



MIT Hillel Update



Independent Activities Period Excitement

Above:

1. (Left to Right): Andres Wallentin '16, Jody Fu '15, and Zev Bimstein '15 display their winning "Chipotle" Hummus from the 6th Annual MIT Hummus Experience. Andres is wearing our "Just Give Chickpeas a Chance" t-shirt.
2. Caroline Morganti '16 and Noam Buckman '16 (hidden) advertise the Latke Hamentaschen Debate.
3. Graduates of Hebrew 101 celebrate their language prowess. Blackboard reads: "*Achshav anachnu midabrim ivrit/Now we can speak Hebrew!*" Inbar Yamin '15 and Dalia Leibowitz '16 (center) were their fearless teachers.

Executive Director's Update



Happy Chanukah! Happy Purim! Yes, it was just the annual Latke-Hamentaschen Debate at MIT Hillel! Hilarity ruled as our faculty teams entertained a packed Room 10-250 crowd last night.

The Debate was moderated by Dean of Admissions Stu Schmill '86. Team Latke was represented by Scott Aaronson (Course 6), Jeffrey Grossman (Course 3) [pictured, with a burning latke experiment], and Steven Dubowsky (Courses 2, 16). Team Hamentaschen was championed by Lorna Gibson (Course 3), Arthur Mattuck (Course 18), and Heather Paxson (Course 21A). Arguments ranged from the global energy consequences of hamentaschen baking to failed attempts to accomplish 2D close packing of latkes. As Dean Schmill concluded, "We have now learned more about latkes and hamentaschen than I ever thought possible!" Missed the fun? [Videos](#) soon to be released...



Of course, the debate ended in a tie... requiring Hillel to begin planning a rematch for next spring.

The Debate capped off a month of entertainment and fun over the January Independent Activities Period. Our winter Birthright trip (see Jeffrey Sperling's account in the ["Mentshn of Mention"](#) column to the right) inspired, activated, committed, and transformed our MIT and Boston participants.

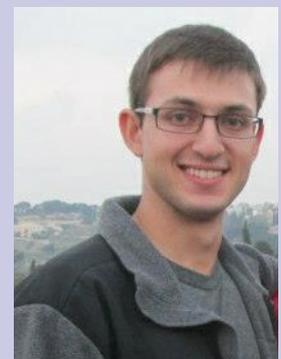


The [6th Annual Hummus Experience](#), co-sponsored with [MISTI MIT-Israel](#), brought students together to learn to make hummus; create their own hummus flavors; and to participate in the now famous "taste

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Mentshn of Mention



Jeffrey Sperling '15
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Hi, my name is Jeffrey Sperling. I am a sophomore majoring in Physics, with minors in Economics and Math, originally from Los Angeles, CA.

I grew up very passionate about math and science, so my decision to come to MIT was never difficult. More than that, I was attracted to the students, to the faculty, and to the immense resources provided by the school. Since I have been here, I have been involved with a dizzying array of extracurricular pursuits: varsity tennis, business clubs, nonprofit service initiatives, Institute governance, Presidential Search, research in physics and economics, classical music, and the Arts Scholars program.

More important than anything else I do, I have found a great community within Hillel. In fact, most of my close friends are Jewish and closely involved with the organization. By chance, all five of us in our (unusual) freshman advising group were Jewish, and many times, we'd all go to Shabbat

...nevers, and to participate in the now famous "taste off". Over 450 ballots were cast for this year's eight flavor options: Chipotle, Hummus Italiano, Power of Ten (with ten secret ingredients), Spicy Tomato, BBQ Rooster, Peanut Butter, Chocolate Chip Dessert Hummus, and Guacamole. The winning flavor -- Chipotle, designed by two Mexican Jewish students (pictured above in the headline) -- was only one vote ahead of the runner-up. Clearly we have good chefs on campus!



Gifts and samples from national and local companies (from hummus bread to hummus ice cream to original hummus brands) rounded off lunch-time. "Why buy lunch when you can eat hummus?"

Other classes and discussions provided some more serious education over the month. An openly gay Jew presented his personal story at "Being Out and Being Jewish," an event co-sponsored with the [MIT Rainbow Lounge](#). "The Adam Doesn't Fall Far from the Tree" brought together a diversity of students and chaplains who explored the Garden of Eden story as a piece of literature, and as a theological text interpreted variously by different religions. Students related that they were not only stimulated by the interfaith small group discussions in which they closely read and asked questions of the text, but were enthralled hearing their chaplains share and disagree on how they understood the story.

Leadership training also garnered attention, with undergraduate and graduate student board retreats. The trainings included conversations on pluralism, creating a welcoming environment, community organizing, and program creation. Mazal tov to our new student undergraduate Board: President Keren Greenbaum '14, VPs Noam Buckman '16, Adam Eagle '16, Inbar Yamin '15, and Treasurer Caroline Morganti '16.



With MIT Hillel going ["On the Road" over the next month](#) to South Florida, Los Angeles, and San Francisco with our successful Leading Jewish Minds program, I hope to meet many of you on our travels!

L'shalom,
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Hannah Durschlag SM '12 (Course 4 - Architecture). She is graduate of Northwestern University and MIT, and works as a civil engineer in Boston. She can be reached at h.durschlag@gmail.com.

"Two men only," the sign read. Fortunately, my coworkers and I would follow that rule to the letter. The sign was pasted on a small metal basket hanging over the side of a forty-story building. The "two men" - my coworkers - were waiting for me to jump in. I am a woman and, apparently, I don't count. As a civil engineer, my current project is examining the exterior of a building for failure. It is a very unusual job for a woman. I am free to do my work, and I am grateful for that. However, there are clearly boundaries and insensitivities, similar to this week's Torah portion, Mishpatim (Exodus 21:1-24:18).

This portion has several very famous *mitzvot*/commandments. "An eye for an eye," "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt," and "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk." However, it begins with an incredibly detailed account of the laws governing slavery. This made me very uncomfortable, and I found many similar reactions while researching this article. Why didn't we abolish slavery completely? If God recently freed the Jews from Egypt, how could slavery be tolerated in *Eretz Yisrael*/the land of Israel? Looking back at Martin Luther King Day a few weeks ago, and looking forward to Pesach in just a few weeks, how can we read the *mitzvot* of slavery?

Fortunately, I found several palatable explanations. The first maintains that the text must be challenged in order to understand it. It offers that the Hebrew text could be read, "It is good for him [the slave] to be with you." However, it could also be read, "It is as good for him as it is for you." Therefore, the rabbis of the Talmud conclude: "When you buy a Hebrew slave, it is like buying yourself

dinner together. And I have also been involved with some of the social activities for Hillel, such as Jews on Ice, comedy club, speed dating, the Latke-Hamantaschen debate, and study breaks.

I have always grown up with the strong cultural notion that I am Jewish. Especially growing up in Los Angeles, the fourth most Jewish city in the world by population, I felt secure in this identity. But, for various reasons, my religious involvement has waned over time: while my household held separate kosher refrigerators and dishwaters for meat and dairy when I was younger, now I get away with showing up to Shabbat a few times a month, and I have forgotten practically all of the Hebrew I used to know.

In an attempt to reverse this trend, and in what may very well have been the best decision of my life, I decided to go on Birthright this winter. For those who do not know, Taglit-Birthright Israel is a (free) 10-day trip to Israel for young Jewish adults aged 18-26. If you would like to learn more, I would recommend talking to Hillel Israel staffer Shoshana Gibbor (birthright@mit.edu). For me, it was a trip of a lifetime, and the most significant experience I have had in the last year. The watershed moment came on Day 2 of the trip...

A little bit of context: Because of my background in debate and math/science, I have learned to question everything I learn, including Judaism. So the trip to Israel was almost a fact-finding mission. Do I really believe in the Torah, that God exists, that Moses led the Jews out of Egypt, and that Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac? But as the Birthright Director of Education Zohar Raviv deftly phrased it on Day 2, "Questions of accuracy are distinct from questions of relevance." Just because the modern Jew struggles to find his relationship with God, does not mean the teachings of the Torah, the rich history of the Jews, and the sense of shared experience in our community are not all relevant and vividly important to our lives today.

A few moments in Israel this winter—my violent sobbing when I touched the Western Wall and felt God, felt my ancestors and my parents, brother, and sisters back home. The touching moment when Israeli soldier and

a master" (*Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 22a*). Not only must a slave be treated as a human being, that slave must be afforded everything his master is. Another explanation of these laws is that, although we are given the laws of slavery, they are a result of the circumstances of the time period. In the Ancient Near East, slavery existed. It was part of the framework of society. Jews had to work within that framework but did so in the most humane way possible. The rights of slaves were increased and protected.

In a similar way, I am working within a framework dominated by men. By being there, on the job, and forcing people to understand that the boundaries will not last forever, I hope to be a small part of the freedom process. Jews no longer tolerate slavery, and the United States is working towards equality for women. I hope you enjoy the freedoms in your life as the joyous festival of Passover approaches.

Source: Rabbi Jeffrey Goldwasser. "[Mishpatim: The Purpose of the Torah.](#)" 2/17/2012. www.rebjeff.com.

MIT Hillel's 2013 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.

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 2013 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 Danny Watt, MIT Hillel's Director of Development, dwatt@mit.edu.

On the Hillel Calendar

Monday, February 11: Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT... On the Road in Florida

Professor David A. Mindell PhD '96 will be speaking in Aventura, FL: "From the Deep Ocean to the Moon: Human, Remote, and Autonomous Systems in Air, Sea, and Space." Still need an invitation? [Email us](#).

Watch for announcements of "Leading Jewish Minds on the Road"... in Los Angeles and San Francisco in March with Professor Sherry Turkle.

Spring Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT line-up:

March 15: Susan Solomon, Ellen Swallow Richards Professor of Atmospheric Chemistry and Climate Science

April 12: David Kaiser, Germeshausen Professor of the History of Science Department Head, Program in Science, Technology and Society Senior Lecturer, Department of Physics

May 3: Richard "Dick" Wurtman, Cecil H. Green Distinguished Professor Emeritus



When I met Susan and friend Alon "Aloni" Habuba stripped off his ranks from his uniform, handed them to me, and asked me not to forget him or Israel when I went back home. The pain and anguish I felt at Yad Vashem and Mount Herzl. And the confusion and sadness when I looked out onto the borders of Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza and heard the stories of children who, terrified by the sound of rocket sirens, must run to the nearest bomb shelter within 15 seconds. My experience in Israel was deeply personal, and the transformation was many times painful. But now I know there is something fundamental but infinitely valuable that we are all fighting for in Israel—the right to live.

Since the end of Birthright, there have been a few exciting developments. Among other things, I have grown increasingly invested in the safety and security of Israel in international affairs. Specifically, I've become involved with AIPAC and was recently invited to attend their 2013 National Policy Conference—the largest pro-Israel gathering in the world.

Going forward, my vision for Jewish involvement at MIT is strong. I believe there is a large contingent of MIT students who come from varying Jewish backgrounds, and I believe Hillel is capable of reaching out to all of them. I also believe students around MIT would benefit from learning about Holocaust remembrance, the establishment of Israel, and current Middle East politics. On this front and on the AIPAC front as well, I have some ideas that I hope to roll out soon.

On a more lighthearted note, I am looking forward to the beginning of the spring semester -- and loved seeing my fellow Jewish students at the AEPI Super Bowl party this past Sunday!

**Thank you for
supporting
MIT Hillel!**

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

MIT Hillel wishes a hearty "Mazal Tov" to:

David Stiebel '09 and Erin Cooper on their November 4 wedding in Baltimore, MD.

A lifetime of happiness and joy to them!



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