Greetings from MIT to our Alumni, Faculty, Staff, Parents and Friends!

1) Elan Ness-Cohen ’17 hosts a full table of MIT students for a SHAB@M dinner
2) A group of MIT Hillel students after participating in a group SoulCycle class
3) MIT Hillel Staff, with Hillel International President Eric Fingerhut, being presented with the award for Strengthening Global Hillel

Breaking Hillel news!

As this hits your inbox, Rabbi Fisher and most of the Hillel staff are in Orlando at the annual Hillel International conference. We are pleased to let you know that MIT Hillel has been recognized again this year. In partnership with the Hillel of The Technion in Israel, we won the Drive to Excellence Award for Strengthening the Global Hillel Movement, for our unique ConnecTech program that just completed its sixth year. This year-long fellowship pairs MIT and Technion students to learn together, exploring Jewish identity and peoplehood. Thank you to our donors and to CJP for making this program possible, and kudos to our Assistant Director, Marissa Feinman Freed, and her counterpart in Israel, Yael Frank, for having such a strong impact on our students.

Executive Director’s Update

Shab@M! Urban slang: “That’s amazing!” MIT Hillel slang: “Shabbat across/at MIT”. This past Friday night we had over twelve Friday night dinners sponsored by Hillel in dorms, living groups, and fraternities – with over 200 undergraduates participating in Shabbat meals. Hillel provided challah (baked by MIT’s Challah for Hunger chapter), grape juice, ritual needs, and a budget. Student hosts provided a warm, fun, de-stress environment for their friends and networks.

This was just one of the many events – on campus and along the East Coast - this weekend. Conservative and Orthodox Shabbat services ran, as they do every Friday night. Grad Hillel had their monthly Shabbat dinner. The MIT Conservative Minyan ran their once/semester Shabbaton, with a Saturday morning service, lunch, and teaching on “How the rabbis dealt with crudeness and bullying in the 4th century” by Hillel’s Hebrew College rabbinical student intern, Josh Weisman. Shab@M!

Sunday afternoon, Hillel Board student elections (with no upsets or recounts necessary) raised Mae Dotan ’19 to the presidency. Her board will be selected over the next days. I look forward to sharing her insights and vision in a future Mentschn of Mention column – her story as a post-Army Israeli MIT undergrad is fascinating, and we’re lucky and honored to have her leading our Jewish student community.

Our signature speaker series enabled us to connect with our Jewish MIT alumni and share amazing learning ourselves. Leading into Shabbat, on Friday we hosted a typical “Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT” luncheon, with Professor Joel Moses welcoming nearly 70 locals who came to hear Emeritus Professor Jay Keyser and Nancy Kelly speak about the MIT tour they led to India. Once Shabbat was over, I capped my weekend in South Florida with a “Leading Jewish Minds… on the Road” event hosted by Elizabeth and Jose Waingarten P’15 P’18. Alumni spanning the decades from the 50s to the ’teens, as well as parents of current and past students, all met, shared stories, and learned from Prof Adam Berinsky (Political Science), as he tried to make sense of polling data and the recent presidential election. We learned – and asked – a lot, as you may imagine!

With only a few weeks before I head to Tel Aviv for my sabbatical, I’m looking forward to the opportunity to refresh, study, and write. Thank you to the MIT Hillel Board of Directors for this gift. I leave Hillel in the hands of my terrific staff, and the leadership of Assistant Director, Marissa Freed. They’ll continue to fill you in on everything Jewish life in my absence – including, in February after Chanukah and IAP, an update on our over-subscribed winter Birthright trip and Birthright Extension (we had a wait list for the first time ever for our MIT bus!).
Early wishes for a Happy Chanukah, and a great semester.

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM ’97
rabbif@mit.edu

Torah from Tech

Our Torah this month is taught by Dina Betser, (Course VI 2011, M.Eng 2012), she lives in Palo Alto, California, and works at Google headquarters. She’s currently a Senior Site Reliability Engineer for Calendar and Gmail, making sure that the products remain available and responsive for billions of users. In her spare time, she picks lots of fruit with an awesome local organization called Village Harvest and sings as many nigunim as possible. She can be reached at dbetser@gmail.com.

Toldot opens with “And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham.”, indicating that the text is going to focus on Isaac, the second of the Jewish forefathers. And while Isaac plays a prominent role in the parsha, he still seems to take a back seat to the roles played by his father Abraham, and his son, Jacob. For instance, in the stories of two of the major incidents of Isaac’s life, the binding and the blessing of his sons, Isaac plays a more passive role. In the binding, he is the one bound for sacrifice by Abraham, and in the blessing of his sons, it seems that Jacob (and Rebecca) are the ones running the show. An interpretation of “and they came to the place” (Bereishit 22:9) is that while Abraham was the one initially preparing the altar, Isaac, knowing he was to be the sacrifice, helped his father to prepare it. Although Isaac’s role does not appear as active as those of our other forefathers, we see repeatedly that Isaac serves as an essential link between Abraham and Jacob, bridging the generations and providing a stabilizing force in the continuity of our forefathers.

Our forefathers spent large portions of their lives as sojourners, wandering and exploring the land, searching for new places to settle. For much of his life, Isaac is an established, wealthy landowner who never even needed to leave the land of Canaan. When Isaac travels to Gerar because of a famine, God warns him not to go down to Egypt: “Stay in the land and I will be with you and bless you” (Bereishit 26:3). His remaining in the land of Canaan served as a way of establishing and concretizing his family’s - and thus the Israelites’ - presence and claim to the land. In contrast, Yaakov, like Abraham before him, leaves Canaan almost as soon as he receives his blessing: “So Isaac sent away Jacob and he went toward Paddan-aram” (Bereishit 28:5). Like Abraham two generations earlier, he again initiates the process of the establishment of the nation of Israel.

Abraham and Jacob both take a more active role in shaping the direction of the Jewish people. Meanwhile, Isaac serves more as an implementer, building up a strong foundation for Jacob and preparing him for his future journey. In my view, this kind of role is often just as critical towards the long-term success of a project, even if it’s not as flashy. I see this today when it comes to projects at work. It’s critical to have innovators and leaders on the team to come up with ideas and help them take direction. Sometimes, though, the real key to a project’s success is the quiet teammate who implements his or her portion of the project successfully, on time, and to specification. Understanding the critical contributions of all our forefathers to Jewish tradition, despite the differing nature of these contributions, helps us appreciate all the different types of roles people play in achieving our everyday pursuits.

MIT Hillel’s 2017 Annual Fund

Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

To our current and future supporters,

Last month seems like so long ago! The election, Thanksgiving, and travel to Florida for our Leading Jewish Minds on the road event. Plus all the routine factors at work and at home – readying the end-of-year appeal letter, connecting with alumni, a family simcha in New Jersey, a few shiva calls, my youngest child’s college applications, the Boston Jewish Film Fest. The weeks have flown by, and it’s hard to believe that the semester is almost over.

Of all of the events of the past month, the one that stands out in so many ways is the election, and the reactions across the political spectrum to the outcome. For me, there is a clear parallel between the election and my work. I see philanthropic allocation as a lot like voting. It is a way of backing what you believe in. It is a way of supporting leaders who can and will do good things. It is being part of something larger than you can achieve alone. It is hopeful. It is constructive.

Philanthropy would be a lot easier if there were only two major options, but of course donors have many, many choices. I, for one, had 13 organizations email me on Giving Tuesday (I must have unsubscribed a lot after last year’s inbox inundation), and my pile of paper mail appeals already numbers in the dozens, and grows daily. Professor Daniel Jackson will be stepping down after four years of leading the MIT Hillel Board of Directors, and his final annual community letter is especially touching – I hope you will agree that it stands out among the pack. We thank you for holding MIT Hillel among your priorities.

Additional notes:

- Thank you to Professor Adam Berinsky, for traveling to Florida on behalf of MIT Hillel. Suffice to say, he updated the talk we heard on political polling from when he spoke for us in NYC before the election. The 30+ alumni and other MIT constituents enjoyed a most interesting evening. And a special thank you to Jose and Elizabeth Waingarten, who graciously hosted such a lovely event.

- Seeking a donor to offer a challenge to inspire our youngest alumni (Classes 2012-2016) to participate in supporting MIT Hillel. Roughly 200 of our 800 annual donors have been supporting Jewish life on campus at
least as far back as our records go (1990) – we need to start now to achieve that continuity with the next
generation. If this type of one-time special gift interests you, please let me know and I’ll be happy to explain
more.

- Our Leading Jewish Minds spring semester line up is in formation
  - Feb 24 – Linda Rabieh, Concourse Lecturer and incoming President of the MIT Hillel Board
  - March – date and speaker TBD
  - May 12 – Daniel Jackson, CSAIL Professor and outgoing President of the MIT Hillel Board

Wishing you a very Happy Chanukah!

L’Shalom,

Marla Choslovsky SM ’88,
MIT Hillel Director of Development
marla360@mit.edu

Add your name to MIT Hillel’s 2017 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. To inform us that you have already planned such a
gift, please contact us directly or let us know in writing.

On the Calendar

- Feb 24 – Linda Rabieh, Concourse Lecturer and incoming President of the MIT Hillel Board
- March – date and speaker TBD
- May 12 – Daniel Jackson, CSAIL Professor and outgoing President of the MIT Hillel Board

If you have life-cycle events to share with the MIT Hillel community, please let us know.