



MIT Hillel Update



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

The Students, Board, and Staff of MIT Hillel

1. **Prof. Josh Tenenbaum PhD'99 teaches faculty, alumni, and pre-frosh parents at a Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT luncheon during Campus Preview Weekend.**
2. **Sarah Toledano '15 runs a "Dead Sea Station" to teach preschoolers about density and Passover. The program was part of an MIT Hillel Student Board volunteering day in collaboration with Combined Jewish Philanthropies' Early Childhood program.**
3. **Spring has sprung! And Jews involved in MIT's Greek life gather for a barbeque to celebrate the nice weather.**

Executive Director's Update



From Passover to Campus Preview Weekend to Yom HaAtzmaut to a Greek Life Barbeque, April was an incredible month at MIT Hillel! For me, seeing the continuous and diverse stream throughout the month of event participants, holiday revelers, and pre-frosh getting involved in activities, conversations, and food made me kvell.

At Passover, Hillel supported six different seders over two nights. After in-depth study of the haggadah with Hillel Educator Philip Sherman, Russell Spivak '13 and Jesse Kirkpatrick '15 led a seder – as first-time “officiants” and to much acclaim – at Hillel; two smaller dorm seders also took place that first night. Second night, Grad Hillel brought together their community, AEPI hosted more undergraduates, and another seder was held in East Campus. Over 100 seder meals were served this year – on a year when Passover fell on a travel-able weekend! We also learned during the week the difference having a kosher meal plan on campus makes: we experienced a nine-fold increase over past years in students “ordering” mid-week kosher for Passover lunches and dinners. Beyond official meals, no one went hungry despite the withdrawal from hametz. Students organized a “Matzah for Change” booth throughout the week: in exchange for a spare change donation to [Yad Chessed](#), passersby enjoyed matzah topped with chocolate, jam, and other tasty spreads.

Out of Egypt and into Cambridge, the Institute was overrun by the admitted students of the Class of



2016. While the high school seniors schmoozed and hung out with current students, learning about Jewish life at MIT, Hillel arranged to distract their parents at a Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT luncheon featuring Professor Josh Tenenbaum PhD'99 of Brain and Cognitive Science.



Menschen of Mention



Noa Ghersin '14,
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My name is Noa Ghersin, and I am a sophomore majoring in Biological Engineering, with a concentration in Pre-Medicine.

I was born and raised in Israel until the age of 15 when my family moved to the United States. My name reflects my character accurately. *Noa* is a biblical name that has become extremely popular in Israel over the past decade; it integrates the “old” bible with the “new” state of Israel. That is exactly how I view myself - a modern Jew with a strong Israeli identity.

My interest in MIT started during my junior year of high school. I owe much to my classmates who used to ridicule me (in a friendly way) for being the only girl in my AP Calculus and Physics courses. They used to joke that I would study at MIT (with a guaranteed acceptance thanks to my gender...) I started learning about MIT, and the more I read and researched, the more I liked it. You can probably imagine how high I jumped on 3/14 at 1:59pm due to the exciting news that I would indeed go to MIT! Being an artist and a math lover, I originally planned to study Architecture. During my freshman year, however, I met Professor Pawan Sinha from the Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences and started doing research with him. I discovered a fascinating world

Creating a more serious tone, Yom HaShoah was marked with a student-organized memorial service. Particularly moving, Greg Kravit '14 shared his grandmother's story of survival. It was a reflective moment for me to consider that responsibility for formal Holocaust remembrance is now shared by the grandchildren of survivors. It brought a new depth to "Never forget."

The Spring "holiday season" came to a close with Yom HaAtzmaut. Hillel celebrated Israel's 64th birthday by giving away 1,000 blue and white cupcakes in Lobby 10 on the Infinite Corridor. Israel pamphlets and videos also educated the MIT community about Israel's contributions to science and technology. The day concluded with a Blue and White Bash – an Israeli-style barbeque and falafel party.



Barbeques attract barbeques (Course 8 students tell me it's a new physical law). Building off the fabulous energy of February's "greek" Shabbat dinner at Kappa Sigma and taking advantage of the warm (but windy) spring weather, Jews in fraternities and sororities also organized an April barbeque. The picture in the top banner shares the beginning of the fun; I'll attest to the grilling skills of the chefs!



The coming weeks bring Faculty Shabbat and Outreach Shabbat dinners, numerous needed study "breaks" to off-set paper and exam modes -- compare this to April's FYSH photo (First Year Students at Hillel), where "study" appears to overshadow the "break", a goodbye party for Eliad Shmuel, Hillel's Program Director of five years (see [calendar below](#)), and a Senior Appreciation Dinner.

And, if we're toasting seniors, commencement isn't far behind! Will you be in Cambridge for reunions? Please stop by the [Hillel Reception](#) to reconnect with classmates and wish "mazal tov" to our newest alumni -- the Class of 2012.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Stephen Fried '09 (Courses V & VIII) who is currently a graduate student of chemistry at Stanford University researching protein biophysics. Stephen has no qualms about altering the stoichiometry when cooking, and finds this to be a rewarding line of inquiry. He can be reached at sdfried@alum.mit.edu.

The Torah portion "Achrei Mot" is combined with that of "Kedoshim" (Lev 16:1–20:27) this year. The former explains sacrificial rituals that take place on Yom Kippur and enumerates forbidden sexual relations. The latter portion is sometimes cited as the holiness code, and contains a collection of

(mostly) ethical commandments, understood to be foundations for holiness. Some of the "Bible's greatest hits" are found in this parshah, such as the injunctions to not hate someone in your heart (Lev 19:17) and to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18).

I find it intriguing that the text associates the label "holiness" to these universal sensibilities of morality, when the Hebrew word (kedosh) also implies separate, and in many cases particularistic. Indeed, our contemporary word "holy" tends to carry ritual undertones, suggesting overt religious expression, as in the sarcastic phrase "holier than thou." What is it about ethical virtues that associate them closely with holiness?

To address this question, I appeal to the preamble of the Torah reading, which offers that "you should be holy because holy am I, your God" (Lev 19:2). This sentence asserts that holiness can be ascribed to the human behaviors that *imitate* God. In essence, if we begin with the postulate that God is holy, it follows fairly logically that man's quest to be holy comprises of copying God's attributes. Can we find Godly behaviors that parallel all the holy-for-humans

discovered a fascinating world and a new passion for understanding the human body. I decided to be a part of this world by studying Biological Engineering.

Growing up in Israel, it was always obvious to me that I was Jewish, even without defining myself as religious. When I came to the United States, I discovered that being Jewish, which was so natural to me, was not so for many Jewish and even Israeli children who were raised in American culture. Many of my peers at my Jewish high school viewed Jewish History and Hebrew lessons as torturous. During high school, I became very active in the Israeli Scouts, in order to attract those peers to both Judaism and Zionism. Naturally, when I came to MIT the first thing I did was visit Hillel with my family. I knew that I wanted to incorporate Jewish life into my broader college experience, and I am proud to say that I was the first student to join the Shabbat dinner meal plan - a fact that made me famous throughout the Hillel community!

During my freshman year at MIT, I became involved in more activities than just eating: I served as Hillel Social Chair and organized activities like Pizza in the Hut during Sukkot, Speed-Dating, and Jews on Ice for the general Boston Jewish undergraduate community. I also became a Hebrew teacher in the Hebrew@MIT ulpan. This year I was elected Hillel President, and I continue to teach Hebrew.

Hillel is like a second home to me, especially during the holidays when I cannot celebrate with my own family. By organizing fun activities for the Jewish community at MIT, I try to attract new students for involvement. I want each and every one of them to experience the homey feeling I receive from being a part of a close community and from experiencing a connection to Judaism.

During my two years here I have found MIT to be even better than I expected. True, classes are challenging, but MIT has so much to offer, and very often I find myself feeling like a kid in a candy store, trying to enjoy it all. Some of the "candies I have purchased" include working on my third undergraduate research project; going to India during last year's IAP (the month of January) and conducting research there; interning in Israel through MISTI Israel for two summers in a row; participating in UPOP; participating in the Gordon Engineering Leadership program next year; and being a member of the Sigma Kappa sorority. People sometimes ask me, "Why do you need Hillel in

prescriptions? In some cases, the parallel is manifest. For instance, we should be generous with giving food to the hungry (Lev 19:9-10), because that was precisely what God did for the Israelites with the gift of manna when they were wandering in the desert.

What about the requirement to use well-calibrated weights and balances (Lev 19:36) – is this something that God really could apply to himself? In a sense, God also carefully calibrated certain key measures as well. The stone, the *ephah*, and the *hin* (units of mass, volume, and liquid volume) can be thought of as “human” equivalents of the electron mass, Planck’s constant, and the speed of light. Their assigned values are arbitrary, but their constancy and continuity is of utmost significance. The text implies that a standardized set of measures is a precondition for reasonable exchange and trade (“You shall have just balances, just weights, a just *ephah*, and a just *hin*”). In turn, the standardized dimensions that seem to recur in Nature are preconditions for a reasonable universe. I am effectively recasting Wigner’s “unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics” and Einstein’s “incomprehensible comprehensibility” as a requirement for God’s holiness code to apply to God. The existence of an “ethical God” that “plays by his own rules” is important to us; at least, it is important to scientists. This picture can help us appreciate perhaps why, in turn, the existence of ethical humans is important to God. And if I’m not mistaken, this is precisely the point that Parshat Kedoshim is trying to teach us.

Keep the Good News Coming! Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

Generosity and annual support from alumni, parents, faculty, and friends 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 MIT Hillel's 2012 Donor Roll.

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

On the Hillel Calendar

Goodbye and Thank You Reception for Eliad Shmuel Monday, May 14; Main Dining Room, W11

After a five-year tenure at MIT Hillel, Program Director Eliad Shmuel is taking his next career steps. Celebrate Eliad's programmatic contributions to MIT Hillel -- from the creation of the Hummus Experience to developing the Technion Hillel-MIT Hillel ConnecTech program to professionalizing Hebrew@MIT classes -- as well as the deep personal connections he has made with so many students and others. Can't come? Drop him an [email](#).

Commencement/Tech Reunions/ Jewish Community Reception Friday, June 8

- **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 2012
- **Shabbat @ Hillel:** 7 pm, Services; 8 pm, Dinner, both at W11; RSVP today hillelsvp@mit.edu

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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...in addition to all these activities?" For most of my activities, although very enjoyable, I need to exercise my brain. Being involved in Hillel, although time consuming, is pure joy for me. It gives me the energy to go on with my wonderful but hectic life as an MIT student.

**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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