Reflections, continued from front page

blended families where they received mixed messages about religion. All are looking for something—some piece of their identity that they feel is missing or uncertain. Students who came to college with ambivalent memories of Hebrew School and Jewish practice now have the opportunity to shape their own Jewish experience and community.

My challenge to our alumni and parents is to nurture Jewish communities in which any student can “try on being Jewish.” For some this means: “First time I’ve been to a Jewish service.” Or, “I’m more ritually observant.” In this community, issues of formal Jewish status are much less important than they were when I was a congregational rabbi.

The students see themselves and project themselves as a welcoming community. More traditional students engage and respect students who don’t. Students new to Jewish practice are excited about being B’nai Mitzvah. The class consisted of weekly meetings during which four Hillel students taught us the basics of being Jewish: holidays, life cycle, and major prayers. The semester culminated in a rare and emotional Saturday morning service when three of us became B’nai Mitzvah.

I was terrified to tell my mother about the experience Judaism has always been an integral part of my family: my father is Jewish, and my mother is Catholic. Although raised without religion, I have always felt Jewish. Scared she would think I was choosing my father’s heritage over hers, I did not tell my mom about my Bat Mitzvah until days before the service. When I finally called her, I told her in one breath how light I felt each week in class, how wonderful it was to feel the warmth of the Hillel community, and how exciting it was to include Jewish practice in my life. She stopped my ranting and said she loved me and was incredibly proud.

Our portion that week, Parshah Vayishlach, recounts the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau after Jacob stole Esau’s birthright. Although Jacob fears his brother will attack him, upon meeting, Esau embraces him. I feared that telling my mother about the experience of inclusion in the Hillel community, and how exciting it was to include Jewish practice in my life, she would think I was trying to embrace a religion different from that of my mother.

Becoming a Bat Mitzvah has meant many things to me: getting active in our wonderful Hillel community, making Jewish practice an important part of my life, and finally feeling confident in my Jewish identity. And it has also meant growing even closer to my Catholic mother.
Hillel is a community built upon trust. So when Jacob Udeil ’12 told the Hillel community that he had this “great idea” for spring break, we trusted him. Mind you, no one really had any idea what a Jewish-ecological-philosophical farm would be like, but we had faith in Jacob’s judgment when we headed down to Reisterstown, Maryland, the home of Kayam Farm.

Kayam Farm strives to have an active relationship with the land through the study of Jewish texts. In addition to taking this Jewish approach to farming, Kayam also considers the larger agricultural issues affecting the greater Baltimore area. The week-long trip was incredible. Our leaders, Abby and Yoshi, were insightful and engaging teachers. Our trip centered around the “Chesapeake—Watershed Pilgrimage,” a three-day exploration of the land leading into the Chesapeake Bay. The bold and athletic Hillel snikkatch, or family, hiked, canoed, sang, and sailed during the pilgrimage, braving the elements with ease. Shabbas came as a much-needed rest for the weary pilgrims. After preparing a five-star meal, our Hillel group was joined by the Kayam community for a joyful Shabbas evening.

The Hillel Alternative Spring Break to Kayam Farm was an enlightening, fun, and meaningful experience away from the normal routine of school.

Student Snapshots

Kayam Farm Spring Break Trip

Hillel teamed up with the Hindu Student Association for a vibrant dinner to celebrate Purim and the Hindu festival of Holi, which included historical background from Rabbi Ira Shlifer and Assistant Professor of Religion Vasudha Paramasivam.

Orna Goldman

Orna Goldman was born in 1960 and grew up in Tel Aviv. Her parents are Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Israel from Poland. Goldman earned her B.Ed. at the Lewinsky Teachers College in Tel Aviv, and her M.Phil. in Hebrew Literature at Columbia. We are very fortunate to have been able to place our small but growing college in Tel Aviv, and her M.Phil. in Hebrew Literature at Columbia.

Modern Hebrew Update

The Modern Hebrew Language Program has undergone many exciting developments this year, including development of minors in Modern and Classical Hebrew and a new Middlebury school abroad established at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. We will also welcome Orna Goldman as a year’s new members as well—most likely with a piece of fresh chocolate chip challah or a lively game of Ninja.