



MIT HILLEL FOUNDATION
NORMAN B. AND MURIEL LEVENTHAL CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE

MIT Hillel Update



Greetings to Alumni, Parents, and Friends in Cambridge and Beyond...

Pictured Above:

1. Ruth Abrams '14 (see Mentshn column, right) and members of the Muslim Student Association enjoy dinner together at an MSA-Hillel Dinner.
2. MIT and Technion ConneCTech students lounge and pose outside the Stata Center.
3. Hillel student volunteers at the Cambridge Soup Kitchen, originally founded by Benjamin Francis '12

Executive Director's Update



I love prompting students to ask questions. A good day is when we have lots of questions. So much better than just answers... especially when those questions are ones of core values and identity.

Who are you... as a Jew? As an MIT student? How do you as a Jewish MIT student interact with others? How does your Jewish identity influence what you do and how you think, about science, about career, about others? These hard – and important – questions weaved through many of Hillel's activities this month.

In partnership with the [New Center](#), MIT Hillel sponsored [an evening with Eran Egozy SB/SM'95](#), founder of Harmonix and creator of Rock Band. The conversation included questions about Eran's Israeli and Jewish identity and his thoughts on how those affect his career. An impromptu clarinet concert was added entertainment.

Hillel also dove into even deeper conversations: how do science and religion relate, combine, or influence each other? [Prof Hazel Sive](#) gave one answer at Family Weekend Shabbat dinner. Professor Sive explained her theology as a Jewish biologist, and talked about how she shares her beliefs with her students every spring in the opening minutes of 7.013, Introductory Biology. That conversation leads to interactions with students of all faiths during her office hours. After her talk, there was much debate and food (it was Shabbat dinner!) for thought.



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Mentshn of Mention



Ruth Abrams '14
rabrams@mit.edu

Hello, Y'all! My name is Ruth, and as you might have guessed, I am from Texas. I am currently a senior in course 9 (Brain and Cognitive Science). I plan on going to medical school next year.

During my time at MIT I've been on Hillel Board, been a part of Camp Kesem, a camp for children whose parents have cancer, participated in MedLinks and Associate Advising, have had a UROP, done Dancetroupe and Musical Theater Guild, and been my floor's Birthday Chair.

I came to MIT to have the chance to experience all of these things. I went to a small Jewish high school, and though there were lots of things to do, I knew MIT would offer me more opportunities. MIT is not an obvious choice for a pre-med. It's an engineering school with major grade deflation. But, I knew the people I would meet, from professors to the students

There is never one answer to questions of religious thinking, especially for Jews. As a speaker in our series of Tech Talks, [Prof Jeremy England](#) looked at science and the Bible with a different starting point. Professor England re-interprets the Joseph story in the Torah. What if we don't look at Joseph as a magical, divining dreamer, but as a proto-scientist who saw the future by understanding Nature, weather, agriculture, and astronomy better than his brothers and neighbors? Does that make us "more comfortable" with a story that otherwise seems anti-scientific? What lessons can we learn about reading the Bible? And just as important, what can we learn about/from our dreams, be they the imaginings of theoretical physics, or politics?

Hearing talks from others is one way to learn. Personal involvement, especially those that push comfortable boundaries are even better for growth. Over 80 students from Hillel and the Muslim Student Association crowded together to share a meal and dialogue with each other this month. This initial "get to know you" led to conversations from head coverings and ritual practice to the source of the best hummus. Next events include Torah/Koran text study and continued trust building -- so that our deepest questions for each other, Jew or Muslim, can be asked and answered honestly.



Interacting with "the other" also often occurs between Jews. Our ConneCTech program brings together Hillel students from the Technion and from MIT for peer-to-peer learning and social justice. A highlight is the delegations of students who visit each other's campuses and communities. We hosted 10 Technion students at the end of October, including tours of labs and companies from the Media Lab to [Akamai](#). As the week unfolded, Israelis who were not familiar with the American Jewish experience were amazed by the diversity of Jewish expression, and by an embrace of Jewish ritual by those they saw as otherwise "secular" Jews. A smile was brought to my face when one Technion student commented, "I didn't know what to make of a woman proudly, and unguardedly, wearing a kippah on the streets of Boston." On both sides, as we had hoped, there was a rethinking of one's own world and prior assumptions on what Judaism is, and can be.



Intimate Shabbat dinners are also a great place for deep conversation. Our [Peer Network Engagement Interns](#) are tasked with building relationships, connecting their peers to Jewish life in its broadest sense, and creating meaningful Jewish opportunities based on their peers' passions and interests.

A Next House gathering was one such opportunity created by Beth Cholst '16, one of our interns. Also pictured (right) are students creating Sukkot decorations for Next House back in September.



For the second month of the school year, activity was expansive, and personal and communal search, reflection, and commitment was even broader.

L'shalom,
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM'97
rabbif@mit.edu

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by David Held '05 SM'07, a Ph.D. student at Stanford doing research on machine learning, robotics, and computer vision. For the last three years he has been working on developing self-driving cars. He is also married to Irene Kaplow '10 (Course 18). He can be reached at davheld@alum.mit.edu.

For the next few weeks, the weekly Torah readings will be about the story of Jacob. After wrestling with an angel, Jacob's name is changed to "Israel," which later became the name of the Jewish state, and we are called "B'nei Yisrael" - children of Israel. What is it about Jacob that we have taken on his name for our nation and our people, and why, as scientists and engineers, is Jacob a

role model for us?

One primary characteristic of Jacob that we observe throughout his life is his focus on long-term planning. We first see this in Jacob's purchase of the birthright from Esav. One day when Jacob was a teenager, he sees that Esav is hungry, and thinks about how to take advantage of the situation. Rather than asking Esav for something that can help him immediately, he asks Esav for something that won't benefit him until many years in the future - the birthright of his father.

Next, when Jacob is working for his father-in-law Lavan, he negotiates his salary to be

professors to the students, were the type of people I wouldn't be able to meet anywhere else. And they have been! I have been so lucky to work and interact with everyone here, and I have developed both academically and personally through my relationships with them.

I did not really interact with the people at Hillel, though, until I decided to run for Hillel Board my sophomore year. I had been at Jewish school and camp my entire life, and I needed the chance to meet people who were not Jewish. I felt myself being drawn back, and so I semi-reluctantly ran for secretary and was elected. Boy am I glad I did! It has led to a great community of friends and people whom I can rely on and who have similar values. MIT Hillel has wonderful staff, and they have enabled me to spread my wings in many ways.

MIT Hillel has specifically led to two opportunities that have really helped me grow Jewishly and as a person. The first is ConneCTech, an exchange program where students from MIT visit the Technion and vice versa. Having a group of friends in Israel who are focused on science is really wonderful. In fact, I am hoping to return to Israel for a month or two in the spring and work in a lab at the Technion, mostly because of this experience. Going on ConneCTech made me want to experience what it is like to be a scientist in Israel, and of course, have the chance to continue to hang out with my friends!

The second opportunity came about after this Rosh Hashana. I went home for the holiday, and went with my family to our new synagogue. The services so deviated from what I was used to, I left feeling frustrated, and unfulfilled. That led me to ask myself, why do I care so much about the way I say the prayers if I don't know what they mean? So I set up a meeting with Rabbi Goldfeder, Hillel's new Senior Jewish Educator, and we created a *chevruta* [study partnership] to explore the meaning behind prayers. The *chevruta* is aptly titled "Punching Rabbis," after my frustration.

I am graduating in February, and I can't believe how fast my time at MIT has gone by. From classes, to friends, to exploring Boston, MIT has been an unforgettable experience. I am so grateful to have had so many wonderful experiences at

spotted, speckled, and brown goats and sheep. Such traits were genetically recessive, and were thus less common. However, through years of working with sheep, Jacob learns that if he mates heterozygous sheep, one quarter of the time they would produce speckled offspring. By using rods as aphrodisiacs, he was able to encourage heterozygous sheep to mate. Such a plan required years of controlled breeding and observation, but his persistence and long-term vision enabled Jacob to succeed, and in the end he benefited from his work.

Before Jacob meets his long-lost brother Esav, he encounters an angel. They stay up all night wrestling, and finally the angel requests, "Let me go." Jacob is now in a position where he can request anything from the angel, and what does he ask for? He says, "I will not let you go until you bless me." Jacob doesn't go for any short-term gains - all physical gifts would be only temporary - but he knows that a blessing will carry on to future generations as well. The name that he receives from the angel, Israel, is the name that we still use today. Jacob's choice is to invest in the future.

Jacob's favorite son Joseph also learns these techniques from his father, as Joseph instructs Pharaoh to save wheat for 7 years in preparation for the 7 years of famine that are ahead. Later when a severe famine spread throughout the Middle East, the only kingdom that was able to prosper during that time was Egypt.

Long-term planning has led to many of the great engineering advances in history. For example, Alan Turing's theoretical work on the idea of a "Turing Machine" in 1936 led John von Neumann (he's Jewish too!) in 1945 to describe the computer design consisting of a processing unit as well as a memory unit for storing data and program instructions. The ideas of Turing and von Neumann were soon put into practice, leading eventually to the small and ubiquitous computers that we have today.

The idea of an airplane started with Sir George Cayley, who, in 1799, defined the forces of lift and drag and presented the first design for a fixed-wing aircraft. Lord Kelvin famously predicted, in 1895, that "Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible." It took the Wright Brothers five years of design, testing, and many crashes before they created the first successful piloted powered flight, over 100 years after Sir George Cayley's initial discovery of the basic principles of aeronautics.

May we all have the wisdom to think about shaping the future, and may we use our skills in a way that will impact the world, even if that impact isn't fully realized until many years ahead.

MIT Hillel's 2014 Annual Fund Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

The generosity and annual support of alumni, parents, faculty, and friends contributes to a depth of Jewish life, experiences, and growth for MIT's Jewish community. Thank you to our [2013 Annual Fund donors!](#)

Do you like what you read and hear about Jewish life at MIT? Please help us create vibrant Jewish life at MIT, and lasting commitments to Judaism. [Add your name](#) to MIT Hillel's 2014 Donor Roll!

Tamid Initiative - Planned Giving @ MIT Hillel

Endowment and planned gifts truly sustain and build an organization. MIT Hillel is excited to help you create your personal Jewish legacy at MIT.

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.

To inform us that you plan such a gift, download and send us a [pledge form](#).

MIT and MIT Hillel are eager to help you meet your objectives. For more information, please contact Rabbi Fisher, rabbif@mit.edu.

On the Calendar

Fall Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT line-up:

- **November 8: Sanjay Sarma**, Fred Fort Flowers '41 & Daniel Fort Flowers '41 Professor of Mechanical Engineering: "Learning and Education at MIT and Beyond"
- **December 6: Peter Temin PhD '64**, Elisha Gray



wonderful experiences at Hillel, and am very honored to be this month's Mentsh of Mention!

Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!

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

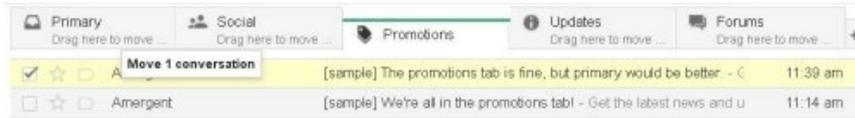


Leading Jewish Minds on the Road... in NYC!

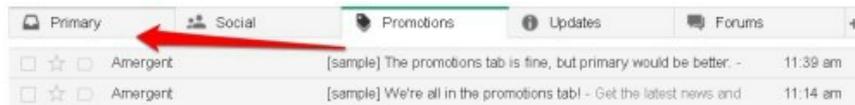
November 22: Bob Langer ScD '74, David H. Koch Institute Professor: "Biomaterials and Biotechnology: A Journey from Discovery to the Future"

Don't miss an e-newsletter!

If you are a Gmail user, you may have noticed their new "tabs" format. Almost all nonprofit emails are being automatically filed in the promotions tab. Don't miss out on an MIT Hillel update: move MIT Hillel emails to your primary tab for better visibility.



Simply drag an email to a new tab (your "Primary" tab).



Once the email has been placed there, a box pops up at the top of the screen and asks if you want future messages to go there too. The answer is, of course, "Yes".

See more at: <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/what-are-gmail-and-yahoo-doing/#more-62572>

Tel: 617.253.2982
Fax: 617.253.3260
mit.edu/hillel
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