



## 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. Toasting our seniors!** Pictured, left to right: Sara Dahan, Neta Batscha, Benjamin Francis.
- 2. Mazal tov, Graduates!** Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM'97 celebrates at Hillel's Reunion Reception on Commencement Day with Hannah Durschlag SMBT'12 and Greg Steinbrecher '12
- 3. MIT Hillel ConnecTech delegates visit Google-Israel with their Hillel Haifa-Technion counterparts.** Check out [their blog](#) to learn more!

### Executive Director's Update



Mazal tov, Class of 2012!

It was a pleasure greeting, wishing "Mazal Tov," and high five-ing the graduating seniors and graduate students as they marched past the Religious Activities Center this morning. A bittersweet pleasure I will admit, as I again come to grips with the post-commencement reality that as students embark on new beyond-MIT adventures, it means less frequent personal interactions. I will miss the coffee dates and unplanned Infinite Corridor chats, even as I wish our students great success and meaning as MIT alumni. Stay in touch!

The return of so many Jewish alumni for reunions and to our annual Hillel Reception also brought a well-worn smile to my face. It was a joy to welcome so many of you back. I'm looking forward to Shabbat dinner with more of you tonight – kosher food prepared on campus; a limited taste of the new kosher options at MIT.

While we've been celebrating on campus, continuing students have been traveling throughout Israel. MIT Hillel's first ConnecTech delegation bonded with Hillel students at the Technion in Haifa. Students on both campuses spent the year studying ethical and moral challenges in science through the lens of Jewish texts, and volunteering to improve their home communities. Now they are learning about each other, about Jewish identity in the US and Israel, and about science, technology, and community service in Israel. Many thanks to [Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies](#) and the [Boston-Haifa Connection](#) for their support in making this incredible opportunity a reality. Here's an excerpt from the ConnecTech blog about their Shabbat experience: "Imagine our surprise when we heard that the people in this kibbutz [Hanaton] were real-life pioneers! What? How could members of a socialist movement started one hundred years ago be pioneers? We soon found out that this was no ordinary kibbutz. Unlike most kibbutzim, which are primarily secular (a few kibbutzim are orthodox), this kibbutz is the first and (so far) the only kibbutz in Israel where Conservative, Orthodox, as well as Reform Jews actively engage



### In This Issue

[MIT Mentshn of Mention](#)  
[Director's Update](#)  
[Torah from Tech](#)  
[2012 Annual Fund](#)  
[Planned Giving](#)

### Mentshn of Mention



Jason Strauss '12 (Course 6), [strauss@mit.edu](mailto:strauss@mit.edu)

MIT students have different ways of escaping the rigors and stresses of being an MIT student: sports, sleeping, parties, etc. For four years, my personal favorite was - Shabbat Dinner.

I just finished senior year and have been attending Hillel events since my first week at MIT. I grew up in Long Island, NY and attended a private Jewish day school. After visiting MIT during Campus Preview Weekend and seeing the curious research and outlandish personal projects that students work on, I had to accept! The first Friday night of freshman year, I attended Shabbat dinner at Hillel and made friends who would be some of my closest friends throughout my four years at MIT.

Coming to MIT, I wasn't quite sure what to study and took a variety of classes ranging from entrepreneurship to toy product design, a primer on mechanical engineering. After my first software class, I promptly declared Course 6 (read: Electrical Engineering & Computer Science).

The summer following my freshman year, MIT Hillel organized a trip to Israel to

together in all aspects of Judaism. How about that for pioneering! I guess a 'pioneer' does not only have to be somebody who starts a new country, but also can be somebody who innovates society from within." Check out more from [their blog!](#)

All ConnecTech participants are Israel "veterans" – or at least have been to our Jewish State before. Exploring Israel for the first time with peers, MIT



Birthingright participants arrived in Tel Aviv on Tuesday, and immediately began exploring, hiking, immersing themselves in our Land. Most of our students on Birthright will be remaining in Israel for MIT's unique Birthright Extension. In collaboration with MIT's [MISTI Israel](#) Program, we provide the special opportunity to explore the HiTech side of Israel for four extra days. Highlights include [BetterPlace](#) -- including driving Israel's new

electric cars, exploring the labs at Teva Pharmaceuticals, and hospitality with MIT alumni. The Birthright students also have a [blog](#) you can follow.

Summer is (supposedly) quieter for college-based professionals. True, a dearth of students makes for easier walks across campus, but the Hillel staff is working hard to evaluate this year and plan for next. We said *"hitraot!"* until later" to Eliad Shmuel, our veteran Program Director (picture right is Techiya serenading Eliad at his farewell party with their parody: "All We are Saying is Give Chickpeas a Chance." [Watch the video!](#)) and to Philip Sherman, our Hebrew College rabbinical student intern/educator this May. We now welcome Marissa Feinman as our new Director of Student Life and Programming and Lev Meirowitz Nelson as our next Jewish educator/rabbinic intern. We all are already thinking ahead to welcoming the Class of 2016.



L'shalom and a great summer,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

## Torah from Tech



*Our Torah this month is taught by Eliana Schleifer '12 (Course 14). After graduation, she will be in Chicago working at The Greatest Good, an economic consulting firm. She can be reached at [ess717@alum.mit.edu](mailto:ess717@alum.mit.edu).*

This week's parasha, *Bha'alotcha*, describes Bnei Yisrael/the Children of Israel's wanderings around the desert – they have recently left Mt. Sinai after a year of remaining there and have settled in the desert of Paran. Paran is extremely close to *Eretz Yisrael*/the Land of Israel and Bnei Yisrael expect to be nearing the end of their wandering

and to finally be entering the promised land of Israel. However, after they settle in Paran, a day goes by, a week goes by, but God still does not move the people forward. The people are confused and in reaction to not knowing what's going on, they begin to complain about inconsequential things. They start to whine about the "*man*", the breadlike food that they have been consuming for over a year. So why do they suddenly begin to object to it now?

I believe the criticism of the "*man*" is really a vocalization of the deterioration of the people's faith in God and a representation of their fear of leaving familiar places such as Egypt and Mt. Sinai. And God sees this deterioration in Bnei Yisrael's faith! In this parasha God not only continues to let the people wander even though they are so physically close to Eretz Yisrael, but, also, God is angered and creates a fire that consumes the people. God puts the people through these hardships because he recognizes their lack of faith as can be found in chapter 10: verse 33, in which the term "*mehar Hashem*" (leaving the mountain of God) is used. This is the only time in the entire tanach that this term is used. Usually, the tanach will write that the people left "Har Sinai" (the mountain of Sinai).

The distinction in these two terms is extremely crucial and poignant. The reason God is angered in this chapter and postpones the people entering the land of Israel is because the people have not only left the mountain of Sinai, a physical location, but they have also left God. God is so angry because he recognizes that his people are not only physically removed from the mountain, but have committed an even greater sin – they are emotionally

learn about the research at the Technion University and to visit high tech Israeli startups. We teamed up with Technion engineering students to visit Better Place to see Israeli's future electric cars. At the Technion we saw research on maintaining plants' fruit production through droughts. At night we went out with the Technion students and talked about good and bad professors, homework, and other common student fare. It was an amazing experience to see firsthand Israel's technical prowess and to see the work being done there.

I have had software internships on both coasts and have explored the Jewish communities (and best kosher restaurants) in Boston, New York, and Palo Alto (try the kosher "bacon" burger at the Kitchen Table). While not doing homework or interning, I've had some opportunities to hack with friends on projects – building a course planner for MIT students and a tool to collaboratively create music playlists. Otherwise you'll find me on the tennis courts, mountain biking, or if at all possible skiing.

As the Boston weather got warmer this past April, Hillel hosted a Greek BBQ for students in fraternities and sororities. Attending with five other Jewish students from my fraternity, it was a great opportunity to meet other Jewish guys and girls and to grill out at MIT. Another one of my favorite events is "Jews on Ice", an inter-Hillel ice skating night on the MIT ice rink, which brings together Jewish students from several Boston schools.

I've eaten in a Sukkah in front of the MIT student center, shared challah with professors, and lit a test tube menorah in Lobby 7. After every week of work though, despite all-nighters, problem sets, and tests, there's Shabbat dinner. Shabbat dinner at MIT Hillel is a time to get together with old friends and meet new ones, to eat, to relax, to talk Jewish, to talk Tech, and to talk literally everything in between, literally everything.

I'm currently a recipient of the hackNY fellowship, working at a software startup in New York City. I expect to be working long hours, but if the course load at MIT taught me something, Shabbat dinner taught me something too – take the time on Friday night, it's worth it.

**Thank you for supporting**

removed from God. God understands that Bnei Yisrael currently have the wrong attitude and thus, even though Paran is so close to Eretz Yisrael, the people are condemned to wandering as opposed to entering the promised land with the wrong attitude and a lack of devotion to God.

This week is not only that of Parshat Bha'alotcha, but it is also the weekend of the graduation of the 2012's! As a student of this class, I can attest to the fact that we each have spent the last four years working extremely hard, gathering skills that will hopefully be useful for a very long time and have also helped build a strong, lasting community at Hillel and in various other organizations. As students, we each have a great devotion to MIT, and although I am extremely excited to enter the post-college world and put my skills to use, similar to Bnei Yisrael, I am also nervous regarding the future.

Bnei Yisrael wandered the desert for years and began to lose faith, doubting that the future held promise – maybe Egypt or Mt. Sinai were better than Paran or the future land of Israel? We, as upcoming graduates, are at a similar intersection – MIT has been an unbelievably emotionally and intellectually nourishing place for us, so are we entering the “promised” land or actually leaving it? In a way, I believe that we are doing both. MIT, over the past four years, has been a “promised” land for us, helping to mold us, provide us with an unbelievable set of resources and inspire us to use science and engineering to help better the world. Now, we must enter the world, utilizing the skills MIT has given us, and help turn the current world into a “promised” land.

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### **MIT Hillel's 2012 Annual Fund 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.](#)

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### **Tamid Initiative - Planned Giving @ MIT Hillel**

Endowment and legacy gifts truly sustain and build an organization. MIT Hillel is excited to help alumni and friends to create their personal Jewish legacies at MIT.

MIT Hillel invites alumni and friends to consider joining MIT's Katharine Dexter McCormick (1904) Society ([KDMS](#)) and be part of MIT Hillel's Tamid Initiative by making a planned gift or bequest to MIT for the benefit of MIT Hillel. Your generosity will help MIT Hillel engage the 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)

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