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

1) Marissa Freed wears a silly hat during the month of Adar, continuing Rabbi Fishers' tradition during her sabbatical
2) A group of MIT Hillel Students participating in a discussion with Daniel Gordis
3) Shoshana Gibbor, Michal Shlapentokh-Rothman ’19, and Haley Abramson ’19 enjoying the 15th Annual Latke vs. Hamentaschen Debate

Rabbi Fisher is on Sabbatical for the Spring, 2017 semester. In her stead the MIT Hillel Staff will be providing updates and insights focused on their roles and activities.

MIT Hillel Update

I loved the movie, "The Big Short." While the information was heavy and made me worry about a mortgage I don't have, the way they explained the data was engaging and informative. And, since the majority of my job is data oriented, this made me realize people might actually find this stuff interesting!

When I get home from work, I often talk about the changes in databases and new types of reporting available. From the glazed look my wife gives me, it seems that the way I explain data is not as enticing as in the film.

While Anthony Bourdain and Selena Gomez is a stretch, I’d love to get President Reif and Rabbi Fisher to make an informational video about how the databases are compiled and how reports are created—but it does not seem that that will be materializing anytime soon.

When I joined MIT Hillel in September 2014, I was excited by various databases and the 25 years of data incorporated. Since then, I have worked with Rabbi Fisher and Maria Choslovsky to better organize those records and bring uniformity to the system. At the same time, Hillel was invited to use all aspects of the MIT database system. New fields, reports, tables, etc. were created and adapted to our needs, as MIT to wanted make sure the system contained all the historic Hillel data.

With every great change, though, come difficulties. The first task I needed to complete was making sure everyone had the proper name fields filled in. While the majority of this merge went smoothly, many records had to be hand entered. I’ve already apologized to many of you for the typos and I continue to appreciate the outreach that they may be corrected.

Now aspects of my job are much more efficient. For example, creating Thank You letters has gone from a full day project to about an hour of work and concentration. This shift also has made recording RSVPs for events such as Leading Jewish Minds not only simplified from the former process, but allowing for easy exportation to create name tags.

The main reason I love our database is because of what it represents. I get to see thousands of lines of information at the push of a button, and know that each line deals with a member of this wonderful community. It is a great feeling to see the involvement of our students, alumni, parents, and community members every day.

This also has made participating with MIT Hillel’s Leading Jewish Minds "@ MIT" and "...On The Road" series so much fun. While seeing the data is a wonderful way to visualize the breadth and depth of the community, getting to see people face to face intensifies my love for the data. While I won’t have the opportunity to meet everyone, each of your stories is what I look forward to seeing each day with the data.

Chag Purim Sameach!

Benjamin Flax, Administrator and Development Associate

Mae Dotan ’19
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My name is Mae Dotan. I am currently a sophomore at MIT majoring in Mechanical Engineering (2A) and I am interested in robotics, assistive technology and manufacturing. I am an American Israeli. I grew up in Tel-Aviv and had the privilege of spending my summers in upstate New York with my family. My extracurricular activities include Hillel, Design for America, my dorm living group (German House), my sorority (AXO) and dance.

I came to MIT because I wanted an American learning experience: the opportunity to explore interests, knowledge and experiences, not just within the classroom, but beyond too. I wanted a place that is at the forefront of its field, and my coming from a strong STEM background, having majored in science and math in high school, being on a FIRST robotics team and being an electronics technician in the Israel Defense Forces, MIT was the right place to go.

I came to MIT as a freshman, barely knowing anyone, and was immediately welcomed into the Hillel family. Hillel reached out to me even before I arrived at MIT, inviting me to meet students who participated in the MIT Birthright extension in Israel. I like continuing the tradition I bring from home of enjoying Shabbat dinner together with this new, welcoming family, and I like inspiring my fellow Jewish MIT students to come to Hillel and enjoy it too. Last year I served as programming vice president for Hillel and this year I have the honor of being the...
Our Torah this month is taught by Dr. Jessica Tytell PhD ’06 (Course VII) is currently the executive director for the Biological Design Center at Boston University where she is working to advance interdisciplinary research, bridge the gap between academia and industry, and change the graduate training paradigm to prepare students for the broad range of career opportunities available beyond academia. Before joining the team at BU, Jessica spent several years in a Kendall Square startup helping design and build new assay technologies to enable novel biomedical research. She can be reached at jtytell@bu.edu.

One of the things that I find the most enriching from both Torah and science is the ability that both have to help us expand our vision and perspective — both literally and figuratively. As a cell biologist, I spent hundreds of hours in our microscope room in Building 68 looking inside tiny cells, watching the dynamic dance of their chromosomes as the cells divided. Even when we seem at rest, each microscopic cell inside your body is teeming with activity. There are tiny motors pulling different types of cargo along dynamically changing routes. Proteins and chemicals constantly form and reform in an intricate, delicate dance, every minute, every day. It reminds me that so much of the world’s beauty and complexity goes unseen.

The same can be said for Torah. For example, let’s look at the story of Noah and the great flood. Once Noah is back on dry land, God promises him that (Ch9v11) “never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” To mark this covenant, God creates the rainbow.

I find the image of God and the rainbow particularly compelling. Oftentimes people consider the rainbow alone as a symbol of beauty. But like a drop of Charles River water that is teeming with life, or a cell that contains a bustle of activity, there is much more going on. We usually see sunlight as “plain” white light. However, white light is not the absence of color. Instead white light is the blending of all the colors of the visible spectrum merged together so tightly, they cannot be distinguished. A rainbow spreads out those colors, showing the beauty that hue possesses.

Through the rainbow, God shows Noah — and us — a much deeper glimpse into who he is. We witness all the different facets of his being, aspects we are generally incapable of seeing. Part of the wonder of the rainbow comes from the fact that it’s always present in all the light we see, even though it normally remains invisible to our eyes. As such, Torah study helps us to better understand the otherwise complex, confusing, mysteries of our religion.

Much like the dancing chromosomes I watched inside cells as a student, the fact that we can’t always see these facets of light, or of God, doesn’t mean that they aren’t there. It just means we normally lack the ability to see them. You just need a prism or some other tool to look deeper. And much like the view through the microscope, there is so much more of the world to appreciate when you take a closer look.

Thank you for
supporting
MIT Hillel!!

Your generous support allows us to help unlock a Hillel-specific extra match.

I have seen the impact of this type of giving in another arena in my life. My youngest sibling lives in a specialized group setting in Chicago, where I am from, and that organization has a massive city-wide community appeal every year at the end of April. Participating on those designated days as our family has for decades — as both givers and askers — is deeply meaningful to all involved.

In my three years here at MIT Hillel, I have stressed a lot about the MIT annual campaign calendar, and how it is weighted toward reunions and commencement weekend in June. Too many of our gifts come in at the very, very end (June 30, anybody?!) of our fiscal year. Which brings me to the second reason to participate in Giving Day: making your gift on March 14 is a very strong way of building community. Even though dollars are of course simply additive, on another level there is a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. An anonymous MIT alum will provide a $150,000 bonus if 1,500 donors give on March 14. Gifts of all sizes will inspire others, and together we will reach aggressive targets. And a gift to MIT Hillel will also help keep Jewish life vibrant on the MIT campus!
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

- March 17 – Arnold Barnett, George Eastman Professor of Management Science, Sloan
- May 12 – Daniel Jackson, CSAIL Professor

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