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

1) Our “fighting” hamantasch, Avital Weinberg '21, and latke, Lior Hirschfeld '21, duke it out during our annual Latke Hamantaschen Debate.

2) “Bet Bet” -- B’nei Bayit, that is “members of the household” -- is a new MIT Hillel-sponsored initiative in which Israeli Sloan students are paired with local host families to have American Jewish experiences while studying at MIT and in Cambridge. Fun at one recent gathering.

3) Margalit Glasgow '18 and Zoe Levitt '21 shake their groggers to drown out the name of the evil Haman during the Megillah reading. Creative costumes were plentiful!

MIT Hillel Update

International Hillel’s mission statement is “to enrich the lives of Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.” Most campus Hillels focus exclusively on their undergraduate populations in fulfilling this mission (many don’t even have non-undergraduate students). MIT Hillel is one of only a few Hillels that also has a vibrant Grad Hillel community -- and has had such a community for decades. I still remember arriving at MIT in 1985 to begin my Chemistry PhD, and being tapped by the then MIT Hillel Director to run a Sukkot program for my grad peers. Some form of that “Jazz in the Sukkah” event has run to this day. (And my crockpot is still darkly stained from my attempt at making chocolate fondue, and then storing the leftovers by just turning off the crockpot and letting the chocolate re-harden. I’ll share a lesson learned: it won’t just re-melt when you turn the crockpot back on.)

Just as MIT is a leader and innovator in technology, our Hillel strives to be on the cutting edge of campus Jewish life, as well. Hillel has connected with almost 200 graduate students and young professionals in the Cambridge area in just the past fall semester. These students organize monthly community-wide Shabbat dinners. They have volunteered in the community. They do social events together. A successful “Do It Yourself” Shabbat evening and Chanukah week candlelightings built micro-communities, with multiple individuals hosting dinners and gatherings for their peers, on and off campus.

Last year and this year, we have hired a rabbinic intern from Hebrew College to serve as a “Senior Jewish Educator” solely for our graduate community. These interns have advised our graduate student leadership, and engaged students who might not otherwise participate in MIT Jewish life. They created classes specifically for grad students, organized Jewish hikes and Jewish meditation, advised and “coffeed” a plethora of graduate students. They have extended the reach of MIT Jewish life to previously untouched populations.

Another new graduate initiative this year includes Israeli Sloan students in our engagement work. As the picture above shows, we’re making these students “B’nei Bayit” -- household members, abbreviated “bet bet” in Hebrew -- of local Boston families, allowing them to have a home away from home and more fully experience American Jewry and American Judaism during their time at MIT. It’s an exciting, and mind expanding program, for both the students and their hosts (which include MIT alumni). As one Israeli family related, “[The program] helps me build a close relationship to the Jewish community, reminds me to celebrate holidays, and helps me to understand how the local Jewish communities operate.”

We are learning a lot about what it means to support college graduates. When we experimented with rabbinic interns for a number years with our undergraduates, we learned that continuity and time were crucial to an educator’s success. As we move forward expanding our graduate student options, I envision the day – hopefully within a year – when I can add a full time Senior Jewish Educator to our team to further develop our graduate student programming, educational offerings, and engagement. 21-26 year olds are a different population than undergrads, and deserve their own attention and offerings. We are the only Hillel in the nation moving in this direction, and I look forward to leading what could be an amazing addition to Hillel work at MIT and across North American campuses.

Early wishes for a hag kasher v’sameach, a happy and sweet Passover,

Ronit Langer '20
mlanger@mit.edu

The transition to college is not an easy one, especially not when that college is MIT. After the excitement of getting in fades, the worry begins to set in. Will I be smart enough to pass all my classes? Will I be able to participate in any of the programs that they talked about in admissions sessions? Will I make friends? I decided to deal with these fears in the only way I know how, I made a plan.

The first step of my plan was to take a gap year. My whole life I had been defined as someone who was good at school; If I was going to survive at MIT, I needed to establish myself as a person outside of academics. I decided to spend the year living and learning in Jerusalem. The program I participated in, Midreshet Torah Ve Avodah, combined studying Jewish history and texts, with exploring the country and giving back to the people. We participated in community service projects, while meeting Israelis from a wide array of backgrounds. The year exposed me to people who found deep meaning in their lives. That meaning sometimes originated from their religion, or their families, or their music. Sometimes, it was the
Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM ’97
Executive Director, MIT Hillel
rabbif@mit.edu

Torah from Tech

Our Torah this month is taught by Jocelyn (Wiese) Nelson SB ’00 SM ’01 (Ill). She has been working in the oil and gas business since graduating from MIT and lives in Houston, TX with her family. Jocelyn stays connected to MIT by visiting every fall as a campus recruiter for ExxonMobil. Her college experience as Hillel Student Board President prepared her well for her current responsibilities as a Board Trustee of Congregation Jewish Community North in Spring, TX. She can be reached at jocelynliese@ejim.mit.edu.

The Passover season is upon us. The Passover Seder is one of my favorite Jewish traditions. The storyline of escaping oppression and wandering through the desert to the Promised Land has a parallel to my family history. My maternal grandparents fleeing Germany as teenagers in the early days of WWII and wandering through many places before finally settling in the United States and meeting each other, and ensuring the tradition of our people lived on.

The observance or commemoration of the Passover is mentioned in several places within the Torah. The Torah portion for the second day of Passover (Leviticus 23) contains instructions on when and how to commemorate the Passover. On the fourth day (Number 9) we read about how the Israelites made the Passover sacrifice in the desert, how we got the commandment to eat the Passover sacrifice with unleavened cakes and bitter herbs.

I went to many Seders in my five years at MIT. Seders at MIT Hillel. Seders at the home of a friend whose family lived in the outskirts of Boston, and were kind enough to host us for a home cooked meal. Seders at AEPI where tables filled the entire first floor of their house. I cooked my first Seder in the Spring of 2001 when I was a graduate student living in Tang Hall. With my apartment kitchen and newfound interest in cooking I was up for the challenge! I can’t remember how many people came; from the photograph I found there were at least 10 people there – about the right number for a proper Seder meal. The details of the evening are fuzzy (must have been those four cups of wine) but I do distinctly remember us calling Nightline as our festivities were ramping down to see if they could tell us the 10 plagues in order.

Now that I am a mother (incidentally of a first-born son named Aaron) the Passover story speaks to me in a new way. For one thing, the mere possibility of an angel of death slaying the first-born son hits a little close to home. The commandment in the Torah “And you shall explain to your child on that day. ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’ (Exodus 13:8)” also hits close to home. Even since he was a little guy, I’ve tried to have Aaron attend a Seder every year. Sometimes at our home, or my Mother’s home, or at our Synagogue, or hosted by friends, I need to teach him to find his own parallels to the Passover Story. It is important to take one or two evenings a year and remember. Perhaps next year I will add an engineering element to our Passover preparations and leverage my Materials Science roots for experimental structure-processing-property analyses to understand why some matzo balls are sinkers while others are floaters.

Chag Sameach!

MIT Hillel’s 2018 Annual Fund
Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

To Our Current and Future Supporters

The Olympics are behind us, but one of the play-by-play comments sticks with me and still makes me laugh. It was the skeleton race, the one where they get on a board and go head first down a tunnel track made of ice, one of the sports that makes me nervous just to watch, and thanks to creative camera placement, even nauseous. The reporter, noting that the athlete stuck his foot out and touched a wall, said “He’s gonna lose a lot of time from yesterday’s score… granted he’s got three-quarters of a second to work with.” I dare say that most of us can’t even register three-quarters of a second, let alone, “work with” it!

Fortunately for MIT Hillel, like most non-profits, we have a full year to work with our community to fund our funding goals to support our activities on campus.

Sometimes, though, as we approach June 30 when our fiscal year ends, it does feel like we have almost no time to work with. From my perspective, one of the greatest benefits of MIT’s Giving Day is that it helps motivate our donors to shift their giving timeline from June 29 to March 14. Last year we were invited to be one of the first partners in the then-new endeavor, and through this platform we both grew our base and lessened the inherent lumpiness of our annual appeal.

We are pleased to share that MIT Hillel again has a dedicated page on MIT’s Giving Day platform. We are looking to build on last year’s success, and invite you to make your gift specific on this date. If you have already made your gift to MIT Hillel and want to help us achieve our participation goals to unlock three matches, tune in later in the day to see how we are doing and consider making an extra gift if we are needing the boost. Alumni from class years ’53, ’88, and ’04 have provided “micro-matches” to Hillel to unlock extra gifts when the 53rd, 88th, and 104th donors have contributed. A gift on ANY page helps MIT achieve a massive $314,159 match, so this is a great opportunity to connect with all areas of campus that are meaningful to you.

*Already made your gift and haven’t been thanked? Nearly 400 gifts came in December, and I am way more than three-quarters of a second behind my schmooz! Writing thank you notes is the one time a year I have to stop and think about each donor, to notice if you are in an area where Michelle will be traveling, if it is a reunion year for you, if your child is graduating this year, if you have moved, who else on our team you are connected to. As a donor I don’t like getting a note that feels signed as part of a production line, and as a development professional I don’t want to make you feel that way. Couple the amount of work and the personal attention with no replacement yet for our former Administrative/Development Assistant, Ben, who prepared the letters for me, and the usual seasonal backlog gets exacerbated. So, please bear with me, and thank you!

simple action of walking through the country they loved.

These people inspired me to think deeply about what brought meaning to my life. I was fortunate to have an entire year of reflection and learning from others. My list was constantly being refined, but one thing kept making its way to the top of the list: community. I realized being a part of strong, supportive communities had been an integral part of my life so far, and was essential to maintain moving forward.

So, onto step two of my MIT plan, finding communities. A few weeks after making this realization, an email came to my brand new MIT email address: “Application open for Freshman Learning Communities.” The title immediately caught my eye, and I began scouring the websites of the four learning communities at MIT. I was attracted to one called Concours, which was a community of people interested in the intersection of humanities and science. They want to bring the human-side of science into the conversation. I was captivated by this and saw it as an extension of the work I had been doing on my gap year. And with that application, the process of my community building at MIT began.

I did a freshman pre-orientation program called the Freshman Leadership Program, to find a community of leaders on campus. I became a member of a sorority, Kappa Alpha Theta, for a community of supportive women. I joined a new learning initiative called NEET, New Engineering Education Transformation, which creates an interdisciplinary community of students passionate about solving big problems. (Our project involves building a gut-on-a-chip platform for use in drug testing, so cool!) And the list of communities goes on and on: the floor I live on has the privilege of living on, the clubs I have participated in, and the people I have endured certain classes with.

But one community stands out above the rest, one that I did not need an application to join: Hillel. The Hillel community at MIT is an incredibly special one. It is a place
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, Maria Choslovsky, marla360@mit.edu. To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly.

On the Calendar

Boston:

- March 23 – Elizabeth Klierman: "Does early to bed and early to rise make college students healthy, (wealthy), and wise?"
- April 27 – Peter Tian
- June 8 - Hillel Reception at Commencement / Reunion weekend immediately after Graduation Exercises

Mazel Tov!

- Mazel Tov to AJ Edelman '14 for representing the Israeli Olympic team in skeleton in PyeongChang.

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

From the Archives!

MIT Hillel has a rich history of programs and events told through student-made flyers, pamphlets, and great pictures!

The collection of MIT Hillel "artifacts" are now held in the Institute Archive and Special Collections for proper care and preservation.

A glance at what was going on for Passover at MIT Hillel in 1999!

Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!

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