



# 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. **Techiya:** Techiya -- MIT's Jewish, Hebrew, Yiddish a cappella group -- performs at a recent Board of Directors brunch with students
2. **Latke Hamentaschen Debate 2011:** Check out the [video clips!](#)
3. **Parents Brunch in Los Angeles:** MIT Hillel went "on the road" to California this month. The trip kicked off with a parents brunch at the L.A. home of Mayer and Sandy Brenner P'13

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## Menschen of Mention



*Ariel Sommer G, Course 8.*

I am a graduate student in physics at MIT, and am currently serving as the president of Graduate (Grad) Hillel. I grew up in Illinois, and went to Stanford as an undergrad. I came to MIT because of the breadth and inspiring atmosphere of the physics department. Hillel has been an important part of my experience at MIT since I arrived here three and a half years ago. At Shabbat dinners and other Hillel and Grad Hillel events, I enjoyed interesting discussions with other students, and I appreciated being part of a Jewish community.

Last year I started attending the Grad Hillel meetings and helping with some of the events. It was nice to help this group after benefiting from

## Executive Director's Update



For me, March consisted of traveling: visiting with alumni and parents up and down the coast of California as well as in NYC and Boston. I have enjoyed sharing MIT Hillel updates with individuals and small groups, and hearing stories of Jewish life spanning the decades. It is a pleasure to get out and meet MIT Hillel friends around the country.

For our students, March consisted of mid-terms, lab-work, and a well-earned Spring Break to refresh before the intensity returned again this week.

As usual, Hillel provided opportunities to put aside P-sets (problem sets) and UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program) work, and enjoy hanging-out and learning with other Jews. And, as usual, most of these options involved food. The Reform Havurah sponsored a Hamentaschen Baking night (both pictures) in anticipation of Purim; even with the holiday falling during break, the cookies were well-appreciated.



Graduate students joined me at a local café for our second in a series of "Torah and Tonics" classes. Each night we discuss a topic of student interest, presented through a Jewish lens; subjects include: internet privacy, environmental

responsibilities, and should we “think globally and act locally”?

“Bring-a-Friend” Shabbat – an even-further-reduced cost Shabbat meal at Hillel for “regulars” and their “newcomer” friends – resulted in a 50% increase in Shabbat attendance mid-month.

Finally, with food as a theme... a reminder that all students interested in seders and/or kosher for Passover meals during the week, must [sign up](#) by next Wednesday, April 6! In addition to a communal first night seder at Hillel, we are again coordinating seders around campus in multiple dorms and living groups. The entire community is thankful to AEPi Fraternity for hosting an undergraduate second night seder and to Grad Hillel for hosting a grad seder that evening, too.

The month of March once again proved, "If you feed them, they will come!"

At MIT Hillel, it is our pleasure to nourish the body and the soul.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

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## Torah from Tech



*Our Torah this month is taught by Irene Kaplow '10 (Course 18 with a minor in course 7). Irene is now a first year Ph.D. student in computer science at Stanford and doing research in computational biology. She can be reached at [IKaplow@stanford.edu](mailto:IKaplow@stanford.edu).*

An aspect of the Hagadah that I often think about is the lack of Moses’s presence. Why is Moses missing from the verses that describe the Passover story?

There are two answers that I have heard to this question. The first is what I would consider to be the “classic answer:” Moses is not mentioned in the Hagadah’s version of the Passover story because we need to remember God’s role in the Exodus from Egypt. Since Moses was an amazing leader, emphasizing his role might lead the Jewish people to forget God’s role and possibly start worshipping Moses. A second answer I have heard is that the lack of Moses’s presence allows us to focus on Elijah and, through Elijah, the future redemption in the end of days.

The first answer suggests that the purpose of not including Moses is to help us understand God’s role in Jewish people’s past differently from how we might have understood it otherwise, and the second answer suggests that Moses is not included to force us to see the future in a way that we might not have seen it otherwise. I want to suggest that the purpose of absence of Moses and, in fact, the seder as a whole, is to help us see the present in a way that we might not have seen it without the seder. At my seder a few years ago, I argued that Moses was not included so that we would focus on God’s role, not just in the Exodus and in the future redemption, but in the world today.

However, I think that God is not the only protagonist of the Hagadah. The other protagonist is the Jewish people as a whole. By focusing on the entire Jewish people and not Moses individually, the Hagadah reminds us of the importance of coming

dinners, seders, and other fun events like Grads on Ice.

Working with Grad Hillel this year as president has been exciting. From the welcome barbeque in the fall, to Shabbat dinners, the Boston Jewish Film Festival, and Grads on Ice, it has been a pleasure to see other graduate students enjoying Jewish activities. The liveliness of Grad Hillel this year owes a lot to several enthusiastic first-year graduate students who have contributed greatly to organizing events, as well as to Hillel staff and to help from the past leaders.

This semester we added a few new activities for Grad Hillel. We organized a trip to the Jewish Family and Children’s Service food pantry, Family Table, where we helped to package and deliver food. It was fun and rewarding, and not too difficult, although transportation posed a small challenge. We also started a series called Torah and Tonics, where graduate students meet together with Rabbi Fisher to discuss a Jewish topic in an informal setting. I look forward to seeing Grad Hillel continue to provide enjoyable and meaningful Jewish events for graduate students.

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**supporting**  
**MIT Hillel!**

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

and not merely individually, the Haggadah reminds us of the importance of coming together as a community and not just focusing on the successes of individuals. In fact, the Exodus from Egypt is the first time in the Bible when we see the Jewish people coming together as a nation. My experiences at MIT Hillel helped me to appreciate the importance of community because I worked with other people on almost everything I did, from solving tough problems on an organic chemistry problem set, to planning High Holiday services, to preparing for the algorithms final.

But what about Elijah? Emphasizing Elijah, in fact, could also be seen as a way to help us focus on community in our daily lives. At the end of the Haftarah on the Shabbat before Passover, God says that Elijah will reconcile parents with children and children with their parents. This suggests that the idea of Elijah is that families will come together instead of having each family member look out only for him/herself.

The seder as a whole, I think, is really about helping us enrich our daily lives by focusing on our community and not just on individuals. The purpose of having a meal as a part of the seder is to force us to interact with the other people at our table. I hope that we can all leave our seders this year with a greater appreciation of our communities and of what is possible when communities come together.

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## MIT Hillel in the MIT News

Maseeh Hall and Kosher Dining continue to move ahead.

From the MIT News Office on March 11: "New meal plan to offer more dietary options and flexibility" -- From athletes to vegetarians, kosher to vegan, revitalized House Dining program will broaden offerings for students... [Read more...](#)



Check out and subscribe to all the [News at MIT!](#)

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## 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. Our Fiscal Year ends June 30 -- make your 2011 gift today!

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

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## On the Hillel Calendar

[Passover Seders and Meals](#)



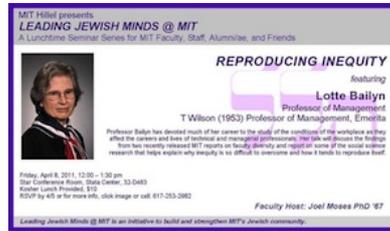
Know a student who needs/wants a seder or Kosher for Passover meals? Have them [sign up](#) by April 6! Passover begins Monday night, April 18.

[Campus Preview Weekend 2011](#): April 7-10; over 1000 newly admitted students will get a taste of MIT; MIT Hillel will be sponsoring a number of activities throughout the weekend.

[MIT 150th Convocation](#): April 10

[Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT](#)

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



- **April 8**, [Lotte Bailyn](#), Professor of Management and T Wilson (1953) Professor of Management, Emerita, on "Reproducing Inequity"
- **April 29**, [Philip Khoury](#), Associate Provost & Ford International Professor of History, "The Arab World: Where it's Been and Where it's Headed"

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