



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. **Israel Independence Day Celebrations:** Yael Schein '13, Claire Smith '11, Hannah Gramling '13 celebrate at the Yom HaAtzmaut Israeli Barbeque
2. **New Torah Mantle:** Graduating Seniors Meena Viswanath '11, Brian Ross '11, Jesse Dunietz '11, Dina Betser '11 display the Class of 2011 gift to MIT Hillel
3. **MIT Birthright Trip:** Nifer Fasman '13 and Jon Malmaud G enjoy a Bedouin camel ride in Israel

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Menschen of Mention



Rachel Bandler '13

Hi! My name is Rachel Bandler; I am a junior at MIT majoring in chemistry and minoring in neuroscience. I am from Scarsdale NY, and attended the Hebrew Academy of the Five Towns and Rockaway (HAFTR). Outside of class I work in a biological engineering and neuroscience laboratory that specializes in optogenetics to control the brain with light, and am an opinion columnist for *The Tech*, MIT's MIT's oldest and largest newspaper.

Judaism has always played a major role in my life, so when I arrived at MIT I right away sought out Hillel. I found that not only was Hillel a great place to meet other Jewish students, but was also the

Executive Director's Update



Days from now the MIT Class of 2011 will sit in Killian Court and walk before President Hockfield, becoming our newest alumni. I look forward to greeting our Jewish students beforehand as they process to Commencement, and afterwards at Friday afternoon's Jewish Community Reception. If you are on campus for Commencement or Reunions, please join us to celebrate on Friday afternoon.

Publicly, now, **Mazal Tov** and **Yashar Koach** (increased strength) to all those receiving degrees on Friday!

This past month of May not only was the end of the semester – with all that entails: final papers, projects, exams, and students' feelings of [being hosed](#) (alleviated somewhat by Hillel with free lunches and study breaks) – but also a month of **Israel focus for MIT Hillel**. As I have discussed with many parent and alum, MIT is blessed by having relatively minimal political rancor, and tensions around Israel are much lower than at many other schools. This affords a wonderful opportunity for students to explore, deeply and fully, many different connections to the State of Israel, without “anti” distractions. **Israel education, Israel advocacy, Israel's hi-tech contributions to the world, social and cultural connections to our Jewish State**

all find expression on campus.

Starting off the month, **Yom HaAtzma'ut/Israel**

Independence Day celebrations featured an Israeli barbeque (pictured: Jason Strauss '12), Israeli music, and much fun. Last week (as you can also read in Rachel Bandler '13's Menschen of Mention column) four MIT students attended the **AIPAC Policy Conference** in Washington, DC, sponsored by a generous donation from alumni. Participating with hundreds of other college students in advocacy training, navigating a crowd of 10,000 attendees, the students told me that they were "amazed," "energized," and "tired." A highlight was getting to hear Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu '75, SM '76** in person in a speech to the student delegates -- **in which he mentioned MIT specifically.**



Currently, the **MIT/Harvard Birthright** bus is traveling across Israel. Soon after arriving at Ben Gurion airport last week, they drove north to Caesaria on the coast and recited "*shehecheyanu*," giving thanks for this free opportunity to visit and



experience our Jewish homeland. (Pictured right, Cody Zoschak '13 resting by a eucalyptus tree in the Golan; some MIT mathematics with Dead Sea mud to the left.) Many of the students will also take advantage of the second-ever **MIT**



Birthright Extension. Co-sponsored by MIT Hillel and [MIT's MISTI-Israel program](#) – Birthright Extension allows students to remain in Israel for several days to experience the HiTech side of the country (Israeli entrepreneurial startups, science labs, technology companies), meet with MIT alumni, and celebrate the Shavuot by staying up all night studying in Jerusalem and praying at sunrise at the Western Wall. A different take on problem sets.

While the summer is quieter in Cambridge, students remaining on campus are already planning pot-luck Shabbat dinners, volunteer activities at the Jewish Family and Community Services food pantry, and ice cream lab/work breaks. I am also looking taking a group of six to eight students to St. Louis for the International Hillel Institute in August, where they will be trained in leadership, peer engagement, and utilizing social networking skills, allowing Hillel to identify and connect with greater numbers of campus Jews in meaningful ways. We look forward to continuing to make such connections with you, our alumni, parents, and friends, as well.

A warm, relaxing summer to all!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Andrew M. Greene '91, courses VIII-A and XXI-E. Andrew is a member of the Hillel Board of Directors. A programmer by trade, he also constructs

center of Jewish life at MIT.

As a freshman I served on the Hillel student board as Tzedek chair, and really enjoyed playing an active role in the Jewish community.

I have also always had a strong love for Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. Upon arrival to MIT, however, I was saddened to discover that hundreds of students knew almost nothing about Israel. Then "Palestine Awareness Week" arrived in the spring of my freshman year. I was disturbed at the false accusations and anti-Israel sentiment being propagated on campus, but was even more surprised that there was no pro-Israel student group organized enough to respond to these accusations. It was then that I decided it was my responsibility to show the MIT community the extreme importance of the US-Israel relationship, and began my journey of pro-Israel advocacy at MIT.

When I returned to campus fall to begin my sophomore year, I became president of [MIT Students for Israel \(MITSi\)](#), the AIPAC student liaison at MIT, and an Emerson Fellow for [StandWithUs](#). Fortunately, I was able to find devoted students also passionate about Israel to join the MITSi board, and we began our successful pro-Israel campaign. This past semester, for example, MITSi produced events including the MIT Hummus Experience, an "Ethiopians and Israel" event co-sponsored with the Black Student Union, and a Happy Birthday Israel BBQ for Yom Haatzma'ut with over 200



crossword puzzles for various outlets, writes Jewish choral music, is editing a siddur called Siddur Hiddur Tefillah, and manages a project to produce an open-source translation of the Talmud

into English. These projects and contact info are at greenehouse.com/a.

We are approaching the end of the period of counting the Omer. During this time, we have a mitzvah that once each day we recite a beracha thanking God for this mitzvah, and then... we count. "Today is one day." "Today is two days." "Today is seven days, which makes one week." And so on for seven complete weeks; on the fiftieth day we celebrate Shavuot.

It is a mitzvah of awareness. Performing this mitzvah does not change the world in any physical way, and it does not change our religious position. What it does is heighten our perception of the passage of time.

In Psalm 90, attributed to Moses, we read, "Teach us to number our days, that our seat of intelligence may gain wisdom." The *peshat*, the obvious meaning of this verse, is that knowing that we have a finite time in this world will lead us to knowledge of the true priorities in life.

Time, of course, is essential to the Jewish understanding of the world. As Rav Soloveitchik writes, Judaism "is extremely time conscious, finding the present moment so important. For instance, we are permitted to do work on a Friday afternoon until one minute before sunset, but are enjoined from doing work one minute later. Why does one minute make such a difference, distinguishing between the permitted and the sinful?" Heschel's philosophy is that "Judaism constructs the Sabbath as an architecture of Time."

Some Jewish times are imposed from without, such as the moment of sunset that ushers in Shabbat. The determination of other times has been granted to us by God. The first mitzvah given in preparation for the Exodus was calendrical: "This month [Nisan] shall be for you the first of months." Not only were we given the authority to intercalate months to keep the lunar and solar calendars lined up, the Sanhedrin established on which date each month began. For although the Jewish calendar is based on the phases of the moon, it is more specifically determined by the proclamation of the high court that the new moon has, indeed, been seen. Our time is governed not by *astronomy* but by *astronomical observation*, giving a quite literal meaning to the verse in Deuteronomy: "*Lo ba-shamayim hi*," the law is not in the heavens.

Returning to our verse from Psalms, I would suggest another reading, perhaps more apt for MIT: "Teach us to measure the passage of time, so that we may increase knowledge." This is at the heart of MIT's mission --- teaching people how to use science and technology to measure the universe, and thereby discover new things.

But just as the Jewish measurement of time contains a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic elements, the scientific measurement of time is subject to differences between measurements that come from without and determinations that arise from within.

Einstein, perhaps the most famous *yiddische kopf*, demonstrated by a thought experiment the fallacy of treating scientific time as being absolutely measurable. The

mitzvah with over 200 attendees, among others. In addition, thanks to very generous donors, a delegation of four MITS/Hillel students attended the AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington D.C., where President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu addressed over 10,000 Israel supporters.

Furthermore, this past semester I became an opinion columnist for the, *The Tech*, writing specifically about Israel and the wider Middle East. I have written articles explaining why Israel is a strategic ally for America, why congress should maintain aid to Israel despite the current economic downturn, and why Israel must reserve the right to defend herself. I plan to continue to write for the newspaper in the coming years, and enjoy having an outlet that allows me to reach thousands of readers.

MIT is like a blank slate because your experience on campus completely depends on how you shape it. With proactive efforts and determination, I believe it is possible to shape and influence the MIT student body and grow the pro-Israel community on campus. I trust that knowledge and support for Israel will only grow at MIT in the coming years, and I look forward to involvement in Hillel and MITS for the remainder of my time undergraduate years, and beyond. Although I know that my involvement in the Jewish and pro-Israel community will continue far after my graduation, I will make sure that my successors are as determined as I am to defend

more precisely we try to grasp for time, the more we need to account for our own position (vis-a-vis an external gravitational field) and our motion (vis-a-vis acceleration disturbing our inertial reference frame). And these are not merely theoretical or inconsequentially trivial: the atomic clocks on GPS satellites must compensate for both of these effects. Einstein demolished the idea of absolute extrinsic time.

Both as Jews and as Techies, we strive to balance time as we define it and time as it defines us. We count the days from Pesach to Shavuot, and watch each one slide from future to past. We count the years from 1861 to 2011, and wonder what MIT will accomplish next. We run a program on our smartphones and find out what time Shabbat will begin. We calibrate atomic clocks to count 9,192,631,770 periods of hyperfine oscillation of an atom of cesium-133, and call that a second. We mourn someone whose days have reached their final number, and we count seven days, and thirty days, and eleven months, and a year.

We number our days, our picoseconds, our sesquicentennials, and we pray that the awareness of time passing gives us wisdom, both to master the world and to appreciate being mastered by it.

MIT Hillel Creates Community



Parents connected with each other and with MIT Hillel at a brunch at the home of Lisa Rosenbaum '77, P '10 and Ron Fisher P '10. Earlier in the semester, Mayer and Sandy Brenner P '13 hosted a similar gathering at their Los Angeles home.

Todah Rabbah/Thanks again to our Donors!

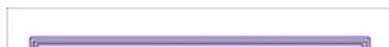
...and please support MIT Hillel this year!

Thank you to all of our Annual Donors! Your leadership and support contributes to a depth of Jewish life, experiences, and growth for the Jews and Jewish community of MIT.

If you like what you read and hear about Jewish life at MIT, [add your name](#) to Hillel's 2011 donor roll, and watch for it to appear in the fall. The 2011 Annual Fund closes June 30 -- please make your gift **today!**

On the Hillel Calendar

Friday June 3:



and advocate for Israel, and to ensure continuity in the pro-Israel community.

Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!

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



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 2011
- **Shabbat @ Hillel:** 7 pm, Services; 8 pm, Dinner, both at W11;
RSVP today hillelsvp@mit.edu



Tel: 617.253.2982
Fax: 617.253.3260
mit.edu/hillel
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Cambridge, MA 02139
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