



In This Issue

MIT Mentshn of Mention  
 Director's Update  
 Torah from Tech  
 2015 Annual Fund  
 Planned Giving  
 On the Calendar  
 Mazal tov

**Greetings from MIT to our Alumni, Faculty, Staff, Parents and Friends!**

1. Sherri Green '18 prepares for the fall holidays, apple picking with fellow Birthright Alumni at a reunion event
2. Tally Portnoi '17 and Cady Lytle '18, alumnae from this past June's Birthright Israel trip, take an apple picking break to enjoy some doughnuts
3. Dalia Leibowitz '16 and Joe Schuman '16 help put the schach roofing on the MIT sukkah
4. Ariel Jacobs '17 practices knot tying as Hillel builds the MIT sukkah on Kresge Oval

**Mentshn of Mention**



Dalia Walzer '17  
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**Executive Director's Update**



I love the fall holidays! And, I love when those holidays come to a close. (I actually have a t-shirt that says, "[Rabbis \[heart\] Heshvan](#)". (Heshvan is the Jewish month after Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Simchat Torah during which there are no Jewish holidays.)

The Jewish High Holy Days are great. We see dozens and dozens of students hanging out, praying, eating, meditating, learning, reflecting, meeting each other, learning what Hillel has to offer socially, religiously, and experientially. On the first night of Rosh Hashana, we found ourselves "appropriating" additional tables and chairs from a room across the student center balcony because our setup for 80 was not enough for the more than 100 students who came for our annual New Year's Celebration and dinner. Ctrl-alt-del, our rebooting conversation on Rosh Hashana afternoon, a guided conversation on how to restart one's life on a positive note, drew many students, some who had been to one of our three flavors of services in the morning, many who were looking for an alternative way to acknowledge the season. For the first time, we also set up a booth along the Infinite Corridor during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and handed students "[resolutions](#)" they could fill out for themselves, using paperclips they could slide around the page.



Sukkot is a different feel from Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. It's all about physicality. Building the sukkah. Waving a lulav. Seasonally-appropriate apple picking. Eating outside (the weather held very nicely for about two days in Cambridge and then eating competed with rain and wind, so New England; definitely not Israel weather). We were able to have one intermediate day nice enough to hold our Hillel classes in the sukkah. I saw one freshman sitting there with his [Concourse](#) teacher, catching upon a lecture he missed on Plato and Socrates due to holiday observances. Our Graduate Student Sukkah soiree brought klezmer to the sukkah – the hut was simply hopping.

It's all about



And this week the holidays came to close... big satisfied sigh of a crazy, busy time period well-done!

Hi! My name is Dalia Walzer. I'm a junior, studying biology with a minor in Ancient and Medieval Studies. I hail from Tenafly, New Jersey, a small suburb of New York where bagels abound. I'm incredibly excited to dive into the new school year. This past September has been eventful enough; I've been happily occupied with classes (my personal favorite: a course on Old English), with extracurriculars (including the brand-new Microbiome Club) and with ventures into unfamiliar territory (see: Boston). In addition to that, I've started meeting all of the new freshmen on campus and in Hillel!

I was raised in a secular household and attended public school. However, my extended family exposed me to a wide range of Jewish practices and denominations; I have relatives who are secular, ultra-orthodox, and everywhere in between. Stepping into the lives of my cousins for a few days every time we spent a holiday together immensely broadened my perspective and understanding of Judaism. I became involved in MIT Hillel my freshman year, and was thrilled to find myself a part of a Jewish community that reflected the diversity of my family. Hillel is home to students across an

Staff and students are full of smiles and energy as we now begin "regularly scheduled" programming. Classes from Jewish perspectives on recent Supreme Court decisions to topics out of the Book of Genesis ("Should everyone reproduce?" is session one). A return to work on our year-long Strategic Planning Process. Israel-focused activities and Birthright engagement. The continuation of free Shabbat dinners. Beyond the holidays, it's going to be a busy Heshvan!

L'shana tova,  
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97  
[rabbif@mit.edu](mailto:rabbif@mit.edu)



## Torah from Tech



*Our Torah this month is taught by Ari Epstein PhD'95 (Course 12W) teaches in the Terrascope freshman learning community. Trained as a physical oceanographer, Ari is particularly interested in developing ways to integrate free-choice learning (the kind of learning promoted by museums, community-based organizations, media and other outlets) into the academic curriculum, integrating formal and informal educational strategies. He can be reached at [awe@mit.edu](mailto:awe@mit.edu).*

A friend's daughter is studying an ancient religion, one of those in which demigods find human/mortal women so attractive that they visit and couple with them, leaving offspring who grow up to be legendary heroes. Another friend's son is reading an old creation story

that explains the origins of various animals as the result of cosmic and almost comical misunderstanding; in this case, a god keeps creating different kinds of creatures—a surprising array of herd animals, birds and wild animals—in an effort to make one suitable for mating with a human. The obvious (to us) answer—humans ought to mate with other humans—is almost an afterthought or a desperate last resort for this creator.

What do these stories have in common, other than a certain focus on what we would now think of as unsuitable couplings? Well, as some of you will already have figured out, in both cases the ancient religion I'm referring to is Judaism—yes: the demigods are in Genesis 6:4, and the parade of unsuitable mating partners is in Genesis 2:19-20—and both stories are in this week's Torah portion.

Both of these examples illustrate something we might think of as the Sunday School Effect: we learn Bible stories as children, and so we tend to be taught narratives that are much less complex, confusing and/or troubling than the actual Tanakh itself. There are lots of other examples. For instance, Moses didn't heroically go to Pharaoh and demand the freedom of the Hebrews via the now-canonical phrase, "Let my people go." No, Moses was asking for permission to go out into the wilderness just for a couple of days, to make sacrifices and then come right back, almost as a modern Jew might ask his or her boss for a little time off around the chagim. And wandering for 40 years in the desert? Yes, in the desert for 40 years, but the vast majority of that time—all but roughly two years—was spent camped in the same spot. The sin of Sodom? It was poor (OK, extremely poor) hospitality, not any of the acts referred to in modern legal codes as sodomy. In a more lighthearted example, I'm ashamed to admit how old I was when I finally figured out that the contest Queen Esther won was a lot racier than the beauty pageant most of us reenacted in the Purim plays of our childhood.

And then of course there are more disturbing examples in the Tanakh/Bible, maybe not ones we don't know of, but certainly ones we would rather forget when we can. Entire cities destroyed at God's command, with even the tiny babies condemned to death. A great king, ancestor of the future Messiah, who sends an officer off to die in battle so that he can seduce that man's wife. And many more.

Now we are at the start of a new cycle of Torah reading, and I'd like to suggest that we undertake that reading in typical MIT fashion: with our eyes wide open and a willingness to take all that we see into account, even when that includes data or observations that don't fit into our cherished theories and pre-existing ideas. This will be really difficult (for me, anyway), and I don't know whether I'm up to it; sometimes it's a lot easier to let troubling or confusing passages just slide past, and to reconnect with the more comforting and familiar sections. But maybe it's better to really engage, to struggle with the text when it makes us unhappy, and to open ourselves to learning new and even more surprising parts of stories that we thought we already knew. It's certainly worth giving it a try.

A sweet, healthy and happy new year (religious and academic) to everyone in the MIT Hillel community.

**MIT Hillel's 2016 Annual Fund**  
**Add to Jewish life @ MIT!**

incredible spectrum of Jewish practice, as well as to students (like myself) who might not have a label for their nuanced relationship to Judaism.

Later in my freshman year, an upperclassman on the Student Board encouraged me to get involved in Hillel leadership. I served as the Freshman Engagement Co-Chair for one year, and I'm currently a Programming VP on the Student Board. Serving on the student board exposed me to an entirely new way of thinking about my Jewish community: how to give back.

I've also had to think more deeply about the role of Hillel and Hillel's future as a participant in the ongoing Hillel Strategic Planning Process. The members of the Strategic Planning Process team are analyzing how well Hillel currently meets students' needs, and set concrete goals for Hillel to work towards. I've had the privilege of working along Hillel staff, MIT faculty, and students in this process; we identify Hillel's weaknesses and strengths, and seek out students' concerns and praises. We deliberate on questions including: how can Hillel balance its role as a student group and as a national and religious organization? How can Hillel be made as welcoming and inclusive as possible? What do students look for in Hillel? It's been an incredibly valuable experience for me, both in thinking about organizational structure and in strengthening my connection to Hillel.

One of the most exciting opportunities Hillel gave me was participation in a ConneCTech fellowship. I traveled to Israel with six other MIT students and Marissa Freed, the wonderful Assistant Director of Hillel. There, we spent the week with a cohort of engineering students from the Technion in Haifa. We held fascinating, honest discussions on our Israeli and American identities—culturally, religiously, and politically. The program created an extremely thoughtful, honest space for each participant to explore their identity and beliefs. Later this month, the Technion counterparts will visit us in Boston; I cannot wait to reunite with them.

**Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!**

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



First, it was the caffeine. As I do every year, the day after Rosh Hashanah I started to wean myself off of my daily cup of coffee. Three quarters caf, then half-caf, then one-quarter caf, then decaf, and finally by the end no coffee at all, breaking fully from even the aroma and the warmth of the ritual. And wonderfully, no headache while I fasted. Success... until... the day after Yom Kippur, I relished my regular cup, only to find that I was WIDE AWAKE at 1:49 AM that night, finally falling asleep sometime around 2:30 AM. I hadn't thought to ramp back up gradually. To paraphrase an old anti-drug campaign: this is your brain, this is your brain on caffeine.

Then, it was my son's posting on Facebook, about how elite players (of which he is one) of his favorite board game actually play it differently, more mathematically. This is your brain, [this is your brain on Scrabble](#). (For those of you affiliated with Brain & Cog Sci, [try this version](#).)

Finally, it was a marketing email from Kripalu, encouraging me to return this year for another retreat. This is your brain, [this is your brain on yoga](#).

Of course, all of these messages in the span of a few days made me recall that selfless behavior is actually good for you too. This is your brain, [this is your brain on philanthropy](#). For all of the kindnesses you perform, from small deeds to big volunteer commitments, from your top giving priorities down to that box of Girl Scout cookies you buy from the neighbor kid – may you go from strength to strength. As we approach this new year with dreams and plans, may we succeed in all that we hope to accomplish, and help each other to get there. And as always, thank you for including MIT Hillel among your interests. It is an honor to join with you in maintaining and building a strong Jewish presence at MIT.

#### Two specific items:

Leading Jewish Minds is coming to Manhattan on Nov 13! If you will be in NYC on Friday, Nov 13, please join us for breakfast with Professor Neri Oxman. Hosted by Martin '51 and Madge Miller, this event promises to be enlightening. Invitations are in the mail. If you will be visiting New York or are a local who we inadvertently missed, please let me know to include you.

The High Holy Days were meaningful and very well-attended, and a specific need was identified for next year. MIT Hillel would love to update our Reform Machzor with a set of the newly-published latest version. A one-time gift of \$5,000 is needed to help us achieve state-of-the-art liturgy for the Reform service. If you identify with this movement and/or want to underwrite this endeavor, or have someone you'd like to honor or memorialize in this way, please contact me directly.

Thank you,  
Marla Choslovsky SM'88,  
MIT Hillel Director of Development  
[marla360@mit.edu](mailto:marla360@mit.edu)

**[Add your name](#) to MIT Hillel's 2016 Donor Roll!**

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#### **Tamid Initiative - Planned Giving @ MIT Hillel**

We invite alumni and friends who care deeply about Jewish life at MIT to consider joining the Institute's **Katharine Dexter McCormick (1904) Society (KDMS)** and be part of the **Tamid Initiative** by making a bequest to MIT, for the benefit of MIT Hillel. Your generosity will help MIT Hillel engage today's students, securing our Jewish future with confidence.

MIT and MIT Hillel are eager to help you meet your objectives. For more information, please contact MIT Hillel Director of Development, Marla Choslovsky, [marla360@mit.edu](mailto:marla360@mit.edu). To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly or [let us know in writing](#).

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#### **On the Calendar**

##### **Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT: Fall Line-up**

- **October 30, Tom Leighton** PhD '81, CEO Akamai
- **November 20, Alex Slocum** '82 SM '83 PhD '85, Neil and Jane Pappalardo Professor of Mechanical Engineering, MacVicar Faculty Fellow
- **December 11, Deborah Ancona**, Seley Distinguished Professor of Management, a Professor of Organization Studies, and the Director of the MIT Leadership Center at the MIT Sloan School of Management

##### **Leading Jewish Minds... On the Road in NYC**

- **November 13, Neri Oxman**, Sony Corporation Career Development Professor of Media Arts and Sciences; Associate Professor of Media Arts and Sciences



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**MIT Hillel wishes a mazal tov to:**

Board of Directors Treasurer [Bob Ferrara '67](#) on [being awarded MIT's Bronze Beaver Award](#), the highest honor the Alumni Association bestows upon any of its members.

Former Board of Directors member Jack Fischer '59 z"l for post-humously [being awarded MIT's Harold E. Lobdell '17 Distinguished Service Award](#), a recognition of alumni relations service that is of special depth over a sustained period.

*If you have life-cycle events to share with the MIT Hillel community, please [let us know](#).*

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