



## MIT Hillel Update



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

Chag Sameach,  
The Students, Board, and Staff of MIT Hillel

1. Prof. Dick Wurtman addresses a gathering of MIT alumni, parents, students, and pre-frosh at the Florida home of Riccardo '72 and Raquel Di Capua's as Hillel took "Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT... on the Road"
2. Hebrew@MIT ulpan students take a break in the sun as Spring comes early to MIT. Front row, second from left is Inbar Yamin '15, the class instructor.
3. IDF Navy Commander Dalit Caspi-Schachner shared with students her experiences as an Israeli, an electrical engineer, a Naval officer, spouse, and mother.

### In This Issue

[MIT Menschen of Mention](#)  
[Director's Update](#)  
[Torah from Tech](#)  
[Donor Thanks](#)  
[On the Calendar](#)

### Menschen of Mention



Vivian Hecht G, [vhecht@mit.edu](mailto:vhecht@mit.edu)

The graduate community at MIT Hillel is one of my favorite things about being a student here. I arrived two years ago, after enrolling in the Biological Engineering Ph.D. program. Going to graduate school was the first time that I really left Los Angeles; I grew up there, my family lives there, and I was an undergrad at UCLA. However, I was drawn to the diversity of research and the strength of the department, so I decided to pack my bags and move across the country. I quickly settled into a lab, where I now spend most of my time measuring cells on micro-scale resonating cantilevers, while hoping ardently that that I can use the physical properties that I measure to identify diseased cells.

My boyfriend, Aaron — who has since become my fiancé — and I arrived in Cambridge knowing few people, and uncertain where our Jewish home base would be. I had heard stories about the unexpected resources that MIT Hillel could provide, like the one about a graduate student who recruited a half dozen undergrad research assistants from the various Minyans. We didn't need much time to discover how warm and welcoming MIT Hillel could be. Through MIT Hillel, Aaron and I have found our community.

### Executive Director's Update



March at MIT is always characterized by the frenetic pace of mid-terms, exams, and problem sets. One week the juniors and sophomores can't be found. The next, freshmen are huddled over their books. Seniors are trying to balance classes and post-college thoughts and jobs. All appreciate the week of R&R at month's end.

Last week, I spent Spring Break in South Florida. No, I wasn't beaching-it or surfing in the much-warmer southern waters. I was experiencing deeper enjoyment visiting and meeting alumni and parents.

During the trip, Hillel premiered our "Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT" faculty program "on the Road." Hosted at the home of Riccardo '72 and Raquel Di Capua, former MIT Hillel Board member and Emeritus Professor Richard (Dick) Wurtman presented "A New Approach to Finding Treatments for Alzheimer's Disease" to an enthralled group of alumni, parents, current students, and pre-frosh. My introductory remarks focused on community building on campus and creating memorable Jewish experiences at MIT. One alumna asked me afterwards, "So how do we keep *this* community in Florida connected after tonight?" I was overwhelmed and moved deeply -- I am so encouraged by the fact that Jews affiliated with MIT will seek out opportunities to connect and interact with one another.

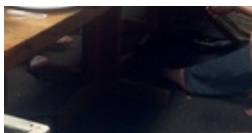
I love sharing with our supporters how we are creating Jewish memories.

Passover is about re-creating and living out historical memory as each Jew is obligated to see him/herself as if he or she personally came out of Egypt. Building on last year's successes, Hillel will help support many campus seders this year: at Hillel, at AEPI, in multiple dorm locations, and one specifically for graduate students. All will be student-led --organizers meet with our Educator, Hebrew College rabbinical student Philip Sherman, and design the evening experiences in order to maximize engagement, meaning, and memories.



On the heels of Passover, pre-frosh will begin

creating their own MIT memories. Campus Preview Weekend will bring hundreds of high school seniors, newly admitted students, to MIT. Hillel will welcome them with several events. If you have or know of a Jewish pre-frosh, please contact me, [rabbif@mit.edu](mailto:rabbif@mit.edu), and pass along their name and email so I can wish them "Mazal Tov."



On behalf of everyone at MIT Hillel, I wish everyone, near and far, a happy, sweet Passover!

Hag sameach,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

## Torah from Tech



*Our Torah this month is taught by Matya Schachter (Course 8, '05), who lives in Cambridge with his wife Anna (U of Michigan "Course 9," '03/MPH '06) and son Caleb (Class of '34?). Matya works for a hedge fund in Waltham, MA and can occasionally be found on the MIT track on Sunday afternoons. He can be reached at [matya@alum.mit.edu](mailto:matya@alum.mit.edu).*

Passover starts this weekend, a time to celebrate our freedom and religious liberty. A seemingly tangential point is included in the Exodus story that we will read in synagogue on Shabbat: "And the children of Israel did according to Moses' order, and they

borrowed from the Egyptians silver objects, golden objects, and garments. And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And they despoiled the Egyptians" (Exodus 12:35-36). The Israelites were about to wander in the desert for the next 40 years, with God providing for all of their daily needs. As such, of what good was gold and silver, and why mention it here?

An answer can be found in a discussion between Moses and Pharaoh following the plague of locusts. Moses demands that Pharaoh release the Israelites to go worship God. Pharaoh, not willing to allow them to observe the eventual Christian tenet of "render[ing] unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22), forbids the people from taking their tools of religious worship with them. Moses responds to this political interference in religious practice with a message that is just as relevant today as it was then: "we do not know how we will worship the Lord until we arrive there" (Exodus 10:26). He asserts that the Israelites must do whatever they can to prepare for any eventuality in how they might be called upon to serve God. Only later do we learn that the Israelites needed the gold and silver to build a Tabernacle--an Earthly dwelling place for the Divine. Had they left Egypt empty-handed, constructing the Tabernacle would have been impossible. Another example of this can be found in the reading on the 7th day of Passover; the Mechilta, a rabbinic midrash, derives from Exodus 15:20 that the Israelite women carried musical instruments as they left Egypt so that they could properly celebrate God's miracles at the Sea of Reeds.

Dr. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi teaches that this message continues to apply in every generation. We must make the most of our skills and resources, for we cannot know in advance how we will best be able to serve God. This lesson is embraced by the MIT Hillel community: in addition to acquiring the knowledge and skills that will form the basis for our careers, MIT students are able to develop their musical skills in groups like Techiya or MITSO, hone their political talents by helping to run their fraternities/sororities/dormitories or the Hillel Student Board, and refine their culinary abilities in their kitchens or at events like the Hummus Experience. We cannot know what challenges and opportunities will face the Jewish community in the coming years, but the time spent at MIT helps prepare students and alumni for whatever it is that comes next.

## Todah Rabbah/Thank you! ...to our [2011 Annual Campaign Donors!](#)

Your leadership and generosity contribute to a depth of Jewish life, experiences, and growth for the Jews and Jewish community of MIT.

[Find out who supports Jewish Life @ MIT.](#)

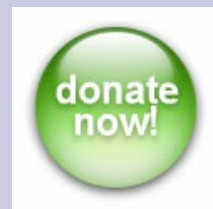
If you like what you read and hear about Jewish life at MIT, [add your name](#) to

I have since become involved in both Grad Hillel and the MIT Conservative Minyan, and Friday night services at MCM are the highlight of my week. Through Grad Hillel, I've had opportunities to meet other Jewish students who have become some of my closest friends. The Hillel staff, particularly Rabbi Fisher and Eliad Shmuel, is always supportive of our ideas. In the past three months alone, the Grad Hillel board has organized Shabbat dinners, potlucks, a Tu B'Shvat seder, a Purim party, monthly "Torah and Tonic" learnings with Rabbi Fisher, community service outings, and an ice skating event.

I was very active in Hillel at UCLA, and I've been very lucky to have the opportunity to continue this involvement as an MIT grad student. While I haven't yet recruited any Hillel undergrads to work in my lab, I look forward to the opportunity to do so in the future. At Hillel, I am surrounded by a group of people who are just as excited about science and engineering as they are about hummus, and I find that to be pretty special.

**Thank you for  
supporting  
MIT Hillel!**

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



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## On the Hillel Calendar

### Passover

**Friday, April 6-Saturday, April 14**

As part of the new meal plans in Maseeh Hall, kosher for Passover food will be available through MIT Dining for MIT students, faculty, and staff. (Due to Passover food planning needs, reservations were required by March 30.)

### Campus Preview Weekend (for admitted pre-frosh and their parents)

**Wednesday, April 18-Sunday, April 22**

Know a newly admitted Jewish pre-frosh? [Please let us know](#), and we'll wish them mazal tov!

### Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT

**Friday, April 20, noon, Maseeh Hall**

*Towards a Computational Account of Common Sense*  
Josh Tenenbaum PhD '99

Hillel's popular faculty/staff/alumni lunchtime seminar series continues. Our final presenter for the spring term is Josh Tenenbaum, Professor of Cognitive Science and Computation, Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences. In the vicinity of MIT, [join us!](#) Parents of pre-frosh visiting for CPW weekend, warmly invited to be our guests.



### Jewish Music and Materials @ the MIT Libraries

**Ongoing**

A new fund established by MIT alumnus Michael Gruenbaum '53 has enabled the [Lewis Music Library](#) to add more Jewish music to its collection. It is open to the public in 14E-109. [Learn more...](#)

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