HARVARD HILLEL

JEWISH LIFE AT HARVARD

5785

2024–2025









FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On July 1, 2024, our community was still reeling from the shock of 10/7 — not only the devastation in Israel, but the eruption of ugly anti-Israeli and anti-semitic discrimination from numerous Harvard affiliates. We had well-founded fears about the direction of Harvard and the future of Jewish life on this campus. United in those concerns, we were nonetheless divided and even in conflict over the course of action the university should take, and on the role we should play.

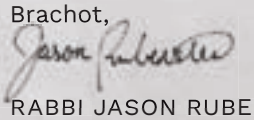
Significant work remains and real challenges persist. And yet by June 30, 2025 the reality and anticipated future of Harvard's Jewish community bore little resemblance to the bleak description above. Our achievements over the past academic year — in advancing a shared framework of pluralistic tolerance, supporting President Garber's principled and far-reaching reforms, and reinvigorating Jewish life for thousands of Jewish students — go well beyond what we dared hope for at the beginning of the last year. We are here because we worked together to become, and to remain, an informed, cohesive, and effective community — drawing on the source of strength that has always sustained the Jewish people.

Our advocacy finds its fullest value in creating the conditions for Jewish students to flourish during the most formative years of their adult lives. At its heart, Harvard Hillel's mission is to foster Jewish life that meets both students' needs and their ambitions — offering joy, support, and connection along with wise mentorship to craft their own Jewish identities and communities that will serve as the foundation of their adult lives.

The support and resources you have provided have allowed us to elevate what we offer students throughout this transformative year. Students are finding their voices as Jewish leaders, deepening their understanding of their heritage, and building the skills and relationships that will shape them, and through them — the next generation of American Jewish life.

We are nowhere near done, and never will be. The future opportunities that stand open before us are vast — and I cannot wait to partner with you in this new year, and in the coming years, to continually enrich and enliven Jewish life at Harvard. Thank you for making this community possible, for sustaining us through this challenging season, and for investing in the flourishing Jewish future these remarkable students will create.

Brachot,



RABBI JASON RUBENSTEIN '04
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Harvard Hillel is our community's shared project. What you see in these pages — the Jewish life, the advocacy, the transformational experiences for students — exists because alumni and friends like you have chosen to step up and build something extraordinary together.

This is what sets us apart: you have influence here. Your voice helps shape the Jewish pluralism that happens on campus, the relationships that enrich students' formative years, and the community they carry into their entire adult lives. Harvard Hillel belongs to all of us, a living partnership among the generations and breadth of Harvard's Jewish community.

As Executive Director, Jason exemplifies this spirit of collaboration. His arrival just over a year ago has brought new energy, vision, and momentum to our work, and his leadership has focused on building bonds with and among our diverse, dedicated, and engaged community: keeping you up to date on what's happening on campus and how you can help, throwing Hillel's doors wide open for family weekend and reunions, and connecting dozens current students with alumni mentors. And that is only the beginning of what we hope to build together with you.

We are grateful for your sustained support in our challenging and unpredictable time. Your generosity has allowed us to be creative, responsive, and strategic as we navigate a dynamic campus and world at large. The impact you see here is the direct result of your partnership with us.

Together, we are raising our sights for thriving Jewish life at Harvard and cultivating the next generation of Jewish leadership.

Warmly,

ADINA ASTOR '95, MBA '98
BOARD CHAIR

The Daily Rhythm of Life at Rosovsky Hall

Harvard Hillel serves as the center of Jewish life at Harvard, offering students something more than an unparalleled program of events, travel, and leadership opportunities: a community.

The numbers reflect our commitment: **$1.4 million invested directly in undergraduate programming, 70% of our total budget devoted to student experiences, hundreds of students engaging with us each week.** These investments show up in ways as diverse as a Tuesday afternoon puppy yoga session in Rabb, a cooking class with an Israeli chef that runs two hours over because no one wants to leave, a packed courtyard barbecue, student-led trips to Israel and Europe, and Bagel Brunches attended by over 100 students every Sunday.

This is how Jewish community takes root at Harvard. Not through obligation or nostalgia, but through shared moments that, over four years, become the foundation of lifelong Jewish connection.











Many Communities, One Home

Our Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox minyanim offer distinct pathways to Jewish engagement, supported by dedicated Harvard Hillel clergy. This winter, each community embarked on transformative retreat experiences that deepened bonds and strengthened identity.









"These are fraught times for Jewish life in this country and around the world. All the more important to have a place like Harvard Hillel that can bring Jewish students together from different backgrounds to discuss their disagreements as well as what they have in common. Harvard Hillel provides on-the-ground experience for Jewish students to learn the art of democratic public discourse in a pluralistic setting, so they come to regard that pluralism not as a threat, but as a source of strength — that's the kind of leadership the Jewish community needs to flourish."

PROFESSOR
MICHAEL SANDEL

Building Skills for Jewish Living

Beyond worship, practical tools like Shabbat Hosting Labs and deep learning opportunities like our Jewish Learning Fellowship and Kol Yisrael study programs equip students with skills they'll carry forward as they build Jewish families and communities.

Embracing Thoughtful Disagreement

Jewish tradition makes room for passionate debate. This year's "Battle of the Stevens" Latke vs. Hamantaschen debate between Professors Pinker and Levitsky perfectly captured our belief that Jewish life is enriched by good-natured argumentation and intellectual play.

Investment in diverse Jewish programming ensures every student finds their place while appreciating the beauty of Jewish traditions beyond their own experience.

Inspiring Tomorrow's Jewish Leaders

Students don't just participate in Jewish life at Harvard Hillel — they shape it. This year, 186 students voted in our competitive student elections, demonstrating extraordinary engagement in Jewish leadership that matters. Our students power, run, and market the vast majority of Harvard Hillel events, designing programming that speaks to their peers while embracing Jewish tradition.

They write op-eds for the Crimson and for national publications, give interviews to international media, and serve as articulate advocates for Harvard's Jewish community. In times of challenge and celebration alike, they represent Jewish perspectives with sophistication and courage, preparing them to become lifelong Jewish community builders who will carry forward our values and vision.











"It would be inadequate to say that Harvard Hillel changed my life because everything I'm doing today is because of Harvard Hillel. Every part of my life is because of Harvard Hillel. Starting with the person I've been married to for 25 years, who I met at a Shabbat dinner at Harvard Hillel, but also my entire approach to Jewish life."

DARA HORN '99, PHD '06

"Leading Hillel in 2024 was one of the most valuable experiences I've ever had. It taught me how to navigate the complexities of the modern Jewish world better than anything else could have, and it showed me the importance of community-building, pluralism, and remaining true to my own values. I exited my role of president with a much stronger desire to learn and think deeply about the world around me, and I'm confident that the experience of leading my Harvard Jewish community will allow me to build and strengthen my own Jewish community wherever I end up."

NATHAN B. GERSHENGORN '26, IMMEDIATE PAST STUDENT BOARD PRESIDENT

"Hillel's commitment to student leadership has empowered me not only to envision the community I want to be part of but also to actively create it. Through this role, I have learned to lead with curiosity, resilience, and a sense of responsibility."

AMELIA MAE HELLER '27, STUDENT BOARD PRESIDENT

PEAK EXPERIENCES

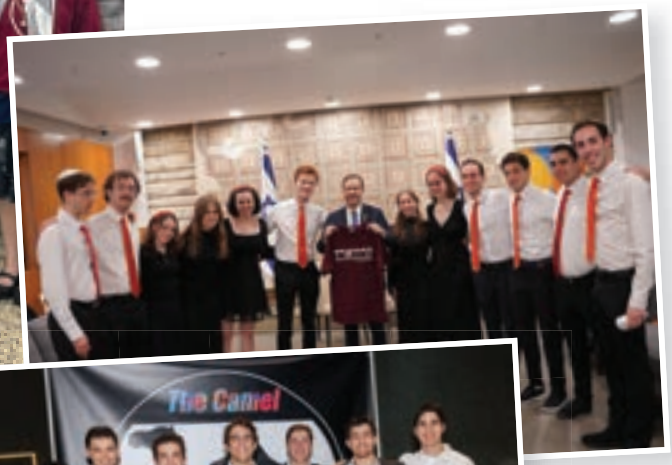
Apichorus Israel Trip

Our Jewish acapella group took a 10-day trip to Israel where they performed at a children' s hospital, an Ethiopian community center, and the President's office.

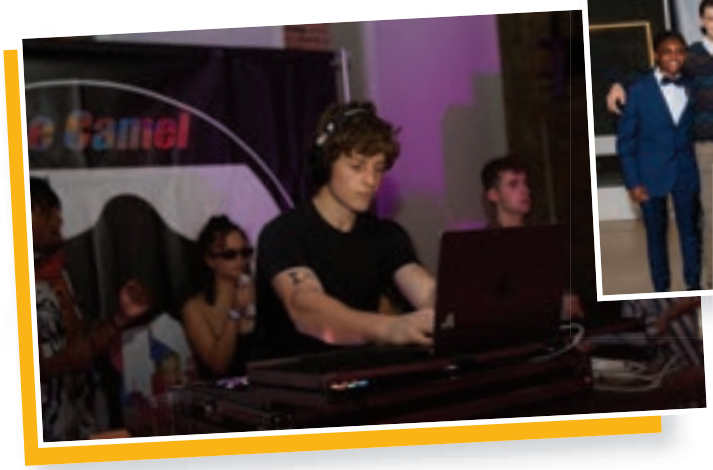


"The ApiChorus Israel trip was one of the most meaningful experiences of my college career. I loved bonding with my fellow group members, learning about Israeli culture, and connecting to my Judaism through song."

TOVA KAPLAN '26









"As a freshman at Harvard, the Camel has been such a great place to socialize and learn about Israel's entrepreneurial side. As a Jewish student who grew up largely secular, it's nice to have all these different lively events where I can bond with other students at Harvard and MIT—regardless of what our backgrounds look like."

TEJAS BILLA '28

The Camel

This student-run organization exposes thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish students alike to the vibrancy of Jewish and Israeli culture and business. Their list of speakers includes Adam Mosseri, CEO of Instagram, Strauss Zelnick, CEO of $36 billion video game company Take-Two Interactive, Scooter Braun, and many others.

Israel BBQ

On Yom Ha'atzmaut, our student board threw a barbecue to celebrate the Jewish State's founding. It was a joy to experience, full of Jewish pride, great food, toasts from student leadership, and an impromptu acapella performance from Apichorus.

Travel Programs

Nearly 200 students participated in our transformative international programs this year. Through our flagship Israel Trek program and Poland-Hungary educational journey, students gained firsthand perspectives that shape their understanding of Jewish history, Israel, and their own identity — experiences that resonate far beyond graduation.











"Growing up in Jerusalem, I've never had much experience with baseball. I was pleasantly surprised by the communal atmosphere and energy of the crowd. Celebrating Jewish heritage together made it especially meaningful, and running into unexpected friends from our community was wonderful!"

THEO MOTZKIN '19,
PHD STUDENT



Jewish Heritage Night at Fenway

Harvard Hillel brought 100 students, staff, and alumni to Fenway Park for Jewish American Heritage Night, complete with matching Harvard Hillel red caps. Against the iconic backdrop of the Green Monster, our community celebrated Jewish pride and cheered for the Red Sox in a vibrant display of team spirit.



Defending Our Community, Transforming Our Campus

When antisemitism surged at Harvard, we didn't retreat, we led. Harvard Hillel became a voice advocating tirelessly for Jewish students and reshaping the university's response to hatred.

Taking Our Case to the Nation

Executive Director Rabbi Jason Rubenstein brought Harvard's Jewish story to national audiences, appearing on ABC and CBS News, while speaking with CNN, The Boston Globe and other major outlets. When the world was watching Harvard, Rav Jason ensured our community's voice was heard clearly and with dignity.

> "As long as anti-Semitism is an especially important issue, Harvard Hillel is going to be an especially important institution. Whether it is counseling students whose families have been touched by tragedy, whether it is speaking up for the basic right of people to walk across Harvard Yard unharassed, or whether it is making sure that our leaders meet their obligation to provide moral leadership by condemning the unacceptable. Harvard Hillel is vitally important now."
>
> LARRY SUMMERS,
> FORMER HARVARD PRESIDENT
> AND US TREASURY SECRETARY



Driving Institutional Change

We didn't just speak out, we created lasting change. Harvard Hillel's leadership shaped the Presidential Task Force on Antisemitism, working directly with university administrators to craft new policies protecting Jewish students. When anti-Zionist protests threatened our community, we secured strong public statements from President Garber condemning hateful speech targeting Jewish and Israeli students.

Pioneering Campus Education

Despite significant campus opposition, we successfully brought Project Shema's antisemitism training to Harvard, the first comprehensive educational initiative of its kind here. We expanded Jewish Studies course offerings and influenced admissions policies to better serve prospective Jewish students.

The fight against antisemitism isn't just about defense. It's about creating a Harvard where Jewish life flourishes openly and proudly. Through persistent advocacy and strategic partnerships, we've transformed how the university understands and protects its Jewish community.

The Power of Presence

In an environment where Israel often exists only as an abstraction or political flashpoint, Harvard Hillel made it real — through the entrepreneurs who built it, the culture that defines it, and the people who love it. We didn't simply defend Israel; we introduced it, celebrated it, and invited students to discover their own connections to it.



Creating Sacred Spaces for Grief and Hope

When tragedy struck, we gathered. Hundreds joined vigils for Hersh Goldberg-Polin and the Bibas family, transforming Harvard Yard into a space where the university community could grieve together. These moments transcended political divides, reminding us that behind every headline are human stories deserving of dignity and compassion.

Building Bridges Through Innovation

The Camel, our student-led initiative with an annual budget of over $300,000, transformed perceptions by bringing world-class Israeli entrepreneurs to campus. Over 1,000 Jewish and non-Jewish students alike discovered Israel's innovative spirit through conversations with leaders like Instagram CEO Adam Mosseri and Take-Two Interactive CEO Strauss Zelnick. A three-day hackathon paired elite IDF veterans with Harvard and MIT students, forging connections through shared creativity rather than conflict. And last but not least, The Camel's Sababa Nights bash brought Israeli culture to Harvard Square's DX Dunster for a night of DJs, dancing, and fun.

Living Culture, Daily Connection

Our Israel Fellow, Sapir Reznick, brought Israel's vibrancy to daily interactions — through impromptu Hebrew conversations over coffee, stories of Tel Aviv startup culture, and the simple power of friendship. When former IDF spokesperson Ronen Manelis visited, students engaged with Israel's complexities through thoughtful dialogue rather than soundbites.

From our Yom Ha'atzmaut BBQ that filled the courtyard with the scents of Jerusalem to intimate conversations about family members serving in the IDF, we created spaces where students could explore their relationships with Israel on their own terms.

In a year when Israel faced unprecedented challenges, Harvard Hillel ensured that students could connect authentically with Israel — not through politics or polemics, but through celebration, culture, and human connection.



















A Lifetime of Jewish Community

At this year's Celebration of Jewish graduates, Rabbi Rubenstein told our departing Class of '25: "Know that you are not ending, you're really entering into a community here which is stronger and more loving and interconnected than I think you can even imagine at this stage."

Harvard Hillel isn't just four years — it's a lifetime. We prioritize alumni engagement, recognizing that our graduates carry Harvard's Jewish future far beyond Cambridge.

Reunion Weekend exemplified this vision. President Garber joined our pre-Shabbat reception to mingle with our alumni. Later, alumni experienced powerful panel conversations between recent graduates and current students about navigating Jewish life on campus today. Our packed Ice Cream Social and panel with Sam Lessin '05 and Professor Tarek Masoud on "Harvard's Future" proved that alumni hunger for meaningful connection to both their past and Harvard's present.

Enter Elisha Gechter, our new Senior Director of Community Engagement, who brings deep experience building Jewish communities across generations. "Our alumni don't just support current students — they model what purposeful Jewish lives look like after Harvard," Elisha notes. "Every career path, every family created, every community joined shows today's students their own possibilities."

This isn't nostalgia — it's strategy. Today's students become tomorrow's leaders, sponsors, and parents of future Harvard Hillel students. By nurturing these relationships across decades, we ensure that Harvard's Jewish story continues, chapter by chapter, generation by generation.

The Heart of Harvard Hillel

Harvard Hillel's greatest strength has always been our people. This year, we hired an extraordinary team of educators and mentors who are bringing a fresh and vibrant new energy to campus.







Rachel Eilbaum joins us as Director of Student Life, bringing years of experience creating transformative Jewish experiences for young adults. Her vision for student leadership development promises to empower the next generation of Jewish changemakers.

Uzi Maxwell Pohl, our new IACT Coordinator, arrives from Michigan State with infectious enthusiasm and a proven track record of inspiring students to discover their Jewish journeys.

Mahran Yosef, our new Israel Fellow, brings contemporary Israeli culture directly to campus. Through daily conversations, cultural programming, and personal relationships, Mahran will help students forge authentic connections to Israel beyond headlines and politics.

Ethan and Bella Fried join as our new Orthodox Rabbi and Jewish Educator, a dynamic couple committed to creating inclusive Orthodox spaces where every student can explore traditional Judaism on their own terms. Their partnership model brings both rabbinic wisdom and educational innovation to our Orthodox community.

Together with our returning staff, this team represents Harvard Hillel's investment in what matters most: the mentors who guide our students through college's searching questions, celebrate their triumphs, comfort them through challenges, and inspire them to lead meaningful Jewish lives.

Each brings unique gifts, but they share a common mission: meeting every Jewish student where they are and helping them discover where their Jewish journey might lead.

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THANK YOU

We wholeheartedly thank all those who have made generous gifts to Hillel from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025.

Hillel is dependent on the generosity of parents, alumni and friends. We sincerely appreciate every individual who supports Jewish life on the Harvard campus.

We apologize for any errors or omissions; please contact Harvard Hillel with any corrections.

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This year, we mourned the loss of a devoted friend and leader of Harvard Hillel.

Prudence Steiner served on our Board for decades, playing pivotal roles on our Executive Director search committees and the Finance committee during critical periods in Hillel's history. Through extraordinary generosity, Prudence strengthened Hillel's foundation and ensured that generations of Jewish students could find a welcoming home on campus.

We honor her memory with deep gratitude for a legacy of leadership, vision, and philanthropy continues to inspire our mission of enriching Jewish student life at Harvard.

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