provides hundreds of opportunities for students at Tufts to celebrate, discuss, sing, reflect, travel and study. Please join us as we build a vibrant and diverse Jewish community on campus. **As you can see in these articles in *From the Center*, our students are unstoppable.**

Cover: Dana Traub, A11 and Claire Cohen, A10 atop Masada

Read by the River

Ten years ago Tufts Hillel students had a vision. They wanted to foster a love of learning among elementary school students. Now, in its 11th year and serving Medford and Somerville, Read by the River expands the horizons of hundreds of children who eagerly anticipate Hillel's annual literacy carnival in the spring.



2009 Read by the River Carnival, Benjie Moll, A09, Jordan Cohen, A09, Ken Fifer, A09, David Wachs, A09, Eric Wachs, A12, and Lucy Pollack, A09



Latkes Anyone?

Quinn Connors, A11 and Elizabeth Metzger, A11 celebrate Chanukah with Hillel

A Small Voice Leading to Big Change

Shelley Zeiger

Making an impact is not about poise or positioning, it's about being true to your inner conscience. This was the message that Erin Brockovich, this year's Merrin Distinguished Lecturer, shared with the Tufts community as part of Hillel's Merrin Moral Voices Program. Brockovich's message fell on expectant ears eager to link her colorful character in the Academy Award winning movie "*Erin Brockovich*" starring Julia Roberts, to the true Brockovich standing before them in Cohen Auditorium on November 17.

Adorned with earrings the size of golf balls similar to the ones in the blockbuster, Brockovich assured her audience her story was real and so were the lessons learned. The "Erin" who fought for the right to clean, uncontaminated water for the residents of Hinkley, Calif.

"To me, Erin Brockovich exemplifies what it means to be a moral voice. True moral voices are ordinary people who, when faced with something not right in the world, make every effort within their power to affect a change. And raising a small voice can lead to big changes."

and discussion with 35 Hillel students, Brockovich and the Merrin family. Environmental Justice, this year's Moral Voices theme, was both timely and advocacy-based, according to Laura Herman, A09, chair of Moral Voices.

The vision and generosity of Hillel's leadership donors Anne Heyman and Seth Merrin makes Hillel's Merrin Distinguished Lecture Series one of the most widely attended programs on campus. Heyman agrees that the impact of the movie had far-reaching implications. "To me, Erin Brockovich exemplifies what it means to be a moral voice. True moral voices are ordinary people who, when faced with something not right in the world, make every effort within their power to effect a change. And raising a small voice can lead to big changes."

For Brockovich, her story is not about who won or lost in her fight against Pacific Gas and Electric Company, one of the largest direct action lawsuits of its kind. It's about being willing to speak out for what is right, "even if you don't look or dress the part," Brockovich told her audience.

"[Brockovich's] ultimate message was one of empowerment, saying that ordinary people can do extraordinary things without a lot of money and power," Herman said. "And it's within the reach of everyone here to achieve something great as she did simply by sticking to everyday convictions."

in the mid-90s urged those in attendance to think of environmental justice as an individual mandate. "Our lives affect other lives, and if we don't work together then we are working against one another. Each individual story is eventually a victory for all of us," Brockovich said.

"Only some may be guilty, but all are responsible," echoed Rabbi Summit. Before the event, Summit led a text study



Erin Brockovich, Merrin Distinguished Lecturer, 2008-2009

Although environmental justice may have only recently become a hot topic to policy makers and mainstream media, it is by no means new to Jewish tradition. According to Zachary Abramson, A11, it is natural for Hillel to embrace environmental justice in light of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. "Judaism talks a lot about being mindful of the world you live in and being mindful of the people around you," said Abramson.

To Hillel students, this mindfulness is as practical as recycling and turning lights out. Throughout the year, Hillel has approached environmental justice from both a practical and advocacy-based approach, focusing on organic food, corporate responsibility and environmental advocacy. Close collaboration with other environment groups on campus is a hallmark of this initiative, according to Herman, who added, "I think that it's great because we're all working with the same issue, but approaching it from different angles."

This multi-faceted stance towards environmental justice bodes well for the success of the Moral Voices initiative. "In everything you

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do, there's a way to make it more friendly for the environment," Abramson said. "I think Judaism speaks to that. I think Tufts speaks to that, and I think the way our country and generation are moving speaks to that."

Heyman agrees. "I hope that what everyone took away from Erin's lecture is the belief that ordinary people effect extraordinary change all the time," she

said. "And that they, too, have the ability to make a significant impact simply by acting on their beliefs."

A Weekend to Remember

Molly Frizzell, A09
Office of Web Communications

“**Emotional,**” and “**profound,**” were words used to describe a whirlwind weekend in Berlin, the highlight of the “Berlin Experience,” a year-long Hillel initiative. Co-sponsored by Tufts alumni Peter Bendetson, A08P, A12P, and Andrew Bendetson, A09P, thirty-two students intensely examined how Berlin, with the world’s fastest growing Jewish population, is confronting the legacy of the Holocaust.

Pre-trip educational talks by Professor Sol Gittleman, on the history of German Jews; Rabbi Summit, on why we study the Holocaust; and German educator Thorsten Wagner, on Germany’s response to the past, prepared the group for the journey. Post-trip follow up programming was made possible through the Merrin Moral Voices Program.

In Berlin, students visited poignant historical sites, including the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, and public memorials to understand how public space is used to commemorate the Holocaust. In addition, the group met with educators, activists, and government officials who address this very question. “I think it was important to see that Germany, of all European societies, is actually doing the best with regard to Holocaust education,” said Naomi Berlin, A09. “It reinforced the fact that you cannot blame future generations for what their parents or grandparents did,” agreed Hillel President Nathan Render, A09.

After returning to Tufts, the group focused on post-trip programming, including panels on remembrance and dialogue which were presented during April’s Holocaust remembrance week. “You can read about World War II, you can read about the Holocaust, but it’s another thing to immerse yourself in the history,” said Peter Bendetson.



Moises Cohen, A11, Maya Bronstein, A11, and Nathan Render, A09 light candles to memorialize thousands of people deported from Berlin.

Holidays at Hillel

More than 800 students celebrate the High Holidays at Reform and Conservative services. Delicious gourmet, kosher meals in a family style environment are the next best thing to going home. Students celebrate the Jewish holidays throughout the academic year with their “Hillel family” in innovative and relevant ways. From Pizza in the Hut during Sukkot to a Passover Seder dedicated to those across the globe still enslaved, Hillel embraces our traditions while offering special moments for students to connect.



Left: Preparing for Passover at Gifford House with Adele Fleet Bacow

Top right: Erica Udow, A10 and Jaime Gordon-Lipkin, E09 celebrate Purim

Bottom right: Julia Carlson, A11 prepares for Rosh Hashanah Torah reading



Connecting to the Global Jewish Community

Adam Kornetsky, A10



Adam Kornetsky restoring Jewish Library in Kazakhstan

Last July, 19 students from Tufts Hillel traveled to Almaty, Kazakhstan with the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). Funded by Tufts Trustee Emeritus, Edward Merrin and his wife Vivian, this community service program enabled me and my peers to spend 10 days working with the elderly Jews of the Hesed welfare system. Informed by volunteerism and *Yiddishkeit*, Hesed is the most effective welfare service in the Former Soviet Union [FSU]. We cleaned, gardened, did minor repairs, and organized the library. Most importantly, we experienced a Jewish renewal with Hesed clients, most of whom had children with no Jewish

“I had started to drift a little from my dedication to Judaism, and this trip helped to refuel my passion because I remembered some of the reasons why I love being Jewish.”

—Zehava Robbins, A11

identity. With them, we explored what being Jewish means to each of us. After each work session, we met with Hesed clients who shared their personal stories and the role that Hesed plays in their lives. In addition, we met daily to discuss this work in the context of Jewish texts.

Celebrating Shabbat, reciting Havdalah, and participating in Maccabiah Games were especially meaningful in this predominately secular society. We began to understand the hardships Jews face in the FSU while our Kazakhstani peers learned about Jewish life in the United States. We experienced local culture by participating in peer-led tours, visiting a museum, meeting with a professor, and attending a traditional song and dance performance. We witnessed how our Kazakhstani peers live their everyday lives.

Thanks to Hillel’s Alternative Summer Break and the JDC, the global Jewish community is no longer an abstract idea in our minds, but a community connected by friendships and shared values.



Lauren Godles and friends digging irrigation ditch in Nicaragua.

A Week as Lorena

Lauren Godles, A12

Rice and beans. Pick up a shovel and dig. Rice and beans. Dig. Sleep...*Buenos Dias!* This is the routine that a week as a Nicaraguan construction worker affords you. Throw in some *fútbol*, some funny jokes in Spanglish, and the stunning Diriamba winds, and you’ll imagine what nine other students and I did over Hillel’s Alternative Spring Break in Nicaragua through Tufts Hillel and American Jewish World Service. For several days, we volunteered in a small village, discussed our relationship to the developing world, and studied Jewish texts on social justice.

As college students, we are very busy. In Nicaragua, the pace of life is different. How could we fret about our upcoming midterm when there were hundreds of wheelbarrows full of dirt to be pushed or two hungry boys enviously watching us eat breakfast? The issues were immediate, often literally staring us in the face. Confronted with these problems, we were forced to expand our thinking and learn from the creative solutions employed by COOPAD, the farming cooperative sponsoring our visit.

In a place where food is scarce and sometimes contaminated, COOPAD grows organic foods and builds without machinery. We were impressed by their ingenuity and commitment to the environment and learned a great deal from this “underdeveloped” country. The week was exhausting, but we loved it. So throw me a wide brimmed hat and call me Lorena, because I’m ready to go back and see how else I can help!



Tufts Hillel Alternative Break Service Trip; renovating low income housing in Tampa.



Left: Birthright participants volunteer with Haifa Hoops for Kids

Right: Jeremy Haber, A10, Lizzie Schrott, A12, Robyn Goldberg, A09, Jacob Kreimer, A11 on Taglit Winter Birthright Trip 08/09

The Birthright Experience: Jewish Identity and the Israel Encounter

Shelley Zeiger

Standing in line to board an El Al flight with 56 Taglit-Birthright participants, Tufts student August Longino, A11 hoped he had the right answers to the security officer's questions about his Italian sounding name and temple attendance habits. A self-described cynic who grew up in an agnostic home, for Longino a trip to Israel meant an encounter with a Jewish identity he had never before explored. For Paris Adler, A12, descendant of seven generations of Orthodox rabbis from Kiev, the Birthright experience symbolized a return home; a reconnection with a homeland she had felt a part of only from afar and a confirmation of traditions instilled since childhood.

Coming from very different cultural and religious identities, on December 28, 2008, Longino and Adler boarded their first flight to Israel. While the 10-day Taglit-Birthright Israel trip included the opportunity to float on the Dead Sea, pray at the Western Wall and buy fresh-squeezed pomegranate juice from street vendors, for both of them, it was the knowledge that they were part of a Jewish nation that left a marked impact. In fact, it was life transforming.

During the trip, Adler says she was struck by "what I automatically have in common with everyone else." From the CEO of a company to the guy selling fruit on the corner, Adler said it was interesting to go to a place where the majority of the population is Jewish.

Since the founding of Birthright in 1999 by philanthropists Edgar Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt, more than 200,000 Jewish young people from 52 countries have experienced a free trip to Israel. The purpose of Birthright is to promote Jewish continuity in the face of growing assimilation and to strengthen the solidarity between Jewish youth and the State of Israel.

During the past 10 years, Tufts Hillel has sent nearly 1000 students to Israel. Combined Jewish Philanthropies [CJP], Federation of Boston has established the *Inspired, Active, Committed, Transformed Initiative* [IACT] which provides Tufts Hillel with a full time Jewish professional focused on Birthright. Because of IACT, Tufts is able to send far more students to Israel than many other campuses, and post-trip Jewish engagement programming has become a part of campus life.

Acceptance to Birthright trips is on a first-come, first-serve basis and is open to any student with one Jewish parent who has not yet been on a peer trip to Israel. Tufts Hillel ensures that its students gain a realistic portrayal of Israeli life by including a delegation of 10 Israelis their own age, many still in the army, sharing "bus-time" with the group.

According to Gordon Dale, Tufts Hillel's Birthright program associate, the trip "brings up a whole range of philosophical, historical and theological questions." As an attempt to answer such questions, this year Dale established a non-credit, post-Birthright class as a way for students to process the experience and deepen their understanding of the culture. The 10 week class titled "The Birthright Experience: Jewish Identity and the Israel Encounter," brings in speakers to address topics ranging from "Democracy in the Middle East" to "The Jewish Woman in Today's World." Participants are also given \$500 toward an organized trip back to Israel.

For Longino, the holistic encounter of Israel and Israeli society served as a catalyst to "work through" an understanding of his Jewish roots and to nurture his connection to his heritage. Reflecting on the trip, Longino said, **"I've seen a sufficient amount of cool stuff to hold my attention and cause me to want to learn more."**

The Hillel Scholars Program

Samantha Frank, A11

Rabbi Summit had an idea. He called a group of outstanding Jewish writers and scholars, and made this pitch: “I am not inviting you to give a lecture. I want you to have dinner with a group of incredible Jewish students and tell them what you believe they should be thinking about right now.” And so began the Hillel Scholars Program...

I had always been seeking high level Jewish learning. As soon as I heard about this new initiative, I knew I wanted to participate. The opportunity to speak with Jewish scholars in an intimate setting was too good to miss.

We met monthly with leading Jewish thinkers including Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*; Anita Diamant, author of *The Red Tent*; Rabbi Arthur Green, credited as the founder of neo-Hassidism; and Susannah Heschel, forward thinking historian and Jewish Studies professor at Dartmouth.

With Diamant, we talked about empowering women who make up half the Jewish community; women capable of bringing new energy and strengthening the entire community. With Rabbi Kushner, we discussed prayer, not as asking for an outcome such as forgiveness, but as a composition of three things: gratitude for what we have, acknowledgment that we are not in control, and hope for something greater. Jonathan Sarna spoke about how the Jewish community responded to events such as the Great Depression—particularly interesting given the economic situation of today.

I am now confident in my ability to discuss Jewish issues, to face new challenges with a Jewish perspective, and to evaluate my role in the Jewish community. But what I did not foresee, and I am so excited about, is what I learned from my peers: their histories, interests and questions—all part of the Jewish-American experience.

Responding Jewishly

Dr. Joel A. Roffman, A07P



On February 20, Tufts alumni and parents were inspired by Dr. Joel Roffman at a reception hosted by Annual Fund Chairs, Randi and John Lapidus. A parent of Tufts Alumna, Leah Roffman, A07, Roffman brought a fresh perspective at a time when optimistic attitudes and outlooks are truly needed. With the economic downturn on the minds of all, the advice captured by Roffman and Rabbi Gordon Fuller, in their recently published book, *Coping with Adversity: Judaism's Response to Life Struggles*, was very meaningful.

Roffman uses Judaic teaching as a source of inspiration and a framework for our responses to the many struggles we face in our lives. Judaism is a religion that mandates action and the book reminds us that whatever adversity we might face, **the writing of our life's narrative is largely up to us.**

Roffman spoke of the centrality of *tzedakah* in Judaism, reminding us that by giving, we receive much in return. When asked why he chose to support Hillel, Roffman said, “Nancy and I consider charitable giving to be demanded by our Jewish tradition. We are charged with *tikkun olam*, healing the world. By helping others, we make a difference in the world and it is an honor to carry out this *mitzvah*. **Because we care about Jewish continuity, we chose to support Tufts Hillel whose work deeply impacts the college experience.**”

The Roffman Family Fund for Social Justice supports community service initiatives by Tufts Hillel students. Serving the needs of the local community is a priority of the Roffman Family, and was especially important to Leah during her years at Tufts. Long a supporter of Jewish causes, Roffman explained that by becoming involved with Tufts Hillel, his family not only funds outstanding social justice, education and religious programming, they are also helping shape the next generation of Jewish leaders. In closing, Roffman said, with a smile, “As I grow older (seemingly faster each year!), it becomes more and more important to see our children develop a sense of commitment to Judaism and Jewish community.”

In addition to caring donors such as the Roffmans, we are fortunate to have a Board of Directors committed to promoting Jewish life at Tufts. It is their vision to provide every Jewish student opportunities to encounter Judaism in personally meaningful ways. We are grateful to the more than 1,300 Annual Fund and Program Endowment supporters who help make this vision a reality. *

Hillel's programs depend upon parents, friends and alumni. We welcome unrestricted Annual Fund gifts of all amounts. We also invite donors, at or above the \$1,000 giving level, to sponsor programs of particular interest to them. Tufts Hillel is nationally recognized for cutting edge initiatives made possible by our exceptional students, staff and generous donors. *For more information about sponsorships, please contact Judi Canter at 617.627.3242.*

* **Tufts Hillel Program Endowment and 2009 Annual Fund supporters are recognized on our website, www.tuftshillel.org**



Maccabiah Games
in Kazakhstan



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Contact Tufts Hillel

P: (617) 627-3242

F: (617) 627-3044

E: hillel-center@tufts.edu

W: www.tuftshillel.org