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Happy Passover from MIT Hillel to Alumni, Parents, and Friends in Cambridge and Beyond...

1. Haggadah study in preparation for seders...
2. Empty pizza boxes are a sign of a good class!
3. Rabbi Fisher joined three MIT J Street U students at the J Street conference in DC.

Executive Director's Update



The other day I saw a student who was wearing a t-shirt that made me smile. It said, "Actually the glass is always full..." As Pesach approaches, with its four (or five) cups of wine, it's a good motto to remember. The glass *is* always full.

At MIT Hillel, we keep our seder glasses full, our classes full, and our calendars full. We are planning for a full house of one-hundred students at the student-run Hillel main seder on Friday night. Second night, Grad Hillel is hosting a campus seder. Both these communal seders are in addition to students who are organizing smaller seders within their living groups, including at Random Hall and East Campus. Among campus Greeks, Jewish students in Kappa Sigma fraternity and AXO sorority will also be hosting seder meals. That's a lot of full glasses of grape juice.

Besides supporting the funding of all these meals, throughout the month, Hillel staff have been holding Passover classes on how to run creative and fun seders. Every on-campus student organizer has attended, and many others are taking their knowledge back home to their family seders.

All of our classes are also full, not only those covering Pesach. We just began a new "theology and your professor" series. It does not get talked about much in the classroom, but many professors have well-thought-out and subtle views on theology. Professor Scott Aaronson (course 6, computer science) was the series kick-off speaker, presenting his theology and how it affects his work. A different professor will dialogue with students each month.

Grad Hillel's calendar of activities has also been full. They invited Board of Directors member Paul Levy '72 (<http://runningahospital.blogspot.com/>) to advise them on how to negotiate for a job -- and timing could not have been better as a number of them had just received their first job offer. A recent Saturday night havdalah was followed by a trip to the Improv. And, my "Torah and Tonics" class explored the changing character of Elijah from Biblical through rabbinic literature.

This past month, unfortunately, was also filled with news that is much harder to share. Sadly and frighteningly, March began with two freshman deaths, and Hillel staff spent much time being present, closely listening, and giving pastoral care to students. The student board led by Tally Portnoi '17 (see column to the right) also began asking the deep questions of how they as student leaders can help bring a change to MIT's culture, to bring better life balance, self-care, and a stronger sense of caring community to campus. Less tragically, although also sadly, this month we memorialized two long-time MIT Hillel Foundation board members, founding member [Claude Brenner '47 SM'48](#) and [Jack Fischer '59](#).

Mentshn of Mention



Tally Portnoi '17
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I am Tally Portnoi, a sophomore in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. My family is originally from Ukraine and immigrated to Israel in 1989. I was born in Rehovot, Israel, but grew up in St. Louis, Missouri after my family moved there when I was 3 years old. In addition to Hillel, I am involved in various other student groups, such as dance troupe, the campus radio station, Medlinks, and a few theater groups.

Simply put, I chose to go to MIT because I LOVE math and science. Although I did not know exactly what sort of career I would like to pursue post-graduation when I made my decision, I knew that MIT could equip me with the skills I need. And, of course, I wanted to be surrounded by passionate and curious people who were excited about math, science, and technology.

I think I have had a fairly unique Jewish college experience: I have gone from practically no Jewish involvement in high school to serving as the undergraduate student president of Hillel. I first came to Hillel during my CPW

Ending with the positive, since I last wrote on Purim, our work days and nights included study breaks, student leadership growth and development, Birthright Israel recruitment, and much more... definitely some full, and even overflowing, glasses.

A happy, sweet Pesach to all!

Hag sameach,
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM'97
rabbif@mit.edu

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Jerry Grochow '68. Jerry received his BS and MS in course 6 (electrical engineering/computer science), worked at Project MAC (now CSAIL), then went on for a Ph.D. in course 15 (Sloan). After spending most of his career in industry, he rejoined MIT as Vice President for IS&T in 2003. He retired from MIT in 2010, but continues to do consulting and volunteers as an entrepreneurial mentor with MIT's Venture Mentoring Service. He can be reached at jerryg@alum.mit.edu.

Pesach Remembrances

When I was growing up in New Jersey, we always went to my maternal grandparents' apartment in the Bronx for Seders. Driving through New York City to their apartment was a frequent occurrence, but Pesach was always special. They lived in a small one-bedroom, and we arrived very early to help out. The living room was converted into a dining area with a single long table that could seat everyone in the family. My grandmother took down the dishes that were only used during Pesach (they kept kosher back then), and cooked all day. One treat I especially remember was the fragrance of matzoh meal latkes and how delicious they were, served with powdered sugar as dessert (and often before the main meal as well, at least for children who had trouble waiting).

My grandfather read from the Hagaddah, which seemed to be almost entirely in Hebrew. If there was English translation, my grandfather didn't read it. There wasn't a lot of deviation from the proscribed recitations and prayers and as far as I remember, no one asked any questions other than the standard four.

My grandfather would definitely recognize Seder at our house (and my grandmother would recognize the same heavy skillet she used to make the latkes), but the texture is quite different. Louise ('71) starts cooking three days in advance - she insists on "from scratch" chicken soup, vegetable soup, and both classic and vegetarian matzoh balls (for the vegetarian children). While we do take over our living room with a single long table for family and friends, our service is mainly in English with blessings also recited in Hebrew. I act as leader, but each person is given a chance to read aloud some part of the Hagaddah. The main evolution, however, is that our Seders are much more like a seminar than a lecture - it's hard for us to get through one page of the Hagaddah without someone asking a question, throwing in a comment or commentary (from one of the dozen different Haggadot we make it a point of having available), arguing a point or otherwise discussing what is going on. Since many of our friends have an MIT connection (not surprising with six alums in the immediate family), even non-Jewish friends at their first Seder quickly get into the spirit.

I'm not quite sure when we made the transition to the "inquiring Seder," but I know it had something to do with my daughter's Bat Mitzvah. We were living in Washington, DC, and our rabbi encouraged the students to ask him a question he could address in his sermon the night before the Bat Mitzvah. Her reading (Tzav) included the commandment for unleavened bread in temple festival offerings (Leviticus 6:9 and 7:12). We asked Rabbi Zemel about unleavened bread showing up in portions over than Exodus. He did some research and let us know that unleavened bread is mentioned multiple times in the Torah, including before (and not having anything to do with) the exodus from Mitzrayim. Genesis 19:3, for example, says that Lot served the angels matzot when they visited to rescue him from Sodom. So this inquiry led to my daughter's question about whether matzoh is only the "bread of affliction" (as stated in the Hagaddah) or something more. Some scholars note that leavened bread may have been invented by the Egyptians, a farming people, while the Israelites, a nomadic people, ate unleavened bread. Others note that leavening came from yeast landing on dough left out - basically, flat sourdough bread. Unleavened bread was, therefore, fresh and sweet and worthy of being served on the altar and to angels. Whatever the origin, it is clear that matzoh is part of our Jewish heritage, and just as other aspects of the Seder incorporate both sweet and bitter aspects, we eat unleavened, plain matzoh (the bread of affliction) and, at least some of us also eat caramel chocolate matzoh with dessert!

MIT Hillel's 2015 Annual Fund
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To our current and future supporters:

because I was curious about the Jewish community, but I only started coming to Hillel regularly in large part because of the friendships I formed with other students who lived on my floor. I came to MIT from a fairly secular background: my family attended services maybe twice a year (on a good year!) and we celebrated only major holidays together. I did not have many Jewish friends my age back home, although my family and family friends were very culturally Jewish. First semester freshman year, I lived on Burton 2, which is home to the bulk of the religious underclassmen at MIT, and many became my best friends. From them, I learned more about Jewish religion and customs than I ever thought I would know. I started coming to Shabbat dinners and other Hillel events with my friends. I was asked to serve as freshman engagement chair for the spring term, an experience which introduced me to other people in the Hillel community and got me more involved. Along with Dalia, the other freshman engagement chair, I was responsible for planning all of the CPW and Orientation events for the class of 2018, in addition to other events in the fall to help the new students get acquainted with the community. At MIT, for the first time, I have found a community of Jewish peers. Being a part of such a community has been an extremely valuable experience for me and has helped me explore my Jewish identity in ways I previously did not. While I have not become more religious, I am much more educated and feel much more connected to Jewish traditions. Additionally, I am extremely grateful for the friends and support I have found through the Hillel community. It is for all these reasons that I ran for Hillel President last Fall.

As president, my primary goal is creating a Hillel community where everybody feels welcome. At MIT, the Jewish undergraduates come from diverse backgrounds and levels of observance, which makes it challenging to create a single community that everyone feels comfortable being a part of. The current student board aims to plan events and programming that appeals to a broad range of students. We are also trying to make it easier for students to get to know each other.

**Thank you for
supporting
MIT Hillel!**

Your generous support allows us



to our current and future supporters.

L'Dor v'dor, from one generation to the next. Of all the holidays and rituals in our annual Jewish life, the Passover seder epitomizes this Jewish value of passing on knowledge, history, culture. A child asking the four questions, and being answered by a group of elders, with additional teaching through sensory experiences such as music and tasting special foods – how many of us have a seder among our earliest family and/or Jewish memories? (Thank you, Jerry, for perfectly illustrating my point in your Torah from Tech column!)

It would be easy for me to segue into another column on the Legacy program we have been selected into at Hillel International, but instead I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our readers not just for your support of MIT

Hillel, not for your support of this incredible campus that has brought us all together, but for all you do to make this world a better place, and to secure it for the future.

Every donor has priorities. For example, I am not an animal lover, and would never choose to allocate funding to animals when so many people are in need. And yet at the same time I appreciate that I get to live on a planet that is cleaner and has saved endangered species (and even puppies) because other people do value that. Those investments provide for the next generation as well.

For those of you who also support your area schools, research in the cure for diseases, food banks, synagogues and other communal institutions, disaster relief, endowed chairs and new labs, impoverished people anywhere in the world, individuals who cannot support themselves, political causes, social services, and more – thank you. No one of these causes is the answer, but rather it is the sum of all of these efforts and investments that sustains us. And with a plethora of those worthy causes, we are all the more appreciative that you keep MIT Hillel among your priorities in shaping this world for future generations.

We invite you to [join us this year](#) in supporting Jewish life on campus. Here is an [overview of our needs](#) this year. We are always happy to meet with donors in person, to learn why MIT Hillel is important to you and to talk about why your support makes all the difference.

It is an honor to join with you in maintaining and building a strong Jewish presence at MIT.

Thank you,
Marla Choslovsky SM'88,
MIT Hillel Director of Development
marla360@mit.edu

[Add your name](#) to MIT Hillel's 2015 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 MIT Hillel Director of Development, Marla Choslovsky, marla360@mit.edu.

On the Calendar

Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT Spring line-up

- **Friday, May 1** – Alan Guth, Victor F. Weisskopf Professor of Physics and MacVicar Faculty Fellow



MIT Hillel mourns the recent loss of:

[Claude Brenner '47 SM'48](#), MIT Hillel Foundation founder, long-time MIT Hillel Foundation Board Member and Board Chairman since 2011, who passed on March 7.

[Jack Fischer '59](#), long-time MIT Hillel Foundation Board Member, who passed on March 26.

May their memories be for a blessing, and their families and friends find comfort among all those who

to help keep Jewish life vibrant on the MIT campus!



mourn.

If you have life-cycle events to share with the MIT Hillel community, please [let us know](#).

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