



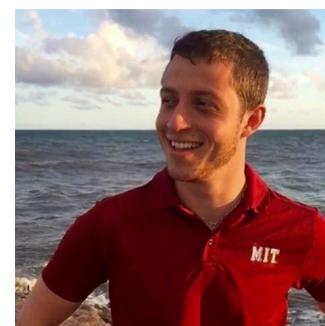
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Greetings from MIT to our Alumni, Faculty, Staff, Parents and Friends!

1. Dancing the night away at the first-ever Boston-wide Hillel Formal!
2. ConnecTech Israeli students learn about American Jewish pluralistic day school education at Boston's Gann Academy
3. Technion students exploring MIT's labs with their MIT Hillel peers.
4. Tyler Lerner '18 and Challah for Hunger president Laura Breiman '16 bake challah for good causes.

Mentshn of Mention



Roman Stolyarov
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My name is Roman and I am a graduate student in the Health Sciences and Technology program at MIT. I came here shortly after receiving my bachelor's degree from SMU in Dallas, TX, which is also where I was born. As a current and active member of MIT Hillel, I must admit that it was not always my priority to be part of a Jewish community. Growing up, most of my friends were not Jewish; I did not attend Hebrew school; my undergrad had a comparatively small number of Jewish students. And beyond my bar mitzvah, I was never observant: I didn't keep Shabbat, attend temple, or keep Kosher.

My secularity can best be explained as a product of my culture. In 1989, my parents emigrated to the U.S. from their home in the USSR in the hopes of building a more opportune life. Escaping anti-semitism in Russia, and dreaming of building a bright future for their children – which they have done with remarkable success – my parents chose an upbringing based on Jewish values that did not necessarily rely on Jewish "observance." And yet, as one of their greatest gifts, they have ingrained in me an intimate and powerful Jewish identity. This

Executive Director's Update



Picture ten Israelis, current Technion students, sitting in a circle on the floor at MIT Hillel, having experienced Boston, Cambridge and MIT for a week with their MIT Hillel peers. Following up on five-months of distance learning on the subject of peoplehood in cross-ocean pairs, they were reflecting upon their experiences since May and over the past week. During their time in Boston, they had visited Gann Academy, our local pluralistic day school. They had toured the MIT D-lab and Electric Vehicle Team, and learned how MIT students are seeking to change the world, living Jewish values through engineering paths. They had heard Tom Leighton PhD '81, founder of Akamai, share the story of his co-founder, Danny Lewin, a Technion alum who had attempted to thwart the terrorists on AA Flight 11 over Pennsylvania. They had attended Shabbat dinner at MIT; Shabbat services at a synagogue in Brookline. They had spoken with Jewish professionals at the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and in a local Hebrew School, in addition to having many unscripted and casual conversations with a range of MIT students: observant students, "just Jewish" students, cultural Jews, Israel advocates, Jewish leaders, Jewish followers. Here is what they said about seeing the American Jewish world: it exposed them to positive Jewish models of living. It pressed them to think about who they are as Jews and not just Israelis. It challenged them to think more creatively and expansively about Jewish identity. It created new connections and friendships between American and Israeli Jewish peers. Listening to them, I was energized and reinvigorated — and whispered a prayer, may their new dreams become reality.



Another picture: ten Hillel students, five months following an immersive experience in the opposite direction. They are Birthright alumni who also participated in our unique MIT Birthright Extension last June. They, too, are reflecting upon their learnings from 15 days in Israel, how interacting with Israeli peers, scientists, and entrepreneurs, how exploring the HiTech side of Israel has affected them. Their insights: trying to find an engineering job in Israel is not something that limits your opportunities, but expands them. That in addition to being the home of the Jewish people, Israel boasts many cutting-edge companies in my field that I am now searching to intern with. That after meeting and talking with so many different Israelis and realizing what amazing things are happening there and how diverse people are, I am trying to go on the David Project trip this winter which tries to create a meaningful dialogue between people about Israel. I give thanks and bless the newly created connections and expanded thinking we gave these students, too.

Certainly not every connection we make is quite as profound or deep. Some interactions we facilitate for our students are just plain fun. Last week over 300 Jewish students from across the area participated in a Hillel Jewish Formal at a local dance club. The atmosphere was happy, fun, and loud! They danced until the wee hours of the morning. And just last night, a different type of music resounded in Lobby 7 under the small dome. MIT's Jewish a cappella group, Techiya, paired with Princeton's Jewish a cappella group, Koleinu for a concert. I enjoyed being "claimed"



by both groups, and proudly enjoyed the sounds of young Jews from both my alma maters (Princeton '94, MIT SM '97) sharing their love of music.

As I write, we are preparing for tonight's further musical act. Sha'anah Streett, the lead singer of the Israeli hip-hop band Hadag Nahash, will be speaking to our students (and hopefully performing, too!) about the creative inspirations behind his music and how he uses music as a tool of social and cultural critique and change.

It is amazing to me that I can create and be a part of all these opportunities to inspire and influence our students to engage meaningfully however they connect to grow Jewishly. Thank you for your part in it all!

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

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Vivian Hecht PhD '15 (Course 20, Biological Engineering), who completed her thesis work recently enough that she is still happy to tell you about it. She is currently building microscopes and imaging fluorescent neurons at Q-State Biosciences, a startup in Cambridge, and can be reached at vivian.hecht@gmail.com.

In parashat Toldot, we learn about the second of the patriarchal families described in the book of Genesis. The parasha starts with Isaac and Rebecca praying for children—Rebecca, like many of our other matriarchs, is barren. God answers this prayer, and Rebecca conceives twins, who soon begin struggling inside her (Gen. 25:22). God subsequently informs her that her painful pregnancy is due to the two nations in her womb, the older of which will serve the younger (25:23). Rebecca gives birth to Esau and Jacob, who soon develop starkly contrasting personalities—Esau is a hunter, and Jacob is a scholar (25:27). Rebecca and Isaac quickly choose favorites: "Now Isaac loved Esau because game was in his mouth, and Rebecca loved Jacob" (25:28).

Interpreting this sentence, the sages trace the origin of Rebecca's love for Jacob to the time of her pregnancy, with her intuiting one twin pursuing wickedness and the other righteousness. Rashi, the eleventh century commentator, further interprets that Jacob would move about in Rebecca's womb when she passed houses of Torah study, whereas Esau would move about when she passed places of idol worship. At the end of the parsha, Rebecca unequivocally demonstrates her preference for Jacob through her role as a key accomplice in his tricking Isaac, earning her the praise of commentators who applaud her role in establishing Jacob as the patriarch of the Jewish people.

But what of Isaac? As Abraham's son, shouldn't he also love Jacob for his studious, scholarly, God-fearing ways? Why, then, does the Torah tell us explicitly that Isaac loves Esau, rather than Jacob, or both? The pasuk quoted earlier (25:28), as translated by the Jewish Publication Society, explains that Isaac loves Esau because "game was in his mouth". Other translations state more explicitly: "Esau's game was in Isaac's mouth". Rashi concludes that Esau bribes Isaac into loving him by feeding Isaac meat of the fields. Further commentators explain that this bribery causes Isaac to lose his sense of sight later in the parasha—the Torah says that bribery can blind the wise; by accepting Esau's bribes, Isaac becomes blind to Esau's faults, and ultimately vulnerable to Jacob's trickery.

However, what if we reconsider the game that Esau presents to Isaac not as a bribe, but rather as a gift? The twelfth century commentator Maimonides even suggests that Esau goes out of his way to find game that Isaac prefers. We can thus understand Isaac's love for Esau a little differently; Isaac loves Esau because Esau loves him back. We can see evidence of Esau's respect for Isaac at different sections of the parasha. When Rebecca prepares Jacob to fool Isaac, she dresses him in Esau's most preferred clothing (27:15). The sages explain that we can understand this to mean that Esau would wear his choicest outfit for administering to Isaac, a sign of profound respect. Moreover, even at the height of his anger at Jacob for stealing the birthright, Esau still considers his father. He swears to murder Jacob his brother due to his treachery, but only after the days of mourning for Isaac have

identity is manifested in many ways, large and small: I live my life by Jewish values; I actively seek and engage with Jewish stories; I love hearing Jewish songs; I visit Israel; when fellow Jews rejoice or feel pain, I feel it alongside them; and when the only Jewish state in the world is unfairly reprimanded, humiliated, or demonized, I feel reprimanded as well.

When I joined MIT Hillel, this passionate feeling came as a surprise to many of my peers. Many Jews I have met at MIT are observant. But apart from gathering with my family for Rosh Hashanah, Hannukah, and Yom Kippur, I can't say the same of myself. So at Shabbat dinners, I found that I could not even recite basic prayers; I was unfamiliar with most of kashrut or halachic (Jewish) law in general. And while I was confident in the identity I grew up with, these differences often made me feel like I was missing something, like perhaps my friends at Hillel felt something that I didn't. Sometimes it even made me feel a little less Jewish.

But in June 2015, I joined ConneCTech, an exchange program offered by MIT Hillel allowing Jewish MIT and Technion students to visit each other in their respective universities. With ConneCTech, I got to travel to Israel to experience the land in a way I hadn't before: through the eyes of Israelis. And during my time there, I discovered something new and amazing. As I began to spend time with the Technion students, I almost immediately experienced a connection as powerful as it was sudden. One moment, we barely knew each other; the next I was in a group of my close friends; and eventually I found myself living with several of them during my extended six-week stay in Israel.

My friends at the Technion are, for the most part, completely secular. They do not regularly attend synagogue or keep Shabbat, and if they eat kosher it is mainly because in Israel this is the norm. But they are unquestionably Jewish. And they express it: through their poignant humor; their relationships and the way they love; their dynamic conversation that so often turns to debate; their constant pursuit of knowledge; the stories they have to tell; their love for life; their connection to a five thousand year lineage; and most importantly, the passion with which they defend Israel, not only as a state, but as the manifestation of a Jewish hope of two thousand years. When I ask myself why I felt this connection, I realize it is because I feel all of the same things.

The Israelis embody the identity I have always felt but had trouble

passed (27:41). This restraint is perhaps more notable when we consider how impulsive Esau has proven himself to be on other occasions—after all, he did sell his birthright for a snack.

Even if we think that Isaac genuinely loved Esau, we cannot assume that Isaac could ignore Esau's shortcomings. Could Isaac, in good faith, trust him to carry on the traditions and laws set forth by grandfather, given Esau's poor judgement and self-control? The modern commentator Nechama Leibowitz points out that the birthright blessing, i.e. the one meant for Esau, was based on material wealth—"abundance, fatness, power and dominion over his brethren" (*Studies in Bereshit*, p.277). She then contrasts this with the blessing that Isaac gives to Jacob before he departs Isaac and Rebecca's camp at the end of the parasha, to escape Esau's wrath (28:3-4). It is only in this second blessing that Isaac bestows the gift of Abraham, perhaps the true birthright, to Jacob. In this way, we learn that Isaac understood that Jacob would be in fact the most qualified of his children to lead future generations of the Jewish people.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of the Commonwealth, speaks of Isaac and Esau's relationship in the following way: "Not all children follow the path of their parents. If it was Isaac's intent that Esau should do so, he failed. But there are some failures that are honourable. Loving your children, whatever they become, is one, for surely that is how G-d loves us."

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



574,700,000. That is the number of dollars that MIT raised last year! Drop the disproportionately large top three gifts, and that number is still a whopping \$404,000,000. No matter how you slice it, in terms of order of magnitude, the \$650,000 that the MIT Hillel community contributed to support Jewish life on campus accounts for one tenth of one percent of the pie. Zooming out, we look like a tiny piece of MIT. Zooming in, we see that our impact is much greater than might be predicted from one number. The strong leadership of Rabbi Fisher, the incredibly creative learning opportunities presented by our program staff, the time for one-on-one relationships with students, and mentoring the students in how to build their own community – these factors together result in both drawing students to Hillel and in turn making Hillel a vibrant part of campus life.

Watch for our letter in your mailbox among the onslaught of end-of-year appeals. We rely on all of our constituents – alumni, parents of current students, parents of past students, faculty and staff, and other friends – to do their part. If you are adding MIT Hillel to your priorities for the first time, a double thank you. No gift is too small... and as the president of my shul quipped recently, and no gift is too large either! Kidding aside, it is the collective power of our giving that enables us to offer all that we do, and to aspire to doing more and better each year.

ATTENTION NEW YORKERS! Last chance to sign up! Leading Jewish Minds is coming to Manhattan on Friday, November 13! Please join us for breakfast with Professor Neri Oxman. Hosted by Martin '51 and Madge Miller at The Harmonie Club, this event promises to be enlightening. If the 7:30 AM start time seems intimidating, please be advised that the program starts at 8:00 AM, with the first half hour for check-in, breakfast buffet, and commute buffer. This is our signature alumni program, and we are so pleased to be back in NYC. We don't get many opportunities to thank people outside of Boston, so please do plan on attending and let us know at hillelsvp@mit.edu.

As always, it is an honor to join with you in maintaining and building a strong Jewish presence at MIT.

Thank you,
Marla Choslovsky SM'88,
MIT Hillel Director of Development
marla360@mit.edu

Add your name to MIT Hillel's 2016 Donor Roll!

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. To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly or [let us know in writing](#).

fitting into my own society. In the U.S., I rarely find Jews who are both secular and assured of their identity – that is, Jews like me. And even though I am still sometimes given quizzical looks back at home, my experiences with ConneCTech showed me that there are other Jews, millions of them, who feel as I do. They are Jewish in a way that is both cultural and practical, and in a way that I find is much closer to my heart. Even though I'm still unobservant, I have never felt more comfortable and more confident with my own Jewish identity. I hope to surround myself with Jewish culture my entire life.

**Thank you for
supporting
MIT Hillel!**

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



On the Calendar

Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT: Fall Line-up

- **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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