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Executive Director's Update



Hurray to all new graduates!! Yashar koach on a degree well earned!

I admit that I often have a hard time on Commencement Day. Celebrating is amazing. Hugging and embracing new graduates, posing with them and their diplomas, is wonderful. Getting to give the Invocation this year to the gathered crowds on Killian Court and beyond was an honor. I love meeting parents, family, friends. I schep as much naches as they do.



And then we say goodbye, and the campus empties out. It's tough – my staff and I have seen them grow, taught them, mentored them, learned from them, laughed with (and at) them, been through ups and downs. Four years goes by much too quickly. (Fade to "Sunrise, Sunset" from *Fiddler on the Roof*...)



To all 2015 graduates and their families, Mazal Tov! May you go from strength to strength!

And, as a new beginning lights the horizon for our newest alumni, our current students continue to have positive Jewish experiences through Hillel. As you read this, our cohort of ConnecTech delegates has just finished their visit to Haifa. These students are starting a year-long remote-learning peoplehood curriculum with fellow science and engineering students from the Hillel at the Technion.



Also in Israel, a group of MIT Birthright students have completed the 10-day official program -- of touring, hiking, exploring Israel old and new -- and are experiencing the unique MIT Birthright Extension: five more days exploring the high-tech side of the country. Stops this year include, among others, visits to six Israeli startups, tours of a number of labs at the Weitzman Institute, time at [MIT MEET](#), interacting with Palestinian and Israeli students who have benefited from this computer science high school program, and a visit to a military base to learn about Army technology. All the stops (with the exception, perhaps, of the army base) are places students can return to in future trips to pursue an internship via [MIT's MISTI-Israel](#) program.



Over the summer, we still stay in touch with our students. Some of those based in DC will be joining us for our "Leading Jewish Minds... on the Road" program next week. Grad Hillel has a calendar of outings and Shabbat pot lucks in the works. During my travels in Israel, I will gather with our students there. And, it is not unusual to suddenly write our student summer email list for a "flash mob" (okay, maybe not that big) announcement of "meet us for ice cream now."

Mentshn of Mention



Miriam Prosnitz '15
prosnitz@mit.edu

Hi! My name is Miriam Prosnitz and I'm originally from Skokie, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. I'm graduating in the MIT class of 2015 having studied Computer Science and Electrical Engineering with a minor in Economics. Following graduation I'm moving around quite a bit. After a quick stop home, I'll be working in Tel Aviv, Israel for 12 weeks at Asymmetric Medical doing business development (organized through the MISTI Israel program). Next, I'm fortunate enough to be able to go home for the Jewish high holidays before beginning a full time job at Palantir as a Product Support Engineer in their New York office. As I said, looking forward my life is a bit hectic.

Looking back, a little over four years ago I chose to come to MIT. If you had asked me back then why I chose MIT, I would have given you a myriad of reasons: excellent education, ease of getting back home to Chicago, endless extracurricular opportunities, and so on. Looking back on that decision, though, I think the most compelling reason I chose to come to MIT was that I pictured myself being happy here. I was right. MIT is a mosaic, and



To give a snapshot of all the ways we connect and influence our students, check out the list of [all we did](#) this past school year! A further thank you to all the students listed there who helped create Jewish experiences for their peers.

Looking forward to a relaxing summer, of evaluating and planning -- and some personal learning and exploring in Israel (and meeting with students and alumni there, as well!). It's just a few short months until the freshman begin to arrive in the fall! A wonderful summer to all!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM'97
rabbif@mit.edu

Torah from Tech



Our Torah this month is taught by Micah Brodsky, who finished his Ph.D. in course 6 this past autumn after a lengthy graduate trajectory taking him from operating systems to developing embryos. He is currently a postdoc at CSAIL while he ponders what he wants to do when he grows up. He can be reached at micahbro@mit.edu.

This week, at last, is Commencement. Our Torah reading for the week, Beha'alotecha, is a fortuitously apt selection, particularly for those of us having completed our doctorates -- and not just because earning a Ph.D. feels like decades of wandering in the wilderness! (Anyway, that's for next week's parsha.) Commencement marks a time for us to reflect back on the important and difficult lessons learned here at MIT, across more years than we may like to admit. Looking back at my Ph.D. journey, I recognize several key lessons

reflecting back in the parsha.

The story of Beha'alotecha is centered on the journey departing from Sinai and the harsh contrast as ideals meet reality. The lighting of the menorah, the first Passover in the desert, the marching formations, Moses's proclamation on breaking camp familiar to us as the opening line of the Torah service -- these give way to a series of misadventures brought on by the people failing to reach the moral ideal they were called to. Yet, between the misadventures is a story of perseverance, vision, humility, and the acknowledgment of one's own mistakes.

What is the most important lesson in a Ph.D.? I maintain that it is to learn to be wrong. Objectivity is a harsh master, and when the data says you're wrong, you're wrong. The Ph.D. process is a sort of boot camp, beating your intuition black and blue, until you recognize how narrow the eye of the needle is, how difficult it is to reach a claim that really is true. Admitting mistakes to yourself -- admitting the inevitability of mistakes -- yet having the confidence to persevere, is the paradoxical formula of success. And, in spite of the inevitability of error, it's crucial to have vision -- to see things not as they are but as they might be -- to prepare oneself to fail in creative ways.

Throughout the book of Bamidbar, problems in the moral sphere take on an unnerving level of objectivity, set before an unimpeachable moral standard, a closeness to God we can hardly imagine in our day. Proper moral conduct, in Jewish law, enjoys no distinction from proper ritual conduct. One after another, the people, Miriam and Aaron, and later, Moses, each make mistakes and are forced to recognize and admit their errors. When Miriam and Aaron gossip negatively about Moses behind his back, jealous of his special relationship with God, Miriam is stricken with leprosy. Aaron's eagerness to admit his folly and plead on her behalf is touching, as is Moses's brief, poetic prayer, *el na refa na la*, in spite of his being the object of the gossip.

Moses himself expresses a humbler, more constructive response to the prophetic gifts of potential rivals to his authority: "If only all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would bestow His spirit upon them!" If only we all had Moses's vision. His humility should remind us that success, even by a rival, is cause for joy, not a reason to feel diminished. We all, it seems, have unique roles to play.

Mazel tov to the class of 2015! May your lessons carry you far.

MIT Hillel's 2015 Annual Fund
Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

no matter who you are the first day of orientation to the last day of senior finals, there's always a community for everyone.

One of my favourite communities at MIT has been MIT Hillel. Being a Conservative Jew from Chicago, I can't pop home for Shabbat dinner or every Jewish holiday. Instead, I've spent those times with my MIT Jewish community. I first met the MIT Jewish community when I came for Shabbat dinner during my campus preview weekend. Little did I know that the people joking around with me at the dinner table would become such integral parts of my MIT experience. I still joke around with them at Friday night Hillel dinners. Contemplating the next stage of my life, I hope I can find a similar Jewish community to the incredible one I have at MIT. I would like to thank MIT Hillel for its contributions to my MIT experience.

Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!

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





To our current and future supporters:

To those of you celebrating a new degree or a reunion this weekend – *Shehechyanu* - Mazel Tov on reaching this milestone!

As our year draws to a close, I ask you to [please make your gift by June 30](#), so that we may renew our goals for next year at the same level of excellence that were delivered this year. Once again, two of our graduating seniors wrote a heartfelt and compelling letter to ask for your support. Their words outweigh mine by far, and I know that when it arrives in your mailbox you will enjoy reading about what Hillel has meant to them during their four years here.

Our Leading Jewish Minds series will continue next year, on campus and “on the road”. We will be working this summer to secure MIT Hillel events in New York City, Florida, San Francisco, and Boston’s Metro West area. It is always a highlight for me when an alum or a parent says to me that they so enjoyed an event that they’d like to host one for us in the future, or that they wish we would come to their area.

It is an honor to join with you in maintaining and building a strong Jewish presence at MIT.

Thank you,
Marla Choslovsky SM'88,
MIT Hillel Director of Development
marla360@mit.edu

[Add your name](#) to MIT Hillel's 2015 Donor Roll!

Hillel Board of Directors Update

To the MIT Hillel community:

The Governance Committee, at the request of Hillel Board President [Daniel Jackson](#), has produced a revised set of Bylaws designed to remedy deficiencies in the present set, which were last comprehensively amended in 2004. As a member of Hillel under the present definition (see below), you are entitled to vote on the changes at the June 18 meeting. The most important are:

1. [Membership in the organization](#). At present, members are defined as anyone who has donated \$36 or more in the previous fiscal year. This is at once too broad—it includes many people who have no substantial commitment to MIT Hillel or its mission—and too narrow—it excludes many people active in the organization who contribute in ways other than financial. We propose to eliminate membership altogether. (This is standard for many charitable and not-for-profit organizations.) Powers now exercised by the members will be exercised by the Board. These changes will also require a vote to amend the Articles of Organization, which will also take place at the meeting.
2. [Membership of the Board](#). The Articles of Organization and the Bylaws conflict on the minimum number required and the maximum allowed. We propose to set a minimum of 4 (as per the current Articles) and a maximum of 25. This is a reduction from a maximum of 38, which we believe will enhance efficiency. The revision states that at least one director must be on the MIT faculty, at least one on the staff, and at least one must be an alumnus/a.
3. [Voting procedures](#). The revision allows votes of the Board to be taken by written consent in lieu of a meeting, a two-thirds majority being necessary to approve an action. Directors may participate in meetings via telephone or similar electronic media. Notice of meetings may be delivered by facsimile, email, or other electronic media in addition to U.S. mail. (All of these are standard provisions in corporate Bylaws.)
4. [Approval of financial obligations](#). The current procedures for writing checks and other instruments of payment require the signatures of both the President and the Treasurer. This is cumbersome and inflexible. The revision allows such instruments, extended to include “all instruments, documents, deeds, leases, contracts, bonds, notes,” to be signed by any two of the “President, the Treasurer, the Executive Director and anyone else that may be given said authority by vote of the Board of Directors.” It also specifies that “All disbursements made other than by check shall be in accordance with the financial authorization and oversight procedures recommended by the Treasurer and approved by the Board of Directors.”

Here is [the complete text](#) of the draft revised Bylaws. We are indebted to Rob Finkel of [Kerstein Coren](#)

