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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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 posted 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
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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-Hamentaschen 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 dishwashers 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 at 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.


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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, Germshausen Professor of the History of Science Department Head, Program in Science, Technology and SocietySenior Lecturer, Department of Physics
May 3: Richard "Dick" Wurtman, Cecil H. Green Distinguished Professor Emeritus

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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