In a recent interview with a job candidate, a group of students and I learned some texts about how the rabbis connected Purim with Passover. Both holidays celebrate miracles and redemption. And that's about where the comparison ends. In the Purim story, the Divine hand is hidden, as God doesn't appear at all in the Book of Esther that describes the Purim narrative, and the positive ending seems to be brought about by human action.

In the Passover story, the Divine hand is literally all over the page (“Adonai took us out of Egypt – not through an angel, not through a firey-angel, and not through a messenger,” says the Haggadah we read at the seder), and the role of any human heroes, including Moses, is downplayed. But, our tradition says that as soon as Purim ends, we’re to move directly on to learning about and preparing for Passover. We should link together, in order to recognize and celebrate, all the ways in which miracles and redemption can occur.

Given we are exactly halfway between Purim and Passover, I want to reflect upon both holidays on campus. I love how our student board celebrated Purim. For the entire week leading up to the holiday, student board members sat in Lobby 10 in the middle of the...
Hi, I'm Judi, a sophomore studying electrical engineering and computer science. I'm from West Orange, New Jersey. I'm a TA for 18.02 and 18.03 (calculus classes) in ESG (Experimental Study Group) and I'm also president on Hillel Student board.

During my first year, I found the transition to MIT to be quite easy because of MIT Hillel. I found a warm, welcoming community almost effortlessly. Growing up as a Modern Orthodox Jew, it is so important to me to have a place on campus to practice Judaism.

Infinite Corridor, and created a “pop up Purim celebration booth”. Passing students were encouraged to make snack bags for their friends, with options of candies, chips, fidget-spinners and more, and to make a donation by cash or Venmo. They then took a Polaroid photo of the giver, and stapled it to the outside of a bag which briefly described the four practices associated with Purim: giving gifts to friends, making charitable donations, eating a festive meal, and hearing the Purim story. The students had also abridged the Purim story into one sentence, also right on the bag. An email was sent to the recipient with instructions on when/how to pick the gift up at Hillel. Swiftly passing by as I was running late to a meeting, the freshman then at the booth, Gila Schein ’22, not only got me to make a bag – “Give it now to whomever you’re meeting as an apology for being late!” – but also to make a tzedakah/charity donation to Yad Chessed. She and her peers were amazing at marketing and spreading joy and Jewish education. And taught me to slow down and appreciate what’s happening around me.

The Passover story says that we rushed out of Egypt, too quickly to stop to let our dough rise. But, (apparently like Purim at MIT,) Passover is a holiday to also slow down and spend time with family, friends, and community. We’re already preparing for seders on campus. Hillel holds two larger communal seders, and many “Do It Yourself” seders at different fraternities, sororities, and living groups around campus. For these smaller seders, volunteer student organizers meet with a Hillel staffer to learn about the Haggadah and how to create a personalized interesting and exciting seder. We reimburse seder food costs. In the past, some of these seders have gone to the wee hours of the morning, watching and discussing the movie Prince of Egypt or debating the various mathematical ways the Haggadah/seder game of numbers surrounging the power of “the finger of God” or the “great and mighty hand of God” can really be calculated if you are a Course 18 (math) major. Our students never lack for creativity.

We’re about to mark an additional miracle that is brought about by factors both in and out of our hands: in one week’s time a new crop of admitted students will descend upon campus. Campus Preview Weekend is always fun, and my staff and I are awaiting our first introductions to the Class of 2023 (yup, really!). For many of these high school seniors, making the less than 7% acceptance rate cut off must feel like a miracle -- and is definitely a reason for celebration. Mazal tov!

A happy, sweet Passover to all,

Rabbi Michelle H. Fisher
Executive Director
rabbif@mit.edu

Mentshn of Mention

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During my first year, I found the transition to MIT to be quite easy because of MIT Hillel. I found a warm, welcoming community almost effortlessly. Growing up as a Modern Orthodox Jew, it is so important to me to have a place on campus to practice Judaism.

MIT Hillel has been an amazing resource for me, whether it's asking the Hillel staff for advice, providing me with free food and fun events, or a place to go every week for Shabbat dinner.
In January of my first year, I decided to join Hillel Board because I wanted to play a role in the group that helped me tremendously in my first few months at MIT. This has honestly been one of the best decisions of my time at MIT. As a VP of Programming on the board, I learned a lot about myself, what it takes to plan an engaging and exciting event, and what it’s like collaborating with the hardworking students of the board to achieve a very important goal. One of my favorite feelings is attending one of the events that I worked hard to plan. I had a lot of fun planning "Purim on Ice," which is an event where we celebrate Purim by skating with friends!

I decided to run for president because I want to continue to make the undergraduate Jewish community feel welcomed to explore their Jewish identities. I want to continue to make MIT Hillel a place where Jewish students feel comfortable and part of a community.

I am so grateful to MIT Hillel and all it has done to enhance my MIT experience.

Judi Fusman ’21
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Torah from Tech

Our Torah this month is taught by Felix Dashevsky ’99 (Course 8, SigEp and AJJ@MIT). After MIT, Felix went on to practice law in NYC, focusing on various aspects of finance. He is now general counsel of a proprietary trading firm. Recently, Felix's focus has been his 6-month old son, to whom he hopes to pass on both Jewish and MIT values.

Parshat Tazria, which is this week's Torah reading, shares the following curious commandments:

“If a man has a swelling, rash or discoloration on the skin of his flesh, and it forms a scaly lesion on the skin of his flesh, he shall be brought to Aaron the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim. The kohen shall look at the lesion on the skin of his flesh, and [if] hair in the lesion has turned white and the appearance of the lesion is deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a lesion of leprosy. When the kohen sees this, he shall pronounce him unclean. But if it is a white discoloration on the skin of his flesh, and its appearance is not deeper than the skin, and its hair has not turned white, the kohen shall quarantine the [person with the] lesion for seven days...”

This goes on for quite a bit more. Other than “be thankful for modern medicine”, what are we meant to learn from this? Some ancient passages may outlive their usefulness, but this is the Torah, and we must seek present-day relevance. And then we read something like this:

“If your device still isn't recognized, check Device Manager to see if the Mobile Device USB driver is installed. Follow these steps to open Device Manager:

1. Press the Windows and R key on your keyboard to open Run Command.
2. In the Run window, enter devmgmt.msc, then click Ok. Device Manager should open.
To Our Current and Future Supporters:

Our organization’s namesake, Hillel, summed up Judaism as “That which is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole of the Torah. The rest is commentary. Go forth and study.” My guiding principle for my development work at MIT Hillel is even shorter: L’dor v’dor.

Scientists, engineers and professionals must strive to explain their fields similarly. Today’s scientific fields are very specialized and highly complex. So are today’s economic and legal systems. MIT graduates, who are the “high priests” of science and engineering, must explain and educate. Ideally, simplicity is designed into any systems with which multitudes interact or by which they are governed.

And if we think that we don’t need to explain ourselves, consider this. Torah’s commandments endure because they are the word of God. Temporal matters carry no such faith.

Felix Dashevsky ’99
feldashv@yahoo.com

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MIT Hillel’s 2019 Annual Fund

Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

This theme of from one generation to the next is all the more relevant as we approach Passover. The rituals of the seder force us to all experience this concept, specifically the script of the youngest child asking the four questions to the elders and the answers that follow. Embedded in our observance is the planning, expense, and effort that goes into creating the setting for this scene to occur at all. The older generations invite, clean, cook, overcome family differences, travel, etc. all to ensure that our Jewish history, culture, and values are passed on to the next generations. In today’s world, we could opt to send our kids an email with these teachings; instead we continue the traditions of making it personal and making it appeal to all the senses with food, drink, visual symbols, stories, and song.

Throughout the academic year, the work at MIT Hillel with our students parallels these elements of the Passover seder. When I ask for your gift, I am asking you to help us answer the questions for the next generation.
Lastly, part of why Passover works to keep the next generation connected is that it ends. We don’t keep reminding our kids throughout the year that once we were slaves; charoset is off the dinner menu until next year. Instead, we know we’ve done our jobs, and now we give them a year to grow into the lessons and get ready to approach the same questions at a deeper level of maturity next year. Here again, I find a parallel to my own work. Once your annual gift is made, we can spend the rest of the year saying thank you and demonstrating to you why it will be worth doing again next year.

As we enter the final quarter of our fiscal year, I ask you to renew your support of MIT Hillel. As we approach Passover, I wish you a sweet and meaningful observance, one in which you both recall the answers from the generations before you and have opportunity to share your values with those that follow you.

Maria Choslovsky SM ‘88
MIT Hillel Director of Development
marla360@mit.edu

Add your name to MIT Hillel’s 2019 Donor Roll! Scroll down to MIT Hillel to give.

Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!
Your generous support allows us to help keep Jewish life vibrant on the MIT campus!

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, Maria Choslovsky, marla360@mit.edu. To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly.

From the Archives!

For this month’s "From the Archives!" we found a brunch poster from the 1970s! However, this isn’t a normal Hillel brunch with bagels and lox. This was a Matzoh Brei Brunch!

Let us know if you remember seeing this poster around campus, or if you attended this brunch!

On the Calendar

On Campus: Our next Leading Jewish Minds seminar will take place on April 12, featuring Professor Jeremy England.

Mark your calendars for another Leading Jewish Minds seminar taking place on May 10,
featuring Professor Ezra Zuckerman.

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**Mazal Tov**

*If you have life-cycle events to share with the MIT Hillel community, please [let us know](mailto:hillel@mit.edu).*

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