



# MIT Hillel Update



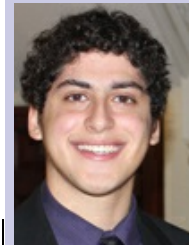
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## Greetings from MIT Hillel to Alumni, Parents, and Friends in Cambridge and Beyond...

1. Purim on Ice: Adam Slatker '17, Noa Ghersin '14, Noam Buckman '16
2. *Mishloach Manot*/Purim gifts to deliver: Zoe Rothstein '17
3. Purim on Ice: Beth Cholst '16

## Mentshn of Mention



Noam Buckman '16  
[nbuckman@mit.edu](mailto:nbuckman@mit.edu)

My name is Noam Buckman and I am a sophomore studying Mechanical Engineering and Math. I grew up in the blizzards of West Bloomfield, Michigan and most recently lived in Atlanta, Georgia where I attended Yeshiva Atlanta High School. Growing up, I had passion for all things math and science; I remember staying up late at night doing math problems or talking algebra with my dad on the way to synagogue. I decided to attend MIT because I knew I would be surrounded by people smarter than me who would push me to be the best student I can be. In addition, I was really attracted to the fact that MIT has a variety of opportunities to discover various fields of research and classes, which was definitely good for a confused senior in high school.

Some could say I am a legacy child, a Hillel legacy child. My parents first met

## Executive Director's Update



It's Spring! And it's about time; Boston and Mother Nature must truly have a slow connection. (Perhaps Cambridge and Nature are still configured with a 2400 baud modem? MIT can teach them something, perhaps, if so. I hope one of them applied to the class of 2018 for some Course 6 updates.)

To warm up from the snow and cold, MIT Jews took to informal learning, and Hillel was the place to be. Classes blossomed throughout the month. Birthright alumni organized another monthly reunion under the banner of "Musing, Schmoozing, and Sushi"; March included an open discussion on "Jews and Tattoos," with Hillel's Senior Jewish Educator, Rabbi Gavriel Goldfeder. Jews, both tattoo-free and sporting body art, shared experiences and texts together. Marissa Feinman, MBA, our Director of Student Life and Programming, and I co-taught a Jewish Business Ethics course at Sloan during their Innovation Period: half the class was Jewish, a good two-thirds of these, Israeli. My favorite feedback comment, "We studied texts like this when I was in high school in Israel; I used to love it. Thanks for bringing that experience back for me!"

The other day, I walked past and listened in on a "Judaism and Wellness" class (ironically, I noticed, over a pizza lunch...). A powerful conversation was taking place on a subject not often enough discussed at MIT: mental health and wellness. Students embraced the encouragement to discuss unhappy or depressed feelings, as those mental states were de-stigmatized.

Other students also expressed wellness in a different form. Hillel's new Arts Collaborative spent one pre-Shabbat afternoon with arts supplies and canvases, and beautiful new artwork now adorns the outside of my office window.

If these weren't enough... *shulchan ivrit* ("Hebrew table") restarted with students practicing their Hebrew dialogue together. Weekly Advanced Talmud and Jewish Medical Ethics courses continued. And, as Passover approaches, "How to be a Passover Maven!" is teaching our on-campus (and off-campus) student seder leaders how to make Passover new and exciting for all at their table. A big insight and



aha-moment from the first training: students realized that leaving Egypt was a choice, and according to a Rabbinic teaching, only one out of five Israelites actually left. (Have a student who needs Passover seder or meal info? Have them email [Passover@mit.edu!](mailto:Passover@mit.edu))



As we move into Passover season, a season of further questions and learning, let me take this opportunity to wish each of you a good and sweet Passover. *Hag kasher v'sameach/happy, kosher holiday!*

L'shalom,  
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM'97  
[rabbif@mit.edu](mailto:rabbif@mit.edu)

P.S. As promised last month, the [2014 Latke-Hamentaschen debate video](#) is now live!

## Torah from Tech



*Our Torah this month is taught by Mara (Daniel) Baraban '04 (course 8). She also completed a Ph.D. in physics at Yale. She currently works at Ball Aerospace and lives in Denver, CO with her husband and three children. She can be reached at [maras@alum.mit.edu](mailto:maras@alum.mit.edu).*

During the Passover seder, we tell the story of how God took us out of slavery in Egypt and made us, the Jewish people, a free nation with a special relationship and covenant with God. There are many rich themes to explore in this narrative. I would like to focus on the growth we see in the Jewish people as they transition from slavery to freedom and how we demonstrate this

freedom by being active participants at our Passover seders.

While the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt, they were extremely passive participants in the exodus story. They follow direction from Moses, but (besides some complaining) we are not told about the people taking an active role during the plagues and the lead up to the exodus from Egypt. For instance, we do not hear of any grass roots efforts to leave Egypt while the Egyptians are suffering from the plagues. Presumably it would have been reasonably easy to leave during the plague of darkness, no one would have seen them go!

As the Jews are on the brink of freedom, we see a shift in their behavior. First, in a Midrash (Rabbinic teaching), we learn that the Sea of Reeds did not immediately split for the Jewish people when they were leaving of Egypt. With the Sea in front of them and the Egyptians chasing them, Nachshon ben Aminadav walked into the Sea believing that God would perform a miracle to save God's people. Only when the water was up to his nose did the water part allowing the Jews to cross through. Once the Jews safely passed through the sea and the water closed over the Egyptians, the Torah tells us the people sang a beautiful song to thank and praise God for their miraculous salvation. No one told Aminadav to walk into the water and no one told the people to praise God with song following their salvation. These were active roles the people took that reveal the growth of our nation as they transitioned from slavery to freedom.

The Torah commands us to retell the story of our exodus from Egypt every year at our Passover seders. The word 'seder' in Hebrew means order, and there is an extremely specific order to everything we do at a seder. At first glance, it appears as though we are slaves again. We follow instructions on when and how to wash our hands, eat specific foods, and tell the story of the Exodus using a set script. We could easily go through the seder being passive participants, but as we will see, this is not the goal of a Passover seder.

The primary source for why we must retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt is in Exodus 13:8 where it says, 'And you shall tell your child on that day, saying, "Because of this, the Lord did [this] for me when I went out of Egypt.'" It is clear from the structure of the seder that the children are not just supposed to listen to the story, but also ask questions and be actively involved in learning about the Exodus. The four questions are specifically meant to be asked by a child, and the many songs during a seder are easy ways to engage them. Further, the seder itself is supposed to spark a child's curiosity. We wash our hands and eat unusual food or foods in unusual ways not to demonstrate that we can follow directions, but in part specifically to prompt our children to ask questions about what we are doing and increase their involvement.

Our children have plenty to learn and are hopefully excited to be involved, but perhaps we as adults, who have participated in many Passover seders can just recite the familiar words and be more passive participants. There is one paragraph in the Hagadah that clearly rejects this idea. Almost immediately following the four questions we say, "Even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all of us knowing the Torah, we would still be obligated to

at University of Michigan Hillel during their undergraduate years. Both of my older brothers were involved with the Hillel at their respective campuses. For me, one of the first things I knew I needed to do was get involved with Hillel at MIT. The first thing I noticed about MIT Hillel was that Hillel represented more than just a physical building or event but rather a larger network of Jewish friends, something I experienced firsthand during my first encounters with MIT at CPW and freshman orientation.

Once I arrived here I jumped in head first into the Hillel community. My first semester here, I planned Hillel's faculty Shabbat which attracted around 100 students and 10 professors, including President Reif. After that event, I decided to run for Hillel board and became one of the Programming VP's. I really enjoyed being able to shape the policies and events that Hillel put on for the greater community. Currently, I hold the position of President of the Hillel Student Board, as well as co-Gabai of the Orthodox Minyan and Treasurer of AEPi. Through my various interactions with Jewish life on campus, I have learned the importance of Jewish friendships for MIT students. Whether it is finding p-set groups for my classes or figuring out plans for Saturday nights, having a Jewish network of friends makes your life at MIT easier and more fun. Sharing Jewish experiences with friends, eating at Friday night dinner or skating at Purim On Ice, has really enhanced my Jewish life on MIT's campus.

My goal as Hillel President is to continue fostering friendships between Jewish undergraduates, building a strong Jewish community. Seeing 10-15 Jewish students sit at a table together eating lunch together at Maseeh every day, coming from different Jewish backgrounds, different years and majors, and different friend groups brings me inspiration for what Hillel can foster in the rest of the Jewish community. As a result of these strong bonds, we will strengthen the Jewish identities of

discuss the exodus from Egypt; and everyone who discusses the exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy." In other words, even if we had all spent years studying the Exodus from Egypt, it is still our responsibility during the seder to look more deeply at the text. Each year we must ask new questions and derive new insights about the Passover story. We must be actively involved in retelling the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

Why is it so important that adults and children alike be active participants in the Passover seder? There are many answers to this question, and I mentioned one answer earlier. I believe that by being active rather than passive participants in our seders, we demonstrate our freedom, just as the Jews demonstrated their freedom by taking an active role as they left Egypt. I would like to suggest a second answer by drawing a comparison between our ideal involvement in the Passover seder and a place we all know and love, MIT. At MIT, no one is ever finished learning. MIT educates the next generation in the fundamentals, teaching physics, calculus, chemistry, and biology year after year while also encouraging students to ask their own questions and be active participants in their education. As researchers, we look for new problems and revisit old questions, looking for new approaches that will increase our understanding. I think it is clear that the success of the greater MIT community comes from this culture of ongoing learning and exploration, and the desire to understand every aspect of a problem.

By being active participants and involving our children in our Passover seders, we not only demonstrate our freedom, but we ensure the health of our Jewish identities and community. Just as MIT thrives from a culture of ongoing learning, so to, the Jewish community thrives when everyone is actively involved in asking questions, and searching for new insights. May you all have a chag kasher v'sameach, a happy and kosher Passover holiday, and use this holiday as an opportunity to expand your Jewish learning.

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### MIT Hillel's 2014 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.

Thank you to our [2013 Annual Fund donors!](#)

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 2014 Donor Roll!

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### 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 MIT Hillel Director of Development, Marla Choslovsky, [marla360@mit.edu](mailto:marla360@mit.edu).

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### On the Calendar

#### Monday night, April 14-Tuesday, April 22: Passover

- Know a student looking to participate in a seder? We have multiple options at Hillel! Email [passover@mit.edu](mailto:passover@mit.edu) for information.
- Kosher for Passover meals will be available for all meals during the week; just come to W11 during meal time with a Meal Plan card or pre-loaded TechCash. Regular dining hall prices.

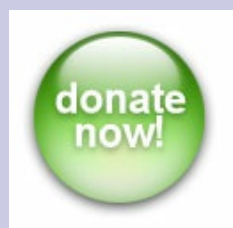
**Friday, April 25: Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT**  
**Professor Scott Aaronson**, Associate Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, "God Indeed Plays Dice"



undergraduates that will last beyond their four years at MIT. I am very thankful for the abundance of resources at MIT, be that the Hillel professional staff, MIT's student group funding, or the countless hours students put into Hillel programming, and I hope to continue to utilize these resources to better the Jewish community on campus. As a freshman, I had the pleasure of using our Hillel Jewish Programming Grant which provides funding for students to create Jewish programming on campus, and now I have the pleasure as President in helping distribute the funds and helping students make their Jewish ideas happen on our campus. I look forward to overseeing all the amazing events and activities our Hillel Board has planned for the rest of the semester and to helping work on how our Jewish community can grow and improve on campus.

## Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!

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



**Friday, June 6: Commencement/Tech Reunions/  
Jewish Community Reception**



- Alumni Reception: 1:30-4pm, Building W11 Have a nosh, visit and celebrate with fellow Jewish alumni and say mazal tov to our newest alumni, the Class of 2014
- Shabbat @ Hillel: 6 pm, Services; 7 pm, Dinner, both in W11; RSVP to [hillelsvp@mit.edu](mailto:hillelsvp@mit.edu)

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Fax: 617.253.3260  
[mit.edu/hillel](http://mit.edu/hillel)  
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