



MIT Hillel Update



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

Pictured above, left to right:

1. **Tzedek Initiative:** Hillel Students Elena Glassman (L) and Hannah Durschlag volunteer at the JF&CS Family Table, Greater Boston's largest kosher food pantry.
2. **Israel Advocacy:** Students meet Rabbi Daniel Gordis at a local AIPAC evening.
3. **Israeli Bar Night:** Now an every-semester tradition: graduate students network over Israeli food and beer at the Muddy Charles Pub.

Executive Director's Update



What is the checklist for the beginning of a new MIT semester?

- Registration for classes... **check.**
- Receiving your first p-set (problem set) within minutes of the first class beginning... **check.**
- Pulling an all-nighter by Thursday of week one... **check.**
- Finding social or educational activities to participate in with Hillel... **check!**

As January's Independent Activities Period ended, Hillel jumped right into the spring semester. Following up on the whimsical, culinary connections to Israel of the Annual Hummus Experience, a group of students took a more serious tack, attending a local AIPAC event featuring [Rabbi Daniel Gordis](#) of Israel's Shalem Center, shortly after the Middle East uprisings began. The MIT attendees, a mix of Birthright alumni and student advocates involved in MIT Students for Israel, are planning more advocacy events throughout the term. Many thanks to Steve '58, PhD '62 and Carol Tannenbaum for underwriting MIT Hillel's Israel Advocacy opportunities.

With grad life at least as intense as the undergrad experience, Hillel's



Graduate Student community joined forces with the Israeli Student Association to continue the tradition of Israeli Bar Night at the Muddy Charles Pub in Walker Memorial. A second Grad Hillel social event this semester, Grads on Ice attracted post-college 20-somethings from all the Boston campuses. This Friday is the first Grad Hillel Shabbat dinner of the term.

20 Adar I 5771

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Menschen of Mention



Sara Dahan '12
Brain & Cognitive Sciences Los Angeles, CA

I remember walking along the Charles River in Cambridge when I was a young child, dreaming of one day attending MIT. As my education progressed, math and science instilled me with strong senses of passion and fascination, which led me to optimistically apply to the Institute in my senior year of high school. However, it wasn't until after I was admitted (woohoo!) and attended MIT's Campus Preview Weekend (CPW) that I truly began to understand what MIT had to offer.

Without a doubt, I find the student body to be the most exciting thing about MIT. We are so diverse in terms of nationality, culture, religion and beliefs, but we also share

In the spirit of our namesake, the Sage Hillel, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I," *tzedek* initiatives also flavored the beginning of the term. Student volunteers at [Jewish Family & Children's Service's](#) food pantry packed food packages and delivered them to needy households around Boston. Several students made a Jewish connection to Valentine's Day with a sale of home-baked, heart-shaped chocolate chip cookies, raising money for [Save a Child's Heart](#), an Israeli-based humanitarian project providing life-saving heart surgeries and follow-up care for children around the world. This last combined both *tzedek* and Israel advocacy work, presenting the beauty of Israel and her external focus to improve the world. If you are in Boston on March 8, join Hillel on our on-going *tzedek* mission as [Rabbi Mira Regev](#), a Reform rabbi from Tel Aviv, speaks on the manifestation of the connection between Judaism and social justice in Israeli secular society.



Now, back to the checklist:

- Learning and growing with Hillel... **check!**
- Recovering from all these activities at Hillel's relaxing and fun weekly \$4 Shabbat dinners... **check!**
- Anticipating additional fun and more to come... **check and check!**

Can you believe we're less than four weeks into the semester?

L'shalom,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Reuven Lerner '92 (Course IV-3), a consultant specializing in open-source Web technologies, a PhD candidate in learning sciences at Northwestern University, and a columnist for Linux Journal magazine. He made aliyah in 1995, and moved in 1999 to Modi'in, where he lives with his wife and three children. Reuven is an active member of the independent,

egalitarian "Achva" minyan. He can be reached at reuven@alum.mit.edu.

I still remember packing for my first trip to Israel, during the summer of 1986. The USY Pilgrimage packing list explicitly said, "Don't bring raincoats and umbrellas, since it doesn't rain in Israel during the summer." I said to my parents, "That's ridiculous -- how can they possibly know that it won't rain during the summer?" (They smirked, and instructed me to remove the umbrella from my suitcase.) Of course, anyone who has been in Israel knows that the packing list was telling the truth, and that rain doesn't fall during the summer.

What defines the "summer," or "dry season," in Israel? The answer is quite easy to uncover, if you're familiar with the Jewish calendar: On Shmini Azeret at the end of the fall holiday of Sukkot, we say *Geshem*, the special prayer for rain. And indeed, since making aliyah in 1995, it has never ceased to amaze me that the first autumn rain comes on or immediately after Sukkot, making clear the connection between land and liturgy.

As I write this, we are currently in the middle of the rainy season. Our liturgy therefore includes the phrases "who makes the wind blow and the rain fall" and "give us dew and rain."

This year in particular, the need for rain is quite apparent. Even if you don't see the stark reduction in size of the Kineret (Sea of Galilee), and even if you don't see the billboards and television advertisements reminding you that Israel's only enjoyed 60 percent of the usual, average rainfall, this winter has been warmer and drier than any than any we've had in a while.

There are a few ways in which we can think about the current dry spell. One is to remember the Sh'ma, which explicitly reminds us that we will receive the rain in appropriate quantities: "and I will provide precipitation for your land, the late rain and the early rain," but only if we behave well. The problem with this approach, of course, is that it raises the question of just what we might have done wrong, to deserve this dry weather. Should we be observing Shabbat? Treating others appropriately? Caring better for the environment and our natural resources? All of the above? It's hard to know, and I'm generally

a sense of eagerness to broaden our horizons and learn from each other. The same can be said about the Jewish community here - we come from different areas of the world and we each possess a unique outlook on Jewish traditions and practices. However, through Hillel and other Jewish-related organizations, we unite in appreciation for our heritage (and a good math joke, of course).

I was first introduced to Hillel during the infamous CPW when I met the staff, current MIT students and other prefrash. Those bonds strengthened when I returned to campus for Orientation a few months later and started attending Hillel events (Shabbat dinner, High Holiday services, Sukkah decorating). But that was just the beginnings of my involvement in Jewish activities at MIT.

I have held numerous leadership positions in MIT's chapter of Alpha Epsilon Phi (a nationally Jewish sorority). In addition, I spent last summer doing research at Bar-Ilan University in Israel through the MIT International Science and Technology Initiative, MISTI: MIT-Israel. Recently I have been working with Hillel staff to implement programming ideas for the Reform community, and I am also working on an endeavor to reach out to Jewish students involved in Greek life.

Overall, being involved in Jewish student life at MIT has been an extremely fulfilling experience. What I think makes MIT unique is that each student has the opportunity to not only be a part of Jewish organizations, but also to pitch their own ideas and subsequently watch the community thrive. After reflecting on how far we have come since I first arrived here, I personally cannot wait to use my last few semesters at the Institute to continue to shape Jewish life.

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supporting
MIT Hillel!**

uncomfortable with people who claim to have a definite answer to such questions.

That said, a lack of water is a problem for the community, and the response to this problem must thus come from the community. According to *Mishna Ta'anit* ("Tractate Fast Day"), an extended draught leads to three public fast days, followed by another three and a further seven if the draught continues. If the rain still hasn't come, then the community responds by reducing its commercial dealings, weddings, and the like — the social interactions that define a community. In some ways, it's as if the people are saying, "We'll show you, God, what it'll look like if our community falls apart! And if you don't give us some rain soon, then it will fall apart."

Rabbi Max Kadushin wrote of "normal mysticism," the holiness associated with the everyday goings-on in the world that we often take for granted. I often think of this in the context of weather, which is so necessary for life on our planet, but whose miraculous nature is easy to forget. As the rainy season in Israel draws to a close over the coming two months, I hope that we will enjoy a resurgence of wet weather, allowing our plants, animals, and communities to function as they should.

Overheard at Hillel...

When making sufganiyot for Chanukah with the Reform chavurah, we had two teams of students frying the dough. One, several female undergraduates was producing beautiful, golden browned sufganiyot. The other, several graduate students in biology, was producing burned sufganiyot. Someone said to them, "Why don't you take them out earlier? Then they won't burn." The graduate students looked at her, puzzled, watch timer and thermometer in hand. "But we're following the recipe exactly." Then they paused. "Wait, do you mean it's not calibrated correctly?"



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.

[Add your name](#) to Hillel's 2011 donor roll, and watch for it to appear in a future issue.

Please consider taking advantage of the recent tax bill that extends through 2011 the opportunity to make tax-free rollover gifts from IRAs to charity/MIT Hillel. 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.

MIT Birthright Extension Update

A public thanks to our co-sponsor: MISTI MIT-Israel

A highlight of Hillel's January e-newsletter was an update on Hillel's Birthright trip and the first-ever MIT Birthright Extension.

As our Birthright Extension participants work on their follow-up *tzedeck*/social justice activities, their impact on campus and the community extends the value and excitement of their trip.



Many thanks to [MISTI: MIT-Israel](#) (the [MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives](#)) for co-sponsoring this incredible opportunity. We especially appreciate the partnership of [David Dolev](#), MISTI-Israel coordinator.

What is MISTI-Israel? The MISTI-Israel Program connects MIT students and faculty with research and innovation in Israel. It facilitates dynamic connections between the thinkers and ideamakers of the MIT community and their counterparts in Israel. Drawing from an extraordinary network of renowned research institutes, universities, and corporations, the MISTI-Israel Program connects Jewish and non-Jewish, undergraduate and graduate MIT students with the amazing innovation in Israel. For a summer students can:

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



- conduct research at labs in top Israeli universities.
- work in cutting-edge high-tech companies.
- enjoy and learn from a unique multicultural experience.

Hillel is thrilled to have co-sponsored the MIT Birthright Extension with MISTI-Israel.

On the Hillel Calendar

Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT

Save the dates (Fridays, noon-1:30):

- **April 8**, Lotte Bailyn, Professor, Sloan School of Management on "Balancing Work and Home"
- **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 representing **Team Latke:** [Allan Adams](#) (Course 8), [Sanjay Sarma](#) (Course 2, Director MIT/SUTD Collaboration), [Bob Weinberg](#) (Course 7).

And for **Team Hamentaschen:** [Shaoul Ezekiel](#) (Course 16), Steve Wasserman (Course 20), and [Fatih Yanik](#). (Course 6).

Come join us as they each present an argument in favor of their respective Jewish delicacy.

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