I love the holiday of Purim! I like the craziness. I like the fun and silliness. I like that there is one day on the Jewish calendar when we’re not supposed to take ourselves so seriously. I love this so much, that I make Purim into a multi-week holiday. The Rabbis of the first-century of the Common Era teach that when the month of Adar (Purim is the 14th of Adar) enters, happiness is increased. I have a personal custom of wearing a different funny hat every day of the month (or in leap years, the double-month) leading up to the 14th of Adar. Yes, I own that many hats. And, this year, as a leap year, I get to wear 45 of them!

My hats range from silly to colorful to eclectic. I walk around campus with them. I take extras to meetings, and also make MIT administrators wear one. I get smiles. I get laughter. I get funny looks. I increase happiness. It’s a very good thing at and for MIT. An extremely important aspect of what Hillel offers our students is ways to de-stress from their pressures: through warm and caring staff who listen deeply to students as they share their needs and
fears and concerns; to study breaks; to Shabbat and holiday down-time celebrations; to classes on values and the big picture questions of life and living. We help them learn to relax and be less serious.

When I wore a Tweedledum (or is it Tweedledee?) rainbow propeller hat on a day when Boston experienced 45 mph winds, I did not quite fly away. Although, I’d swear I made it more quickly to the meeting of my Student-Directors Cabinet. I later stopped by an undergraduate sushi making study break. I’m not sure which was more amusing, my hat or my attempt at rolling an over-stuffed maki.

I was Maleficent from Sleeping Beauty one day, as the Yom HaAtzmaut/Israel Independence Day Carnival planning committee was sitting outside my office with our Director of Israel and Birthright Programming, Shoshana Gibbor, planning May’s celebration of Israel. The hat led to a short conversation on villains (and heroes).

An East Campus student dared me to actually dye my hair the multicolored punk look of one hat. I took a pass. And then I wondered if there was a deeper question actually being asking of me, about how much I was willing to embrace and absorb, or shed, a particular self-identity.

A student leader saw me while I was crossing the Stata courtyard. She smiled broadly, and then excitedly pulled out the props for her Purim costume.

I was told by another student that I have to re-wear my bright green cricket hat when I lead the first seder on campus next month – it can apparently double as the second plague of locusts. He was thinking much further ahead than I – my future planning only went as far as the pumpkin pie hat I plan to wear on 3-14.

Whatever your wardrobe, may your Adar continue to be happy, and may we have may reasons to laugh and spread joy.

Happy Purim,

Rabbi Michelle H. Fisher
Executive Director
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Mentshn of Mention
My name is Jessica Knapp, and I’m a freshman planning on studying bioengineering with a minor in statistics and data science. I have been going to MIT Hillel for Shabbat dinner almost every week. I’ve also been involved in the Kindle Your Judaism group, where we read books with Jewish themes and topics.

After a while, I realized that I know many Jews, but I just don’t see them at Shabbat. Some (like me) feel a little alienated by the lack of Reform Shabbat services. Others feel that it’s just too far away.

Jessica Knapp ’22
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Torah from Tech
Our Torah this month is taught by Tchelet Segev ’18, who grew up in Taiwan, South Korea, Israel, and the US. She graduated from MIT in 2018 with a Master’s in Environmental Engineering and Bachelor’s in Civil and Environmental Engineering. She is now working at the Angeles National Forest near Los Angeles managing post fire restoration projects.

When living in South Korea, I learned that Korean public schools study the Talmud, because of the respect they have for Jewish education. Those Korean students probably know more Talmud and Torah than I know.

Admittedly, when I was asked to write this month's Torah for Tech, I agreed before understanding what it was that I was supposed to write about. I said yes because I valued being a part of the MIT Jewish community and was excited to still contribute, albeit remotely. Now that I am signed up for this, I could try to write about a part of the Torah, which would mean I would be reading that portion likely for the first time and offering an interpretation with little context of how it fits in with the rest of the Torah. But what I loved about participating in Jewish life at MIT is that you can be anywhere on the spectrum from Orthodox to Jewish-ish, anywhere in between or beyond, and still have something to add to and learn from Jewish life.

So instead, I'll share what I've learned at MIT about what being Jewish has meant to me, in the hope that you may in some way also benefit through osmosis.

After living for seven years in countries (Taiwan and South Korea) where I was usually the only Jew some of my peers had ever known and struggling with explaining what being Jewish meant and why I was still Jewish despite eating the occasional pork, I must say, I wasn't sure I knew exactly what being Jewish meant.

When I got to MIT, I learned the answer: there is no answer. Being Jewish seems to as often be an identity as a practice, a family as often as a group of worshippers. And I learned that where you fell on the Jewish spectrum doesn't matter. Everyone was friends with everyone else, and we were all learning, celebrating, and, of course, eating mountains of Jewish foods together. From the classes one could take with Rabbi Goldfeder, to the holiday celebrations ranging from Jews on Ice to Seders I organized at my place (with lots of help from Hillel and my just-as-Jewish-as-me friends), and the endless food at Shabbat dinners and snacks during finals weeks, I think being Jewish can't be defined; it's an existence.

Having really not seen much in the way of Jews for almost a decade, coming to MIT I really learned to appreciate the differences among us Jews, from how and what we eat, through how we pray (or don't pray), to what we believe in. But most importantly, being a part of a Jewish community with such diversity meant I was always evaluating what Jewish aspects are different from mine that I may or may not want to integrate into my life. And let me tell you, every Jewish food-related occasion has been integrated into my life, as have lifelong Jewish values and friends.

And I've learned that being Jewish means accepting and being accepted, no judgment. Those of us (i.e. me) who don't know what a music note is (let alone how to hold one) still sing and pray just as loudly as those of us in MIT a cappella groups, and can still attend Jewish holiday celebrations, such as the Latke vs. Hamentashen debate (I'm sorry, I meant the Chanukah and

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To Our Current and Future Supporters:

Please DON'T make a gift to MIT Hillel today. 

Wait…. What?!?!?

Isn’t my role to encourage you to be philanthropic and ask you specifically to support MIT Hillel? Weren’t you expecting a little nudge toward your checkbook? Aren’t we quite far from our annual goal and concerned about deficit vs. balanced budget?

This is some of what I’ve learned at MIT. Lessons I'll remember in a decade when I can no longer solve differential equations or remember what the laws of thermodynamics are. In a way, I think my Korean friends were right about Jewish education. The reason I value Jewish life and am proud to be a Jew is because I'm always learning.

Tchelet Segev ’18
tcheletsegev@gmail.com

MIT Hillel's 2019 Annual Fund

Add to Jewish life @ MIT!

Yes to all of these, of course. And you’ve probably already figured out that my main point is about timing. In particular, next Thursday will be March 14, also MIT’s now 3rd annual 24-Hour Challenge Giving Day. On the same day that future students receive notification that they've been accepted, the entire MIT community will come together online to inspire each other to make this another strong year for our campus. Making your gift on that day will have added impact.

MIT Hillel is pleased to once again have a dedicated page on the Giving Day platform. We have an aggressive participation goal of 154 gifts, and a total of $11,000 in matching funds from five Jewish MIT families to encourage giving on that specific date. I chose for us a participation goal instead of a dollar goal because I believe that the best use of this platform is to strengthen our community, and we don’t get many opportunities to do so joyfully by working together.

Ways you can participate that day:

• If you have not yet made your gift this year, please consider doing so on that specific date in order to have your gift help us (and also MIT) earn challenge funds.

• If you have already made your gift this year, please consider an extra boost of $18 or $180 to help us count your participation toward the match.

• If you cannot make your gift online, let me know and in many cases we should be able to have IRA, stock, other gifts get added in, although it might not show up on the “counter”.

• Encourage a classmate or other friend to join you in supporting Hillel (and other areas of campus) on that day. It’s a great time for first-time donors to make their gift count.

• Have fun watching the progress.

As always, thank you for being engaged in and supportive of our work on campus. We couldn't do it without you.
For this month's "From the Archives!" we found a Purim poster from the '80s! Located at Faneuil Hall, this celebration seemed to have everything, including dancing, games, jugglers, and plenty of food.

Let us know if you attended this Purim festival!

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, Marla Choslovsky, marla360@mit.edu. To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly.

From the Archives!

On the Calendar

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

Mark your calendars for another Leading Jewish Minds seminar taking place on April 12, featuring Professor Jeremy England.

Mazal Tov

Mazal tov to MIT Hillel alumni Max Plaut '14 and Inbar Yamin '15, on the birth of a baby boy, Adiv Nathan, born on Monday, February 25!