Happy 2019! I will still begin by wishing you all a great 2019, even though it’s now February, and the spring semester has already begun. And even though December vacation and even IAP (Independent Activities Period, aka January at MIT) are mostly distant memories. It has, in fact, been over two months since our last enewsletter. Quite the break.

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

1) MIT Hillel's 2019 Student Board during their retreat earlier this month.

2) Mia LaRocca '20 with challah she made for Challah for Hunger.

3) Students Kyle Morgenstein 20', Victor Fink '19, Miles Johnson '21, and Gal Zeidman '18 on a hike at the top of Ein Ovdat in Israel during Birthright.

MIT Hillel Update

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One of the lessons we at Hillel try to teach our students is that stepping back is just as important as leaning in. Everything and everyone needs regular breaks.

Even Hillel Directors. I spent some time in Israel this winter vacation. I went there with no organized plans. I was not leading our ConnecTech student delegation to the Technion – that was last May. I was not participating in an Encounter Intensive in the West Bank – that was last October. I was simply having a “friend-cation”, spending time with Israel and Israel-American friends in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Zichron Ya’akov. I came back refreshed and
Returning to campus, I shared my travel experiences with students, role modeling for them what downtime means and why it’s important. And, in the process, I learned from them how they use these two months to regroup, mentally and intellectually. Over coffee, I heard freshman Jess Knapp ’22 talk passionately about the play she was rehearsing for over IAP, while also learning a bit of Python on the side. Maya Levy ’21 spent time painting a new mural for the Religious Activities Center’s Main Dining Room, where Shabbat meals are held.

A number of students, with Hillel support, organized various Shabbat dinners for their peers (there’s no regular meal plan over IAP). Grad students also held one of their regular monthly Shabbat dinners as IAP came to a close.

Our students work hard when classes are in session. They sometimes forget to make time for relaxing as the term ramps up. Among our goals moving ahead is to remind them, or even teach them, the value of rest. To not only stop and smell the roses in the winter (which can be a bit hard depending upon where you live…), but to regularly refuel, renew, and rejuvenate. Be it on Fridays at a Shabbat dinner, or by attending a study break, or through participation in a class on identity and Jewish values, or simply in conversation over coffee with a caring Hillel staffer – we guide them to embrace rest as important, worthy, and necessary. Not only in December and January, but throughout this (and every) new, exciting semester.

May all of you find that balance, as well.

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

MIT Hillel has openings next year! Help us bring great professionals to our students.

- Director of Graduate Student Engagement
- Part-time Orthodox Rabbi

Mentshn of Mention

My name is Victor Fink, and I am a senior here at MIT studying Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. I am from Haverford Pennsylvania, a suburb which is about 10 miles outside of Philadelphia. The area I grew up in was heavily Jewish, and was the norm at my high school. We got school off for all of the important Jewish holidays, and at least half of my close friends from childhood were Jewish. In fact, many of us attended the same Hebrew school.

My freshman year at MIT, I attended services for the high holidays. I searched out Jewish groups, and I tried to continue the Jewish practices and traditions I grew up with. Ever since
then, I have felt myself sinking farther and farther away from organized Jewish events, as I have become less and less religious. While I love the Jewish traditions and holidays, I believe less and less. What I’ve stuck with and enjoyed as a Jew at MIT is my community on Burton 3rd, which has a few other Jews. We get together for the holidays and once in a while we will attend a Hillel event together. Having close friends who are also Jewish makes it a lot easier to keep traditions, and makes being Jewish at MIT fun.

Although I have felt more distanced from Judaism over the past few years, my desire to go on Birthright didn’t change. I love to travel, and Birthright was an amazing chance to go to a country I had never experienced before. I had heard some mixed reviews about Birthright experiences from my friends. Some said it was 10 days of Israeli propaganda. Others described it as a free vacation. That is what I expected going in: a free vacation. I was going with a few people I was friends with, so I thought it couldn’t be too bad.

My expectations were completely blown away going on Birthright this winter with MIT Hillel. Most importantly, I had an amazing group. From the staff to almost every one of the participants on the trip, we really bonded. After only ten days with these people, I felt as though we were a family. Along with this, I think that the staff was a lot less biased than I originally assumed. Our tour guide, Moose, had grown up in the West Bank, and had a very interesting perspective on the Israeli/Palestinian dispute. Beyond that, the trip was exciting and very interesting. I really enjoyed seeing so much in such a small country. From the quiet mountains around the Sea of Galilee, to the beaches at the Dead Sea, to the thriving night life in Tel Aviv, I had a blast at every place. The best part of the trip for me was the fact that we had seven young Israelis with us for the entire trip. They all had different perspectives about the issues within Israel. From what I could tell, the country’s politics are incredibly partisan, just like in the United States. This is something that you would never know unless you got to speak to real Israelis, as the media likes to paint the country in a single light. I feel as though I learned more about Israel from just talking to these participants than I did from our guided tours.

From talking to Shoshana Gibbor, MIT Hillel's Director of Birthright and Israel Engagement, and the rest of our Birthright staff, it seems as though I had pretty much lucked out on every aspect of the trip. They gave me the impression that we were one of the better groups they had ever had. Our staff member Dan noted that Moose was a great, thoughtful tour guide, and that other guides he’d been on trips with were a lot more biased and extremely one-sided. I really appreciated the trip that I went on, and I would definitely recommend the MIT Birthright trip to anyone who is interested. I cannot really speak for the other Birthright trips as a whole considering I only experienced this one. The only thing that I felt was missing from the trip was a real dive into the Palestinian side of things. While our tour guide was great, it is impossible to be fully neutral on a trip sponsored and influenced by the state of Israel. I would love to go to the West Bank in the future on my own time, to learn about the other side of things.

The one thing that I really took away from the trip was feeling comfortable with my Judaism regardless of how religious I am. I don’t have to keep kosher or celebrate Shabbat every week to call myself a “good Jew”. There’s a lot more to my culture than following religious teachings.

Victor Fink ’19
vfink@mit.edu

Torah from Tech

Our Torah this month is taught by Benjamin Francis ’12 (Math), who recently finished a five-year stint in the U.S. Navy and moved back to the Cambridge area, where he works for a local software company.
Shalom from MIT Hillel!

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To Our Current and Future Supporters,

Even without a red carpet, limo, celebrity presenter, or acceptance speech, we were pleased to be honored by Hillel International in December for our development work. Specifically, the “Philanthropy 101” class that Marissa and I offer to our graduating seniors won the Innovation in Fundraising Award.

The truth of the matter is that there really isn’t much to be “innovative” about in fundraising. What differentiated us from the others is the big-picture, educational approach we take with our students. The main message of the class is that just as they plan to use their MIT education to do great things, they should also view their philanthropy as another way to leverage themselves and their ideas in this world.

However, it is precisely because our students expect to do great things that they undervalue the impact of their participation. For example, “I’ll give when I can do something significant like name a building”. We teach that if they don’t build relationships over time, they won’t have any place where they want to put their name. We also teach that every worthy organization out there depends on donors of all levels. Finally, we provide worksheets to help them organize their own thoughts and priorities, and to help them set goals for themselves. More meaningful than any award is knowing that what we offer is appreciated and impactful.

Our message applies to you, as well. A recent (lengthy) article in e-jewish-philanthropy summed it up well: “…charity, since the dawn of time memoriam, has been meant to be done together.” MIT Hillel is a success because 800 of you make it possible…. had there been an Oscars-like ceremony, can you imagine the acceptance speech!?!

As always, THANK YOU.

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

Add your name to MIT Hillel's 2019 Donor Roll!

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
For this month's "From the Archives!" we see a poster from 1986, advertising a Shabbaton taking place with MIT, Bowdoin College, Wellesley College, and Simmons College. Students from all four schools got to study, eat, and enjoy Shabbat together.

Let us know if you were here!

From the Archives!

On the Calendar

On Campus: Our next Leading Jewish Minds seminar will take place on March 15, featuring Professor Bob Merton.

Mazal Tov

Mazal tov to MIT Hillel's Director of Graduate Student Engagement, Mikhael Reuven, on his marriage to Naomi Kling, that took place on December 9, 2018!

Mazal tov to MIT Hillel alumni Keren Greenbaum '14 and Adin Schmahmann '13, MNG '14 on their marriage, officiated by MIT Hillel's Senior Jewish Educator, Rabbi Goldfeder, that took place on January 20, 2019!

Mazal tov to MIT Hillel alumnus Kyle Swanson '18 on receiving the Marshall Scholarship to pursue graduate studies in the United Kingdom!

Mazal tov to MIT Hillel alumna Meena Viswanath '11, her husband Jamie Conway, and their son Psakhye, on the birth of a baby girl, Prive Charna, born on December 30, 2018!

Mazal tov to Sam Weld, a former participant of MIT Hillel's ConnecTech Fellowship, on his engagement to Jasmin Moghbeli!

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