



## 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. **Orientation week make-your-own pizza connected upperclassmen and new frosh. AEPI brothers welcome first-years (L-R): Jonathan Elzur '15, Noam Buckman '16, Ben Niewood '15, Jon Jove '15, Stevie Fine '15**
2. **Hillel Grads take a day off to explore the Boston Harbor Islands -- spelling out their MIT pride.**
3. **The official West Campus vs. East Campus Orientation Week water fight included modern day "Maccabees" (L-R) Inbar Yamin '15, Jill Katz '16, Dalia Leibowitz '16, and (front) Nanu Roitman '15**

### Executive Director's Update



Welcome to the Class of 2016!

There is something magical about the beginning of the school year. Energy. Excitement. Palpable optimism mixed with a healthy dose of fearful newness.

The little questions being repeated again and again student to student can be interpreted as big questions: Where are you from? What do

you want to do and study? Where am I, and how do I get to where I need to be?

MIT Hillel provides a context and home for all levels of questions. Here are conversations I overheard this past Orientation Week about or between Jews on campus:

"Anyone who is from California, hop into the center of the circle. Ok, back to the circle. If you're on a sports team... If you're Jewish..." Marissa, Hillel's Program Staffer, to Shoshana, Hillel's Israel Engagement Staffer, as they walked by at just that moment: "Could you read the names on those name tags...?"



"The AEPI Fraternity House is as clean as it ever will be – I think I even saw my reflection in the doorknobs yesterday. Do you think we could invite our parents back *now* to see what it looks like?"

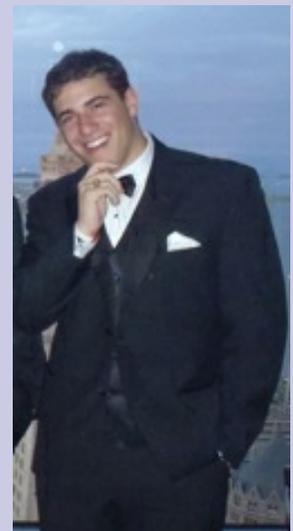
"So, what's the difference between 3.091 and 5.111? If I don't know whether I want to be a chemistry, material science, physics, electrical engineering, or aerospace major, how do I keep the most options open?"

"Hey, Russ, any Jewish freshman this year on the football team? Mazal tov on being chosen one of the team captains."

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### Mentshn of Mention



**Russell Spivak '13**  
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My name is Russell Spivak and I am a senior in Courses 15 and 17. I'm originally from Scarsdale, NY and I chose to attend MIT for many reasons. Among them were location, academic opportunities, and athletics (I am one of a handful of Jews on the MIT football team).

My Jewish experience at MIT is probably different than most. It is not necessarily the specific customs that bring me closer to my Jewish roots, rather Judaism gives me a spiritual and emotional grounding. As I toil on a problem set in my room, I am reminded by my mezzuzah on my door and the *Etz Hayim* Humash (weekly Torah readings) that sits on my shelf to be thankful for all that I've been blessed with, and I immediately regain my perspective. Conversely, when I have really strived and feel great about myself, my celebrations and boasting are toned down because my Jewish upbringing reminds me to be thankful for, and not arrogant regarding, my

"Hi, umm, Lizzie introduced herself in Bexley, and told me you were having a make-your-own pizza dinner. Umm. I don't know if I'll be at Hillel so often, but can I come in and check it out?"

"Yo, Jon, are you coming to Shabbat dinner tomorrow?" [Shouted across Kresge Oval.] "It's free... bring all your frosh."



Questions lead to knowledge. Questions lead to growth. Questions lead to connection. I see each and every question as an opening... to learning more about what inspires our Jews on campus. I take the gift of their questions and searching to introduce students to new or deeper ways to be Jewish. We have student leaders who create spaces and times for building community and for celebrating Shabbat and holidays and for volunteering. We have student engagement interns who are reaching out within their peer networks to initiate Jewish conversations among and between Jews in sororities and on sports teams. We have seniors who are creating a series to explore life beyond MIT, asking specifically Jewish and universal questions of post-college life together: how does one balance work and non-work priorities? How do you drink like a *mentsh* in the work force?

I look forward to another year of giving students the tools to both ask big questions and own their Jewish journeys. My year of questions begins with "How will we continue to create opportunities so that MIT Jews can see the world through a Jewish lens?" Magic and success for me will be these students graduating from MIT, equally energized and excited, and going forth enriching the Jewish people and the world.

L'shana tova,  
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97

## Torah from Tech



*Our Torah this month is taught by David Tabak '90. David studied economics and physics at the Institute before doing his graduate work at that other school in Cambridge. He now works as a consulting economist in Manhattan. He can be reached at [dtabak@alum.mit.edu](mailto:dtabak@alum.mit.edu).*

This week's Torah portion, *Ki Tavo*, contains one of the biblical references to tithing: "When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithing—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your gates." (Deuteronomy 26:12). While tithes are now often thought of as charitable contributions like *tzedakah*, because this was a

commandment in the Torah, tithing was effectively a tax on income. As a Course 14 graduate, one of my first thoughts was for whom was this tithe used, and why?

Whether tithing is thought of as a tax or charity, providing for the fatherless and the widow is eminently sensible because at the time of the original commandment, they lived in a society in which widows and orphans would have great difficulty in earning a living.

In contrast, the first recipient mentioned in the passage, the Levite, earns his portion not through unfavorable circumstances but through a divinely imposed monopoly (with a great barrier to entry—no one could become a Levite who was not born to the position). If tithing is thought of as charity, this seems somewhat perverse; someone born with a natural advantage is given even more. But, there is an economic justification for the tithe if thought of as a tax for a public good because the Levites' actions were done on behalf of the community. This is something that we find echoed in the former *Yom Kippur* ritual of sending a goat into the wilderness in atonement for the people's sins. If payments to the Levites were voluntary, then the "free-rider" problem would arise—individuals would have an incentive to pay little or nothing, trusting that others would ensure the Levites' participation.

Finally, the stranger's inclusion may evoke the oft-repeated commandment to be kind to strangers because we were strangers in Egypt. But, why should kindness mean a charitable gift, rather than just treating a stranger with the same fairness that one should show a fellow member of the community? One answer may lie in Deuteronomy 24:19-22, where the Israelites are

accomplishments. That thought process has been re-enforced time and time again at MIT, as school and life have their incredible highs and lows, often dictated by classwork. Jewish life to me here is a fantastic mechanism to stay grounded.

My specific interactions with the MIT Jewish community have been numerous. I've helped lead the community in a Passover seder. I've participated in a Greek (ie, fraternity and sorority) Shabbat. I've participated in an outreach program to excite more Jewish members of the community to become active. And I studied with Reb Phillip, Hillel's former Hebrew College rabbinical school intern, to take on deeper aspects of the ethical philosophy I studied in classes. In this light, my Jewish interactions have, once again, given me space from within the daily grind of MIT and provided an outlet to share the positive aspects of my Jewish upbringing and try to engage others to feel the same way.

These interactions have been incredible in their ability to force me to expand my thought process, meet new people and appreciate my family and friends for instilling in me our traditions and customs from a young age. Without a doubt, my MIT experience would be lessened without the added aspect of Jewish life.

**Thank you for  
supporting  
MIT Hillel!**

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



instructed to not go back to collect wheat, olives, and grapes that were missed in harvesting. Instead, they are told to leave those for “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.” The stranger is thus joined not with the Levite, but with those who have difficulty earning a living.

*Ki Tavo* and related passages provide interesting history on how Jews were told their taxes and charitable gifts were to be used. I do not know how much that should affect our thinking about the use of taxes and *tzedakah* today, or even in what direction the answers lead, but asking and attempting to answer such questions is surely a worthwhile endeavor.

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## MIT Hillel's 2013 Annual Fund Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

The 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 2013 Donor Roll.

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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.

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)

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## MIT Jews in the News

MIT Hillel Board Member and MIT Dean of Admissions, **Stu Schmill '86**, recently appeared on Radio Boston to discuss the upcoming October Supreme Court case on affirmative action, Fisher vs. University of Texas at Austin. [Listen](#) to Stu discuss the Amicus Brief recently filed by MIT.

### Mazal Tov to...

**Dave Held '05, SM'07** and **Irene Kaplow '10** on their wedding in Brookline, MA on September 2! Much happiness to them and their families.

**Eli Cohen '10** and **Margaret Zwiebach** on their wedding on September 2! And, mazal tov to their other MIT-community family members: father-of-the-bride Professor Barton Zwiebach of Course 8, and brother-of-the-bride, Aaron Zwiebach '16, as well as everyone in the Cohen and Zwiebach families.

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## On the Hillel Calendar

### Wednesday, September 12: Birthright Registration

Birthright is a free 10-day Israel experience for Jewish students aged 18-26 who have not traveled on a peer-group Israel program. Tell your eligible students to register: [www.israelwithisraelis.com](http://www.israelwithisraelis.com). Email MIT Hillel's Birthright Coordinator, [Shoshana Gibbor](#), for more information.

**Sunday, September 16 - Tuesday, September 18: Rosh Hashana**  
**Tuesday, September 25 - Wednesday, September 26: Yom Kippur**  
**Sunday, September 30 - Tuesday, October 9: Sukkot**

To learn more about services, meals, and happenings on campus, check out [our flier](#). Free Rosh Hashana dinner for MIT students!

## Friday, October 12: Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT

We kick off the Fall lineup with Political Science Professor Adam Berinsky speaking on "The Political Behavior of Ordinary Citizens." Not in the Cambridge area? Look for announcements of "Leading Jewish Minds on the Road"... we may be coming to a city near you!



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