



MIT Hillel Update



Mazal tov to the Class of 2013 and All New Graduates!

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

Pictured Above:

1. Ariel Sommer PhD'13 and Rabbi Fisher celebrate as graduates process to Commencement in the misty rain.
2. Betty and William Kantrowitz SM'63 proudly display a new red jacket at the Hillel Reunions Reception.
3. (L-R): Adin Schmahmann '13, Ariana Mann '13, Paul Lazarescu '13 dry off and relax at the Hillel Reunions Reception.

Executive Director's Update



Mazal tov, MIT Class of 2013! I loved celebrating with this year's graduates -- they entered MIT at the same time I began my tenure as Hillel's Executive Director. This is "my" class, and it was quite bittersweet to high-5 them, hug them, and wish them all success as they continue on their journeys. From local start-up work to Stanford graduate school, the National Guard special forces, Maccabiah basketball teams,

and Wall Street, I expect some continuing great reports and sagas. We are so blessed in the 21st century to have so many ways to remain in touch!

Which is how we could also welcome numerous alumni back to Hillel for Reunions. I loved meeting all the returning alum, hearing their stories, and sharing how Jewish life has changed since their days at MIT -- be that five years ago or fifty-five. We've come a long way: kosher food as part of an MIT meal plan; engagement work that includes fraternities, sororities, dorms, sports teams; busloads of students going to Israel each year; and a Hillel staff that knows by name and story about 75% (and growing) of all Jews on campus.



While we kvelled, met, and marveled on campus, many underclassmen and graduate students were exploring Israel. Twenty-four toured Israel for the first time on our summer Birthright bus (Nico Rakover '15 and Nathan Landman '15 show their might at the Dead Sea, left); thirteen of them remained for additional days after the official trip as part of MIT's Birthright Extension. Thanks go to David Polak '59 for underwriting the Extension, and to [MIT MISTI Israel](#) for the co-sponsorship and connections to especially interesting labs and companies. Our students were awed by Israel's science and technology prowess as they visited start-ups, labs, and hi-tech companies. I got this update along the way: "Today we went to the science gardens at Weizmann Institute in Rehovot. These gardens were an engineer's dream-



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Mentshn of Mention



Ariana Mann '13
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Hi, my name is Ariana Mann. I just graduated with my degree in Physics, along with minors in Chemistry and Political Science. It is hard to believe how quickly these past four years have flown by and how much I have learned in that time!

Originally from Seattle, I was able to find a home far away from home at Hillel and on Burton 2, where I lived for all four years. When I arrived, the traditional community on Burton 2 was at its smallest. I think we had a Shabbat shacharit/morning Orthodox minyan twice over the whole year. However, the smallness provided the opportunity for very close bonds and friendships to form, which have continued, prospered and supported me throughout my time at MIT.

I have loved getting to watch the community grow since my freshman year. Every year we made minyan more and more. We now have services every Shabbat again. We also have the kosher meal plan. The ability to grab a hot meal when you are swamped is something I will never take for granted. I greatly appreciate everyone's hard work to

come-true - the tour guide told us we acted just like the 6-year-olds there the day before... we saw a crazy math sculpture made of cubes to appear as hexagons, gyroscopes, swings and pendulums. It was clear that we did not forget our knowledge from 8.01 and 8.02 (translation: physics mechanics and physics electricity and magnetism)...." [Their blog](#) has lots more. The picture (right, Julia Ellermeier '14 and Joe Schuman '16) also proves that you can actually exhaust an MIT student.



Overlapping these travels, another delegation of our students also absorbed Israel's scientific wonders and created people-to-people connections with Hillel students at the Technion. Over the school year, this ConnectTech experience exposes students at



both schools to social justice opportunities, science ethics questions, and science education volunteering in Boston and Haifa. [Follow their excitement](#) in Israel.



With seniors now scattered and many students working and traveling off-campus for the summer, there are some weeks of quiet ahead. Hillel has informal happenings over the next few months, from potluck Shabbat dinners to bike rides. This photo is my recent 20-mile ice cream ride to Kimball Farms with Techiya, MIT's Jewish a cappella group. Such gatherings give welcome breaks from the important summer work of program evaluation and strategic planning for the fall.



I look forward to being back in touch in September as students return! Have a great summer.

L'shalom,
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM'97

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Benjamin Francis '12 (Course 18). Benjamin is now training to be a submarine officer in the US Navy. He can be reached at bfrancis1989@gmail.com.

There is a perplexing incident related in this week's parasha, Chukat, which gets to the heart of matters pertaining to love, loss, and reunion. After wandering in the desert for forty years, the Jewish people demanded to know why Moses had led them out of Egypt "to this evil place; it is not a place for seeds, or for fig trees, grapevines, or pomegranate trees, and

there is no water to drink." Moses prayed to God for guidance. God instructed him to speak to a rock in the presence of the congregation "so that it will give forth its water." After Moses and his brother, Aaron, had assembled the congregation before the rock, Moses said, "Now listen, you rebels, can we draw water for you from this rock?" He struck the rock twice and "an abundance of water gushed forth." Whereupon God told Moses and Aaron that since they did not have faith in Him, they would not lead the Jewish people into the Land of Israel.

The story raises two questions. First, why would the Jewish people make such an astonishing statement? Second, why was Moses punished for his response?

Maimonides, one of the greatest thinkers of all time, suggests that Moses was punished because his behavior gave the impression that God was angry, when in fact He was not. This in turn suggests that the Jewish people were justified in expressing their grievance. How can this be the case?

The timing of the incident is important. Just before the congregation confronted Moses, Miriam, his sister, had died. Who was Miriam? Rashi, who wrote one of the most important commentaries to the Torah, cites the Talmud in giving us a glimpse of her importance. He states that while Miriam was alive, a well had followed the Jewish people through the desert in her merit.

make that a reality on our campus.

I began as a mashgicha (kosher supervisor) in the Hillel kitchens my freshman year and have continued to serve as one every year since. There have been a lot of adjustments with the addition of the meal plan, and a lot more has been asked of the student mashgichim. I have enjoyed not only helping to provide kosher meals to the students, but also getting to know the kitchen staff. I hope it continues to grow and improve with the coming years!

I have also watched the community grow as the vice-president of MIT Students for Israel (MITS) for three years. We run cultural events such as "A Night of Blue and White" in the fall to kick off the year and Yom Ha'Atzmaut celebrations, complete with cupcakes in Lobby 10 and an Israeli-style barbeque. There are also political events when we have brought in speakers such as Hillel Neuer of the UNWatch and Yisrael Ne'eman of Hamartzim. The greatest part of MITS is tabling and talking to students who, while lacking some natural connections to Israel, are passionate supporters of Israel.

Outside of Hillel and the Jewish community, I spent many a semester and summer working in my UROP, a collaboration between MIT, Harvard, and McGill. Additionally, I served as a mentor at Girl's Angle where I worked to challenge and inspire young girls in the area with a gift for math. Also on the education track, I volunteered at the Massachusetts State Science and Engineering Fair and provided analysis to help them improve the fair itself, as well as their teacher training programs.

Looking back, I feel exactly the same as when I accepted my admission to MIT: that there is nowhere better for me. MIT has not only provided me with information, but it has taught me how to think better and actually made me smarter. One thing is for sure, my MIT experience would not have been the same without Hillel and the entire Jewish community here.

Thank you for supporting

When she died, the congregation had no water.

Even with this information, it is hard to justify the congregation's apparent lack of faith. Had they not learned to trust God by this time? How could that be, given that they had directly experienced so many miracles from Him?

I want to suggest an explanation for this difficulty. There are times, especially after losing a loved one, when God suddenly feels distant. People die and we wonder if we will ever see them again. These are times of trial for faith. I believe the Jewish people confronted Moses at the time and in the manner that they did because they had lost one of the great leaders, one of the "three shepherds," of the congregation. What's more, God understood their emotional pain. As we have seen, He did not express anger at the congregation, and He even punished Moses for doing so. (The reasons for punishing Moses, who must have been in an even greater state of emotional distress over the death of his sister, are beyond my comprehension. I can only cite the Jewish tradition that the righteous are held to stricter standards.)

The story we have discussed provides hope in times of sorrow. It tells us that God understands the pain we are in. Our tradition teaches that we will one day be reunited with those we have lost. Until that day, the pain we feel cannot be erased, but we should take comfort that there is a God who understands it.

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!

Our fiscal year ends June 30!

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 Rabbi Fisher, rabbif@mit.edu.

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