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

1) MIT Hillel Student Board President Judi Fusman '21 painting the Jerusalem
The weeks leading up to Thanksgiving are pretty stressful for our students, filled with papers, exams, and assignments. Their return after the holiday is then a similar race to the finish line of finals in mid-December. In most years, Chanukah falls around this time, and we are able to bring light, food, and a breather to students in the form of menorah lighting study breaks and parties. When Chanukah falls during winter vacation, it just takes a little more creativity and rebranding to ensure we are taking care of our students’ well-being throughout this time period.

Hillel is, foremost, an educational organization. Thus, opportunities to give students a break are also opportunities for informal, as well as formal, learning. Our goal particularly for this time of year is to bring moments of relaxation, while simultaneously elevating feelings of gratitude and giving back as Jews, within a larger community. The week before Thanksgiving, as Shoshana Gibbor, our Director of Birthright and Israel Engagement, and her husband Andy Bailer celebrated their first week as newlyweds, we introduced many students to the practice of sheva brachot. Literally “seven blessings,” it is the week of meals and post-meal blessings for a couple, hosted by friends and the community throughout the week after their wedding. Students played the “newlywed game” with the couple and offered both traditional and personal blessings to them. Mazal tov, Shoshana and Andy! May you have a lifetime of joy and happiness with each other.

Shabbat is the ultimate symbol of rest and stepping back from work/school responsibilities. This week, as part of Shab@m – “Shabbat across MIT”-- about a dozen student-hosted Shabbat dinners will be held across campus, involving over 240 students. Inviting their friends and hosting their own meals, while working with our staff on content, undergraduate and graduate students are honing the skills needed to be a good host, and learning how to create a personalized and meaningful Shabbat atmosphere for their peers.

Students also externalized giving back. A Student Board-organized community service project combined a few hours off from p-sets with volunteering at Boston's Community Servings' 27th Annual Pie in the Sky bake sale. The day of fundraising reflected Thanksgiving ideals (and desserts) as well as Chanukah’s theme of increasing light and goodness in the world.

Even if Chanukah is “late”, a semester should never end without gelt and treats… Chanukah/finals care packages will be delivered soon, as we wish all students good luck and a successful end to the term. In parallel, we also say thank you to all of our donors who allow us to nourish our students’ bodies and souls.
I am Jesse and I am a graduate student in chemistry at MIT. I am originally from Montreal, Canada and did my undergraduate degree in chemistry at McGill University. I have lived my whole life in Montreal until moving to Cambridge in the fall of 2016 to pursue my PhD. In the whirlwind of moving and settling in a new city and country, and taking classes and teaching, I didn’t put much thought into checking out Jewish life at MIT. I thought I was too busy to attend any Jewish-related events.

Shortly after moving to Cambridge, I realized I had no idea what I would be doing for the upcoming High Holidays. Fortunately, I found MIT Hillel and was able to attend their High Holiday services and programming which put MIT Hillel on my radar.

After my first semester at MIT, I felt like something was lacking from my new life in Cambridge. I realized that I was missing the Jewish aspects of my life that I had back in Montreal with my friends, family, and shul. The MIT Hillel community has been able to help fill that missing piece. Since those first High Holiday services, I have attended numerous Hillel events and programming. Some of my favorite Hillel events are the GradHillel Shabbat dinners where I get to enjoy Shabbat and hang out with other Jewish grad students at MIT. Thanks to these events, I can now count on having somewhere to be and celebrate Shabbat and other Jewish holidays, as well as see all the friends I have made through Jewish life at MIT.

Over the years, MIT Hillel has been an important part of my MIT experience. Since that first Yom Kippur I spent in Cambridge, I’ve subsequently been asked/volunteered to take an Aliyah and read Torah the past two Yom Kippur. Recently, I led a klezmer jam in the MIT Sukkah as part of the GradHillel Sukkot party. It felt great to share one of my biggest passions, klezmer, with the MIT Jewish community and I hope to be able to do so again. Having a meaningful Jewish experience and community has definitely helped make my MIT experience feel whole and more fun.

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Torah from Tech

Josette Capriles Goldish was born and raised on the island of Curaçao. She is a graduate of MIT’s Department of Economics and the MIT Sloan School of Management. Prior to embarking on research about the Sephardim of the Caribbean about two decades ago, she was a management consultant, served as the Chief Financial Officer of an energy consulting firm, worked in the banking industry, and was involved in air pollution and energy conservation research.

There are several topics in this week’s parsha of Va-Yetzei that one can elaborate on. First, there is Jacob’s encounter with God in his famous dream. Depictions of Jacob’s ladder
reaching to the sky with angels going up and down while the Lord stands by him have inspired many visual artists. And God’s promise to always be with Jacob, protect him wherever he goes, and return him to this holy place is a powerful bond between the Almighty and the dreamer. Second, there is Jacob’s reunion with his uncle, Laban, and Laban’s (and Jacob’s) subsequent betrayals. Since betrayals and falsehoods saturate our news today, I will leave any analysis of such behavior to others. As a woman, the topic that seems most interesting to me in this parsha is the passive roles of Laban’s daughters, Leah and Rachel, and their maidservants.

Leah and Rachel have very little say in most of the developments in this story in which they are important personalities. This is made clear early on when Jacob promises to work for Laban for seven years in order to be given [sic] the younger daughter, Rachel, in return. Was Rachel asked? Not clear. But the parsha says that Jacob loved Rachel, and one might fantasize that she loved him as well. Then Jacob is betrayed by Laban and ends up with Leah and not Rachel on the night of his wedding feast. Jacob is furious when he discovers this deception and exclaims to his father-in-law the next morning “Ma zot asita li?” - What is this you have done to me? And then, without any consideration of Leah’s feelings, the two men strike a new deal. Laban suggests that if Jacob works for him for another seven years, he can also have Rachel after the bridal week with Leah has elapsed.

The relationship between the sisters must have been very tense after these events. There they were: Leah, rejected and unloved (she had weak eyes) and Rachel, beloved (shapely and beautiful). Leah, fertile and bearing Jacob his first-born son Reuben, and Rachel, unable to conceive while Leah continued to have one son after another. Eventually Rachel offers her maid, Bilhah, as a surrogate to bear Jacob’s child. Bilhah, who is even lower on the totem pole than the two sisters, being not only female, but also a servant, is a totally passive participant in this arrangement. She soon has a son who is named Dan, by Rachel. Bilhah is silent.

When finally Jacob begins to explore the thought of leaving Laban, he uncharacteristically turns to his two wives for advice. Surprisingly, in spite of their disagreements and jealousies, they are united in their encouragement and urge him to leave. Their answer “kol asher amar Elohim eleicha, aseh” – do all as God has told you – is crucial in changing the course of their own lives and that of their offspring. It is the first time that the sisters turn away from passivity and begin to speak up and act on their own in response to the male figures in the story. It is also the first time in the parsha that Jacob approaches them as equals. In a totally unanticipated fashion, Leah and Rachel end up being the catalysts of a major move that changes the fate of the children of Israel.

I hate it when women are treated as second class-citizens. It is a situation which I myself have rarely experienced. Not even at MIT in the 1960s, when the women in my freshman class were only five percent of the incoming students. Not once during my graduate time at Sloan many years later, where women were still in a significant minority. And very rarely in my work environment. Maybe it was because I was less attuned to those slights since the women in my family were always listened to or maybe it was because of the many outstanding women who came before me at MIT. Whatever the case, I was never Leah nor Rachel. Reading about those times in history and in the Bible when a woman’s opinions and feelings meant nothing infuriates me. I came to the end of this parsha where the two women finally get to say something of importance and went: “You go, girls!”

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MIT Hillel’s 2020 Annual Fund
Add to Jewish life @ MIT!
of peers at the Massachusetts Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. As is typical of conferences, some of my key takeaways were good reminders of things I already knew, some were fresh takes on old solid ideas, and some were new ways of thinking. Here is what is jumping out at me as I reflect on the sessions I attended:

- The emails flooding my inbox on Giving Tuesday (none from MIT or MIT Hillel) and the appeal letters starting to arrive in my mailbox (yes, there will be one from MIT Hillel later this month) are easy to disassociate from the people working on behalf of organizations with important missions. Being surrounded by fundraisers from MIT, other universities, other types of school, hospitals, other health-related organizations, social service providers, Jewish and other religious institutions, land conservation stewards, and other miscellaneous non-profits made me realize how many organizations would struggle without committed professionals working with you, the donors. I think by now you all know that the best part of my job is getting to know you, preferably in person, sometimes only virtually, and the gratitude I express is most sincere.

- The breadth of organizations represented was a reminder that our donors have many, many worthy choices of how to allocate their philanthropic dollars.

- Americans gave $427.71 Billion dollars in 2018. MIT Hillel’s share of that does not register. MIT’s probably does, although still a tiny percentage of a percent. Our society depends on philanthropy.

- Even well-established and popular events like our “Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT” speaker series have room for improvement.

- It’s good for donors to be disciplined. Purposeful giving is more likely to be repeated over time. (I think this describes MIT Hillel’s donor base very well.)

- An organization’s currency is its ideas. People will want to support organizations that continually innovate. (shout out to MIT Hillel program team for immediate successes from our investment in graduate student programming)

- Younger donors are more likely to give to change an institution, whereas older donors are more likely to give to sustain an institution.

And lastly, it is my job to keep asking! Sometimes we just need to hear that.

And so, in addition to thanking you, I ask you to respond to our Chanukah appeal when it arrives in either your physical or digital inbox. You make the difference to MIT Hillel.

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Add your name to MIT Hillel's 2020 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!
From the Archives!

For this month's "From the Archives!" we take a look at a poster advertising the Latke vs. Hammentaschen debate that took place in 1977.

The representative for team hammentaschen, Professor Steven Tannenbaum '58, PhD '62, is a current Hillel Board member.

We even lit the MIT Test-Tube Menorah back then!

On the Calendar

Mark your calendars for one more Leading Jewish Minds seminar this semester:

- **Friday, December 13, 2019 - Professor Laura Schulz**

Mazal Tov!

- Mazal tov to Shoshana Gibbor, on her marriage to Andy Bailer!
- Mazal tov to MIT Hillel alumnus Noam Buckman SM '18 on his marriage to Naomi Hachen!

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

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