



MIT Hillel Update



Greetings to Alumni, Parents, and Friends in Cambridge and Beyond...

Pictured Above:

1. David Wyrobnik '15 enjoys a Lag B'Omer barbequed burger, wearing a fake mustache in support of AEPi Jewish Mustache Month
2. Inbar Yamin '15 (L) and Beth Cholst '13 revert to high school slumber-party mode at "Girls Night In"
3. In a Hillel volunteering outing, graduate student Nate Zuk shows local elementary school students the "magic" of science

Executive Director's Update



It is hard to find the right words to characterize this past month – really two long weeks -- in Boston and on campus: difficult? surreal? scary? communal? supportive? intense? All and none of these adjectives fully describe the experience.

As the Boston-area was shocked by the Marathon bombings and Friday's lockdown after the late-night campus shooting of [MIT Police Officer Sean Collier](#), may his memory be for a blessing, my staff and I stayed in contact with students by phone, Skype, email, Facebook, IM, and text (I publicly thank AT&T for crediting my over-texting charges – with understanding and without questions – so I could do my job of remaining in touch with our students through their preferred method of connection). Our students' flexibility and resilience matched that of the city I am so proud to call home. On Shabbat, I made "house-calls" around campus and to fraternities along Bay State Road. Morale was high, and I heard stories of where students had been late Thursday night/early Friday morning: of fraternity brothers watching police cars fly down an empty Memorial Drive, of one Jewish student EMT finding a place to buy flowers early, early Friday morning (pre-Boston-wide lockdown) for Officer Collier's first memorial, and of friends supporting each other as they stayed within dorms and living groups. By Sunday, the mood on campus had evolved to genuine relief as students happily returned to problem sets and no longer sat glued to TV sets.

One week later, this past Sunday, was the Jewish holiday of [Lag B'Omer](#) – a minor holiday in which we mark the end of a month-long plague of Roman persecutions that terrorized the second-century students of Rabbi Akiva (see Jenna Berkowitz's Torah from Tech below gives a 2nd interpretation). I felt that, on campus, we understood Rabbi Akiva's disciples as never before, as we, too, were emerging from shock and fear to celebrate living life. The weather could not have been more cooperative – a gorgeous Boston spring day, bright sunshine and temperatures in the 60s. At the Hillel Lag B'Omer barbeque, students basked in the sun: playing Frisbee, soccer, and just schmoozing and lounging. [AEPi](#) brothers concluded their [Jewish Mustache Month](#), a Hillel co-sponsored moustache growing and shaving for tzedakah/charity. Seniors from the class of 2013 gathered for a photo shoot



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Mentshn of Mention



Gregory Kravit '15
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Shalom! My name is Gregory Kravit, and I am currently finishing my sophomore year at MIT majoring in Aerospace Engineering (Course XVI). I went to high school in Scarsdale, NY after growing up mostly in the suburbs of New York. All my life I knew I wanted to study aerospace engineering so MIT seemed like the perfect fit, while not limiting myself to the many opportunities that abound here. I always tell prospective parents and students on my tours that my favorite part of MIT is the vast opportunities that are available here. It truly is a privilege to study here.

Aside from filling in as a tour guide, I am involved in a number of activities on campus. I am the athletic sports chair for my dorm, Macgregor, and I also represent my dorm on the UA council. I have been a part of MIT's AIAA Design/Build/Fly team, and we recently placed 4th place in Tucson, Arizona. If I am not in lab working on the competition airplane, you will find me either biking around Boston, on the ice playing intramural hockey, or up in the air taking off from one of the local airports.

My connection with Hillel and my Jewish identity has grown stronger since first coming to MIT. To be honest, my first semester of freshman year, I never went to Hillel. Starting in the second semester, I started coming to



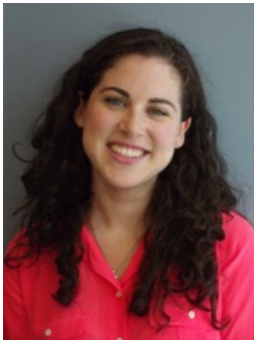
– and I stood amazed, contemplating and honoring the class that entered MIT as I returned here four years ago as Hillel Executive Director.

For all that we went through this past month, I stand in awe of our blessings: our incredible students, our caring and honorable first responders, our sense of community, our love for one another, our love of life. As we move towards finals, into reunions, and on to graduation and summer plans, I hope these are the lessons and memories we carry with us.

L'shalom,
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

P.S. Earlier this month, as part of Hillel's Yom HaShoah/Holocaust Remembrance Day Commemoration Event in the MIT Chapel, MIT Hillel and the MIT Concert Choir co-sponsored a performance of the choral piece *Peace*, composed by Cathy Mansfield P'16. [Listen](#) to a section of the larger opera.

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Jenna Berkowitz '09. After quickly abandoning her course 7 degree, she turned to a career raising funds for the Institute. She is currently running the MIT Parents Fund, planning to eventually pursue an MBA, and sincerely hoping that 8+ years at MIT don't make her a lifer (but would that be that bad?). She can be reached at jennab@alum.mit.edu.

Since graduating in 2009, I've had the privilege to stick around Cambridge doing development work for the Institute. It's been great remaining a part of such a robust community. In light of recent events around our city and campus, I've felt the need to find some perspective.

When the bombs went off at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, I was safe on campus and, thank God, I quickly learned that those I hold dear were spared as well. When the MIT Alert system texted me about an "active shooter on campus," I was across the country traveling on behalf of MIT. I didn't sleep that night, partially because I was too nervous to silence my phone - my friends and family, and the automated systems of both MIT and the City of Cambridge, did not stop texting or calling. By the following evening the lockdown was lifted and more information was available. The shooters were identified as the bombers and were finally killed/apprehended. The shooting victim was identified as widely loved MIT police officer Sean Collier. MIT Campus and Cambridge started on a path back to normalcy.

I missed the huge memorial service for Officer Sean that was attended by thousands from the MIT and law enforcement communities. It was another difficult day to be away from home, but even watching the video recording days later moved me. Vice President Joe Biden gave a particularly poignant, heartfelt speech. He praised the diversity and equity of MIT's community, the questioning, forward-thinking attitude of our research, and the strength and resilience of the people of MIT and Greater Boston. The very existence of these traits are a Jihadist's worst nightmare, he said. This speech continued to resonate this past Shabbat when I was reminded, by Rabbi Zarchi (of the Chabad house that serves a certain arts and crafts school down the river) of the tragic story of Rabbi Akiva's students.

We are currently in the middle of counting the *Omer*, the 49 days between the holidays of Passover and *Shavuot*, the first 32 days of which are widely viewed as a period of mourning for the following reason: the Babylonian Talmud in the tractate *Yevamot* tells of a plague that killed 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students during the period of the *Omer*, and concluded on the 33rd day of counting. The students' lack of respect for one another is cited as the reason for this tragedy. This justification raises a question: was it not Rabbi Akiva who taught that "to love your neighbor as you love yourself is the greatest principal of the Torah"? Why was it that all of his students, who assumedly ascribed to his principles, lacked respect for one another? Rabbi Zarchi theorized that this fatal flaw actually resulted from their affection for each other: because they loved one another, they would not simply dismiss a difference of opinion. Rabbi Akiva's students so wanted to engage in each other's intellectual positions, but they didn't temper their passions for their own, and thus they were punished

I've always been incredibly proud to be a part of (and talk about) MIT's collaborative and dynamic environment. Unlike the students of Rabbi Akiva,

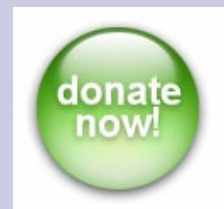
Friday dinners after realizing I was losing my Jewish identity. To my surprise, I found a vibrant and strongly, knit Jewish community. Soon, I found myself engaging in the prayers and even attending the services before the dinners. Most importantly, I have formed great friendships through Hillel.

As my connection and involvement in Hillel grew, I found myself taking advantage of the many opportunities that Hillel offers, each opportunity leading to another richer experience. Because of Hillel, I went on Birthright last June and visited Israel for the first time. In addition to the incredible Birthright experience, I stayed on for the MIT Birthright Extension that provided a fantastic opportunity to visit Israeli startups and meet MIT alumni. These experiences provided another lens to experience Israel as the "Startup Nation" in addition to the cultural and religious experiences of the Birthright trip. After returning home from the trip, I was invited by Hillel to attend the AIPAC policy conference, which, in turn, led me to seek out and be invited to additional student leadership advocacy training this past January. This semester I was asked to be one of the undergraduate members of the Hillel Board of Directors. I attended the board meeting in April and look forward to attending future meetings in the coming year.

To say the least, MIT Hillel has positively influenced my MIT experience, and I look forward to growing my connection with Hillel as I finish my undergraduate education.

Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!

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



MITers put finding the best possible solution first, regardless of whether that solution was their own or not. We respect each other, valuing each other's opinions, and have seen the impact that such an approach can have. Watching the memorial service and the healing it facilitated last week confirmed that, in addition to this steadfast respect, we love one another as we love ourselves.

MIT Hillel's 2013 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.

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 2013 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 Danny Watt, MIT Hillel's Director of Development, [dwatt@mit.edu](mailto:d watt@mit.edu).

On the Hillel Calendar

Friday, May 3: Richard "Dick" Wurtman,

Cecil H. Green Distinguished Professor Emeritus, "A New Strategy for Ameliorating the Memory Disturbances of Alzheimer's Disease"



Friday, June 8: 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 2013
- **Shabbat @ Hillel:** 7 pm, Services; 8 pm, Dinner, both at W11; RSVP today hillelsvp@mit.edu

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