



MIT Hillel Update



Greetings from Cambridge to MIT's alumni, parents, and friends on campus and around the globe!

Pictures above, left to right:

1. **The MIT Hummus Experience:** Graduate students Isaac Oderberg, Ethan Sokol, Renin Hazan learn to make *zhug* (hot Yemenite sauce) and hummus during IAP.
2. **MIT goes kosher:** full-time kosher dining service comes to MIT when [Maseeh Hall opens -- Fall 2011](#)
3. **Birthright students show MIT pride in Israel:** (L to R): Ari Miller '11, Eliad Shmuel (MIT Program Director), Doug Feigelson '14, Jared Katz '14, Ethan Sherbondy '14, Mike Thompson '12, Jacob Hurwitz '14, and Ilan Moyer '08 G

Executive Director's Update



Spring Semester is about to begin. Students traveled, explored, and took very few classes for credit -- and January was a very busy month! MIT Hillel sponsored nearly [twenty courses and activities](#) during IAP (Independent Activities Period). A visit to the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, MA (Luis Voloch '13 pictured) and classes on Kabbalah, a series on Jewish

Meditation, and a mini-course on Modern Food Technology and Kosher Certification -- plus hummus-making and a kosher chocolate factory tour -- were all on the menu this month. Hundreds attended the [Annual Hummus Taste Off](#) capping our activities. With samples from Cedar's, Tribe, and Sabra, as well as chocolate-hummus-flavored ice cream from J.P. Licks, it's an event that even caught the eye of *Hadassah Magazine* last IAP.

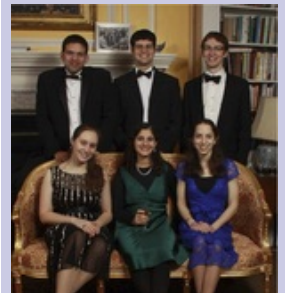


Participants voted "Samurai Miso" this year's top recipe; last year's winner, "Chili Lime Hummus" is still being considered by Cedar's for use as a "seasonal flavor."

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Menschen of Mention



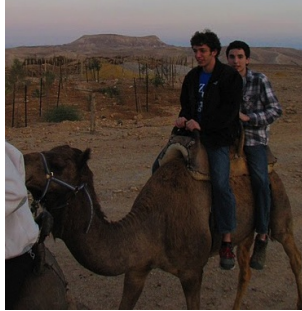
Three classes of Cambridge-MIT Exchange Jews (clockwise, from top left): Daniel Guetta CME '09, Jesse Dunietz '11, Colin Berkley CME '07, Tamara Litwin '09, Meena Viswanath '11, Dina Betser '11

During the 2009-2010 academic year, the Jewish Society of the University of Cambridge hosted three representatives from MIT Hillel: Dina Betser, Jesse Dunietz, and Meena Viswanath. The three of us, who have been very involved in Hillel throughout our time at MIT, participated in the Cambridge-MIT Exchange (CME), through which we experienced a different form of Jewish university life. Dina, from Los Angeles, studies computer science and is currently one of the



Beyond the excitement on campus, fourteen current MIT students traveled to Israel in December and January on Birthright Israel (for more details). Building upon the energy created by nearly 40 MIT Birthright participants last year (a ten-fold increase over any prior year), Hillel this year added a special MIT-flavored "MIT Birthright Extension." Students visited several venture capital-backed companies changing the face of Israel and the world, including Better Place, which is creating the infrastructure for electric vehicles, as well as Naiot and Given Imaging. They interacted with peers and professors while touring laboratories at the Technion and Weizman Institutes. And they spent social time with fellow students at Haifa Hillel and enjoyed Shabbat hospitality provided by the MIT Israel Alumni Club.

Upon their return to MIT, the student participants will be designing a *tzedek*/social justice project together. In the words of participant Jacob Hurwitz '14, "All college Birthright trips are great, but what made our recent trip even more special was the unique MIT Extension program. After 10 days schlepping through the country seeing every possible tourist attraction,



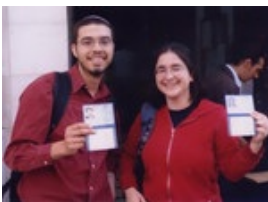
the Extension gave us a few days to experience first-hand the State of Israel's high-tech sector. We visited companies developing groundbreaking technologies, learned about start-ups, toured educational institutions, and talked to MIT alumni about their experiences living and working in Israel. It was the experience of a life-time, and I expect to be on this high for months!" (Pictured on camel-back, Doug Feigelson '14 and Jared Katz '14.)

Hopefully within all these events, activities, classes, and experiences, a little R&R was had, as well. Registration day (January 31) and a new semester is right around the corner...

L'shalom,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Chaim Kutnicki '07, VI-2, a software developer in Israel currently focusing on jumping between as many startup companies in Silicon Wadi as possible and working as a mechanic of armored personnel carriers in his spare time. The accompanying photograph was taken with his wife, Kayla Jacobs '06, VIII, XVIII, as they hold up their Israeli identity cards in celebration of their vanquishing of Israeli bureaucracy. Chaim can (still) be reached at chaim@mit.edu, via Zephyr, e-mail and direct B2B (brain-to-brain) download protocol. (Chaim was also an alumni host of our Birthright Israel students this month.)

At this time of year, the cycle of Torah reading leads us to the *raison d'etre* of G-d's project for the Jewish people - the receiving of the Torah. The classical commentaries use this story to identify the refined character traits that define a person, and a people, worthy of receiving Revelation.

coordinators of the MIT Conservative Minyan. Jesse, who hails from Highland Park, NJ, is also studying computer science, and is a former Hillel Vice President of Education. Meena, from Teaneck, NJ, is studying civil engineering and is a former Hillel president and current Orthodox Minyan coordinator. Now seniors, we would like to share a bit about our experiences studying abroad and the perspective we've gained in returning to MIT this year.

Much as Hillel is the center of Jewish life at MIT, the center of Jewish life in Cambridge is the Cambridge University Jewish Society (CUJS), or "JSoc," as it is affectionately known. The JSoc calendar is full of events, coordinated almost entirely by the organization's 20-person student committee, for which Jesse served as Publicity Officer and Dina as Webmaster. Shabbat events are some of the main attractions, of course; weekly Shabbat dinners are regularly attended by over 100 undergraduates, and are typically followed by socializing (socialising?) in "Culanu," a flat which, like the Hillel Center, serves as a venue for small-scale social events. Culanu also hosts weekly Sunday bagel brunches and mid-week kosher lunches. Beyond the recurring attractions, the calendar boasts plenty of one-time or termly events, including celebrity Friday night speakers, holiday parties, group trips to the pub, community service outings, and JSoc's biggest event of the year: the CUJS Charity Talent Show, where

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz (1901-1979, Head of Mirer Yeshiva, orchestrator of yeshiva's escape to Shanghai) expounds on the three attributes that the Ohr HaChayim (1696-1743, Rabbi Chaim Ibn Atar, Morocco) identifies with a pious Jewish people worthy of the Torah - first, tireless devotion and strong work ethic, particularly in Torah study. A classic paradigm is the rabbinic story of Jacob's escape from Esau when he is said to have studied Torah feverishly for fourteen years without rest or indulgence in creature comforts.

Second, worthiness of the Torah comes from an utter denunciation of haughtiness of the heart. When approaching Mount Sinai the Torah notes, "And they (the Jewish nation) camped in the desert" and the Talmud (Nedarim 55) expounds, "When a person makes himself like a desert, that is, a place where all (sense of self and ownership) is forfeited, the Torah is given to him as a present." What the Talmud is saying in its typical use of metaphorical imagery is that if a person is solely occupied with his own advancement, his own self-righteousness, his own glory, then he won't have room for experiencing the other and for the acceptance of an objective, non-self-serving standard of justice and conduct. To withdraw one's ego is to make room for the rest of the world to enter.

The final attribute needed for receiving of the Torah is that of kinship and camaraderie between fellow men. If the Torah had been given to the 600,000 Jews at Sinai individually, they would not have been able to bear the burden, but because each Jew was concerned with the observance of his fellow, they succeeded in sustaining it together as a nation. In the later Talmudic era it is similarly taught (Sanhedrin 20), "the generation of Rabbi Yehuda ben Rabbi Ilai (demonstrated greatness) in that (due to poverty) six students would make use of a single tallit (prayer shawl) and study together." While it would be difficult for multiple people to fit under one tallit if each was seeking their own place, the improbable became possible when each student became equally as concerned with the welfare of his friend.

Strangely enough, all this abstract Torah talk might suddenly remind oneself of a different time in life, whether past or present, namely, life at MIT. What strikes many students about their time at MIT is the diehard work ethic, the incredible humility of the people, and their genuine desire to arrive at the truths of the universe whether by calculation or by distilling column, a sort of transcendence by proof. In the way of a personal anecdote, I remember standing outside a lecture hall in Stata (Bldg 32) waiting for the beginning of a public talk by a Nobel prize winner on the faculty and I remember only noticing a handful of students, a few faculty milling about and some visitors. "Where is the speaker?," I asked myself. And indeed, when the lecture began I realized that he was in fact one of the unassuming middle-aged men chatting outside, talking to students with a warm smile and with no pretense to be discerned. True humility is demonstrated when someone has reached the top, but can't stop looking up and continuing to realize how much farther there is to go.

The rabbinic scholars among the readers might ask at this point, *ma bein MIT le'Torah*, where is the point of convergence between MIT and Torah? The answer is trite but profound -- both are emblematic of humankind's search for truth and meaning in this world. While the rabbis described the Torah as the blueprint of Creation and Lemaitre (1894-1966, Catholic priest and physicist) described the Big Bang theory as the source of the Universe, both are simply two sides of the same cosmic coin. Luckily, those same traits that prepared us to receive the Torah many millennia ago

the three of us, along with several MIT/CME alumni, performed a rousing rendition of the MIT Engineers' Drinking Song, to the amusement and slight bewilderment of the Cambridge Jewish community.

The quantity and scale of some of these events, supported by Cambridge's larger Jewish community, make for quite a different atmosphere from MIT's smaller, close-knit community.

Studying abroad was truly an illuminating experience. We were able to spend a year in a completely different country with completely different customs and still find a home within JSoc. We made new friends, spent Shabbat in five cities around Europe, and returned to MIT with a broadened world view. We miss the friends we met in England, but we have already been able to host a few of our Cambridge friends at MIT Hillel and plan to host more in the upcoming semester, thus making the circle complete.

While there were many wonderful things about the JSoc at Cambridge, one thing we always missed about MIT was the quirky and welcoming atmosphere that permeates MIT Hillel events. It has been great to come home to Shabbat dinner conversations about gene discoveries and computer science jokes, and to hear our beloved Engineers' Drinking Song appended to the *birkat hamazon*/Grace after Meals once again.

Thank you for
supporting
MIT Hillel!

are still at our disposal for the challenges of today.

Todah Rabbah/Thanks again to our Donors!

...and please support MIT Hillel this year! Even with your IRA!

Thank you to all of our 2010 Annual Donors! Your leadership and support contributes to a depth of Jewish life, experiences and growth for the Jews and Jewish community of MIT. Stay tuned for a donor roll appearing in next month's issue.

[Add your name](#) to Hillel's 2011 donor roll.

Please take advantage of the recent tax bill that extends the opportunity to make tax-free rollover gifts from IRAs to charity/MIT Hillel. You have until January 31, 2011 to make your IRA contribution to MIT Hillel and have it treated as if made on December 31, 2010. To make a gift from an IRA, contact your IRA custodian as soon as possible. [Judy Sager, MIT Director of Gift Planning](#), can also assist you.

All about Birthright Israel!

Birthright Update

Birthright Israel is the free 10-day Israel experience of a lifetime. Any Jewish student 18 to 26 years old, who has not traveled on a peer-group Israel program is eligible.

In the words of Ilan Moyer '08 G, "The Birthright trip and the MIT extension program were both amazing! The extension was the perfect complement to the Birthright experience. While Birthright was a whirlwind tour of Israel, the extension provided greater depth and exposed me to the areas of Israel which touched closest on my day-to-day life of engineering. The pace of the extra days was more relaxed which was much appreciated. It was also great getting to spend additional time with some really great people: my classmates, Israeli MIT alumni, and scientists and entrepreneurs changing the face of Israel and the world."



(And look! Even William Barton Rogers attended the chocolate-making event hosted by the MIT Israel Alumni Association for our Birthright students!)

[Birthright Israel Registration](#) for summer trips opens February 15.

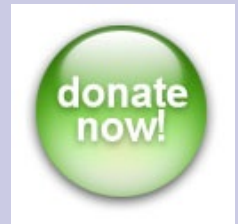
Contact birthright@mit.edu for more information.

On the Hillel Calendar



[Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT](#) continues in the spring semester. Save the dates:

Your generous support allows us to help keep Jewish life vibrant on the MIT campus!

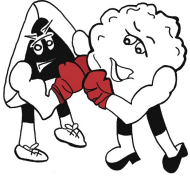




- Friday, February 18, Andrew Lo, Harris & Harris Group Professor, Sloan School of Management on "Financial Engineering"
- Friday, April 8, Lotte Bailyn, Professor, Sloan School of Management on "Balancing Work and Home"
- Friday, April 29, Philip Khoury, Associate Provost & Ford International Professor of History, "The Arab World: Where it's Been and Where it's Headed"

The Annual Latke Hamentaschen Debate!

Tuesday, March 1, 8:00, 26-100. An annual MIT tradition since 2003 and an occasional tradition before that! This year's teams of prominent scholars is shaping up to be among the best. Come join us as they each present an argument in favor of their respective food.



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