

In This Issue

MIT Mentshn of Mention  
 Director's Update  
 Torah from Tech  
 2015 Annual Fund  
 Planned Giving  
 On the Calendar  
 Mazal tov



**Welcome to All New and Returning Students!**

**L'shana tova to All!**

Left and Right: Greeting new members of the Class of 2019 at the Activities Midway during Orientation Week. Left picture: Katie Fisher '19 and Sarah Stern '19; Right: Hillel Assistant Director Marissa Freed and Evelyn Florentine '18

Center: For some Jews, Rosh Hashanah tradition includes a fish head, eating from it and/or displaying it on one's holiday table. On one level, this symbolizes the "head" of the year, the literal translation of "Rosh Hashana". On a deeper level, and in MIT tradition, it also signifies the desire to be at the "head" or front of any endeavor. Pictured: Jason Fischman '17, Tally Portnoi '17, Harry Lubowe '17, Caroline Morganti '16

**Mentshn of Mention**



Rachel Galowich '18  
[galowich@mit.edu](mailto:galowich@mit.edu)

I am sophomore from Chicago, who is studying in Course 1-ENG (civil and environmental engineering), materials and mechanics core.

In addition to the prestigious academic reputation for STEM fields, I decided to come to MIT because of the level of student involvement on campus. When I visited for Campus Preview Weekend, I was amazed to see (and stressed to pick from) the twenty different events occurring in the same hour, all run by students. Unlike accepted student weekends at other schools, the diverse range of passions was expressed so naturally. I was really shown (not just told) all of the buzzwords administrators or admissions officers use to describe their schools.

In high school, I participated in (and was eventually the co-president of) my school's Jewish Student Connection program. I met one of my closest friends attending the weekly meetings. I came to Hillel hoping to form similarly strong relationships.

**Executive Director's Update**



Happy new academic year! L'shana tova/happy New Year!

I love this time of year. Eager first-year students. Refreshed returning students. Energy! Smiles! Anticipation!

New beginnings are exciting and inspiring.

Over the past week, I have met dozens of freshmen and first-year graduate students, fulfilling dreams as they begin MIT. I have also counseled many a parent who is dropping off their first (or last) child and has their own mixed emotions as their children grow up and begin a more independent journey. And, I have hugged and warmly welcomed back

all our upperclassmen, who are catching up with each other on summer internships and travels. Our first Shabbat dinner during Orientation Week was a crowded room of joy, introductions, and relaxation. Classes started yesterday, and all too soon a school routine will begin.



Sunday night begins Rosh Hashana, another new beginning. Over the Holy Days, Hillel, of course, offers services, and our free Rosh Hashana dinner on Sunday night, at which we expect close to 100 attendees. In addition, as my staff and I always strive to do, we meet students where they are at. Our late-afternoon Ctrl-Alt-Del discussion, to "reboot for the New Year", is a perennial favorite, especially for those who find it difficult to skip classes for services. This year, we will have a table on the Infinite Corridor offering apples and honey – and the opportunity for students to write themselves a letter of wishes and resolutions, which we will mail back to them mid-semester. Our Senior Jewish Educator, Rabbi Goldfeder, and I will wander campus with a shofar on Rosh Hashana afternoon, sounding it for all who ask. To help creatively mark Yom Kippur, we will again return to the Infinite Corridor; we will have slips of paper available upon which students can write traits or acts they want to blot out moving forward, and a bowl of water will be available for them to place those "deeds" within, and watch as the marker ink dissolves away.

Hillel staff spent much of August planning for all these beginnings. As a result of our currently-

underway strategic planning process, we know more about what students say they want: community, help with a search for meaning, ways to relax. We are more intentionally infusing all our programs with greater depth, finding new ways to consciously mentor and guide students through life's big questions, and creating new opportunities to connect students of similar interests. We are excited by our work, and know that will diffuse outward at a fast rate.

Best wishes to all, as you, too, commence a new year. A happy, healthy, meaningful 5776 to all!

L'shana tova,  
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM '97  
[rabbif@mit.edu](mailto:rabbif@mit.edu)

P.S. Last June, I shared that I had given the Invocation at Commencement. We've [posted it](#) on YouTube, if you want to hear my words.

## Torah from Tech



*Our Torah this month is taught by Linda R. Rabieh, who teaches in the Concourse Program at MIT. She teaches and writes on ancient and medieval political philosophy. Among her writings include the book, [Plato and the Virtue of Courage](#) and essays on Maimonides, ancient views on ethics in war, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Leo Strauss. She can be reached at [lrabieh@mit.edu](mailto:lrabieh@mit.edu).*

The Torah passage that we read on the first day of Rosh Hashanah seems especially relevant as we assess the various candidates seeking the Presidency. Can reflection on Abraham and on his leadership shed light on the character of good leadership in general? While Abraham may not be clearly a political leader as are others, like Moses and David, he is a leader at least in this sense: he is to be the father of "a great nation." Abraham must be a leader in the sense of being someone whom subsequent generations can admire and from whom they can learn.

God, in fact, singles out Abraham "so that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (18:19). His leadership, then, consists in teaching particularly in teaching what is right and just.

It is in light of this charge that I'd like to consider the main event of the reading for Rosh Hashana. Chapter 21 of Bereshit begins with God fulfilling the promise He made in Chapter 17 (17:15ff) that Abraham would have a son through his wife, Sarah, and that this son, Isaac, would be the one through whom God will keep his covenant. But there's a problem, of course: Isaac is not Abraham's first-born child. Abraham has another child, Ishmael, from the slave-woman Hagar. Upon learning of her own pregnancy, Sarah suddenly insists that the "slave-woman and her son" be "cast out," for the son of "that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son, Isaac" (21:10). This seems to be an act of surprising harshness, even cruelty, on Sarah's part. But even more perplexing, perhaps, is the fact that God *endorses* Sarah's demand, instructing Abraham to "do as Sarah says." We're not told *why* Sarah insists on banishing Ishmael. But we can glean a possible answer on the basis of other things the Torah says. First, Sarah's insistence on "casting out" Ishmael is preceded by the terse phrase that she saw Ishmael "playing." Second, we are told that Abraham was "greatly distressed" by Sarah's demand that his son be sent away. Taken together, these statements can be interpreted as prompting Sarah's concern about Isaac's inheritance in particular and perhaps Jewish nationhood more broadly. It is not clear why Ishmael's "playing" is relevant, but might it not be that in watching Ishmael "playing," Sarah notices impressive virtues in Ishmael? Perhaps she sees in his "play" that he is strong, fast, capable, and hence a genuine rival for her son's inheritance? This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that we are told of Abraham's "great distress" at Sarah's demand; he clearly loves his first-born son deeply. Indeed, when God affirmed that Sarah would give birth to his heir, to be named Isaac, Abraham's instinctive response was "O that Ishmael might live before thee" (17:18), so attached was he to the thought of the child he already had being his heir. We are thus led to wonder, I think, whether Isaac's role as the conduit of God's covenant with Abraham is at risk.

This raises the question of *why* it is necessary to remove any potential impediment to Isaac's becoming Abraham's heir. The obvious reason is that the most important consideration concerning Abraham's heir must be to disclose unambiguously the nation whose role it is to be the vehicle for bringing awareness of the one God and His teaching to humanity. In order to stand apart and be clearly identifiable for this purpose, that nation, the Jewish people, must be clearly understood to have been the people selected by God for this purpose – hence the importance of Isaac's miraculous conception and birth to a ninety-year-old woman, in stark opposition to the eminently natural manner of Ishmael's conception and birth. It seems essential, then, to the whole purpose of Jewish "nationhood" that Isaac, the miracle child, and not Ishmael, the natural one, be the undisputed heir. However important this may be, though, Abraham is still forced – both by Sarah and by God – to do something that runs counter to his deepest inclinations, to send his son away. The lesson Abraham learns here regarding the right and the just furthers one of the lessons learned from his dialogue with God over the fate of Sodom: if one is to be a leader, one must put the good of the whole above and beyond one's personal hopes and attachments. Sending Ishmael away to secure Isaac's lineage marks

This summer, I went on the [MIT Birthright trip](#), and then extended my ticket to participate in [MISTI Israel](#), a program that helps students find internships or research positions at Israeli companies or universities. I mainly worked in Akko, a small town on the northern Mediterranean coast (between Haifa and the Lebanon border), at the International Conservation Center. Many structures from the Crusader and Turkish periods remain, and are undergoing historical preservation. I worked with architects from the Israel Antiquities Authority to help document and plan this process for Khan a-Shewarda, a conglomerate of local restaurants and businesses that open into a large square.

On the weekends, the other MISTI students and I tried to take advantage of the unique opportunity to be abroad. We looked across the borders into Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, and Egypt; scuba dived in the Red Sea; climbed natural stone arches in Wadi Rum, Jordan; rode camels in Petra; and visited an authentic Turkish bath in Istanbul. We struggled through language barriers, the sometimes tough-minded Israeli mentality, and finding dinner after sundown on a Friday night. It was an amazing summer of learning and growth.

I am most grateful for these friends and professional contacts that MISTI, Hillel, and Birthright introduced me to, people I never would have met otherwise. I am already looking forward to seeing everyone again once campus returns to its normal rhythm, and finding ways to express our newfound adventurous mindsets in Boston!

## Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!

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



Abraham's continued development from doting father into father of nations.

But is it so clear that what Abraham is forced to do – to banish his son to an uncertain future – is right and just? How can it be right and just when, although Ishmael does not die, he suffers from his banishment? But perhaps it is precisely in recognizing the real harm Ishmael suffers in being banished that we learn the Torah's nuanced teaching on what is right and just, particularly for a leader. For Abraham learns that part of his role as a father of a nation is not only relinquishing his personal attachments but also countenancing the suffering of an individual, one very close to him, who does not deserve to suffer, for the sake of the good of a greater whole.

In its attempt to depict the education of Abraham in what is right and just, the Torah does not shrink from presenting a tension in the notion of justice itself. The imperfect condition of human things means recognizing and sometimes endorsing the paradoxical conclusion that justice does not always mean justice for each individual. This difficult and painful lesson that Abraham learns is, of course, relatively small preparation for the much more difficult, even shocking, lesson in the reading on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. Still, we see here the structure of God's education of Abraham, an education that begins to give Abraham a growing confidence in political affairs. Indeed, our chapter concludes with Abraham exercising his political chops by concluding a wise and profitable treaty with Abimelech.

Let me conclude by suggesting why the Rabbis may have chosen this passage to be read on Rosh Hashanah. The passage teaches that it is at times necessary to allow or to undertake actions in which not all our hopes for justice can be answered, at least not without God's providence. In having us consider these events *at this particular holiday*, the Rabbis force us to reflect upon the harshness of a tension in justice as well as on its inescapability in human life and politics, namely, the fact that justice for the greater good and justice for each individual do not always coincide. In being directed to this reading on Rosh Hashanah, are we not being asked to recognize that even as we may have to endorse acts that harm innocent individuals, our humanity and moral integrity require that we continue to recognize and atone for the great harms that can be caused in the pursuit of a greater good? We do so by acknowledging the need to ask for forgiveness for acquiescing in these harms. The Torah seems to teach that such forgiveness will be forthcoming, as we are taught that human things lack perfection. Nonetheless, it is good for us to ask forgiveness. It is so that we never lose sight of, never become used to, and never take lightly the evils we must sometimes endorse when they are necessary and even in the service of justice.

---

#### **MIT Hillel's 2016 Annual Fund Add to Jewish life @ MIT!**



To our current and future supporters:

Our office in W11 had some unexpected excitement this summer, thanks to the demolition of Bexley Hall next door. First, for safety purposes, we were told in advance that we would need to evacuate and work from home for a week. Second, when the project ran weeks ahead of schedule, we left on quick notice. And finally, when the delicate part of the work took longer than expected, we couldn't get back in for extra days.

Through this tumult, I tried to think of a meaningful development message for MIT Hillel. All fundraisers talk of building, of securing the future, of investing in the next generation. And donors – myself included – respond to these ideas because they are real, true, and personal. But sometimes organizations need to re-envision, re-build, and re-invest. I give MIT a lot of credit for all that is happening right around us in just this one corner of the campus: recent Chapel renovation, current Kresge renovation, and five-year planning for Bexley area redevelopment. At some point, MIT Hillel and all of the campus chaplaincies will get an upgrade as well. And at MIT Hillel, as Rabbi Fisher reports, the strategic planning is underway to take our program to its next level.

To use Course 6 terminology, I would say that development involves parallel processing, not serial processing. At the same time as those long-term goals are being formulated and supported, daily life goes on with regular operating needs. Our Rosh Hashanah mail appeal should arrive in your mailbox in the coming weeks – please keep MIT Hillel among your priorities this year. As a parent of college-aged children, and as the only one in our office who isn't involved in student programming, I can personally attest to the importance of Hillel and of the excellence of the MIT team.

It is an honor to join with you in maintaining and building a strong Jewish presence at MIT. May you be blessed with good health and much joy in the coming year.

Thank you,  
Marla Choslovsky SM'88,  
MIT Hillel Director of Development  
[marla360@mit.edu](mailto:marla360@mit.edu)

**Add your name to MIT Hillel's 2016 Donor Roll!**

---

## Tamid Initiative - Planned Giving @ MIT Hillel

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.

MIT and MIT Hillel are eager to help you meet your objectives. For more information, please contact MIT Hillel Director of Development, Marla Choslovsky, [marla360@mit.edu](mailto:marla360@mit.edu). To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly or [let us know in writing](#).

---

## On the Calendar

### Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT: Fall Line-up

- **October 30, Tom Leighton** PhD '81, CEO Akamai
- **November 20, Alex Slocum** '82 SM '83 PhD '85, Neil and Jane Pappalardo Professor of Mechanical Engineering, MacVicar Faculty Fellow
- **December 11, Deborah Ancona**, Seley Distinguished Professor of Management, a Professor of Organization Studies, and the Director of the MIT Leadership Center at the MIT Sloan School of Management

### Leading Jewish Minds... On the Road in NYC

- **November 13, Neri Oxman**, Sony Corporation Career Development Professor of Media Arts and Sciences; Associate Professor of Media Arts and Sciences
- 

## MIT Hillel wishes a mazal tov to:

Meena Viswanath '11 and Jamie Conway on the birth of their son, Psakhye Eliezer, on June 8.

Matt Fisher '10 and Leah Nation '11 on their wedding this past weekend. A mazal tov to their families and friends, including Matt's parents, Lisa Rosenbaum '77 and Ron Fisher.

AJ Edelman '14, who is training to become [Israel's first Olympic skeleton athlete](#).

*If you have life-cycle events to share with the MIT Hillel community, please [let us know](#).*

---

**Norman B. and Muriel Leventhal**  
Center for Jewish Life at MIT  
40 Massachusetts Ave, Building W11  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Tel: 617.253.2982  
[hillel.mit.edu](http://hillel.mit.edu)  
Email: [hillel@mit.edu](mailto:hillel@mit.edu)

---

[Click to view this email in a browser](#)

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

---

MIT Hillel  
40 Massachusetts Ave  
MIT Building W11  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
US

[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.

**vertical** DELIVERED BY  
**response**  
Try It Free Today!