Happy Chanukah from MIT Hillel
to our Alumni, Faculty, Staff, Parents and Friends!

1) Rabbi Michelle Fisher and MIT seniors gather around the test tube menorah for Chanukah.

2) Pi Kappa Tau brothers participating in the annual doughnut eating contest at the Chanukah celebration.

3) Seniors Rogers Epstein, Nathaniel Knopf, Michal Shlapentokh-Rothman, and Kimmy Katz lighting the test tube menorah.

MIT Hillel Update

Happy Chanukah! The song Maoz Tzur says “in every age a hero or sage comes to our aid”. This is one of the many things we celebrate at this time of year. And, one of the wonderful things aboutChanukah is “in every age” we also add meaning to what Chanukah is all about. In various ages, Jews have interpreted our Chanukah holiday as celebrating the Maccabees’ military victory over the Hasmonean Greeks; the rededication of the Temple after it was desecrated; the miracle of oil that lasted 8 days; the embrace of winter celebrations at the darkest time of the year; the hidden might of God acting through human agency; the call for the inner strength and power to topple tyrants and fight evil; the hand of God acting directly in history; the fight against assimilation and for our own identities, values, and particularism; and so much more. With respect to meaning, this is one of our most flexible holidays. Perhaps because of this, our students find so many ways to add meaning to their celebrations.

Beyond our annual Test Tube Menorah lighting (a very MIT way of marking Chanukah), undergraduate students have signed up to lead candlelightings in eleven living groups around campus, with parties, latkes, and doughnuts paid for by Hillel. Our graduate students are triply celebrating: at a Grad Hillel party, at a Sloan House Menorah lighting party, and with local host families through the Bnei B’not T’filah (members of the house) program we sponsor for Israeli students. I have seen a new trend of ugly Chanukah sweaters and jackets being worn with Jewish pride; while sitting on the couch watching football games.

As we all continue to light our Chanukah lights, may the depth of meaning of this holiday encourage us to recognize the miracles and blessings of our lives, and to find the inner and God-supported strength to change history for the better.

Thank you to all of you who are our Hillel heroes (and sages), supporting our work and allowing us to engage and inspire our students as Jewish life thrives at MIT.

Mentshn of Mention

Grant Gregus ’20
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My name is Grant Gregus, and I’m a junior studying physics. I’m from Naperville, Illinois in the western suburbs of Chicago. Although Chicago does have quite a large Jewish community, most are concentrated to the north of the city. My high school of 4,000 students had maybe five Jews in total. I grew up attending Sunday school at the synagogue until I had my bar mitzvah, and from then on Judaism faded into the background of my life. My family was not observant at home so most of my knowledge of Judaism and Jewish identity came from going to the synagogue once a week.

Here at MIT, a lot of my time is taken up trying to figure out the answers to physics problem sets and wondering why I chose this major. I do enjoy it though, and the professors are not only brilliant but willing to spend time answering your questions. There is a sense of camaraderie in the department as we spend hours in the physics common room working on homework together. Outside of class, you’re most likely to find me watching sports. I’m a huge Chicago sports fan, and since my mom’s family is from Oklahoma, I root for the Oklahoma Sooners in college football. My favorite things to do are going to sporting events, road trips, and skiing.
Happy Chanukah,
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM ’97
Executive Director, MIT Hillel
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Torah from Tech

Our Torah this month is taught by Gail Kendell. With a BA in Economics from Simmons College and a Master of City Planning from MIT (1979) Gail worked in affordable housing and urban economic development. She then switched to Jewish community work, first as a synagogue Executive Director and most recently as CFO of Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York. Just recently retired, she’s a very busy but relaxed volunteer.

This week’s parsha, Miketz, is part 2 of the 4-week story of Joseph, filled with suspense and emotion.

The stage was set last week in Vayeshev. We learned that Joseph was Jacob’s favorite son, who tattled on his brothers and was obnoxious to them. The brothers threw Joseph into a pit and sold him to traveling Ishmaelites, who brought him to Egypt. The brothers led their father Jacob to believe that Joseph was dead. Joseph ended up in jail in Egypt, where he correctly interpreted the dream of Pharaoh’s imprisoned cup-bearer, telling him his dream meant that Pharaoh would pardon him and restore him to his cup-bearer job.

This week, in Miketz, two years after the cup-bearer regains his job with Pharaoh, he remembers Joseph. Pharaoh is troubled by two dreams, one with seven thin cows eating seven fat cows and one with seven thin ears of corn swelling up seven fat ears of corn. Joseph is brought from jail to interpret the dreams and tells Pharaoh that God is planning seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. He suggests that Pharaoh seek a wise man to oversee the land and stockpile food during the seven good years so that food is available during the seven bad years. The famine is world-wide and since Egypt is the only place that planned for it, it’s the only place that has food. Anyone who needs food, has to come to Egypt to buy it, which makes Pharaoh even richer, and Joseph more powerful.

Rather than allow his family to starve, Jacob sends Joseph’s brothers to Egypt to procure rations, but keeps home Benjamin, afraid that disaster will befall Benjamin as it did Joseph. In Egypt, the brothers don’t recognize Joseph, but he recognizes them and acts like a stranger to them. He asks about their family and they tell him that they were twelve brothers, that the youngest is with their father, and that one brother is “no more”.

Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies and detains one brother and sends the rest home with food, demanding that they return with their youngest brother (Benjamin). They don’t return to Egypt until they’ve eaten all of the food from the first trip and once again are starving. They know that they’ll have to bring Benjamin with them when they go back. They convince Jacob and take Benjamin with them back to Egypt. As they are leaving Egypt to return home, Joseph has his steward plant a silver goblet in Benjamin’s bag. He then sends his guards after the brothers, finds the silver goblet in Benjamin’s bag and accuses him of theft. The parsha ends with a cliffhanger. Joseph says that he’s keeping Benjamin as a slave and the other brothers must go back to their father.

At this point, most of us are angry with Joseph. After what his brothers did to him, and the heart-break that they let their father suffer in thinking that Joseph was dead, we’re not that upset by the way he treats his brothers. However, we are upset by the way he’s treating his father. Joseph is a father himself. He must know that his own father will be terrified if Benjamin doesn’t return home.

It’s not until next week’s parsha, that we see that Joseph reveals his love for his brothers despite what they did to him, that he won’t really keep Benjamin enslaved, and that he wants his father and their entire families to come Egypt where he will provide for them.

The interactions of the brothers in Joseph’s story strikes a familiar note with any parent of more than one child. Even when they’re finally grown-up, that sibling rivalry can rear its head. My daughter (age 31) recently accused my youngest son (age 24) of ruining her childhood! The next day they were texting each other apologies. Fortunately, they reconciled more quickly than Joseph and his brothers.

MIT Hillel’s 2019 Annual Fund
Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

To Our Current and Future Supporters:

The main metric for most development professionals is dollars raised annually. It’s a SMART goal – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound. However, I hold myself to a higher standard: number of thank-you notes written. If you send a gift, I will thank you. If you take time to meet with me and/or Rabbi Fisher, I will thank you. If you help us connect to other alumni, I will thank you. If you alert me to an error I’ve made, I will thank you. If you read to the bottom of my column, I will thank you.

As expressed previously in this column, that moment when pen hits paper is my time to focus on an individual, whether I know you personally or only through your generosity. I write a personal note on every single letter I sign. If your gift comes in December (end of tax year) or June (end of MIT’s academic and fiscal year), I may be writing 300 notes, and there may be a significant lag until you receive your note.

And occasionally, like on the day I am writing this column, I receive a thank you note for my thank you note! That’s when I know I’m serving Hillel well. Despite the temptation, I draw the line at thanking you for the thank you for the thank you!

When I was accepted to MIT, I visited the campus during CPW. It was there that I began to slowly bring back some elements of Judaism into my life. I met the guys at AEPH that weekend and eventually became a brother in my freshman year. Once I moved into the fraternity house, I got to learn for the first time what it meant to be an observant Jew from some of the brothers who were more religious, and my curiosity only increased from there. In my sophomore year, I went to Israel on Birthright which was an amazing experience, since I had never been there before. I was fascinated by what I saw in Jerusalem and the Western Wall.

Besides Birthright, another memorable experience I had at MIT was participating in Jewish Learning Fellowship with Rabbi Goldfeder. It’s a study group that meets once a week and discusses romantic relationships in the context of Judaism. The program was interesting because we used Talmudic sources to answer broad questions about relationships that people have today. Most of the sources we used I had never heard of, so it expanded my understanding of the scope of Judaism and the process of applying Jewish texts to answer our specific questions. Very early I began to see that Judaism is not simply about belief, but about an expansive set of guidelines and principles that help people to lead their lives and make decisions.

I would say it’s almost entirely because of the Hillel community at MIT that I plan to have Judaism play a bigger role in my life than it did for my parents.

From the Archives!

MIT Hillel has a rich history of programs and events told through student-made flyers, pamphlets, and great pictures!

The collection of MIT Hillel “artifacts” are now held in the Institute Archive and Special Collections for proper care and preservation.

In honor of the festival of lights, we found a flyer for Chanukah dating back over six decades! MIT Hillel hosted a Chanukah presentation on the fourth day, on December 2, 1956.

Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!
As we turn toward 2019, I’m already seeking people who will provide matching gifts on our Giving Day page next March. This platform is very effective in motivating more recent alumni to “give back”, sometimes for the first time. Often people in their reunion years, individually or as a group, are interested in making a one-time gift to help connect the generations. If this resonates with you, please let me know even if this is not your reunion year. Large matches have the biggest impact, and we have also had success by creatively combining a series of smaller matches.

Happy Chanukah. May the lights remind you of all you have to be thankful for.

THANK YOU.

Marla Choslovsky SM ’88
MIT Hillel Director of Development
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Add your name to MIT Hillel’s 2019 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. To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly.

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On the Calendar

**On Campus:** Our Leading Jewish Minds seminar continues for a tenth year!

- Friday, December 14 - Joseph F. Coughlin, founder and Director of the AgeLab at MIT.

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Mazal Tov

Mazal tov to MIT Hillel alumna Nifer Fasman ’13 on her engagement to Aaron Goldman on May 1!

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Community News

MIT Hillel mourns the passing of Muriel Leventhal, widow of the founder of the MIT Hillel Foundation, Norman Leventhal ’38. The MIT Hillel Center and Foundation are named in their honor and they were deep supporters of our program. Much comfort to the entire Leventhal family, including Muriel’s son Alan, a member of the MIT Corporation, and Emily MBA ’06.

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